

# Rafael Genis

Rafael Genis

Telsiai

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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I came to the small town of Telsiai [about 250 km east of Vilnius] on Sunday to meet with the chairman of the local Jewish community. The town is located in the central part of Lithuania and it looks like most Lithuanian towns: car park, super market, the downtown and lanes stretching up to the hills. In about 20 minutes I found Mr. Genis's house, which looked much better than the adjacent one: a beautiful, white brick building with a peculiar entrance and stairs. It looked neither like the old houses, nor like the modern cottages. The owner met me downstairs. He was a big elderly man with reddish hair and light eyes: to be more exact he had only one eye, as he lost the other one. Rafael

Genis showed me to the second floor, where most rooms were. He was short of breath when coming upstairs. He had recently had a heart operation. He can hardly talk as every word seems to be an effort for him. Therefore I didn't insist on a detailed story. After the interview Rafael introduced me to his wife, who was waiting for us in a spacious kitchen on the first floor.



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## **My family background**

My grandfather was born in the 1860s in the small town of Rietavas [about 250 km east of Vilnius] of Telsiai province in Lithuania. I vividly remember my paternal grandfather. His name was Bentsion Genis. When I was a child, Bentsion was a widower, and my grandmother, whose name I don't know, died long before I was born. Grandfather was a butcher and owned his own butcher's shop. During my childhood, he wasn't working anymore and was living with his four single daughters. Bentsion was an elderly man. He was sick for a long time and then kept to bed. I loved Grandpa and often felt sorry for him. I often called on him as our house was close by. Grandpa was rather well-off. There was a bakery and his daughters' store in his large house. The entire second floor was leased. Apart from the house, Grandfather owned 12 hectares of land. In summer he

hired Lithuanians, who mowed the grass.

Once in the summer of 1933 I ran up to Grandpa. He was panting and asked me to raise him up. I raised his pillow and suddenly he grunted and then calmed down. He practically died in my arms. I was ten, but still I was a rather grown-up boy. At any rate, I wasn't frightened and called for the adults right away. Grandpa was buried in accordance with the Jewish rites. I was present at his funeral and remember it very well. Grandpa was lying on the floor with his feet to the door and Jews were sitting around him and praying. Then they covered him with a shroud with what looked like overalls covering his feet, put him on a large sheet and carried him across the whole town to the cemetery. Wide boards were placed by the sides of the pit. Grandpa was put in the grave in that sheet. Right before he was put in his grave, they placed small branches between his fingers, which allegedly should help him get up on Doomsday when the dead rise up from their graves. They put pieces of clay on his eyes, when he had already been placed in the tomb. Then they covered him with a large board and put earth on top of it. There was mourning - shivah - for seven days.

Bentsion had a lot of kids. The sons, except for my father, left for America, when they were young. One of them was Zalman, but I don't remember the name of the other one. Father's brothers got married and had children in the USA, but I don't know their names. In prewar times, when Grandpa was still alive, my uncles sent us money and clothes from the USA. Probably they sent secondhand clothing, which was of a good quality and in good condition. They stopped writing to us after Grandpa's death, and we don't know what happened to them.

Father's elder sister Chaya Riva, born a year or two before him, lived in the house of Grandpa Bentsion along with her sisters. Chaya Riva baked bread and pretzels. Most work was done on Sunday, when Lithuanians came to the market from the villages. They stopped by in Grandpa's yard and left their horses and carts there. Whether their trade was successful or not, the peasants went to the church and then came over to Grandpa's for a cup of tea. There was a large old copper samovar, and big chunks of sugar in a bowl with tongs. Lithuanians slowly sipped their tea with white bread and pastries. Chaya Riva had special bread: it was white and light.

Another sister, Channa, born after Chaya Riva, owned a tiny store. She sold sweets, groceries, chocolate and herring. Channa gave a discount to Lithuanians - she didn't sell ten herrings for a lita - which was a common price - but 11. That is why she had many customers. I remember that the peasants came in the store with canisters, where they put the pickled herring juice. Channa also sold the bread, which wasn't gone during the market days. Father's sisters Chaya Riva and Channa remained single. Both of them perished at the very beginning of the Fascist occupation. They were shot along with other Jews of Rietavas in Telsiai.

The younger sisters - Ella and Golda - got help from the older ones. They took care of house chores, looked after their father and stepped in for the elder sisters in the bakery shop. When Bentsion died, Ella and Golda left for America, where their elder brothers were living and they hoped that they would settle down there, as here they were considered spinsters. Indeed, both of them got married in the USA and settled in New York.

Ella married a well-heeled widower, whose name I can't recall. She raised two kids: her husband's son from his first marriage and their son. Her son died at the age of 21 during an appendicitis operation and after her husband's death, Ella lived with her stepson for several years. She moved

out, when he got married. She had enough money, and all the house work was done by the maids. All those years Ella was close with Golda.

Golda married an American Jew called Bromberg, her relative, and bore a child, whom she named Bentsion after Grandfather. I saw both of my aunts in 1989 during perestroika [1](#), when after a long separation I had a chance to visit them in the USA. My aunts wrote that they wanted to see their nephew, who was the only one to survive the war, and I managed to go see Ella and Golda. The two sisters were still friends - Ella helped out her poorer sister and they started every morning with talking to each other over the phone.

