

Tobijas Jafetas

Tobijas Jafetas

Vilnius

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: February 2005



Tobijas Jafetas, chairman of the ghetto and concentration camp prisoners at the Jewish community of Lithuania [see Lithuanian Council of Ghetto Prisoners] [1](#) is a tall, handsome and very reserved man with big dark eyes and a quiet voice. When I first visited Vilnius, Tobijas was busy and could not find time to meet with me. However, he promised and initiated our meeting during my next visit. We met a couple of times to complete the interview. Our first meeting took place in Tobijas' spacious apartment in the very center of Vilnius. He has many books and pictures on the walls. Our second meeting took place in Tobijas' office in the community. Tobijas makes the impression of a rather introvert personality. Even his impeccable clothes - a gray suit (the jacket is tightly buttoned) and a white shirt and a tie on a hot day demonstrate this. I think that the ghetto added docility to Tobijas' natural shyness, or, as he mentioned during our conversation, perhaps, his youth in the ghetto eliminated all idealism from his life.

[My family history](#)

[Growing up](#)

[During the war](#)

[After the war](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family history

My father's family came from Raseiniai in Lithuania [180 km from Vilnius]. My paternal surname of Jafet originated in Raseiniai in the 17th century. My grandfather, Azriel Jafet, born in Raseiniai in the 1850s, was a rabbi. He died in 1920, long before I was born. All I know about my paternal grandmother, Gita Jafet, Azriel's wife, is what my relatives told me about her. My father told me that his was a traditional Jewish family. All my grandfather Azriel did was reading the Torah and the Talmud, and he spent the rest of his time praying at the synagogue. Grandmother Gita took care of the house and the children. This was common for all religious Jewish families. My grandmother perished during the first German extermination action of Jews in Raseiniai in 1941. I don't know where my grandmother's grave is, but my grandfather Azriel's grave is in the Jewish cemetery in Raseiniai.

Azriel and Gita had three sons and four daughters. From what I know, all of the boys finished cheder and received a Jewish education. My father, Rafail Jafet, born in 1893, was the oldest son. The next son, who was given the Russian name [see Common name] [2](#) of Mikhail was born many years later, in 1906. There were the girls born in-between. Perhaps, Mikhail also had a Jewish

name, but I know him by the name of Mikhail. He moved to Kaunas in 1923. In Kaunas Mikhail married Zina, a Jewish girl. They had two sons: Ariy, born in 1925, and Grigoriy, born in 1933. Mikhail owned a small store, which supported the family well. When the Soviet regime was established in 1940 [see Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [3](#), the shop was confiscated, and Mikhail found a job in the fire brigade. When the Great Patriotic War [4](#) began, the family evacuated. They went to Kazakhstan, and when Rostov region was liberated, they moved to Rybinsk. After the Great Patriotic War Mikhail, Zina and their younger son settled down in Riga. After the war Mikhail continued his work as a fire brigadier. He died in the early 1960s, while Aunt Zina lived almost 30 years longer. Ariy, the older son, was at the front. He was wounded in Lithuania in 1944. After the war Ariy moved to Moscow. He worked in the trade unions. He died in the 1980s. Grigoriy and his family moved to Germany in the 1980s. This is where he lives now.

Alexandr, or Alex, as he was called, born in 1913, was the youngest in the family. He also had a Jewish name; I think it was Zalman, since his family called him Zisia. Alexandr had elementary education. He also moved to Kaunas where he married the daughter of a sawmill owner. He worked at this sawmill. In 1941 Soviet authorities deported him and his wife Rosa to Siberia [see Deportations from the Baltics] [5](#). I think it might have been a mistake. They might have been looking for my father, who lived abroad, and Alex suffered for having the same surname as my father. At least, there were no evident reasons to deport him: Alex' family wasn't a wealthy one. Alex' wife died somewhere on the way. Alex spent over 17 years in exile in Irkutsk region. When he returned to Lithuania, there was none of his kin left there. He and Rosa had no children. He lived in Lithuania till 1973, celebrated his 60th anniversary there and left for Israel where he lived with his sister Doba. Alexandr died in 1988.

I don't know much about my father's sisters. Two older sisters, whose names I can't remember, lived in Riga where they perished during the occupation in 1941, as did their families and Grandmother Gita. Mania, five years younger than my father, lived in Raseiniai. In the 1920s, when my parents' family lived in Berlin, my father's companion Isaac Dinerman, a Jew from St. Petersburg, who was about ten days older than Mania, had become a widower some time before and had to raise his little daughter. My father introduced him to his sister and they got married shortly afterward. A year later their daughter Mary was born. They had a wonderful family and Mania was raising two daughters. When the persecution of Jews in fascist Germany became unbearable, Dinerman managed to move his family to London in 1937. Isaac was a wealthy man. He founded a company in London. Isaac Dinerman died in 1942. Mania inherited his company and became its successful leader. I don't know what kind of business she was doing. I know that after the Great Patriotic war my aunt Mania was an active member of the Baltic Jewish Society, established by my father in London. She managed to obtain a license for charity food shipments to Lithuania and Latvia. This was the humanitarian part of her company's activities. Mania died in the 1970s. Her daughter Mary also passed away. Mary's children live in England.

My father's sister Doba, the youngest daughter, studied at the Medical College in Moscow. When her father moved to Berlin, she followed him. She studied at the Berlin Medical University where she met her future husband. I don't remember his name. In the early 1930s Doba and her husband moved to Palestine where they worked as doctors. Doba had no children. She passed away in the late 1980s.

My father finished cheder and went to the Jewish school. He was good at trading since his early years. He started selling pencils, notebooks and other stationery; helping his parents and following his older brother's example. By 1918 he became a merchant of Guild I [6](#) which gave him the right to reside in capital towns. He lived in Moscow. In the late 1920s my father met my future mother in Riga or in Moscow. This was the gloomy period of the [Russian] Revolution [of 1917] [7](#), destruction and expropriation process, which resulted in poverty at best and at the worst it meant exile and death. Therefore, immediately after they got married – they didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding considering the hardships of this time – my parents moved to Berlin in 1920.

