

# Dobre Rozenbergene

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Kaunas

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: October 2005



*Dobre Rozenbergene agreed to an interview at once. I went to her place on the second day of my stay in Kaunas. Dobre lives in a district constructed in the 1980s, on the outskirts of Kaunas. It takes half an hour to get there by bus. A beautiful, neatly dressed elderly woman opened the door.*

*Dobre's apartment is sparkling clean. It feels like it has been recently renovated. It is richly furnished and it has good facilities. First Dobre said that she didn't want the interview to be long as it was hard for her to dive into the recollections about war, ghetto and camps. I was frustrated and was about to leave. Before leaving I said that if everyone refused to tell about these tragedies, there would be no one left to tell people the truth and therefore anti-Semites, who assert that Jews had invented those tragedies, would rejoice. Dobre kept silent for a moment and asked me to come back in the room. The interview was hard on her though. To my regret, Dobre didn't have modern pictures of her children and grandchildren, but she had a lot of old family pictures. Dobre and I made friends. We talked on the phone every day. She helped me find some people who would agree to be interviewed, too.*

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## **My family background**

I and all my ancestors whom I know, were born in the small Lithuanian town of Jurbarkas [about 200 km from Vilnius]. That town is in the western part of Lithuania, not far from the border with Germany. Jurbarkas stands on the river Neman. During my childhood, ships navigating between Jurbarkas and Kaunas were the main means of transport. Those ships and barges belonged to two rich owners, Jews: Lemberg and Vodopian. My paternal relatives had a direct influence on the development of automobile transport in the 1930s. Jurbarkas was a small town with a population of approximately five thousand people. About half of them were Jews, residing in the downtown area. The stores owned by Jews were also concentrated in the downtown area. I remember big manufacture and textile stores owned by Polovin. His daughter Golda kept a vegetable store, where our family used to go. Small shops and ateliers were also located in the center. They

belonged to Jewish craftsmen: tailors, cobblers, hatters, glaziers. There was a gorgeous Catholic cathedral in the heart of Jurbarkas. Catholics – Lithuanians and Poles – went there. There were several synagogues – a large wooden and a large stone synagogue. Usually my parents went to the stone synagogue. There were several small synagogues apart from the big ones.

I didn't know my paternal grandfather. His name was Isroel Most. He was born in Jurbarkas in the 1870s. Isroel was a rather rich merchant, he dealt in grain. Judging by the religious education obtained by my father and his siblings, Grandfather Isroel was a pious man. I can't say how often he went to the synagogue, and whether he wore a kippah or other headwear all the time. Grandfather Isroel died early, when he turned a little over forty. I don't know the details. Father said that Isroel's death was tragic as a result of some accident.

I remember my paternal grandmother Chaya Riva very well. She was several years younger than Grandfather. She was born in the early 1880s in Jurbarkas. I don't know Chaya Riva's maiden name. I don't know what kind of education my grandmother got. At any rate, she was a rather literate woman. She knew how to read and write in Yiddish. Being the wife of a rather well-heeled merchant, my grandfather, Chaya Riva never worked. She raised her children. When Grandfather died, she lived on the adjacent street with one of Father's brothers, Fayvel, and his family. Chaya Riva was religious, observed traditions, celebrated Jewish holidays, but she didn't cover her head every day, only when she was going to the synagogue. Jewish traditions were sacred for her: Chaya Riva fasted on Yom Kippur, even in the concentration camp during the war. She perished in 1944 during selection in the concentration camp in the town of Kiliele in Estonia.

My father, Motle Most, born in 1904, was the eldest child in the family. Apart from him Isroel and Chaya Riva had three sons and two daughters. Since their teens the sons helped Grandfather in his business. In the 1930s they purchased trucks and founded a cargo transportation company. Fayvel was two years younger than my father. He had a family: his wife Beba and a son, named after grandfather Isroel. Fayvel and his family lived in their father's house in Jurbarkas until 1939. Grandmother Chaya Riva lived with them until 1939 when they moved to Kaunas. Fayvel, Beba and Isroel perished in the Kaunas ghetto [1](#) in the early 1940s. My father's two younger brothers, Moishe and Chitel, born in the 1910s, remained single. They lived in Kaunas and also dealt with automobile transportation. Both of them perished during the Great Patriotic War [2](#) – Moishe was killed in action, and Chitel was executed in the Kaunas ghetto.

I don't know if Isroel's sons got some education beside cheder, elementary Jewish school and practical experience. Isroel's daughters went to a lyceum – both of them, the elder Toybl and the younger Leya got a good education. Toybl was born in 1908. She was fond of Zionist ideas [3](#) since adolescence and in 1934 she left for Palestine. There she married Efrani. Toybl lived a long life there and died in 1999. Her children – Sarah, Milya and Isroel live in Israel. Father's youngest sister Leya, born in 1916 was my elder friend. Leya's fate was sad. She got married before the war and spent horrible years in occupation, ghetto and concentration camps. Her private life was crushed by the war, but then she had a new family and a wonderful life. Leya has been with me through the worst times of my life being like a mother to me. I will mention her again in my story.

My father Motle was the eldest, so he helped his father the most. He inherited the business and also dealt in grain trading. Father got married very early, when he turned twenty. He had known my mother since childhood as she lived next door. Their wedding was without any shadchanim. I

can say for sure that they married for love.

I didn't know my maternal grandfather, Dovid Figlyar, either. He died long before I was born. Dovid was about ten years older than Grandfather Isroel. He was also a merchant, but I don't know what he sold. My maternal grandmother Elke was a rather modern woman. Her clothes were made by the best milliners and tailors of Jurbarkas. She even had her attire made in Kaunas. She remained like that after Grandfather's death. I remember her like that as well. Grandmother Elke wasn't as religious as Chaya Riva, but she tried to observe Jewish traditions. She covered her head only when she was going to the synagogue on holidays. Grandmother Elke died in 1941, a couple of weeks before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War. She was buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions. I remember she was put on the floor, then carried on the boards through the town, and put in the grave.

I don't know for sure how many siblings Grandmother had. The only one I knew was her sister Braina. She and her husband rabbi Montse – I don't know his surname – lived in Kaunas. Braina, her husband and other Jews happened to be in Kaunas ghetto, wherein both of them perished.