My aunts remained religious till the end of their days. They didn't do anything on Sabbath, celebrated Jewish holidays, went to the synagogue on holidays, observed the kashrut, fasted on Yom Kippur and donated to charity in a local synagogue. Ella died in 1998 in the USA. Golda happened to see Israel. She went there with her son's family and died in the Promised Land in 2002.

During that trip to the USA that I mentioned before I wanted to see the wives of my father's brothers - Zalman and the second one, whose name I cannot recall. The old matrons weren't willing even to see me and turned me down.

My father, Yankle Genis, was born in 1888. He only finished cheder and a Jewish elementary school, but he was literate. He knew how to read, speak and write Yiddish, Russian and Lithuanian. Before I was born, Father served in the army. He was a lancer. He was drafted for prequalification. Since his childhood my father helped Grandpa and also became a butcher. There was a butcher's at our place. Father made kosher meat for Jews; he removed all tendons and vessels. Rich Jews ordered meat and he sent me to them to deliver it. Father cut the meat and sold the rest of it to the Lithuanians, including sausages.

I didn't know my maternal grandmother. She died long before I was born. However, I knew my maternal grandfather very well. His name was Nakhman Maoerer. He was a tailor. He knew how to make and remake men's, women's and children's garments. In the summer Nakhman lived in the small town of Gargzdai, not far from Klaipeda. Grandpa had a large plantation there. He planted cucumbers. Nakhman liked working on the land, being out in the fresh air, so he stayed in Gargzdai until it got cold. In the fall, usually in late September, Grandpa moved to Rietavas and stayed with us until the spring.

Grandpa was religious: he had a broad and thick beard and wore a kippah. He didn't idle in Rietavas. He would make, remake and mend clothes all winter long. Nakhman was an expert in leather, and peasants brought him the leather, from which he made coats and jackets. Grandpa worked in a separate room, where a Singer sewing machine was placed, as well as presses and a flap table. Grandpa also slept in that room. Very often rich Lithuanians picked him up and took him to their place, where he would work for several days, making clothes for the whole family. In such a case, he took his Singer sewing machine in his hands and just gave its stand to the customers to carry. During this period of time he also fixed our clothes: for my mother, father, me and other kids. Our relatives from the USA often sent him parcels and money. He shared their contents with us, while he was staying at our place.

Grandpa Nakhman lived until the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War [2](#) and would have still lived longer as he was very robust, which wasn't common for people of his age. He was shot in Telsiai in the summer of 1941 along with many other family members.

As I said before, Grandpa grew cucumbers in the town of Gargzdai. My mother's elder sister Golda also lived there with her large family. Golda's husband, Liber Rupel, sold the cucumbers harvested by Grandfather. He put the cucumbers in the horsed cart and went across Klaipeda crying out: 'cucumbers, cucumbers!' He also took the whole cart to Rietavas, where he purchased strawberries and other berries and took them to Gargzdai and Klaipeda. There were times, when he brought small smoked fish from Klaipeda. In general, he had a trading business.

Golda was also very entrepreneurial. She had her own horses and came to the markets with a big cart and loaded it with all kinds of goods. Golda went from town to town, supplying goods to her customers. Golda and Liber had many children. Before the war, their elder daughter Entle worked as a nurse in Telsiai. When the war broke out, she joined the Russians and was a nurse in the lines. After the war she married a Russian officer and lived with him in the town of Pavlovsk, Rostov oblast [today Russia]. My cousin had a tragic death a couple of years ago. The details of her death are still unknown. What is not clear is why somebody would want to kill a lonely, sick and poor woman. Golda's other children: sons Abba and Meishe and daughter Aza - I don't remember the rest - were shot in Gargzdai in the first days of occupation.

My mother, Feiga Taube Maoerer, was born in Gargzdai in 1898. She finished elementary school and was literate like my dad. She read, wrote, and sang well. Mother was a very cheerful lady. During my childhood it wasn't common to ask one's parents about their past. So, I don't know how they met. Most likely they were introduced by shadkhanim, who married off practically all Jews. My mother got married when she was very young.

## Growing up

In 1916 the first-born, my elder brother Dovid, came into the world. Liber was born two years later, Isroel - in 1920 and in 1922 - Abram. On 21st June 1923 I was born. Mother was expecting a difficult parturition, so she left for Klaipeda to give birth there. Thus, I came into the world in Klaipeda and my birth certificate in Lithuanian and German was issued there. I was named Rafael. Another sibling was born in our family. In 1927 a long awaited girl, Tsilya, was born. Everybody adored the baby. The elder ones carried her in their arms and played with her like with a doll. When she grew up, all of us pampered her. We, the elder kids, were made to work about the house and in the garden, and Tsilya was our little princess. Then [in 1929] a boy, Ichil Berko, was born after Tsilya.

Our house was on the central street called Kvedarnos. That street name has been kept. Our town was Jewish. More than a half of the three-thousand strong population were Jews. It is hard to remember everybody, but I still can recall some last names. Gorol sold hardware, tiles, rolled iron; Katz dealt in textile. There were three restaurants in our town, owned by the Jews Lurie and Rodinkovich and a Lithuanian, Eliosius. Every Friday, Lithuanian workers went out partying. There was also a Jewish intelligentsia. Jacques was considered to be the best doctor. We bought the medicine in Friedman's pharmacy. There was one synagogue in our town. It was attended by Jews every day, especially on Jewish holidays and Sabbath.