My mother, Bertha Shustoff, was born in 1893, same year as my father. This Jewish surname appears in Jewish archives. According to some information, my ancestors lived in Lisbon in the 13th century. My mother's parents, David and Genia Shustoff, born in the 1860s, came from the town of Visginas in Lithuania [130 km east of Vilnius]. My great-grandfather, David Doniakhi, grandmother Genia's father -his name originates from the old Jewish name of Yakhi with the Spanish attachment of Don, which proves that my mother's parents lived in Spain - was a rabbi. My grandfather, David Shustoff, studied religion under him. He became his best and favorite student and married Genia. When World War I began, the tsarist government deported Jewish residents from the near-the-front areas, seeing potential spies in them. David and Genia Shustoff were deported to Perm [2000 km from Moscow], where shortly after their arrival my grandfather became the rabbi of the town. When Lithuania gained independence [see Lithuanian independence] [8](#) in 1918, David's family stayed in Russia. This was the time of World War I, and Perm was in the rear. It was cold and there was lack of food in the town. Grandfather David died of hunger in 1942. Grandmother Genia survived and lived ten years after the war.

David and Genia had many children. They got public and Jewish elementary education, but they didn't grow up religiously. However, all of them, except my mother's sister Masha, married Jews. My mother's brother Tobijas Shustoff disappeared during the Civil War [9](#). This is all I know about him; I was named after him. My mother's oldest brother Max, born in 1880, and his wife lived in Vitebsk [Belarus, 250 km from Minsk]. He died before the Great Patriotic War. Max had two sons and two daughters. I have no information about his daughters. His older son, Tankhu, was a pilot during the Great Patriotic War. After the war he got married and lived in Vitebsk with two daughters. In the 1970s Tankhu and his family moved to Israel. Max' younger son, Menia, finished a higher educational institution in Moscow and became an engineer. His wife and two children moved to the USA a long time ago.

The next after Max was Mama's brother Solomon Shustoff, born in the 1880s. He fought in the tsarist army during World War I. He was wounded and was captured. He was in captivity in Austria. In 1922 he was released and got married, but he had nothing to provide for the family. Solomon

wrote to my mother in Berlin. My parents advised Solomon to move to the USA. They bought him tickets, and Solomon and his wife, whose name I can't remember, moved to Chicago in the USA. Solomon worked as a laborer in a printing shop. In due time, he became the owner of a printing shop and a publishing house. Solomon had seven children, born in the USA. The two oldest sons fought in the US Army during World War II. One perished in Europe and the other one died in Japan. Two of Solomon's younger sons still live in America. In total he has 62 descendants. He died in the 1970s.

Naftoli, the youngest boy in the family, was born in 1905. He lived with his parents in Perm, finished the Oil College and lived in Tatarstan, Caucasus, Crimea, where oil was extracted. When Naftoli retired, he moved to Simferopol [Crimea, Ukraine, 1000 km from Kiev] where he died in the 1980s. He had three sons: Yudel, the oldest, born in 1935, moved to Israel with his family in the 1970s, and we lost contact with him. Iosif, born in the late 1930s, also became an oil specialist, a Doctor of Science. He lectured at Sverdlovsk Oil College. In the 1990s he, his wife and their daughter moved to the USA. Veniamin, the youngest, also an oil specialist, followed his brother. That's all I know about him.

Mama's older sister Rebekka, born in the 1880s, also lived in Perm. She was a pharmacist. There, in Perm Rebekka got married and adopted the surname of Veksler. Rebekka had two daughters: Sarra, the older one, and her family live in the USA. Frieda, the younger daughter, lives in Hannover, Germany. Rebekka died in Perm in 1969.

Mama's sister Masha, born in 1891, married Iosif Katinkas from Lithuania. Their daughter Anna was born in 1920. During the occupation Iosif, Masha and Anna stayed in Vilnius. Masha was hiding in her apartment and never left it throughout the occupation. Iosif took every effort to save his wife. Anna was a teacher in a distant village. They survived and supported me. A long period of my life is tied to this family. Masha and Iosif had me in their family after I lost my parents, and actually they replaced my parents. Masha died in the 1980s.

Mama's youngest sister Hilna, much loved by all brothers and sisters, was born in 1907. Hilna married Lazar Frenkel, a Jewish man from Kaunas. She gave birth to their son Lev, but she didn't enjoy her family life. She died in 1933. Her husband never remarried. He hired a nanny for his son. This lady became Lev's second mother. Lev and his father were prisoners in the Kaunas ghetto [10](#). They perished during its liquidation. I know that Mother had another sister, but I can't remember her name. She lived in Perm with Grandmother Genia and had two sons. One became an architect and artist, and the second one was a TV producer. They live in Perm, but I don't know them.

My mother didn't work for some time after finishing the gymnasium. She went to Riga from Perm. In Riga she entered the university, but she didn't study there long. Shortly afterward she met my father. They got married and moved to Berlin. I don't know whether my father managed to take a part of his capital to Berlin, or whether my parents went there having nothing. One thing I know for sure is that in Berlin my father started his own business. Lithuania was devastated at that time. There were no essential goods or products being produced. Taking advantage of this situation, my father opened a small store in a little town near the German and Lithuanian border. My parents were doing well. At least I know that they managed to help their brothers and sisters. However, my parents, particularly Mama, missed their motherland. Since there was no threat of communist repressions, as Lithuania and Latvia became independent bourgeois countries, my parents moved

to Kaunas in Lithuania in 1923.

My father became a dealer for British textile companies. Britain manufactured wonderful woolen fabrics, known all over the world, and exported them to Lithuania. My father was a wholesaler.