Two of my mother's elder brothers left for the USA when they were young. One of them was Iosif. I know some facts about him. Iosif got married in the USA, had a son, Mendel and a daughter, Doba. Iosif corresponded with my parents. He found me after the war and helped my family for some time. He was old by that time. We stopped writing to each other, as it was dangerous to keep in touch with relatives abroad in the Soviet times [4](#). So I don't know when Iosif died. I don't know the name of my mother's second brother. There was no trace of him.

My mother's third brother, who was a couple of years older than her, lived in Jurbarkas. His name was Max. Max had a wife named Rachil and two sons – Dovid, born in 1925, and Yankle, born in 1930. Max was a barber. His shop was in the heart of the city, but leasing houses was the most income-bearing for him. Max owned a couple of houses in Jurbarkas. The whole family – Max, his wife and sons were shot in Jurbarkas in 1942 during the occupation.

Mother's brother Michl, who was almost my mother's age lived in Kaunas. His wife's name was Anna, his daughters were called Doba and Pesya. Doba and Pesya were my favorite friends. They often came to Jurbarkas to see Grandmother and us, and we also went to see them on Jewish holidays. Michl perished during one of the first actions in the Kaunas ghetto. Anna and her daughters were burnt alive when the ghetto was destroyed.

My mother, Brocha Figlyar, was born in 1904, like my father. They were peers, neighbors and had been affectionate with each other since childhood. Later their friendship turned into a deep love and my very young parents got married in 1924. Mother said that they had a very rich wedding. They went under a chuppah in the Jurbarkas synagogue. All my mother's friends envied her posh wedding gown.

My father had already been a well-to-do merchant before getting married. The newly-weds moved into a new house, purchased for them. It wasn't far from the place, where my parents spent their childhood and adolescence. Grandmother Chaya Riva lived in that place at that time. In 1925 mother gave birth to her first son. He was named after Grandfather Isroel. I was born on 23rd August 1928. I was called Doba in honor of my maternal grandfather David. At home I was tenderly called Dobele.

I remember my childhood well. We lived in a large two-storied house with two entrances. The left one was occupied by our family, and the right one was unoccupied at times. There were times when Mother leased the second half of the house. In the late 1930s her cousin moved in there. There were four large rooms on the first floor of the left wing of the house; a large dining room, called salon by my mother. Her friends came to see her on the weekend. They had coffee or tea with cakes, did some handicraft, having a chat about their children, families and the problems with upbringing. A large oval mahogany table was in the center of the room. It was covered with a velvet cloth. Velvet curtains matched the table cloth. There was a small coffee table in the corner by the fireplace. My mother usually had her afternoon coffee there. In the evening a fire was made in the fireplace. Arm-chairs with matching velvet upholstery were by that small table.

My parent's big bedroom was next to the dining-room. There was a large carved bed in the center of the room with the tester. There were a small bed-room and a room, where my maternal grandmother Elke lived. My brother was independent since childhood. He occupied one of the rooms on the second floor. There was a large kitchen on the first floor with a stove. The stove was stoked with firewood. The stove was also used for cooking. On weekdays Mother and Grandmother didn't even get close to the stove. The food was cooked by a housekeeper, a Jew. That old lady - I can't recall her name - had worked for us before the Soviets came to power [5](#) and was very loyal to our family.

Our yard was big. There was a huge shed, where peasants - suppliers - put their grain. Usually Father and his assistant sat at the table by the shed and entered all his trading deals in a large logbook. Usually when the deal was closed common Lithuanian peasants came to our place, where Mother and Grandmother treated them to a lavish dinner. They often kept late hours, telling Mother about their families. At times they asked my mother for advice as they fully trusted her judgment. Mother asked villagers questions regarding our husbandry. We had a small kitchen-garden and an orchard, where my mother, grandmother and the housekeeper worked. Mother kept poultry - hens and turkeys - in a separate coop. We also had a cow and Grandmother made fresh butter and sour-cream herself. Our house had a nice forged fence. There was a small hut, where a Lithuanian woman - the guard - was on duty.

That Lithuanian did all the chores on Saturday, which was a day of rest for the religious Jews. She took food from the stove, stoked the stove, turned the light on. My parents weren't too religious. Neither my mother, nor my father covered their heads during the week, but they strictly observed all Jewish traditions. On Friday Father put a kippah and a dressy suit on to go to the synagogue. There was a thorough preparation for Sabbath at home. Mother and Grandmother didn't let anybody cook. During the week we always had meat, poultry, and dessert as our family was well-off. For Saturday Mother baked challot and cooked some unusual dishes like gefilte fish, which took a lot of time to cook, and all kinds of tsimes: from potatoes, beans, carrots; imberlakh - a dessert made from carrot and ginger, chicken broth with knejdlakh, forshmak from herring, liver pate etc. A nice pot with chulent was in the center of the table. As usual it was kept in the neighboring bakery in the oven after the challot had been baked.

Jewish charity was developed in our town. Without any special agreement rich Jews like my father supported poor Jews in their vicinity. Every Saturday Father brought a poor lad from the yeshivah to join our festive dinner. We had a regular 'customer' - as my father joked - a poor guy called Elke, who lived nearby and raised two orphaned girls. He came to us twice a week: on Saturday

and on Wednesday, had lunch and took a basket with food for his daughters. Usually Grandmother shoved a lita [Lithuanian currency] or two in Elke's pocket. It was good money at that time.

The kashrut was strictly observed in our family. Chicken and other fowl was taken to the shochet in the synagogue. Meat was bought in special kosher stores. There were separate dishes for meat and dairy products. All our dishes at home were very fancy: crystal, china and silverware. Everyday the food was served on a nicely laid table with a starched table cloth.

On holidays the best things were taken out from the chests. On those days my mother also went to the synagogue – dressed to the nines, with her head covered with a lacy kerchief. My brother and I started feeling the holiday from the presents we got. There was not a single holiday, when we wouldn't get new clothes, footwear and toys.

The first holiday of the Jewish year, Rosh Hashanah, usually was celebrated quietly and ceremoniously in our close family circle. It was obligatory to have gefilte fish on the table. The head of the fish was always eaten by the head of the family – my father. There were a lot of desserts – apples, honey, oranges and tangerines – Father always bought the best for this holiday. I don't remember any special rites on that holiday, but the next holiday, Yom Kippur, is associated in my memories with shofar sounds in the synagogue and the kapores rite. Mother gave me a hen, and brother was given a rooster. We took them to the shochet in the synagogue, who carried out that rite. My parents and grandmother fasted strictly on that day. Even we, the children, were given little food on that day just not to be starved. When the fast was over, in the evening, we had a rich feast.