After their wedding my parents settled in the house, given by Grandpa Bentsion to my father. It was located on the same street, next to the house of Grandpa Bentsion. It was an old wooden house: very long and solid. When the babies were born, Father built another house on the same plot of land. It was a large two-storied house. Father leased the old house to a tinsmith. He had his workshop in the house and his family was also living there. We moved to the new place. There was a bakery on the first floor. It was the same as in Grandpa's place.

Like Father's sisters, my mother baked bread, pretzels and there was a wonderful aroma of freshly baked bread in our house. On market days - Wednesday and Sunday - there were large carts of Lithuanian peasants in our yard. They had tea with pretzels sitting at our long table in the yard. When it was cold, they were in our big kitchen on the first floor of our house. Mother was no competitor to Father's sisters Chaya Riva and Golda. On the market day the town was flooded by peasants, who were hungry and thirsty. Both Mother's and Father's sisters had their own regular clientele.

We had Father's butcher's shop on the first floor of our house. The animal was slaughtered and then taken to my father. He took it, then cut the carcass into pieces and got it ready for sale. At first, he had an assistant. When we grew up, we started helping him. There was about one hectare of our land by our house and we helped our parents to work on it. We grew herbs, onions, carrots, potatoes, cucumbers and tomatoes to have enough for our family. However, a significant part of the land was leased out by my father. We also had cattle - a cow and a horse. Father loved horses - he fed and cleaned his favorite himself. Thus, we had our own milk, curds, sour cream and butter.

Our house was big, but we mostly used four rooms on the second floor. Apart from the bakery and the butcher's shop there was a kitchen on the first floor. The only electric bulb was in the kitchen. There was not enough electricity for the town in the prewar times. When it got dark, candles were lit in other rooms.

There was a large flap table in the center of the kitchen. The whole family - ten people - got together there for breakfasts and lunches. Mother made a rule for everyone to have meals together at a certain time. If someone skipped lunch, they didn't get anything. Mother didn't have time to serve meals separately to us, therefore during the meals all of us got together. We had simple food, but it was nutritious and plentiful. There was meat at home, though we mostly ate the parts that couldn't be sold - like heads and legs. Mother often cooked meat in jelly. There was a large platter with potatoes in the center of the table and each of us could take as much as we wanted. Mother made soup for lunch - it was either potato or vegetable soup or borscht and lots of the freshest and tastiest bread. In general we were full all the time. The kashrut was observed at home. We never ate pork or mixed dairy and meat food; we had separate dishes starting from pots and pans and down to the cutting boards.

Sabbath was mandatory in our house. Mother baked challot and made very tasty dishes. We also had chicken on Sabbath. Whether it was bought from someone or taken from our husbandry, it was taken to a shochet in the synagogue. When I grew up, it was my duty to take hens to the shochet. I brought it home, and the others plucked it and threw the feathers in the stove. Mother only used goose down and feathers for pillows. I remember she always plucked goose feathers. When we asked for her permission to go outside, she gave us a task to get one glass of down and after that we were free to go.

My mother cooked chulent for Sabbath. Meat, potatoes, carrots, beans and at times plums were put in a large pot and placed in a hot oven. On Saturday my parents went to the synagogue. When we grew up, we went with them. Father bought a seat there. His tallit and prayer book were kept there in a small cabinet beside his seat. My father knew many prayers in Hebrew. Upon our return from the synagogue, we sat at the table and our housekeeper - a Lithuanian lady - took the chulent from the stove with the help of a large oven fork. Before we started eating, Father said a prayer. I still remember the feeling of that festivity and ceremoniousness during Sabbath in my parents' house.

A Lithuanian housekeeper helped my mother with everything. She looked after us when we were babies and did all the house chores. Mother did all the cooking. She didn't have time for everything. First of all, she had the bakery, a large husbandry and a large family. Besides, she was the only woman in the family. Besides, Mother was an excellent cook. She was always invited to supervise the cooking process during wedding feasts. She didn't cook herself; she only tasted the stuff and managed the hired cooks and waiters. It wasn't often though, only when rich Jews were wed.

### **Our religious life**

Usually on Saturday, after the synagogue, we went for a walk in a park. I loved singing. When I grew up, I joined a children's choir organized in the synagogue by photographer Poser, a passionate lover of singing. On Saturday after the service and lunch we had our rehearsals or just sang in the synagogue.

We celebrated all Jewish holidays at home, though for me they looked the same as Sabbath. Of course, each holiday had its traditions and attributes. On Rosh Hashanah there were a lot of deserts on the table and shofars were played. I started fasting on Yom Kippur since an early age. I've been doing that all my life, except for the time on the front.

I remember Sukkot. Father made a tabernacle in the yard and covered it with pine branches. My brothers and I picked up chestnuts and tied them in pairs. Father made figures in the shape of a star etc. We had meals in the sukkah during this holiday.

I loved Simchat Torah. Everyone got a Torah at the synagogue - some people got bigger ones, others got smaller ones and we all went around the synagogue singing and dancing. Then the rabbi read a prayer for everybody.

On Chanukkah Mother baked potato latkes, we played with a spinning top and of course were agog to get Chanukkah gelt. We had a very beautiful silver chanukkiah on the window sill. Every night Mother lit a candle, adding another one with each day.