Growing up

In 1925 Mama gave birth to my older brother Azriel, named after my father's father. In 1927 Yefim was born. He was called Fima in the family. At the age of six Fima caught a cold and died of pneumonia in 1933. I was born on 31st March 1930. My parents were thinking of giving me the double name of Tobijas-David after my mama's brother, who disappeared during World War I, and after Mama's father. However, the Lithuanian authorities refused to allow the double name, and I was registered as Tobijas. At home my family called me David or Dodik. My surname was registered in the Lithuanian way with the grammatical ending of 'as' [Lithuanization of names] [11](#), and I've lived my life with the surname of Jafetas.

I had a beautiful childhood, and I would wish my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, if I'm lucky to live long enough to see them, to have a happy childhood. Our family was rather wealthy. My father owned two houses. We lived in one, and I can't describe that other house. I don't remember it, but I remember the one we lived in very well. It was a big stone house in the center of Kaunas. It had five rooms and a kitchen. There was a dining room, a living room and a big kitchen on the first floor. There was a beautiful wooden staircase to the second floor. There was also my father's room, where we had to ask permission to come in, my parents' bedroom and the children's room that belonged to Azriel and me. I can't remember our brother Fima. He died when I was just three, but I think he must have slept in this children's room as well. There were two wooden beds with nice covers and a desk where Azriel liked to paint and draw. Azriel demonstrated amazing talents with regards to painting and drawing of houses and structures since he was a young child. There was also a bookstand with our children's books and a wardrobe in this room.

The furniture was plain, while in the other rooms it was luxurious. My father ordered it in Berlin. It was shipped in two freight cars to our town. It was made from mahogany, which was very popular at the time. The beds were huge and had beautiful lace curtains. There was also a four-door mirror wardrobe, full of my parents' clothes. Mama also had her desk with a marble top in the bedroom. Mama did her housekeeping calculations, wrote letters and read books sitting at this desk. There were two huge handmade cupboards in the dining room. Mama told me that when they were delivered, they had to break the wall to take them in. When I was a child, I liked touching the carved cupboard doors ornamented with little birds, flowers and angels. They were made in the rococo style, popular at the start of the 20th century. There was also a smaller cupboard, a table and chairs and a big mirror made in this same fashion. There was a small round table with a silver candle stand on it in the corner of the room. Mama lit candles on Sabbath. In my father's room there was his desk, bookcases and a floor clock where I liked to hide, when a child. There was the marble bust of Mercury, the God of Commerce, on a high narrow table, our only belonging that survived the Great Patriotic War. It decorates my living room now.

My mother didn't work. She had a cook and a housemaid to help her about the house. Mama made daily menus, supervised the cook, tried the dishes and added spices to them. Mama knew all culinary secrets of the Jewish cuisine, but we also had European dishes for our meals. My parents were not religious Jews, though they were both born into rabbis' families. My father had a tallit,

tefillin, Talmud and Torah. On big holidays he attended the big choral synagogue of Tallinn and took me with him, when I grew a little older. My father prayed at the synagogue. He knew Hebrew and also, he knew prayers by heart. However, Jewish traditions were not strictly observed in our house. On Saturday my father had to work, and therefore, on Friday we had no festive preparations for Sabbath like they had in other Jewish homes. My father only wore a kippah when he went to the synagogue. Mama had nice hairdos, and she didn't wear a wig or a kerchief. Mama honored Saturday, wearing a white lace shawl and lighting candles in the silver candle stand. This was all we did for the Sabbath celebration. We didn't follow the kashrut in our family. Though we didn't eat pork and meat was bought in special kosher stores, I don't remember that we had separate dishes or sinks for meat and dairy products. But since I never went to the kitchen, I cannot be quite sure about it.

We celebrated Jewish holidays, though. As a rule, our relatives Mikhail and Alexandr and their families visited us on such occasions. On Yom Kippur my parents fasted, and, what is surprising, the children also followed the fasting, though it wasn't mandatory for children to fast. I can hardly remember any fall holidays. I remember well that we had no sukkah. On Sukkoth we visited Uncle Mikhail. My uncle made a sukkah in his yard. I liked Chanukkah, like all children. The house smelled of potato pancakes and pies with jam filling, which were made in the kitchen. The children were given petty cash. I also remember Purim, the funny costumes and Purimspiels, organized in our house. The cook made hamantashen with poppy seeds and delicious rolls with raisins and nuts under my mother's supervision. I have the best memories of Pesach. The house was thoroughly washed, cleaned and scrubbed before the holiday. There were fancy curtains hung and lace tablecloths put on tables. There was a big basket with matzah brought to the kitchen by a courier from the synagogue. Mama put on her fanciest dress, and helped us into lovely velvet suits with ribbons. There was delicious gefilte fish that Mama made herself, stew, chicken, and also salads and cakes on the table. There were also various tsimes dishes, yimberlakh and other traditional Jewish food on the table. Our daily meals were also delicious and plentiful, but there was no such variety as we had on Pesach. My father conducted the seder according to the rules and I, being the youngest child, asked him the four questions. Often my cousin brother Lev Frenkel and his father visited us. Lev was my best friend. We often played together. I also visited him, accompanied by my nanny.

I don't remember my nanny. My governess was a nice lady from Austria. She spoke German to me, and this was the first language I learned. My parents spoke Russian and Yiddish to one another. My brother, who studied in the old Jewish gymnasium, spoke Hebrew to them, and I also learned it. I spent most of my time with the governess and my brother. Mama also often spent time with us. She took us to an ice-cream shop and to the Jewish children's theater performances.

In 1936 we visited Aunt Mania in Berlin. She, her husband and children lived in the center of the city. We stayed in Berlin for about two weeks, but I was too young to remember any details of this trip. That same year I went to the preparatory class at the gymnasium where my brother Azriel also studied. Jews constituted about 30% of the total population of Kaunas, and there were several Jewish schools there: a Yiddish Jewish school, the technical Jewish gymnasium, the humanitarian gymnasium and a religious school. In my gymnasium the subjects were taught in Hebrew. Soon I started talking to my parents and my brother in Hebrew. I had Jewish friends. One of them, Zandel, was my classmate and so were the girls Tanur and Soloveichik. These were their last names;

unfortunately, I don't remember their first names. Regretfully, our communication didn't last long. Zandel and Tanur perished during the occupation, and Soloveichik and her family were deported to Siberia. I don't know what happened to her. I also played with other children of different nationalities, and we got along very well.