On Sukkot, Father set up a sukkah in the yard, covered with fir branches. There was a table in the sukkah, where Father had meals during the holiday. We didn't enjoy having meals there, as falls were cold in Lithuania as a rule. The most important holiday in the fall was Simchat Torah. On that day all our kin came to ours, as my mother was the eldest daughter in her family. She laid a table for twenty people. It was a mirthful holiday. My brother and I watched a joyful procession carrying the Torah scroll from the synagogue and walking around the synagogue with it, dancing and singing. We didn't take part in those processions. Like any other Jewish family we lit the chanukkiyah on Chanukkah. It was traditionally placed on the window-sill. All Jewish houses shimmered with light on dark December nights. There were a lot of potato dishes – fritters, tsimes and doughnuts with jam. My parents and grandmother gave us Chanukkah gelt. Though I had a daily allowance when I went to school, Chanukkah gelt was somewhat special, festive and eagerly anticipated.

There was a joyful carnival on Purim. Later, when I went to the Jewish school, I also took part in it. We took shelakhmones to our relatives and neighbors. We also received gifts and compared who baked hamantashen the best. It seemed to me that my mother baked the tastiest. Right after Purim we started getting ready for the main Jewish holiday – Pesach. The house was impeccably clean, but still we scoured everything: windows, doors and the floor. The furniture and parquet were polished with wax. Tablecloths, curtains and drapes were changed. On the eve of the seder paschal dishes were taken out of the loft. That set was even more gorgeous than the one we used every day. I helped my mother take out the dishes, and admired them. I started feeling the holiday from that moment. In the evening my father banished the chametz: the remnants of leavened bread, which he burnt in the yard of our house. There was not a single bread crumb in the entire

paschal period. We ate matzah and dishes cooked from it.

Father, clad in festive attire, reclined on the pillows at the head of the table on the first day of the holiday. We knew that he was hiding a piece of matzah, the afikoman, under the pillow. In spite of the fact that the rite was one and the same year in year out, we were enthusiastic about finding the afikoman and getting a present. My brother and I in turns asked my father the four traditional questions about the origin of the holiday. The foods described in the Haggadah were on the table, namely potato, egg, chicken bone with meat, bitter herbs etc. We started eating that after Father's signal. There were masterpieces of my mother's culinary art on the table – fish, chicken stew, pecha, tsimes and matzah dishes like cakes etc. When it was getting dark, Father opened the door for the prophet Eliagu [Elijah]. A goblet with wine was also placed on the table for him. I tried to keep awake to see him, but I always failed. In the morning I asked my mom if Eliagu had come and she always said that he had.

When I turned five, my parents decided that I should get ready for school. A Jew called Fruma came to teach me. She had graduated from the Froebel Institute [6](#). Fruma gathered a group of four-five people, took us for walks and taught us the rudiments of reading. Before going to school I knew how to read in Yiddish very well. Though, when I turned seven, I was sent to study in the Hebrew school talmud torah. The teaching was in Hebrew there. First it was hard to study Hebrew, but when I finished the first grade, I was good at it. All other subjects like Mathematics, Natural Science and Literature were also taught in Hebrew. I had friends at school – Jewish girls, daughters of middle-class merchants like my father – Rivka, Chaïke, Toybele. We parted. I don't know what happened to them during the war. I don't know if any of them survived.

During the first two years of school I wasn't allowed to play in the yard with the girls. When I grew older, my mother gave me some money. My friends and I went for strolls in the park, located in the downtown area. It was a very scenic place. Sometimes we just sauntered there, arm in arm. At times we went to the cafes to eat ice-cream. Sometimes I went for walks with my brother. He was three years older than me. He treated me kindly, but still he wanted to get rid of his young sister when we went out. My brother also went to the talmud torah. He entered a Lithuanian lyceum afterwards. Israel's dream was to become a lawyer and Father understood that he had to be fluent in Lithuanian in order to pursue this dream.

On Saturdays our whole family went out. My parents were dressed up. My brother and I walked around the town, greeting our acquaintances and relatives every minute, who also got out for a walk on Saturdays. Sometimes we drove to the outskirts. It was great. In 1939, when Grandmother Chaya Riva and one of her sons settled in Kaunas, we came to see her. Kaunas impressed me greatly with grandeur of well-dressed people and its size. It seemed so big to me.

I learnt about Jewish traditions and holidays at the talmud torah. Apart from celebrations, children were also told about the history and origin of the holidays. I took part in theatrical performances on holidays. When I was in my last year of school, I joined the Zionist youth organization Betar [7](#). During our classes we were told about Palestine, learnt patriotic songs, got ready for rehearsals. I dreamt of Palestine as my Aunt Toybl left there in 1934. There was a plush farewell party, attended by all our relatives from Jurbarkas and Kaunas. Toybl wrote delightful letters from Palestine, telling about her life in the kibbutz, her participation in building her own state.

## **The Soviet invasion of the Baltics**

We didn't discuss the Soviet Union at home, but other Jewish families spoke of Russia all the time, saying the equality and fraternity of all peoples flourished there. Well-off people like my family were not seeking a better life. As they say the best is the enemy of the good. Though, my parents and brother, who was an independent grown-up, couldn't help being worried about the events taking place in Fascist Germany. They understood that their small country would be finally either under the Fascists or under Communist Russia. That is why when the Soviet Army came in June 1940 my parents took it calmly. They didn't want it, though they understood that they should better be part of Russia, than under the thumb of the Fascists. We didn't go out like many Jurbarkas Jews, who welcomed the Red Army with flowers. However, on the day when the Red Army entered the town, there was a terrible fire and many houses burned down. There were rumors that it was done by the Germans, who were leaving for Germany.

Soon our lives changed. The worst fears of my father were proven right. There was mass nationalization. Our shed was sequestered and Father remained without his business. Good thing that my parents had stashed some lump sum of money, and the whole basement and our coop was full of food, so we weren't so harshly affected by the changes. Uncle Max's houses were taken away. My mother was wise to let her cousin Mere, her husband Daniel and their daughter Raya live in the second half of our house. She was the daughter of Grandmother's sister Braina. She was much older than my mother. My mother asked for Mere's advice regarding many things. Part of our house was given to Mere and Daniel, so the authorities had no claims on our property. At that time Grandmother lived with Fayvel's family in Kaunas. In 1939 they sold their house and moved to Kaunas, where Grandmother Chaya Riva and uncle's wife kept a small store. Grandmother's store was nationalized but she wasn't included on the deportation lists [8](#) as she was considered to be a petty entrepreneur.