On Purim Mother baked triangular pies with poppy seeds called hamantashen. Usually she made 30 of those and all of us knew that we would get three each. We didn't take shelakhmones, as we had a very large family. Mother could barely manage cooking for us, not to mention the presents.

I loved Pesach most of all, the preparation in particular. Almost right after Purim the housekeeper started cleaning, turning the house upside down. We took the carpets, bed linen and mats outside and shook them out. We put beautiful curtains on the windows, festive tablecloth, polished the furniture and the floors. A large hamper with matzah was brought from the synagogue. Kosher

Pascal dishes were taken from the loft. These were nice gilded, silver and porcelain dishes, which were used only for Pesach. The other utensils - pots and pans - were koshered in our yard. We got the presents on the eve of the holiday. My parents were practical people, and gave us the things that we really needed - new boots and clothes.

Then seder started. Father reclined on the pillows at the head of the table and carried out the seder. Mother was sitting by him and Grandfather Nakhman beside him. The youngest child asked the questions - first it was me, and then it was Abram. I still remember those four questions. Some of the kids found the afikoman and got a present for that. Then Father put a goblet with wine, opened the door and called Elijah, the prophet, in different ways. I didn't believe in his existence, but I liked the process of the holiday. Even now I don't know who drank the glass of wine which was meant for the prophet Elijah. I think Father did it.

Apart from the holidays, I remember numerous bar mitzvahs: first my brothers', then mine. The shammash taught us how to read prayers and put tefillin on the right way. We were supposed to read the prayer ceremoniously at the synagogue on the bar mitzvah day. There was a celebration at home afterwards: as usual there was a lot of food, meat dishes, a whole bunch of cookies and deserts. Usually, only members of our family and my aunts were present at the feast.

I went to school at the age of seven. The school was combined with cheder in our town. It was located near a large synagogue. We were taught prayers and compulsory subjects. I didn't enjoy studying at the school because our teachers were very strict. We were taught by two men - Balek and Shreder - who were focused on discipline and at times used a metal ruler. I was a good student, especially in Math.

I went there for four years and then got transferred to the town Lithuanian lyceum. Both Lithuanians and Jews went there and we were very friendly. I don't remember a single case when I'd be hurt by someone. There were Lithuanians among my friends, who came over to our place. They were good to me. I was one of the top students at the lyceum and was often praised. The monthly tuition fee was ten litas. The full course was eight years and I wanted to finish it, but after my second year Mother said that it was enough paying for me as it was the time for me to start working and bring in some wages for the family. We were well-off and the family could afford my tuition, but nobody wanted to argue with Mom.

By that time my elder brothers were working, having finished Jewish school. First, they helped Father and then they started learning some craft. Only the eldest, Dovid, wasn't working. He was eager to become a rabbi and went to a yeshivah in Telsiai.

Mother wanted me to follow in my grandfather's footsteps and become a tailor. I already had some skills as Grandpa was gradually teaching me some things. He gave me some easy jobs to do: stitch on a sewing machine and do some other minor work. I didn't like sewing. I was always attracted by the mechanics. There was a locksmith workshop in our town. It was owned by the Lithuanian Shilenis. He did all things needed in the household. Sometimes, he also made car parts, and parts of different gadgets. Shilenis was odd, but still he was a liberal man. His wife was very religious and went to the church. He was not just an atheist, but a bellicose atheist. On market days, when Lithuanians came to town, they went to church. At times he would get on somebody's cart and hold ardent speeches, preaching the non-existence of God, and saying other blasphemous things. There were cases when he was beaten.

## My apprenticeship

Father arranged my apprenticeship with him. They made an agreement that I would work for him for free for one year, whether I learn something or not. I turned out to be very skillful and in a month I was able to do rather complex locksmith jobs. In three months I told Shilenis that I would not work for free any more. Then he gave me 60 litas. When I took money home and gave it to my mom, first she cried out that I stole it. Then I took her to Shilenis and had him confirm that he gave that money to me. She was very happy and kissed me. Since that time I received 60 litas per month and gave it all to my mom.

I worked with Shilenis for three years. I became a good locksmith and I was also particularly good with engines. There were cases when customers didn't go to Shilenis, but directly to me. The master bore no grudge and valued me as a worker. Along with him we got a task to fix a dynamo machine which was used at the power station and we coped with that. I made money and felt confident. There were both Jews and Lithuanians in my company. We went to the park, to each other's place, to the cinema - a small wooden building, to the dancing party which we were looking forward to every Sunday. There was a football field on the square and we often played football.

My elder brother was a member of Betar [3](#) and enrolled me there. I didn't attend the meetings of Betar, where the methods of foundation of the Jewish state were discussed. Our Grandpa made brown shirts for me and my brother. I became a member of Maccabi [4](#), we often arranged all kinds of sports game and contests. We still celebrated Jewish holidays and Sabbath at home and we did it not to hurt our parents. On holidays I went to the synagogue with my father though I didn't believe in God at that time.

At times I helped my master with anti-religious propaganda. I think he was an underground Communist or a Communists sympathizer. At times he gave me flyers to disseminate. There were times when we tied red fabric to stones and flung them at electric wires, there was a blackout and the fabric was torn into pieces. The next morning the whole town was strewn with small red flags. I did it unquestioningly just satisfying my master's request and fortunately I wasn't caught, otherwise I would have been arrested like many other underground Communists.