There were many Jewish organizations in Kaunas. I liked performances of the Jewish theater where we went with my class. I liked music and liked listening to the records my father played on the record player. I started learning to play the piano, when I was about five years old. We had a piano delivered from Germany. I didn't like playing it but preferred playing with my friends and Lev. I played table tennis for some time. There were Jewish organizations in Lithuania and in Kaunas. I didn't like Betar [12](#) members, who I thought were too aggressive. Maccabi [13](#) and Hashomer Hatzair [14](#) were closer to me. There was another organization in Kaunas, which collected money to purchase land in Palestine, and for the construction of kibbutz communities and establishment of the Jewish state. There was a nice money box, where Mama and Papa always dropped change, in our living room. Every week a representative of this organization visited us. We opened the 'cannon' and he collected the money.

My parents' friends were wealthy merchants, lawyers and doctors. They were the Jewish elite of Kaunas. My parents often arranged receptions and went to see their friends. My father had Lithuanian, Polish and Russian business partners. My father taught me to respect other nations. His secretary Unger was German. In 1939, when Hitler appealed to all Germans to repatriate, he bid farewell to my father and left. I don't know if this was the last drop in my father's cup of patience, or if he already knew how Hitler treated Jews, but he insisted that our family moved to England where Mania's family lived. Many Lithuanians had big hopes for the Soviet regime and looked forward to its establishment, but my parents were well aware of the Soviet Russia in the early 1920s and expected no good from them.

I remember the last celebration in Kaunas. It was my brother Azriel's bar mitzvah. An old Jew visited our house to teach my brother the prayers and how to put on the tefillin. On the day of his coming of age our relatives and close friends gathered in our house. There was a big ball. They already knew about my father's decision to leave Lithuania and this was a kind of a farewell party with the rest of the family. When the academic year came to an end – my brother finished the gymnasium and I finished the fourth grade – we moved to London.

We left in a car and later we took a train to Berlin. My cousin sister Anna Kapiskene, Aunt Masha's daughter, went with us. Anna, born in 1920, was a quite a grown-up young lady by then. In England my father took my brother and me to the college in Brighton on the southern coast, near the English Channel between England and Europe. Then he went to a resort in France. He suffered from stomach ulcer. Mama and Anna decided to travel in England and then join my father in France. My brother and I spent six weeks in college. It was a Jewish educational institution. There were many Jews living in Brighton. We lived in bedrooms, had meals in the canteen and read books in the library. We were bored, I was missing my parents and my brother was trying to entertain me. On holidays we visited Esther, my father's distant relative. She had a traditional Jewish home, and there was gefilte fish, tsimes and other dishes on the Saturday table. This food was very much like my mother would have made it. The international situation in Europe was aggravating. Mama decided she had to take her niece to her parents in Lithuania. Besides, she had more extensive plans to sell the houses in Kaunas and ultimately move to the West. I don't know whether Mama

discussed this with Father or she took this decision by herself, but I really don't know why she decided to leave my older brother in England. One way or another, six weeks after we came to this college Mama came to pick me from there. Mama, Anna and I left.

We arrived in Kaunas in late August 1939, and on 1st September fascists occupied Poland [see Invasion of Poland] [15](#): World War II began. Jews from the occupied areas were invading Lithuania. They were telling horrible things about fascist atrocities, but nobody thought that mass murder would come onto stage. I can't understand why Mama stayed behind rather than leaving with us. She was still hoping to sell the house profitably. I went to my former gymnasium, met with my friends and everything went well for me. Mama kept saying that after the academic year was over we would go to my father in London. This was not to be. In June 1940, when the academic year was over, the Soviet forces invaded Lithuania, and Lithuania was annexed to the new Soviet Russia. We failed to move to the West. Most likely, Mama didn't even try to obtain the permission fearing the Soviet authorities. Many years later, when I grew up, I tried to recall and analyze Mama's feelings, when she realized she was not going to see her husband and older son for quite a while. It never occurred to anyone that this was for good. Maybe, she was hoping that everything would go well and one day we would all be together. At least, this was what she kept telling me. She had to get a job and went to work as an accountant assistant in an office. Her fluent Russian helped her to get a job.

I spent the summer of 1940 in Kaunas, and in the fall I went to the Soviet school, which was a former Jewish religious school. Our gymnasium was closed and its students went to different schools. Deportations of wealthier people began. They didn't care whether they were Jewish or non-Jewish. Zionist and Jewish activists suffered from repressions a lot. Mama often told us how good it was that Papa wasn't in Lithuania, or he would have been deported for sure. We, children, didn't know Russian, and had our school classes in Yiddish. We had a pioneer [see All-Union pioneer organization] [16](#) and Komsomol [17](#) organization, meetings and formations. I liked this new way of life. There was some time to go before I could become a pioneer, but I was eager to join this organization. In May 1941 Uncle Alexandr and his wife were deported. Mama was crying and said that this was a stupid mistake. He was neither wealthy, nor a Zionist. Most likely, they were hunting for my father, and Uncle Alexandr suffered from this.

During the war

When the school year was over I went to the first pioneer camp in my life, in Palanga, a few kilometers from the border. How happy I was! I had a pioneer necktie clasped together with a nice metal clip, and we had pioneer meetings and lined up near the pioneer fire. We swam in the sea and played volleyball. Our life in the camp lasted just one week. At 4am on 22nd June 1941 we woke up from the explosion of bombs. At first we decided these were trainings, which were quite frequent at the time, but this happened to be a bombing and one cannon shell hit our camp. The fire started, and we formed a column and it headed to the sea. We moved in the direction of Latvia, and fear and bombs were pushing us forward. We even saw a sea battle. Fascist planes flew over the column dropping bombs several times. A few children were wounded

Before one o'clock in the afternoon we'd covered 16 kilometers along the coastline. At that point younger children boarded buses and moved to Russia. Fortunately, they managed to rescue these young children. They probably didn't have more buses. Older children had some dried fish and

sauerkraut. I was hungry, and this food, to which I was unaccustomed, seemed to taste delicious. We didn't walk long – some time later a motorcycle with three fascists, two on the seats and one in a sidecar, caught up with us. They were the first Germans I saw. They just told our leader to turn the column backwards. We turned and headed back to Palanga. We never saw these officers again. We were taken to a house. The Lithuanians, who had agreed to serve the Germans, took command. I managed to step aside into the bushes where I took off my precious pioneer necktie and threw it into the bushes. However, I couldn't part with my clip. I put it into my pocket.