In 1940 I went to a new school. It was our Yiddish lyceum, which was now called secondary school. The classes were taught by the same teachers in the Jewish language, so we felt no difference so far. Some lessons were in Russian. First, it was a little bit hard for me. My parents knew Russian very well and helped me a lot. Pioneer [9](#) and Komsomol organizations [10](#) appeared instead of the Zionist ones. I didn't even think of joining them as our family was classified as rich and we had to get ready for the worst: exile to Siberia. There was no official information in this regard, but there were rumors that our family was on the deportation lists. I often think that it would have been better, if our family had been exiled: it might have saved my parents and brother. We were not exiled. Probably, we would have been, as many of our pals, less well-off than we were, had been exiled. Grandmother Elke took the changes very hard. She had heart trouble. She kept to bed and died a couple of weeks before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War.

### **During the war**

At night on 22nd June 1941 we woke up from strong blasts. It seemed to us that the land was upturned. Jurbarkas was very close to the German border, so there was no time to procrastinate. Father horsed a cart, Mother took some precious things, money, documents and we hit the road. We didn't manage to go far. We saw the Germans in about 10 kilometers from Jurbarkas. We had no place to go to, so we came back home. Further events of our life, having taken a sharp turn, are vague in my memories. I picture them as certain stills of an old worn film. The first reason for it is that my parents and brother were very protective, just not letting me out of the houses, and the second reason was the protective reaction of my young body, blocking the horrors from the

memory.

I remember the registration of the Jewish population on the first occupation day. Every day orders were released, and they were getting worse and more preposterous. At first, Jews were banned from being outside during the curfew hour, which was two hours earlier for the Jewish population than for the others. Jews were banned from going in most of the stores, and the cards, given to the population, could be used only in two stores to get the food products. We were not permitted to walk on the pavement. Jews could be easily recognized not only by their peculiar appearance, but by yellow stars on their attire, which were mandatory as per order of the Fascists. It was one of the first orders, and those who disobeyed were to be executed. Mother had been sewing those bands with stars all night long.

On 3rd July the first action took place. Gestapo officers came to all Jewish houses to get all men who were capable of work. My father, mother's brother Uncle Max and my brother, who had just turned 16, were taken. Father tried to comfort us, saying that men were taken to do some work and having finished it they would be back. He most likely believed what he was saying. All the men were shot in the town cemetery on that day. My sturdy and brave mother even smiled and said that we would see our father soon. We didn't leave the house for three days. We didn't starve, though. We had some product stock and my mother even managed to help our neighbors. She understood that her days were numbered. They even came to get her on 6th August. On that day all the wives of those executed on 3rd August were taken. Up until now I can't recall how my mother managed to save me. Either she sheltered me in the neighbor's place or something else. That day was obliterated from my memory.

Soon Aunt Mere and her husband Daniel came to us. Daniel was in hiding, so he wasn't shot with the rest of the men. Since that time they never left me by myself. They took good care of me as if I was their own daughter. That way we lived through August and part of September. I wasn't permitted to leave the house. I was as if in a stupor and mechanically did what I was told, like a doll. Somehow through her pals, Mere got in touch with her mother Braina, who was in the Kaunas ghetto. She said that Grandmother Chaya Riva and Father's sister Leya were in the same ghetto and we had to get permission to stay in the Kaunas ghetto. Mere found the right people in the Judenrat [11](#), bribed someone and we got an official permit to go to the Kaunas ghetto. Mere hired a cab from the peasants with the last money she had. I got on the cart and we -Mere and her daughter Raya left for Kaunas. I didn't care where I was going. Daniel stayed in Jurbarkas; he decided to keep an eye on the house and property. I never saw him again. In the words of other people, shortly after our departure he was executed together with the remaining men of the town.

I don't remember our way to Kaunas [about 100 kilometers]. I was on the floor of the cart and periodically dozed off, seeing my parents and brother alive. Though they still tried to lie to me, saying that I would see my mother in Kaunas, I was aware that she was not alive. I remember how we drove into the Kaunas ghetto. We got off by the gate of the ghetto, guarded by a sentry. Soon my Grandmother Chaya Riva and Leya rushed towards us. They were crying, embracing and kissing me. My kin took me with them and I never saw Mere and Raya again. I know that both of them perished in 1942 during one of the actions.

Grandmother and Leya lived in a poky room of about four meters. It used to be a warehouse of the local synagogue. Grandmother's sister Braina and her husband rabbi Montse had lived here. They



let Grandmother and Leya stay there. When the two of them were there they could manage somehow, when I came there was no room to swing a cat. I was sick in the first days. I had a nervous breakdown and was covered with furuncles all over. I was treated by rabbi Montse. He gave me something to drink and made poultices. We were afraid to call a doctor as it was widely known that there was no mercy for the sick: they put them out of their misery right away. Now I learnt what it was to be famished. I had nothing to eat.

In a while one of our acquaintances from Jurbarkas came. She wanted to find out about her kin. She saw our living conditions. She also didn't have that much space, but she invited us to come with her. There was a rather large room, though it was also densely populated. We were given a corner: a quarter of the entire square. There was a bed by the wall, where Grandmother and I slept, Leya slept on the mattress on the floor. The hostess with her nine-year-old grandson and a daughter-in-law were in front of us. Besides, a young schizophrenic girl was also in the room. She hardly ate anything and barely got up. She was executed during one of the first actions.

The first year in the ghetto was very hard. We were cold and hungry. Leya set up a small stove in the middle of the room and stoked it the best way she could, as it was next to impossible to get firewood. We were starving: we got a little gray bread and grain. We lived in constant fear of actions, the frequency and purpose of which we could not predict. During one of the actions children and old people were taken, other actions were against those incapable of work and those who had no profession, sometimes people were chosen randomly, without any principle. During one of the big actions, I, being 13 and looking like an 18-year-old, and grandmother looking like an 80-year-old, were taken to the 'good side,' to the ones who were to live. Aunt also was with us as she looked very good. Many people were surprised how we could have been so lucky. At that time Leya had a very good acquaintance in the Jewish police, who was helping us. He must have helped us that time.