In 1940, only Tsilya and Ichil Berko, who were studying at school, and I stayed with our parents. Abram, my brother, died from some contagious disease in 1939. Dovid kept on studying at the yeshivah. Liber was a clock mender. He married a girl called Ida from Radviliskis and lived there. Isroel was apprenticed by Liber and also moved to Radviliskis and lived with Liber's family.

In the late June of 1940 the Soviets came to the Baltics [5](#). My parents took it calmly and didn't discuss this issue with us. A Russian officer was housed in one of our rooms, but our store was not taken from us. At first, our lives practically didn't change. Our town wasn't affected by repressions and arrests [6](#) and deportation [7](#). Nevertheless, life was getting worse. Many products vanished from the stores. People only bought primary goods because of high prices. I was thinking of how I could help my family.

At that time the military unit, located 23 kilometers away from Rietavas, had a vacant position of a mechanic. I went there and was hired right away. My salary was 450 litas per month. I rented a room not far from the military unit. I went home to Rietavas only over the weekend. I gave almost all my salary to Mother. Here I started studying Russian and soon I could speak with my pals fairly



fluently. I was a mature and materially independent young guy. I even had a Lithuanian girlfriend, whom I intended to marry in the future.

### During the war

My birthday was on 21st June 1941. It was Saturday and my pals from the military unit wanted me to celebrate it with them, so I didn't go home. My pals and the head of the cart fleet Shalin celebrated with me. We drank a bottle of vodka and went dancing to the club. We stayed there until midnight. I went home and fell asleep straight away. At 6am I was awoken by Shalin: 'Get up, the war has started!' I should say that I wasn't surprised. We understood in the military unit that the war was inevitable. There was talk about it. We said that we wouldn't give up a single piece of our land. Shalin sent me over to the garage and ordered us to dismantle the cars for the Fascists not to take them. There were a lot of them and it took us a long time. We dug a huge pit and covered the cars with timber waste as the saw mill was nearby. By that time the town, where the military unit was located, was almost vacated. Some people ran away, others were hiding.

There was one truck in our unit. I drove it - I had recently learnt to drive. I drove three members of the party, the commanders. I remembered one of them: Vaikus. In general, I was lucky to be able to drive and was ordered to take the Communists. There was no gas and I could not fill the car up. We went to the district town Telsiai. I was worried about my relatives, but I had neither a chance nor time to go to Rietavas. People weren't permitted to go there any more. Rietavas was closer to the border and the Germans had already occupied my town, besides my passengers were getting nervous and made me hurry. We arrived in Telsiai. I saw a large truck by the building of the district administration, where the leaders of the district, party members were sitting. My passengers joined them. I didn't think long and also jumped in the truck and we headed off.

We were going towards the Russian border. We were stopped by Lithuanians in Mazeikiai [town in North-West Lithuania, close to the Latvian border]. They had already taken the German side and they were not willing to let us through. Our activists had weapons, they shot a couple of times and the Lithuanians ran away. There was a covering force of Russian Army soldiers [8](#). They didn't let any single civilian car, a cart or a pedestrian pass. There were a lot of people. At that time a low-flying German plane started firing at people a couple of times. Many weren't moving. Our car was crushed. The passengers scattered. My sandals were torn so I went barefoot. My feet still remember the hot July asphalt. At that time a military column was passing the border, and I got under the tarpaulin of one of their trucks and went with them. We reached Pskov [town in Western Russia, close to the Latvian border]. I was afraid that they would find me, so I jumped off the truck and sat on the curb.

It was the first time I was in a Russian town. It was so dirty! It seemed to me that I happened to be in a cesspool after clean Lithuanian towns. I walked around the town and reached the train station. There was a car with evacuees. I got on the train and it left shortly. It was a locomotive train packed with people. There were mostly women, children and elderly people. I had neither drink nor food. I remember that I was starving. If someone started eating I stood by them with hungry eyes. At times they gave me a spud or a rusk.

Thus, we traveled for two or three days. We reached Gorky oblast and got off at the station Bogoyavlениye [about 700 km from Moscow]. There were carts there and we were taken to a kolkhoz [9](#). At first I was assigned to a tractor brigade. There I got milk and bread. It was my first

meal. There was no place for me to live, so I went around the village looking for shelter. I was housed by a smith, Mikheyev. He lived with a daughter who had recently given birth to a baby. His brother-in-law was in the lines and the smith decided that I would help them about the house. I was still barefoot and Mikheyev gave me straw shoes.

Now I had some shelter, but I had to look for a job. The smith had no job for me. I went from house to house in the village, went to the rural administration, to the canteen. Finally I was hired by the bakery. I was supposed to bake bread, cut it in pieces, dry and place it in paper bags. Those rusks were sent to the front. I had some experience as I had worked in Mom's bakery. I started working and I was given bread. I even brought some flour to the smith and his daughter. I also brought them some defective bread every day. I lived and worked here until 8th March 1942.

On 8th March I got a notification from the military enlistment office and went there right away. I was drafted into the army in the Moscow region. I still cannot understand why I wasn't assigned to the 16th Lithuanian division [10](#), which was also being formed in Balakhna, and where many Lithuanians were being drafted no matter if they were Jewish or not. Maybe it would have been easier for me to be among our people. I felt a stranger here, not because of being a Jew, it wasn't a matter of nationality: there was no anti-Semitism. I was just a stranger: my Russian was broken and my mentality was different.