The Jewish children were separated from the others and taken to the synagogue, a small red brick house. There were already local Jews in the synagogue. They were old men, old women and children. I didn't see any young man. Perhaps, they were no longer in the town, or they had been separated during the first action. Fascists used to kill younger men immediately to demonstrate their beastly character and make people fear them. The synagogue was guarded, and nobody was allowed to go outside. We were given no food or water. On the following day all inmates were directed to a camp located in a mansion. There were two buildings: a kitchen and housekeeping facilities. We were taken to one structure where we had to sit on the floor. In the morning we were given some potatoes and sauerkraut and had to go to work. We were to clean up the building that formerly belonged to the Soviet military. We could find pressed cereals in packages, and we ate them as they were. In the evening we were given some miserable dinner. We slept on the floor so close to one another that when one wanted to turn, the whole row had to turn simultaneously. There was no toilet or sink, and we went to the toilet in the yard.

Ten days passed like this, and I almost lost hope to see Mama. On the 11th day my Lithuanian friends who were in the pioneer camp with me, came to the building where we were working. They said Lithuanian children were to go to Kaunas on the following day and suggested that I went with them. I knew this was the only hope for me to get home. I left work with them and slept in their quarters. On the following day I boarded the bus with them. Nobody asked me about my typical Jewish appearance or my name. I arrived in Kaunas on that same day.

Mama was home. She hadn't left the house since the first day of the occupation, when Jewish pogroms began. She was crying and kissing me. Then she heated some water, washed me and burned my clothes. I wasn't only dirty and exhausted, but also had fleas. So our life in occupied Kaunas began. Mama and I stayed in the house. Frania, my cousin brother's governess, brought us food and told us about what was going on in the town. Soon the order for Jews to move into the ghetto in the suburb of Kaunas, a small village on the Volia River, was issued. They were to move there within one month: from 15th July to 15th August. The non-Jewish residents of this area were to exchange apartments with the Jews living in the town. So, this relocation to the ghetto in Kaunas was well prepared and organized, which was different from other towns. The Jews who had nice houses in Kaunas managed to find nicer apartments in Viliampole. We didn't take the effort of looking for a nicer apartment, and only received one room in Viliampole. We took everything we could carry, and Mama had money and jewelry, whatever was left from what Frania had traded for food.

At first there were two ghettos in Kaunas, separated by a street. There was a passage bridge across the street. The street didn't belong to the ghetto, and the inmates weren't allowed to walk on the street. The ghetto was fenced with two rows of barbed wire. We had our room in the larger ghetto. All inmates who could go to work had to work. Mama worked at the stocking factory in the

town. She went to work there every day and came back in the evening. Children of my age also were to go to work. Fascists had everything planned. Every person had to make his or her own contribution into the Reich, or had to be exterminated. There were no general education schools in the ghetto, but there was a vocational school where I studied the vocation of a mechanic for some time. However, I never got a chance to practice what I had learned.

In fall the first mass action took place. During such actions fascists killed those, who were of no use to the Reich. In early fall all inmates were ordered to gather outside for sorting out. In the following few days the fascists killed ten thousand inmates. All doomed inmates were taken to the old fortress where they were killed. The room where we lived was near Linkovos Street that led to the fortress. Jews were marching along this street and I'll always remember this doomsday. We were lucky to escape this action.

After this action many apartments and houses became vacant, and we moved into the third house from the gate to the ghetto, on Glinius Street. It was a two-storied wooden house with two apartments on the first floor and two apartments on the second floor. We shared our apartment with two other families. One of the families, the family of a Jewish policeman, had a girl, born illegally in late fall. She was given the name of Ghettele, after the place where she was born. She was born illegally, since childbirth was forbidden in the ghetto.

Our life in the ghetto was regulated by a number of orders. There was a German commandatura in the ghetto. It was a fenced tiny and tidy house with 10-15 people in it. Jewish policemen watched the order and formed the guard service. The Judenrat [18](#), with many honorable Jews and Jewish policemen elected as its members, was responsible for compliance with orders. Actually, the Judenrat took responsibility of many parts of life in the ghetto. There was an employment department, which was to provide certain numbers of employees at the German commandment request. It also had an accommodation unit, responsible for accommodations and also the health and sanitary department. There was also a hospital in the ghetto, but nobody wanted to go there. The fascists sent those who had severe health problems to be shot. In late 1941 there were rumors spread that there were many contagious patients in the hospital. The fascists encircled it and burnt everybody inside: doctors, patients and visitors. I don't remember whether they opened another hospital afterward. There was also a funeral crew in the ghetto. There was a wagon pulled by a miserable horse, riding along the street and picking all deceased or killed inmates. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in the ghetto. If they knew the name of the deceased, the Judenrat even installed a gravestone with the name of this person. Often, when there were many dead people, particularly those killed during an action, they were buried in a common grave.

During my three lives in ghettos I saw many deaths, and death was a mandatory element of our life, and we didn't think there was something special about it. When you don't know a different life, and in the ghetto I soon forgot my happy prewar life, then you think there can be no other life and take what happens for granted. At least, this was what many other guys and I thought. We actually knew no other life and it wasn't until many years later that we could evaluate our life and realize the horror of our existence.