In the second year of our stay in the ghetto we gradually adjusted to the dreadful conditions and tried to get acclimatized. Leya found a job. She left the ghetto with the working crew and came back to the ghetto after work. She even managed to bring us some food. I went to work in the children crew. We weeded gardens beyond the ghetto territory. We could stealthily eat a carrot, onion and bring something to my grandmother. Having worked in children's crews for a while, I found out about the so-called 'angels' in the ghetto. 'Angels' were children, hired by rich Jews, who were living in the ghetto, to work instead of adult and healthy people.

I also became an angel. I worked on the aerodrome instead of a grown-up man. The work was hard: I dug ditches with a heavy shovel. In the morning I got a slice of bread and some sugar; if I had a good host, I could get a piece of sausage or pig's fat. At times I was given frozen marmalade or a potato. I was happy to get anything. The person I was working for got a yellow working card, and was protected by it during the actions. Then my pals helped me be included in a good crew, which unloaded cars. We unloaded firewood and stacked it. Now I managed to bring some firewood home. It was the most precious commodity in the ghetto. In the evening Leya and I came home – it didn't take me long to consider the room where we were staying home. When we came home, Grandmother would have already made scarce dinner from the food we could get. She was constantly praying and fasted when she was supposed to in spite of starvation. Leya became like a second mother to me. Before the war she got married. Her husband Yakov was in the lines. Leya didn't have children, and her unused maternal instinct was directed at me. Leya was like a mother

to me in many ways, as well as my best friend, as our disparity in years was not great. She never left me by myself. If during the actions I was taken to the wrong side, she came with me and it turned out as if either God or my parents from another world were protecting me.

In October 1943 we were ousted in the street when the Kaunas ghetto was about to be destroyed. We decided that it was a regular action. In reality, we were classified in two groups as usual and one of them was to be executed. We were lucky: the three of us remained in the auspicious group of women. We were even allowed to take some warm things and food with us. We got on trucks and headed in an unknown direction. First we thought we were taken to the execution place – fort 9, and when they passed it we understood that we were heading for work. Policemen yelled and beat us while we were getting on the cars. Those policemen were Western Ukrainians.

There were about 3500 of us in a car. We were packed like a tin of sardines. We traveled standing. Nobody gave us food, and it was impossible to get the things we had taken with us. We were thirsty, but we weren't given any water. Soon we started to relieve ourselves on the spot without looking at each other. It was the first time when I felt on my own skin that one of the main tasks of Hitler's people was to deprive people of human dignity and make them turn into stupid unreasoning cattle.

We got off on the platform and went to the camp. It was the labor camp of Goldfield, located in Estonia not far from Tartu. We settled in tents and started building a cantonment. Soon there were barracks. It was a camp with Gestapo security guards with German sheepdogs, trained to attack people. Each of us was given a number sewed onto our clothes. There were only Jews there, so there was no need in classifying us by nationality. It was the first time during the occupation when I took off my Magen David. The camp was gradually growing. First there were only Baltic Jews, and in 1944 Jews from Hungary and Czechoslovakia were also brought here. We were involved in hard shoveling works, getting scarce camp rations: gruel and a slice of bread with sawdust and a slice of such bread with margarine for breakfast. We stayed in that camp for seven and a half months.

In summer 1944 there was another action: selection. I was taken to the line of workers, and my aunt and grandmother were taken to the line for execution. Aunt managed to run to me, but Grandmother waved her hand hopelessly and remained in the line consisting of old and feeble women. We had to get on the train again and travel in the same tough conditions as on the way here. We came to the camp in the town of Kilege, also located in Estonia. We had stayed there for a week before starting work. We were taken to the timbering works. It was very hard work.

We were constantly thinking of my grandmother, assuming that she was dead, but we were lucky to see her once again. In about two weeks, on our way from work, we saw that some women who were selected in the previous camp were being taken to one of the barracks. It was guarded by Gestapo people, but we managed to see Grandmother and have a talk with her, separated by a barbed partition, fearing that we might be beaten or yelled at by the guard. Grandmother prayed for us. She said good-bye and having blessed us to live, promised to pray for us in another world. We must have had many people who prayed and pleaded for us. Grandmother and the other ladies were executed the next day.

I, a lean girl, and my aunt, remained in this horrible camp. We were given only potage. There was no water. Dozens of women died of hunger, because of working hard, and from infectious diseases. There were the same conditions as in any concentration camp – barracks with bunks, with sacks of

hay on top of them, checkups, beating and all the other things invented by Hitler's system to exterminate people. Though, in the morning we were given thin coffee and a piece of bread. We had not had such a tidbit in any other camp. Many people were sick, but they couldn't stay in bed. If someone didn't get up for the morning roll call, he would be shot at once at the camp gates. We were not beaten, as we were so feeble that we fell and died without any external intrusion. My energetic aunt found some pals here and got an old basin and gave me a bath with soap every evening. She found that bar of soap very precious.

There was no way we could know that Hitler's defeated troops were rolling down to the West. We didn't know that in July 1944 Vilnius was liberated and Kaunas in August. We could only second-guess, seeing the bold Fascists. In August 1944 we were taken together, shaved, for us not to escape on our way, as being bald everybody would see that we were convicts, and taken to the West. Now we were taken to the real death concentration camp of Stutthof [12](#). It was a huge international camp. There was a constant fume from the furnaces of the camp crematorium and we only had to wait for our turn. We didn't work there and we were hardly given any food. We could only remember morning coffee in Kiliiele. In the morning we got up for a roll call and afterwards we weren't permitted to go back to the barracks. We remained standing outside. Some of us fell down dead.

In a month they selected capable women for a labor camp. My aunt was selected, but I was totally emaciated, gaunt and bald and I was thrown out. Then Leya ran up to me. She was ready to die, but to stay with me. Women gave me better clothes to wear before another stage of selection. They put some make-up on my eyes, covered my head. That time both of us were picked to go to the labor camp Rustashin, which was practically a branch of Stutthof.