I and hundreds of unseasoned recruits were thrown in the battle. We even had never held a weapon in our hands. I don't remember anything about the battle, but the whistle of the bullets. After the battle I was all shaken, I had malaria. I was put in a separate room in the unit, given quinine and sent to the hospital.

Then there was an unpleasant incident, which ended up having no consequence. Soldiers from Russia often asked me how I was living in capitalist Lithuania and I honestly and straightforwardly told them that we had a good living - we had a lot of food, abundance in goods and no oppression. I was called to the party organization several times and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda. I tried to explain that I didn't concoct anything. I was arrested and kept in custody for 14 days along with other 'anti-Soviets' - the wardens of the liberated villages etc. We were put in a guarded cart. They gave us no arms and no explanations. Finally, they either clarified things, or didn't have time for that, or my proletarian origin worked, I was released all of a sudden and sent to the regiment. I will never forget those two weeks of fear and consternation.

I was sent to the 8th reserve regiment of the First Baltic Front in the vicinity of Orel [today Russia, 360 km south-west of Moscow]. The Lithuanian division was dislocated there, and I took part in battles for the liberation of that region. Now it is hard for me to remember the names and dates of the battles. I was as if in a stupor during that noise and cold. After several battles I was sent to the Moscow sergeant school. I was there for several months and it was a fabulous respite.

When I finished the sergeant school I went in the reserve regiment of the tank army of the First Ukrainian Front. We covered almost all of Ukraine, having liberated Sumy, Poltava and the Chernigov oblast. Once in Poltava [today central Ukraine] I was in a dugout, and it was hit by a bomb. I was covered with earth. Fortunately, they found me and sent me to hospital. I had a bad concussion. After the hospital I happened to be in the 9th Tank- Destroyer division, which reached Kiev.

There were all kinds of things at war: both tragic and usual. There were even anecdotes. Once in Ukraine, where the occupiers were Italians, we found a deserted truck with cans. We loaded ourselves with those cans, putting them in our pockets. I even put some of them in my pants and tied them up at the bottom. We could hardly reach our unit. When we opened them, there were tiny paws. It turned out that those were frogs. We could not eat them.

There were a lot of tragic and sad things of course. Every day some of our pals didn't come back from the battle. So many of them were lost! We couldn't even bury them, just leave the cadavers on the battle field and move on. We saw boys dying. Even now I can't get how we were able to survive. We hadn't washed ourselves for months, didn't change our clothes, slept in wet dirty clothes, were frozen to death, but still we fought. Though, I should say that we were fed quite well at the time when there were problems with nutrition.

Knowing the Fascists' attitude towards the Jews, and reading the military press, I understood that Lithuanian Jews, including my relatives, were exterminated. When we were liberating towns and villages in Ukraine, the local people told us about executions of Jews in ghettos and camps, about the atrocity of the Fascists. I saw horrible pits, the places where Jews perished and understood even more that I remained alone. My task was revenge. I went in every battle to take revenge and exterminate as many Fascists as possible. In summer 1943 I undermined four enemy tanks and every burning tank was a monument for my kin.

I reached Kiev with the army of Marshall Rybalko [Marshall Pavel Semyonovich Rybalko (1892-1948) commanded the Third Tank Guards Army, which liberated parts of Eastern Europe from Nazi occupation in WWII] and took part in the liberation of this city. At night on 6th November we crossed the Dniepr on boats. There was a gun crew with us and they put boards one in front of the other and placed two anti-tank weapons on each of the boards. The German artillery fired on the boats from the high right bank. They hit our boat and I swam to the right bank. I was drifted away 500 meters as the current of the Dniepr was strong. I was in Kiev. There was a barge by the dock. I reached it and then I remember only a flash of the blasted shell. I can't remember anything else.

I came around in a Tambov [today Russia] hospital. I had a concussion and an eye injury. There were fragments of shell in my eye. They said they would operate after the war, when they would have more time. They suggested removing my eye, but I refused. I had the fragment in my eye for 26 years, and only then I had it operated. I was moved to a hospital in Saratov [today Russia] from Tambov.

I was discharged in early January 1944 with the so-called 'white card': I could not be in the lines any more. I had to get recouped somehow. I had to find a lodging and a job. I was recommended to be a military trainer at the vocational school. I went to Lipetsk [today Russia], an industrial town, where there were a lot of schools. I was hired by one of the vocational schools right away. I rented a room. I worked hard. All I had to wear was a military uniform. Lithuania was still occupied, and I didn't care where I should live. I did well at work. I had military awards: two Great Patriotic War Orders [11](#) and others. Later I was offered to run the local timber enterprise.

## Post-war

The war was over and I was still wearing my military jacket. I didn't have money to buy civilian clothes. Besides, I wasn't willing to take it off. Now, Lithuania was free and I was eager to go home,

but they wouldn't dismiss me. I said that I wanted to go to my motherland to help restore towns and villages, but they told me that a Soviet person had his motherland all over the USSR.