So at that time I took that life for granted, being the ten-year-old boy that I was. I had to do some work and I became a courier. I did various errands for the policemen on guard at the gate. I was a courier, a messenger and a carrier. The gate was near our house, and I spent almost all of my time

in our yard. Our main care was to get some food. Mama received 700 grams and I received 70 grams of sodden sawdust bread. We also received some cereal, peas and rosetin by cards. The rations were so small that it was hard to put together daily rations, and so we received these food portions once a week or even once in a few weeks. However, we were not to choose, and we were very happy to have what we were given. Mama always tried to bring some food from the town, however dangerous it was. The policemen at the gate could either take away the food or even beat those who violated the rules. Anyway, Mama never got caught, maybe because she never had much food with her. Frania kept almost all of our best belongings and valuable things. She brought food to Mama's work place and supported us well in this manner. She also brought food to her favorite Lev and Uncle Lazar. We didn't see them often. We had our hands full in the ghetto. I made a vegetable garden in our yard. I took care of the vegetables growing and enjoyed this work. The vegetables were a valuable addition to our ration.

I had friends and played with them. We made a ball from cloth and played football. We also organized amateur theatrical performances and the characters were fascists, policemen, inmates of the ghetto surrounding us. Our favorite game was with buttons. We threw them in a special way against the wall and then we watched where they fell - our gain depended on that. I practiced throwing buttons pointedly and won the prize in a game. The prize was a nice gray rabbit. We made a cage under the roof in our house. Later somebody brought a female rabbit and soon we had several rabbits. Picking grass and giving the rabbits food and water was a lot of fun. Rabbits multiply rapidly, and they made a big addition to our food ration. My friend or I never slaughtered rabbits or even looked at how adults picked a rabbit to kill. We loved them well, but we didn't turn down rabbit meat.

I started talking Yiddish here in the ghetto. I only talked Hebrew and German before, but we thought it bad to speak German in the ghetto. In 1943 I turned 13. A few weeks before the date, Mama found an old Jewish man to prepare me for my bar mitzvah. He taught me how to put on the tefillin, and a few prayers. Mama also had her preparations, saved food and even arranged a dinner in honor of my coming of age. My friends, Uncle Lazar and Lev came to this dinner. There was our distant relative Yatkunskiy, the editor of the Kaunas Jewish newspaper, his wife and two sons in the ghetto. We didn't see them often. We worked during the day, and there was a curfew in the evening. We always feared actions. Fascists undertook them spontaneously, slightly changing their requirements. They either wanted to capture 500 men or 200 women. They pretended to be taking people to work, but then they killed them. Though I knew Jewish prayers, I didn't pray according to the rules. I always prayed in my own words. I had God in my heart and needed no minyan to pray.

In 1943 we started being aware of the underground organization. I don't know whether my mother knew any underground activists, she never mentioned it. There were flyers describing the victorious advance of the Soviet army at all fronts and appealing to fight against fascists. We were waiting for the news about the situation at the front, hoping to be liberated soon.

In late April 1944 I went to work as usual. All of a sudden I felt something was wrong. I could hear screams and shooting from the outside. I rushed to my rabbits and took shelter in their cage in the attic. This happened to be the so-called 'children's action.' They exterminated children of the ghetto that day. I stayed in the cage. On that day a tragedy happened in our house. The fascists captured Ghettele, a two-year-old girl, our favorite. Her mother was out of her mind and the fascists killed her in the yard. When Mama returned from work, she told me that I had to leave the

ghetto since one could no longer stay in the ghetto. She had discussed this with some people and had everything prepared for my escape. In the evening Mama washed my clothes. In the morning she took my clothes to work with her. About two days later Mama told me to be at her factory at 12. She explained how I was to find her since I had never left the ghetto before and didn't know the neighborhood where she worked. My first challenge was to get over the fence. I managed it all right. The policemen were used to my presence at the gate, but I didn't use the gate. When there was nobody around, I pulled the lower wire using my leg, and then did the same with the upper wire with my hand, and got to the other side of the fence. Then it took me almost no time to find the factory. Two Jewish workers were waiting for me at the entrance to the factory. They hid me in the boiler room. This was where I saw Mama for the last time. She came to say goodbye to me. She promised that she would also leave the ghetto soon and we would reunite. I said goodbye to her and it never occurred to me that this would be the last time I saw her. Some time later the same workers helped me out of the factory. I still cannot understand, and there is nobody I can ask about it, why my cousin brother Lev Frenkel was not with me. He, his father Lazar Frenkel, my mother and the rest of the Yatkunskiy family perished during the elimination of the ghetto. I was the only survivor in the family.

Two women were waiting for me. One was my cousin sister Anna Katinskaite, Aunt Masha's daughter, and Katrina Katinskaite, Masha's husband Iosif's sister. Katrina was Lithuanian and Anna was semi-Lithuanian. They were dressed like Christian women, wore crosses around their necks and the German authorities had no suspicions about them. They came to Vilnius from Kaunas to help me. They had documents for me issued by a pastor they knew. The documents were issued for Yonas Vaitkavichus. Only now I understand how thorough my beloved Mama's preparations were. Katrina, Anna and I went to Frania's place where we stayed overnight. They washed me, shaved my dark curly hair and told me to pretend I was mute and answer no questions. In the morning we took a train to Vilnius. On our way a policeman addressed me, but I pretended I couldn't hear anything. I had no fear. Quite on the opposite, I found it an interesting adventure. It was the first time in three years I was out of the ghetto. I tried to have no concerns about Mama, hoping that she would be out of the ghetto soon.

In Vilnius we went to Aunt Masha's apartment on 2, Kashtonu Street. Uncle Iosif was not in Vilnius. He was working on a farm. Anna went to the province where she was a Lithuanian teacher. Being half-Jewish, it was easier for her to keep her origin a secret. Katrina lived with my aunt Masha. I stayed with them and had to be very quiet and careful. This was a shared [communal] apartment [19](#), and another room was occupied by two young men. One was a student, and the other one was a policeman. Aunt Katrina told me that this policeman drank a lot one night and sitting in the kitchen told her that once he took part in a terrible thing, which was shooting of Jews. He confessed and felt very sorry. He told Aunt Katrina that this was a terrible thing to see. Aunt Katrina was scared of him. She never left her room and told me to stay inside. In June this policeman had a wedding party, and there were policemen and Gestapo officers in the apartment. Masha and I stayed in our room and felt more dead than alive. Fortunately, nothing happened to us. In late June one could tell that the front was nearing Vilnius. There were severe bombings. Some time around 10th July we saw fascists running away. Their dormitory was near our house. The policeman and the student, our neighbors, also disappeared.