When we came there, first I decided that we were in paradise. There were small clean barracks, where about 40-50 of our good acquaintances were living. There were iron beds with mattresses instead of double-tiered bunks. There was even linen there! There was a shower room with cold and hot running water and towels. Here we weren't given mixed clothes like in Stutthof, but new dresses, warm felt pants and jerseys and wooden footwear, which was common for the camps. The nutrition here was very good: thick potage. However, we had to work very hard. We had to change the rails on the rail road. We crushed stones all day long. We had gloves on, but still our hands were bruised.

The turnkeys were Gestapo women since it was a women's camp. Many of them teased the prisoners, arranged control roll calls, had us align several times a night. Those who couldn't stand were killed at once. We were lucky, our Gestapo women, Vanda and Marta, turned out to be ordinary women and treated the prisoners in a humane way. They even tried to help us the best way they could: they didn't say who was sick and brought them medicine. My aunt, who could approach anybody, soon made friends with them. Vanda and Marta told Leya about their families and sympathized with me.

At the beginning of March 1945 we were told to align in columns and go towards the west. It was cold. It snowed heavily. It was hard for us to walk, as our legs got stuck in the snow. I felt nothing. I was aware that I shouldn't stop as those who couldn't walk were shot at once. We didn't see Vanda and Marta. They most likely had escaped in the western direction as the Soviet Army was attacking. We had been walking and walking, making halts only over night. At night, on 10th March

we were locked in an old wooden shed to spend the night there. Early in the morning the door was opened and Soviet soldiers entered it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I thought that it was an agonal apparition. There were no security guards as they ran away at night. People were crying. My aunt was sobbing and embracing me. Women hugged and kissed the soldiers. They told us that we were free and could go home any time. We weren't given any assistance. Those were leading units of the acting troops who were heading towards the West.

### **After the war**

We happened to be on Polish territory. We were bereft, sick, but free. We took the canned food and rusks left by the Gestapo and headed home. We walked during the day and stopped overnight in the houses of peasants, who let us in. Our worst fear was that the Fascists might come back. Even when Leya and I caught typhus fever we didn't stop. Sick and afraid, we were on the road without taking any medicine. It was dark in our eyes, but we didn't stop. We reached Lodsi, where a Jewish committee was acting. We were told to spend the night in the former ghetto. We settled in an old Jewish house, the inhabitants of which had been exterminated with all the ghetto prisoners.

We were sent to Warsaw from Lodsi. There we also settled on the territory of the former Warsaw ghetto [13](#). We were given food, examined by the doctor every day. It was still hard: we had neither clothes nor footwear. We were cold. We were told to go anywhere we wished, but many Jews decided to go to Palestine. I tried to talk Aunt Leya into it, as Palestine was my cherished dream. Besides, nobody was waiting for me at home. Leya hoped that her husband Yakov would come back from the lines and she convinced me that we should go back to Lithuania. We were sent to a distribution camp in Grodno and stayed there for ten days. We were treated kindly. We got food and beverages, clean linen. I can't say anything bad about investigators who had worked with us, they merely did their job [14](#). Then we were sent home.

In July 1945 Leya and I came to Kaunas. First we were given a place in a dormitory. Several people lived in one room. In a couple of days we met our friend from the camp - I can't recall her name - and she took us with her. People who had to go through the camps found their property precious, they valued human life and tried to assist each other the best way they could. That lady had two rooms and she gave one to us. Leya found a job. She was waiting for her husband to come back from the front. It turned out that Yakov was alive. We got our documents. My name was misspelt - not Doba, but Dobre. I decided: let that kind name stay [Editor's note: 'dobre' means 'good' in Ukrainian]. Since that time I am Dobre in my documents. At home I was called Dobele, the way I was called in my childhood.

I was yearning for coming back to my native town and in a while my aunt took me to Jurbarkas. Our house wasn't destroyed, but it was occupied by Lithuanians, and we had to wait for it to be vacated. I was sheltered by our neighbor Abu Fales. He was married. He and his family, his wife Chiena and their children, remained in the occupation. His loved ones perished, but Abu was miraculously rescued by local Lithuanians. Abu treated me like his own daughter. I stayed with him for a couple of months and could stay there as if I was his daughter. He married for the second time. His second wife was Miriam. She also lost her family. They suggested adopting me. I was seventeen. I loved and remembered my parents, and couldn't betray the memory of them. I understood that I had to start a new adult life.

All happened almost at once. The house was vacated and I was summoned to the municipal ispolkom [15](#) and given the permission to live in our house. I still wonder why they didn't house anyone with me as the house was large. At that time the son of my parents' good friends, Sholom Ruvim Rozenbergas, came back from the lines. I had known him very well before the war, but since he was five years older than me, I never used to have common interests with him, as there was quite a big gap between us in my childhood. Now, as the two of us were lonely, we were attracted to each other. First, we had recollections that bound us, then we fell in love with each other. In the middle of 1946 we got our marriage registered at the regional marriage register. Of course, both of us wanted to be wed under a chuppah, but there was neither a synagogue nor a rabbi in Jurbarkas. During the occupation Fascists made Jews destroy the synagogue with their own hands, stone by stone, and then they shot them on that place.

My husband was born in Jurbarkas in 1923. His father Dovid owned a store, and his mother Mere took care of the children and household. Sholom's parents and his sister Pesya perished in the occupation. He was in the lines, serving in the 16th Lithuanian division [16](#). He was awarded many orders and medals. He came back to his native town with the rank of sergeant-major. Sholom didn't have any special education. He went to school in Kaunas before the war. He was a very gifted man. First he found a job at the canteen, later he was appointed for management positions. He became a member of the Communist Party. When he was to join it, he sincerely believed in the Party.

I didn't work at that time. In 1947 I gave birth to a daughter and named her after our mothers, Brocha Mere, and in 1948 I bore a son and named him after my father Motle. At first, our life was hard from the financial point of view. My husband was the only one who worked in our family, as I took care of the children. I went to work, when the children were a little older. In 1950 I sold half of our house and bought a cow with that money. Now our children had milk. Life was getting better and we weren't going to leave Jurbarkas.

My husband worked as a deputy chairman of the district administration of the Consumer's Council. He was a very honest, decent and literate man, so the leaders appreciated him. When anti-Semitic campaigns [17](#) commenced in the country, we were also affected by them. It turned out that my uncle Iosif from the USA was looking for me at that time. He was happy to find me alive. He wrote me a letter, saying that he was old and couldn't come for a visit, but he was willing to help us. Iosif started sending us parcels. At that time any relationship with capitalist countries was unacceptable, especially for Party members. My husband was called in front of the municipal committee, where he was reminded that his wife came from a rich family. Sholom got away with a stringent reprimand, but he was fired. He was unemployed for one year and only a year after Stalin's death [1953] he was offered a job in another town.