In 1947 I was on a business trip in Moscow and saw a sign on a building downtown - it was the representative office of the Lithuanian SSR in the USSR. I went in and was stopped by the guard. I started asking him to let me in for me to see an authorized representative. The guy was compassionate. He asked me to take my military coat off. I told my story to Bachunas, the authorized representative. He made a couple of telephone calls and gave me a document for my management in Lipetsk. When I arrived, I was dismissed right away.

My trip to Lithuania took four days and I had to change trains twice. I didn't care if it was a locomotive train or not, all that mattered was that it should go to Lithuania. Thus I reached Siauliai and from there I took the shuttle to Telsiai and walked to Rietavas.

I couldn't recognize my town, as all buildings were burnt down, including our house. A Lithuanian lady had used the foundation of our house to build her own there. I went in. We had a long conversation. She told me about the execution of local Jews, about the deaths of my kin. As it turned out my parents and Grandpa Nakhman were denounced by the neighbors. They were those Lithuanian guys, who were my friends, who came to our house. All my kin, Grandpa Nakhman, Father, Liber with his family and Isroel, were shot in the first days of the occupation of Telsiai.

On the day when the war broke out, my brother Liber and his wife Ida with their baby daughter - about two months old - came to see my parents. The lady said that she noticed the tail of the column, where Liber and Ida with the stroller, were walking. The Fascists took the stroller away and it was rolling on the curb. My brother darted after the stroller and the German shot him right away, then they shot the baby.

There were about 14 places out of town where Jews were executed. I don't know exactly where my kin perished. Father's sisters Chaya Riva and Channa also perished. And my brother Dovid, who was studying at Telsiai yeshivah, was shot in Rainai along with 300 rabbis. My mother and sister Tsilya lived a bit longer. One lady, who crept out from the pile of corpses told me about it later. They were in the ghetto in Telsiai. Lithuanians often went there to hire people. One of them wanted to take Tsilya and save her that way, but my sister clung on to my mother and didn't agree to part with her. Then a furious Fascist shot both Tsilya and my mother.

I couldn't stay in the house built on the foundation of our old nest where we had been so happy. The Lithuanian was worried that I would turn her out, but I wasn't going to do that. I went down to the cellar and found apple and other jam, which my mother had made. It was still good. I showed it to the lady, told her to eat it and left.

I couldn't stay in Rietavas and left for Telsiai. Here I met my master Shilenis, who also told me many things. He worked for the regional Ispolkom [12](#), and helped me very much. I was given an apartment - with a large room and a kitchen. I was ready to accept any job. First, I was asked if I knew how to make sausage. They brought me a cow and I made the sausage myself. I was given money and went to Klaipeda. I bought a sausage-making machine.

My boss, a Jew called Germanis wasn't a decent man and misappropriated almost all the sausage. I didn't want to work with him and be liable for larceny. I left him and soon I became the director of

an industrial enterprise. It didn't exist for a long time. Then I was in charge of a logistics department in a car fleet. I changed those jobs within a year and in 1948 I started working in the road department of the Ispolkom as an engineer of asphaltting the road Telsiai-Plunge.

In 1948 I entered a college in Kaunas. Upon graduation I entered the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute. Both educations were extra-mural. Having experience in construction, I started working as an engineer at a commodity base in Telsiai and worked there until my retirement.

At that time all the leading positions required either Communist Party or Komsomol [13](#) membership. I couldn't join the Komsomol in the army as my relatives were living in the USA. When I became an engineer of the commodity base, one of the inspectors at the Ispolkom said that my title envisaged that I should be a member of the Communist Party. I applied for party membership.

A Lithuanian, Vaytrikele, who was sitting at one desk with my sister Tsilya, was the inspector at the party committee. She asked me if I kept in touch with my relatives in the USA [14](#). I said that I did and mentioned that I had recently got a letter from them. My case wasn't discussed for a long time, they turned me down and I made no further attempts.

Nevertheless, my colleagues always had a very good attitude towards me. I had excellent organizational skills and they valued me. I never noticed anti-Semitism in all those years, neither at work nor beyond it. In 1953 when Stalin died, I was only happy for that, I knew what he was worth since I had been put in the cart with the peoples' enemies [15](#) during the war. I understood how much trouble that person had brought.

When I came back from the war, I found a Lithuanian girlfriend, who I had been dating before the war. It turned out that during the occupation she had relationships with men and even gave birth to a daughter. I didn't want to see her, although she was offering to leave everything for me. I had been lonely for many years.

## Married life

In 1953 I met my fate. At that time I was working in the road department and we were building the road Klaipeda-Kaunas. I was in the town of Linkuva rather often as we had a machinery site there. Once I was driving in a car and saw a girl walking along the road. She asked for a lift. Her house was about five kilometers from Linkuva. I gave her a lift and went to work. When I was driving back I saw her standing there again. The lady said that she worked as a maid in Linkuva. Then I saw her again, and even drove her home. This is how we met. I liked her instantly and I came to meet her parents. They liked me at once though they were Lithuanians and I was a Jew. They didn't even think of my nationality. I took the young lady to Telsiai and we had our marriage registered. We have been together since then.

My wife is Lithuanian. Her name is Constantia, maiden name Beryute. She was born in 1932 in Linkuva. She came from a simple farmers' family. They worked hard for a living. Constantia was an only child. She only finished elementary school before the war, then there were no opportunities for studies. She found a low profile job to help out her parents.