We also left home and were hiding in St. Jacob Cathedral. Many other residents found shelter behind its thick walls. On 13th July the cannonade grew quieter. We came out of the cathedral. There was a tank and a dead Soviet soldier on it across the street from the cathedral. There was a glow in the square where wooden storages were located. There was a field kitchen installed here, and people were given soldier's boiled cereal. We ate our ration and the dish tasted delicious. We went home. The windows were broken, and there was ash from the fireplace all around the place. We cleaned the room and placed carton sheets in the window frames. The sense of freedom and that I could walk in the streets without restrictions were new to me. Aunt Masha told me off saying it was too soon to walk in the streets. Gradually Jews from ghettos and camps started returning to Vilnius. I went to the railway station every day, hoping to meet Mama there. Some people returned from Kaunas. Mama was not there. Some time later one man told me that Mama gave her jewelry to a guard at the gate for letting her out, but when she went through the gate, this rascal shot her. I was alone and knew nothing about my father. When Kaunas was liberated, my aunt and I went there. Our house was robbed, and I was scared to be there. Besides, the house was nationalized, and I had no right to stay there. I found the bust of Mercury among the dust and dirt. It was in my father's room watching the chaos and devastation inertly. I took the bust and it has always been with me ever since.

After the war

Aunt Masha and Uncle Iosif treated me as if I was their own son. They were willing to adopt me, but I didn't support this idea. My mother's death caused me a lot of pain. I wanted to keep the name I was born with, and besides, I was hoping that my father would find me. My dear ones understood my feelings and remained my closest people till their very last days; they died in the late 1980s. My cousin Anna has also passed away. I saw Frania, my rescuer, just a few times after the war. She lived in Kaunas and died in 1993. Yad Vashem [20](#) awarded Frania the title of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' [21](#).

In the summer of 1947 I went on vacation to Grandmother Genia Shustoff in Perm. This was the first and the last time I saw her. Grandmother was a traditional patriarchal Jewish woman. She wore a kerchief, followed the kashrut and celebrated Sabbath. She always invited poor women who couldn't afford to celebrate Sabbath to her meal. This was the first time in my life that I celebrated Sabbath according to the rules. I never saw Grandmother again. She died in 1953.

In fall I went to the 2nd grade of gymnasium. After the war Lithuania maintained its prewar educational system: a four-year elementary school and eight-year gymnasium course. I didn't feel quite comfortable, being overage. In summer I studied individually and passed exams for the 3rd grade, and then I could go to the 4th grade. I also took the course for the 7th and 8th grade at university. I was good at studying. I also joined the Komsomol, and in 1949 I finished school and obtained a very good certificate.

I successfully passed my entrance exams to the Chemical Faculty. However, Buchas, the rector of Vilnius University, who came from Kaunas and knew my father very well, said that sons from bourgeois families were not to study at the university, and I was not admitted there. Anna's friend helped me. She was married to the pro-rector of the Teachers' Training College, and I was admitted to the Faculty of Physics and Mathematic. I studied well. I was well-loved at home. Masha's family treated me like their son. I wasn't an active Komsomol member, but I liked amateur performance

clubs. I was involved in the amateur theater performances and sang in the folk choir. This choir toured all over Lithuania on plain trucks. I had many Lithuanian friends and never felt an outcast like I did in the ghetto. When in the early 1950s all newspapers trumpeted about cosmopolitan Jews [see campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [22](#), this anti-Semitic campaign also affected me. I was excluded from the Komsomol, not for being Jewish, but for having a bourgeois origin. I was a success with my studies and finished the college with the highest grades. I wanted to attend post-graduate studies, but I wasn't admitted there, without any explanation. I was told I was to work off whatever money the state had spent on my education.

I got a [mandatory] job assignment [23](#) to Taurage [Lithuania, 200 km from Vilnius], where I worked for two years. I taught physics, astronomy and mathematic in a secondary school. In Taurage I made friends with a girl. She had finished the same college and was an English teacher in my school. I had never looked at her, when we were at college, but at that school, far from home, we became friends and I proposed to her. Yelena Zagorstene, whom I chose, was two years younger than me. She was born in Alytus [Lithuania, 100 km from Vilnius]. During the war Yelena was in the occupation, and after the war she moved to Vilnius with her parents. Her parents and Masha were against our marriage due to the national issue. We were given six months for the probation period. Both sides hoped that we would find different attachments within this time. However, Yelena and I remained faithful to one another. On 20th June 1955, when the academic year was over, we registered our marriage in the district registration office in Taurage. My wife went to take an advanced training course in Vilnius almost immediately after this event, and I followed her after my assignment term was over.

I worked as a teacher before 1959, when I entered the Faculty of Cybernetics for those who had higher education of Moscow Polytechnic College. After getting my degree in cybernetics I went to work at a computer company, which had opened in Lithuania. I went successfully in this company for almost 32 years till 1992. I wrote a candidate degree [Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [24](#) thesis, but I didn't want to defend it. I thought its subject had become outdated while I was working on it, and I decided against defending it for the sake of an increase of my salary and obtaining the candidate's degree.

In 1957 our daughter Edita was born. By that time we had already received a room in a shared apartment. Ten years later the state gave us a nice three-room apartment where we live now. We were quite well-off. My wife and I had decent salaries and had everything we needed. Well, actually, my father supported us well.