He was transferred to the small town of Sakiai, not far from Kaunas. I sold the second half of the house and we moved to a new place. Sholom became the chairman of the district administration of the Consumer's Council in that town. We were provided with lodging right away: a half of a good house. The children went to school and I had a chance to start working. I went to work for a small bakery as a baker. I worked there for six years.

In spite of our Communist beliefs both I and Sholom observed Jewish traditions at home. Of course, my husband and consequently I had to go to work on Saturday and we couldn't observe the

kashrut as there were problems with any food products, not to mention the kosher ones. I have always fasted on Yom Kippur and on Jewish holidays I made a feast for my family and Jewish friends. Following my mother's tradition I made the biggest feast on the holiday of Simchat Torah. We always celebrated Pesach, even in the hardest years for the Jews. We bought matzah from women, who ran the risk of baking it at home.

We spoke Yiddish at home so it was the mother tongue of my children. My children were raised as true Jews. They were proud of their purely Jewish names and even didn't try changing them for any comfortable European ones [18](#). At school they were called Mere and Motle. My children, didn't feel even an iota of the anti-Semitism that we had to feel. Both of them went to school, where there were a lot of Jews. There was a very friendly and warm relationship between the Jews and other nationalities. My daughter was very active. She took part in all possible extra-curricular activities. Upon graduation both of them entered a university – my son went to the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute, construction department, and my daughter to the Vilnius University.

When our children left home in the mid-1960s, it was hard for us to live far away from them and my husband started looking for a job in Kaunas or in Vilnius. He was offered the position of the director at a ceramics plant in Kaunas. The plant was in a deplorable state and in half a year, under Sholom's management, it exceeded projected performance ratios. Then the minister of construction of Lithuania, Brazgauskas, called my husband and gave him a good five-room apartment in the heart of Kaunas. We have lived in Kaunas since then. I moved to my husband and found a job as a technical controller at a textile factory. I worked there until my retirement. Our family did well in that period of time. My husband bought a car. We had a plot of land for gardening [19](#), but we had to sell it as we had no time for it. My husband was a true workaholic. Having a chance to spend vacations in the spas every year, he took vacation once in two-three years. I went with him only once. I devoted all my spare time to my children, and later to my grandchildren.

As a student, my daughter met a good Jewish guy and married him. Her husband, Fayvel Reznik, also graduated from Vilnius University. Having finished the institute Mere and Fayvel were supposed to work as per mandatory job assignment in accordance with the Soviet legislation [20](#). My daughter worked as a German language teacher at school. She had taught for three years when she submitted the documents for immigration to Israel in the early 1970s, the peak of immigration of the Jews, when they were stigmatized at general meetings and fired. My daughter and Fayvel were fired and we helped them before they left. My husband was sure that he would be dismissed as well, but he was just summoned to the municipal ispolkom. He was officially reprimanded and that was it. The matter is that my husband was a great expert, so he wasn't expelled from the Party and remained at work. My daughter left for Israel. She is still living comfortably in Tel Aviv. She gave birth to two daughters. Her elder one, Avigal, is married. She has a daughter, Liya. Fayvel and Mere's younger daughter Neta, born in 1975, is living in Hilat. Neta is single. She is a prosperous manager. She dedicated herself to work.

My son married a beautiful Jewish girl, Ida Tregeraite, upon graduation from university. In 1975 when the Soviet power was in full swing, my children went under a chuppah in the synagogue, and my husband, a member of the Party, was also in the synagogue with me. My daughter-in-law became like a daughter to me. I love and cherish her. My son is working as an engineer in a design institute. Motle has two children. His elder son, Ilan, recently turned 28. He and his wife left for Israel in 1994. They are still living there. He became a very religious Jew. He observes all the

traditions. Ilan has a daughter. My great-granddaughter Nehama recently turned five. This year Motle's daughter, born in 1982, my favorite Elina, graduated from the Medical Institute in Kaunas.

I can say that my fate rewarded me for my ordeals and destitution. I have lived a wonderful life with a caring and loving husband. In 1991 I had a heart attack and it was hard for me to recover. Unfortunately, I had to stop working. Sholom also quit his job in order to look after me. He didn't let me do anything, not only hard work. He didn't even let me cook. He bought everything and cooked himself. In general he took very good care of me. We dreamt of moving to Israel, but doctors recommend me not to do it because of the hot climate. In 1997 my Sholom died. He had an easy and sudden death without ever being a burden to his children.

I have been living by myself since that time. I have wonderful children and grandchildren, who remember about me, are warm and kind to me the way I have always been to them. A couple of years ago my son insisted that I should be operated on my heart. I am quite well. I have been to Israel only once. It is too hot there. My daughter flies to see me every year. We are very close, like best friends.

Aunt Leya and I remained very close in the postwar years. Her husband Yakov didn't return to her. During the war he fell in love with another woman, a military nurse, and went to her. First, Leya took their separation hard, then she married a Jew, Yoselevich. Leya gave birth to a daughter, Sarah, and left for Israel in the early 1970s. We had kept in touch all those years and I knew what was happening with her family. We worried about them when the country was at war. I didn't manage to move to the Promised Land. First we raised our children, then we got sick and old. It appeared that it was too late to change anything in our lives. Leya died in 2000 at the age of 84.

I find it a positive development that Lithuania finally gained its independence [21](#). Moreover I even envy Lithuanians, as they are living in a free country. We, the Jews, will never be kindred and close to them, even now Lithuanians treat us as strangers. But now for the first time in the postwar years, Jewish life has been revived. I am a member of the Jewish community, I attend all holidays there, I made many friends. A couple of days ago we celebrated Rosh Hashanah in the best restaurant in town. Now I am getting ready for Simchat Torah. I never break the tradition. I always make it a holiday for my children and grandchildren.

I will never forget the horrors of the war. I take part in all the events of the community of former ghetto prisoners. We go to the places of the Jewish catastrophe. We went to Stutthof and other camps, I had to go through. We commemorate our kin and hope that such a catastrophe will never happen again.