In 1953 we had our marriage registered in Telsiai and started our life in a poky apartment. It was always neat and cozy. At times in the morning when the breakfast was being cooked in the kitchen, I woke up and thought that there hadn't been a war and soon my mother would come in and wake

me up. It was the first time over those 13 years when I didn't feel lonely and it was a wonderful feeling to know that you were needed.

We had a good life. There was an air of trust and understanding. There were no conflicts. On the weekend our friends came for a cup of tea. We talked about life. We celebrated mostly birthdays and the New Year. During the Soviet time there were no religious traditions in our life.

I got a plot of land in downtown Telsiai, designed my house and managed the construction project. A big and cozy house was built in the course of several years and when it was finished the whole family moved there. We made the furniture, windows, doors and curtains ourselves. It was good that I grew up in a family where I was taught everything by my kin. It was the time of high deficit. I am still living in that house with my wife.

In 1954 our son was born. We gave him a Lithuanian name -Petras. My wife didn't work as she had a lot to do about the house. Our son demanded a lot of attention, but I wasn't a good help here as I was almost blind. We had a big husbandry. We had chickens, a cow, a big garden, where Constantia grew all the necessary vegetables for the family. She made such a beautiful flower bed in front of the house! All the neighbors came to see it and asked for young plants.

My son did well at school. Since childhood he wanted to be in construction and he built anything he could - from sand, stones and branches. When he finished school, he entered a construction college and finished it. Petras was never involved in social work. Although, of course, he was a pioneer [16](#) like all kids of that time. Nevertheless, he wasn't going to join the Komsomol, fearing that he would be refused because of his relatives in the USA, the way it happened with me. In general, all of us were apolitical. The town was small, no events affected it. Everybody minded their own business and cared about the life of their family.

Petras served in the Soviet Army and worked in construction. Even though he has a Lithuanian name, he identifies himself as a Jew, respects Jewish history and traditions and celebrates Jewish holidays. Mostly, it is my wife Constantia who influenced him. She is Catholic, but she is not religious and she doesn't go to church. Nevertheless, she treats Jews with deep respect. She learnt how to cook Jewish dishes. For 20 years, whenever I had some free time, I told her and my son about Jewry, Jewish traditions and holidays. So Petras and Constantia are also interested in them. Now we always celebrate Jewish holidays together, though I'm not a religious person and don't go to the synagogue - by the way, there is no synagogue in our town - I just respect Jewish traditions and history and observe the holidays as a tribute to commemorate my kin.

Petras married a Lithuanian called Stepha. They have two daughters: the elder, Margarita, was born in 1980 and the younger one, Sima, was born in 1985. In the early 1990s, when Lithuania became independent [17](#) business started booming. My son also became a businessman, he became a car dealer. He bought the cars, fixed and resold them. He borrowed a lot of money and couldn't pay it back on time. The debt was huge and he had to find a way to pay it back. I got in touch with my relative who was living in the USA and asked him to assist in getting a visa for Petras. He was a very rich man, he owned a whole block of houses. He helped my son leave and found a job for him. It was seven years ago. Since that time Petras has worked in the USA. He paid off his debts, so we hope that he will come back soon. My granddaughters are in America as well. The elder, Margarita, graduated from the university and got a bachelor's degree. She found a job in the USA that fits her qualification. Sima got a green-card and also left for America. She found a job

as a housekeeper. We are looking forward to their return.

Even though I was almost blind, I worked for many years. I retired in the early 1990s. Though since 1945 I have been getting a pension for the disabled, it is miserable. All those years my wife and I had been going to the places where Jews were executed to commemorate them. I thought of how to mark those places and put the monuments there. Besides, I couldn't feel indifferent towards those Jews, who survived the war, and now are scraping through. I decided to found a Jewish community in Telsiai and went to Vilnius to see the chairman of the United Jewish community of Lithuania, Alperavichus. He supported me. The community was founded in 1993 with me as a chairman.

According to the law on restitution we were given back the former premises of the prewar Jewish community. I sold that house and used the money to help poor Jews. Actually, the community is based in my house. I am the bookkeeper. I distribute the sponsors' aid coming from the Joint [18](#). We celebrate Sabbath and Jewish holidays. I fulfilled my task: I put the monuments to the perished Jews on the places of their execution. I mostly used my savings for that as well as the money from the sponsors, collected by the relatives of the perished.

My Constantia is the best helper in all community activities. On Sabbath and on holidays she cooks a treat for the whole community and the Jews join us in celebration. We chat and recollect family stories. We celebrate holidays according to the tradition. I feel under the weather lately and I have to look for a successor as I understand that I have heart trouble and had an operation recently. I hope that my successor will be Petras, who will come back to Lithuania and help me.

## Glossary

### **1 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

### **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 Betar**

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. Trumpedor, 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.

#### **4 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

#### **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 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

#### **7 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 Estonai 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.

## **8 Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- 2 years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- 3 years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was 3 years and in the navy - 4 years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to 2 years in ground troops and in the navy to 3 years. That system of army recruitment has remained without

considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

## **9 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **10 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.

## **11 Order of the Great Patriotic War**

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

## **12 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.

## **13 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of 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 uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

#### **14 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.

#### **15 Enemy of the people**

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

#### **16 All-Union pioneer organization**

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscoouts 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.

#### **17 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.

#### **18 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.