Almost immediately after Lithuania was liberated, Aunt Masha started searching for relatives. She contacted Uncle Solomon in America. He wrote to her that my father was alive and lived in London. He happened to be a well-to-do businessman. My brother Azriel had graduated from university and became an architect. My father had remarried, but he had never given up hope to find me. He established the Union of Baltic Jews in London. My aunt Mania was a member. They were sending parcels to Jewish communities in Lithuania and Latvia. When my father got to know that I lived in Lithuania, he started supporting me. I also received parcels from the Union of Baltic Jews in London. I saw my father in 1955, when he flew to the Soviet Union and we went to meet him in Leningrad. It's hard to describe this reunion without tears. We had lost hope to find each other. Afterward I was allowed to visit my father every three to four years. I visited him six times. We talked and recalled Mama, our home and our wonderful life together, whenever we met. My

relocation to London was out of the questions considering that Soviet authorities would have called me a traitor and I would have never seen my family again. This was not possible for me. My father's second wife was a nice lady, but she passed away too early, and he was alone again. Regretfully, my father didn't have a long life. He died in 1970.

I visited my brother Azriel in London, and he visited Vilnius several times. Azriel got married in 1949 His wife, whose name I can't remember, was a Jew from Czechoslovakia. They met at Manchester University where they studied. Azriel lives in London now. He has two grown-up daughters: Nadine and Michel. Michel lives in London with her husband, and Nadine lives in Spain.

In 1946 many Lithuanian residents had a chance to move to Poland. [In 1946 Soviet authorities permitted to leave the territory of the USSR to all people, who were born on the territories annexed to the USSR in the period from 1939-1940s.] I also considered this possibility to move further to Israel or England where I was hoping to find my father and brother. However, my wife was against any relocation. I loved her and didn't want to destroy our marriage. The subject of emigration has never again been raised in our family. I have always been very enthusiastic about Israel. I thought it was the very fortress capable of protecting Jews all over the world and would never allow a repetition of the extermination of Jews. Through all years of the Soviet regime I had to keep the fact of my imprisonment in the ghetto a secret. Soviet authorities never went into any details about who or why someone had been in the occupation. One's presence in occupied areas was almost a crime. Back in Taurage, where Yelena was secretary of the Komsomol unit, she helped me to restore my membership in the Komsomol. It ended when I turned 28, and I never wanted to join the Party. Firstly, I didn't care about public activities, and secondly, the ghetto taught me to be quiet and system-obedient, as they said, never to 'stick out.' I enjoyed my work and the family. In the early 1960s my father gave me a car, and the three of us often went on vacations to the Crimea or Caucasus; we also traveled across Ukraine, the Carpathians and Zakarpatiye.

My daughter grew up in an international family. She considers herself a Lithuanian, but she has a Jewish heart. Though our family never celebrated Jewish holidays during the Soviet regime, Judita always arranges celebrations for me on Pesach, Purim and other holidays. My wife doesn't mind it, but she never initiates any celebrations. Judita finished school successfully and graduated from the Faculty of Applied Mathematic of Vilnius University. She actually followed into my footsteps. Now Judita works with one scientific newspaper publishing office. Judita's marital life was not that successful. She divorced her Lithuanian husband, but she kept his surname of Shpokauskene. I have two grandchildren: David, born in 1981 and named after my grandfather, who graduated from the Law Faculty, and my granddaughter Raya. She is two years younger than her brother and studies to be a designer.

My family had very positive feelings about the changes after perestroika [25](#), when Lithuania gained independence [see Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic] [26](#). Well, this office where I was working happened not to be needed, like many others, and I lost my job in 1992, but my brother supported me all right, and besides, I had my pension. In independent Lithuania I didn't have to explain anything, when I wanted to travel abroad. We became free citizens of a free country. Besides, I've become a rich man. According to the restitution law my parents' house in Kaunas was given back into my ownership. Now I have real estate, and my family and I go there at weekends. My grandchildren will inherit my house, which was built by my father.

The public Jewish life has progressed in independent Lithuania. In 1994 I was offered to be the Head of the Lithuanian Jewish Union of ghetto and concentration camp prisoners, and that's where I've worked since that time. We started from scratch looking for the former prisoners, because they had kept this fact a secret during the Soviet regime. Now we have a big society. We often get together and talk about our childhood and youth behind bars in the ghetto. The memories still hurt. We've established international relations. We correspond with Jewish communities and unions of former ghetto prisoners from the USA, Israel and other countries. I celebrate Jewish holidays with others in the community. I'm trying to get closer to the Jewish tradition. I haven't become religious, but I respect those who believe in God and pray. I also address the Lord and destiny, whatever there is above us, but I speak to them in my own words, which come deep from my heart.

Glossary:

1 Lithuanian Council of Ghetto Prisoners

founded in 1988 by the Lithuanian Jewish community. The main purpose of the organization is mutual assistance as well as unification of Ghetto Prisoners and Concentration camp survivors, collection and publishing of recollections about the war, and arranging meetings with the public and youth.

2 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.

3 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.

4 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.

5 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 Estonian 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.

6 Guild I

In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

7 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

8 Lithuanian independence

A part of the Russian Empire since the 18th century, Lithuania gained independence after WWI (1918), as a result of the collapse of its two powerful neighbors, Russia and Germany. Although resisting the attacks of Soviet-Russia successfully, Lithuania lost to Poland the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city of Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius) in 1920, claimed by both countries, and as a result they remained in war up until 1927. In 1923 Lithuania succeeded in occupying the previously French-administered (since 1919) Memel Territory and port (Klaipeda). The Lithuanian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

9 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

10 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.

11 Lithuanization of names

Voluntary Lithuanization of family names was introduced during the First Lithuanian Republic, banned during the Soviet occupation (1939-1991) and reintroduced in the Second Republic. Often it involves the attachment of the characteristic Lithuanian ‘as’ ending after the family name.

12 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. 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.

13 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.

14 Hashomer Hatzair

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

15 Invasion of Poland

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

16 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.

17 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.

18 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.

19 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

20 Yad Vashem

This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

21 The Righteous Among the Nations

Non-Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust.

22 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'.

23 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-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.

24 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

25 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.

26 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.