## **Glossary:**

### **[1](#) Kaunas ghetto**

On 24th June 1941 the Germans captured Kaunas. Two ghettos were established in the city, a small and a big one, and 48,000 Jews were taken there. Within two and a half months the small ghetto was eliminated and during the 'Grossaktion' of 28th-29th October, thousands of the survivors were murdered, including children. The remaining 17,412 people in the big ghetto were mobilized to work. On 27th-28th March 1944 another 18,000 were killed and 4,000 were taken to

different camps in July before the Soviet Army captured the city. The total number of people who perished in the Kaunas ghetto was 35,000.

## **2 Great Patriotic war**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic war. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **3 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **4 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

## **5 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)**

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

## **6 Froebel Institute**

F. W. A. Froebel (1783-1852), German educational theorist, developed the idea of raising children in kindergartens. In Russia the Froebel training institutions functioned from 1872-1917 The three-year training was intended for tutors of children in families and kindergartens.

## **7 Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement**

It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first



fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

## **8 Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)**

After the Soviet Union occupied the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in June 1940 as a part of establishing the Soviet system, mass deportation of the local population began. The victims of these were mainly but not exclusively those unwanted by the regime: the local bourgeoisie and the previously politically active strata. Deportations to remote parts of the Soviet Union continued up until the death of Stalin. The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. Deportations were reintroduced after the Soviet Army recaptured the three countries from Nazi Germany in 1944. Partisan fights against the Soviet occupiers were going on all up to 1956, when the last squad was eliminated. Between June 1948 and January 1950, in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodged from labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life' from Latvia 52,541, from Lithuania 118,599 and from Estonia 32,450 people were deported. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Lithuanian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable to reject the regime. Most of the exiled died in the foreign land. Besides, about 100,000 people were killed in action and in fusillade for being members of partisan squads and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

## **9 All-Union pioneer organization**

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

## **10 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread the ideas of Communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a Communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education, people could accept as uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **11 Judenrat**

Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for

everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

## **12 Stutthof**

German concentration camp 36 km east of Gdansk. The Germans also created a series of satellite camps in the vicinity: Stolp, Heiligenbeil, Gerdauen, Jesau, Schippenbeil, Seerappen, Praust, Burggraben, Thorn and Elbing. The Stutthof camp operated from 2nd September 1939 until 9th May 1945. The first group of prisoners (several hundred people) were Jews from Gdansk. Until 1943 small groups of Jews from Warsaw, Bialystok and other places were sent there. In early 1944 some 20,000 Auschwitz survivors were relocated to Stutthof. In spring 1944 the camp was extended significantly and was made into a death camp; subsequent transports comprised groups of Jews from Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Lodz in Poland. Towards the end of 1944 around 12,000 prisoners were taken from Stutthof to camps in Germany – Dachau, Buchenwald, Neuengamme and Flossenburg. In January 1945 the evacuation of Stutthof and its satellite camps began. In that period some 29,000 prisoners passed through the camp (including 26,000 women), 26,000 of whom died during the evacuation. Of the 52,000 or so people who were taken to Stutthof and its satellites, around 3,000 survived.

## **13 Warsaw Ghetto**

A separate residential district for Jews in Warsaw created over several months in 1940. On 16th November 1940 138,000 people were enclosed behind its walls. Over the following months the population of the ghetto increased as more people were relocated from the small towns surrounding the city. By March 1941 445,000 people were living in the ghetto. Subsequently, the number of the ghetto's inhabitants began to fall sharply as a result of disease, hunger, deportation, persecution and liquidation. The ghetto was also systematically reduced in size. The internal administrative body was the Jewish Council (Judenrat). The Warsaw ghetto ceased to exist on 15th May 1943, when the Germans pronounced the failure of the uprising, staged by the Jewish soldiers, and razed the area to the ground.

## **14 SMERSH**

Russian abbreviation for 'Smert Shpionam' meaning Death to Spies. It was a counterintelligence department in the Soviet Union formed during World War II, to secure the rear of the active Red Army, on the front to arrest 'traitors, deserters, spies, and criminal elements'. The full name of the entity was USSR People's Commissariat of Defense Chief Counterintelligence Directorate 'SMERSH'. This name for the counterintelligence division of the Red Army was introduced on 19th April 1943, and worked as a separate entity until 1946. It was headed by Viktor Abakumov. At the same time a SMERSH directorate within the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Navy and a SMERSH department of the NKVD were created. The main opponent of SMERSH in its counterintelligence activity was Abwehr, the German military foreign information and counterintelligence department. SMERSH activities also included 'filtering' the soldiers recovered from captivity and the population

of the gained territories. It was also used to punish within the NKVD itself; allowed to investigate, arrest and torture, force to sign fake confessions, put on a show trial, and either send to the camps or shoot people. SMERSH would also often be sent out to find and kill defectors, double agents, etc.; also used to maintain military discipline in the Red Army by means of barrier forces, that were supposed to shoot down the Soviet troops in the cases of retreat. SMERSH was also used to hunt down 'enemies of the people' outside Soviet territory.

## **15 Ispolkom**

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'Soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the Soviets. The democratic credentials of the Soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

## **16 16th Lithuanian division**

It was formed according to a Soviet resolution on 18th December 1941 and consisted of residents of the annexed former Lithuanian Republic. The Lithuanian division consisted of 10.000 people (34,2 percent of whom were Jewish), it was well equipped and was completed by 7th July 1942. In 1943 it took part in the Kursk battle, fought in Belarus and was a part of the Kalinin front. All together it liberated over 600 towns and villages and took 12.000 German soldiers as captives. In summer 1944 it took part in the liberation of Vilnius joining the 3rd Belarusian Front, fought in the Kurland and exterminated the besieged German troops in Memel (Klaipeda). After the victory its headquarters were relocated in Vilnius, in 1945-46 most veterans were demobilized but some officers stayed in the Soviet Army.

## **17 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

**18** Common name: Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the

spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

[19](#) Dacha: country house, consisting of small huts and little plots of lands. The Soviet authorities came to the decision to allow this activity to the Soviet people to support themselves. The majority of urban citizens grow vegetables and fruit in their small gardens to make preserves for winter.

[20](#) Mandatory job assignment in the USSR: Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory two-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

## **[21](#) Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic**

On 11th March 1990 the Lithuanian State Assembly declared Lithuania an independent republic. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held in February 1991, over 90 percent of the participants (turn out was 84 percent) voted for independence. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 6th September 1991. On 17th September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations.