

# Miriam Patova

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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*Miriam Patova and her husband Henrich Kurizkes live in a two-room apartment in a nine-storied building, which was built in the 1970s. It's situated in a new neighborhood in Tallinn. Miriam charmed me at once. She is a petite lady with short curly gray hair and amazingly bright eyes. She is very emotional and sociable. Her eyes shine brightly, when she talks about things which she finds interesting, and she looks quite like she does in her childhood pictures. Miriam's apartment looks like a green conservatory. There are blooming and boosting pot plants everywhere. She is very fond of ceramics. There are pictures on the walls. For the most part they are her older grandchildren's paintings. Miriam is a terrific housewife. She is a wonderful cook and also arranges her dishes finely. Her sandwiches are like pieces of art. Miriam's favorite pastime is reading. She has books on medicine, her profession, philosophy and fiction, on her desk. Miriam spends all her free time reading. It's interesting to converse with her. Her opinions are very different, and she sees common things from a very different perspective. Miriam and her husband make a beautiful couple. They've been together for almost 55 years. They are very sincere, kind and intelligent.*

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## **My family background**

Unfortunately, I know very little about my dad's family. All I know about my father's parents is what he told me about them. My father came from Ukraine. Of course, his parents had no opportunity to keep in touch with us as they lived in the USSR, while we lived in Estonia, a capitalist country. The Soviet regime didn't approve of any contact with relatives living abroad <sup>1</sup>. Regretfully, I failed to ask my father about all I would have liked to know. Now I know that parents must always tell their children about their origin and roots so that their children know who they are. Some people may be

ashamed of their parents who were common people or craftsmen. This is wrong. Everything about the family is of interest and needs to be known. I wish I had come to this understanding earlier.

So, here's this bit of information that I know about my father's parents. My grandfather's name was Isaac Patov, and my grandmother's first name was Miriam. They had a big family. My father, Benjamin Patov, was born in 1894. I only knew two members of the whole family. I know that in the early 1920s my father visited his family. Everybody knew about how poor people were in the USSR and when my father was preparing for the trip, our acquaintances brought us clothes, gifts and shoes to take to my father's family. I met my relatives in the 1940s, when Estonia had been annexed to the USSR [see Estonia in 1939-1940] [2](#). I met my father's brother, Boris Patov, during evacuation. He also visited us in Tallinn after the war. I also heard something about my father's two other brothers. One lived in Leningrad [today Russia]. We wanted to visit him after we had been evacuated, but nobody was allowed to visit Leningrad. He died during the siege of Leningrad [see Blockade of Leningrad] [3](#). The other brother died in evacuation. My father also had a sister. Her name was Sophia. After evacuation we met her son Boris and daughter Raisa. My father's parents may have lived in Kiev [today Ukraine] for some time before World War II. When Kiev was occupied they were killed by fascists in Babi Yar [4](#) on 29th September 1941.

Remembering my father, I think that his family was religious and observed Jewish traditions. At least, my father was religious and knew the Jewish history and traditions well. I think he was well-educated in this respect when he was a child.

During World War I my father served in the tsarist army at the front. He was involved in combat action and was shell-shocked at the front. Regretfully, I have no idea how my father happened to move to Estonia after the war. All I know is that many of those involved in World War I stayed in Estonia and started their families here.

I know more about my mother's family. The history of my mother's family starts with my grandfather. His name was Moshe Hazan. He was short and had red hair. I know that my grandfather lived in a small town. Somehow I remember that it must have been in Ukraine. His parents sent him for training with a Jewish hat maker called Birbauer. The training course lasted two years and after finishing it my grandfather became this hat maker's apprentice. He stayed with his trainer's family. He was also provided meals, but wasn't paid for his work. The hat maker had no extra money to pay my grandfather. Birbauer had a wife and eight daughters. His was a big family. One day my grandfather lost his temper and informed his master of his strong intention to leave him for not being paid for his work, but he also demanded that his master paid him whatever he owed. The master said he still had no money to pay him, but that he could give him one of his daughters to marry. My grandfather chose the youngest, Hava, who had gray eyes. She must have not turned 16 at that time. I only knew my grandmother's older sister Ida of my grandmother's family. She lived in Riga [today Latvia] making men's clothes. Ida was single.

My maternal grandparents had a traditional Jewish wedding. After the wedding they moved to Riga. My grandfather earned his living by making hats, while my grandmother gave birth to their children. She had ten, but five died in infancy. One of those who survived was my mother's sister Dora, born in 1894. My mother Sheina was the next child. She was called Zhenny in the family. She was born in 1896. After my mother, her brother Rachmil was born, and the next one was Naum. The youngest in the family was Alexandr, born in 1907. My mother told me that though all the

children in the family were different, they were hardworking, cheerful and could sing very well. My aunts and uncles could make their own clothes and cook. Actually, there was hardly anything they couldn't do. They were very handy and smart. In the early 20th century, the family left Riga for Viljandi [150 km east of Tallinn], a small beautiful town in Estonia. A long time ago Viljandi was called 'little Switzerland' because of the hills, woods and a beautiful hanging bridge.

Everybody in my mother's family spoke Yiddish. I don't think my grandparents were very religious, but they observed Jewish traditions, went to the synagogue and celebrated Jewish holidays at home. They also raised their children Jewish.

My grandfather was the breadwinner, and the family was big. My mother told me that they were very poor. To have something for the family to eat in winter, my grandmother cooked red bilberries. She couldn't afford to buy sugar to make bilberry jam, so she just cooked it plain. In winter they spread it on bread. In winter my mother wore galoshes. However poor the family was they managed to raise their children. [My mother's sister] Dora was very smart. She did well at elementary school, and Viljandi town authorities granted her a scholarship to continue her studies. Dora finished a gymnasium. My mother did badly at school, but she was also eager to study. Unfortunately, she had no such opportunity. At the age of ten, she had to help my grandmother about the house. She also made hat linings and attended to the younger children. My grandfather had no money to pay for my mother's education. My grandfather said to my mother, 'Sheina, you can sign your name, read and count. This is when you have to stop your studies. You're very handy and will assist me with my work.'

My mother sewed hat linings while standing at the table, being too short to sit, and holding little Alexandr [her youngest brother]. She was clever with everything she did. She also taught us that nothing in life is easy. It can never be. She used to say, 'If you want to accomplish things in life, you have to be quick-witted. You have to pinwheel to have your rear ahead of you.' I often recall my mother's witty and wise expressions behind her joking manner. She only finished two years in elementary school, and this was all the education she managed to get. However, she did her best in learning things by herself. She spoke Estonian, German, Russian and Yiddish. She wrote in Russian with mistakes, but she could write well in Estonian. My mother wanted to go to Paris [today France] before she got married. It was quite common for girls from poorer families to go to Paris to learn dressmaking. When the training was over they returned home and opened their own businesses. Local ladies willingly ordered their dresses from dressmakers trained in Paris. This was quite a profitable business. My mother tried to convince my grandfather to send her to Paris, but he said he had no money. Therefore, my mother's dream to study never came true, and the only thing she had left in this regard was to dream for her children to get a good education.

Aunt Dora got fond of revolutionary ideas and became one of the first revolutionaries in Estonia. She had the gift of conviction and involved Uncle Naum in revolutionary activities. After finishing the gymnasium Dora left Viljandi for Riga where she took to revolutionary activities. My mother told me about an incident. Dora returned to Viljandi escaping from the Riga police. Shortly afterwards, gendarmes came to search my grandfather's house. They were looking for leaflets, but found nothing. Later, we found out that Dora had managed to put them in the pocket of my grandfather's jacket which he was wearing. Of course, it never occurred to the gendarmes to search for the leaflets in the old man's pockets. However, some time later, Dora was arrested and put in prison in the tower in Tallinn. It houses a museum now. The [Russian] Revolution of 1917 [5](#) liberated Dora

and other revolutionaries from prison. Dora and Naum moved to Moscow [today Russia] and lived there ever since. After the war for independence [see Estonian War of Liberation] [6](#) Estonia gained independence [see First Estonian Republic [7](#)]. We lived in different countries and couldn't keep in touch with our relatives. It was dangerous for residents of the USSR, who could be blamed of espionage or persecuted for keeping such contacts. It's amazing that we managed to survive the repression [see Great Terror] [8](#) period which started in the USSR in the mid-1930s. However, we lost contact with them for a long time and had no information about them.

[My mother's brother] Rachmil received training in tailoring and in due time he started to work on his own. Alexandr, the youngest brother, learned to make hats and worked in my grandfather's shop. My mother also assisted my grandfather before she got married.

I don't know how my parents met. I think they got married in 1919. Since their families were religious, I think my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. I don't think it could have been otherwise at that time. After the wedding my parents resided in Viljandi for some time before moving to Rakvere [100 km from Tallinn]. I don't know what made them move. Unfortunately, I shall never get answers to these questions.

Rakvere was a small beautiful town. It was an old town with a ruined castle. Its old name was Vezenberg. It was a clean and tiny town. Its residents led a quiet life. They didn't even lock their houses as there was no theft. Owners of houses cleaned the pavements in front of their houses and everything was very clean.

The Jewish community was established in Rakvere at the end of the 19th century. There was a synagogue in Rakvere and also a shochet. There was a cheder for boys. There was a Jewish cemetery with beautiful gravestones and tombs. Cantonists [9](#) were the first people buried in the cemetery. However, there was no Jewish general education school there. Children studied in a German gymnasium and an Estonian school with advanced studies of German. All Jewish families in Rakvere were religious, observed Jewish traditions and raised their children religiously. My parents settled down in a small house with a garden. My father made hats and my mother assisted him. She also took care of the house and children. My sister Rachil [see Common name] [10](#), Rokhle-Leya in her documents, was the oldest. She was born in 1920. Then came my brother Beines, born in 1923, and I was born in 1929. I was named Miriam after my paternal grandmother.

## **Growing up**

My father made nice hats and had his customers, but he was slow. My mother did her best in assisting him. She was the center of our lives. She was very quick and did several things at a time. Despite her hard life my mother was cheerful and never drooped. She was good at sewing, knitting and embroidery. She could even make fur clothing. I loved her dearly and never missed a chance to be with her. When sewing with her knitting machine my mother used to sing Jewish songs, and she did it well. I used to sit or stand besides her listening to her singing. I can't remember the songs, but when I hear them on the radio, I recall my childhood.

My parents spoke Yiddish to one another and German to the children. We all spoke fluent Estonian, living among Estonians and communicating with them. My parents also knew Russian, but we didn't speak it at home.

My mother brought us up to be hardworking. She often repeated that she would be happy if I didn't have to work hard in my life, had nicely groomed hands, different from her worked out hands. However, she wanted me to know everything and to be able to do things. I wasn't so good in handicrafts, and was jealous about my older sister who could do everything including sewing, knitting, embroidering and cooking. There was hardly anything which she couldn't do. She was very pretty. She was slim and had thick black wavy hair and beautiful features. Rachil was very smart and was as quick as my mother in doing things. I admired her, but Beines and I were closer. I loved him dearly, and he spent a lot of time with me. I was often ill as a child, and I was tiny and weak, and my older brother wanted me to grow stronger. He did sports and involved me in various sporting activities.

In winter we went skiing, and he taught me to ski down the hill. Before we went home, Beines undressed me to rub snow onto my body, and then at home put me in hot water. My mother didn't object to this, and his efforts had their results. I stopped catching a cold so frequently. In summer we rode bicycles, and my brother taught me to climb trees. I didn't fear anything when my brother was with me. Beines taught me to love nature. We had a jar with a wide neck, and there were frog eggs in drift weed at its bottom. Beines and I used to watch tadpoles emerge from their eggs. When they grew a little bigger, we used to let them go into the river. We had dogs and cats at home. My brother and I loved animals. I was the youngest and everybody spoiled me, but I remained a cheerful and easy-going child. I was loved and loved everybody in return.

My parents observed Jewish traditions at home. On Saturdays and Jewish holidays they went to the synagogue and the children always went with them. My mother always asked me whether I wanted to go to the synagogue with them, and I always accepted. I found these Jewish gatherings interesting, and children also talked with other children. My mother and I went to the upper tier where other women were praying. My brother stayed with my father on the ground floor. My father was a member of the Jewish community of Rakvere. On Saturdays they had meetings to discuss their issues. We also celebrated Jewish holidays at home according to the traditions. My mother had special dishes for Pesach. My father bought matzah for Pesach at the synagogue. We only ate matzah through the whole duration of the holiday. There was no bread at home. My father conducted the Pesach seder. Everything was in accordance with the Jewish traditions. On Yom Kippur my parents fasted. I always looked forward to Chanukkah.

Uncle Rachmil and his wife also lived in Rakvere. My uncle was a tailor, and owned a clothes store. He was very business-oriented and was doing quite well. He and his wife had no children of their own, and they cared about me. They were much better off than our family, and on Chanukkah my uncle always gave me a whole crone for [Chanukkah] gelt. My brother taught me to read at my early age, and I liked it a lot. However, books were expensive, and my parents couldn't afford such expenses. I used to buy a book after receiving a crone from my uncle. This was a lot of money at that time, considering that a pair of shoes cost two crones. My mother told me that Uncle Rachmil and his wife wanted to adopt me, but she didn't agree to that. Uncle Rachmil owned a house and even a car, which was a luxury at that time. They always invited me over on Saturdays and we went for a ride out of town.

Rakvere was a small town, and there was no Jewish school. My sister and brother studied in a German school. Rachil finished twelve years of the gymnasium. She knew Russian and English. They also got vocational education. Rachil could do typing, file keeping, sewing and knitting. After

finishing the gymnasium my sister moved to Tallinn. She wanted to live in a bigger town, and believed she would have more opportunities in Tallinn. However, there was an economic recession during this period, and it took her a while to find a job. She finally found a job as a shop assistant.

My brother was very talented. Everything came easy to him. He had a beautiful baritone and he was very musical. He took singing classes. He was strong, tall and handsome. He was growing fast and couldn't wait till he could start working. He liked dealing with technical things. He always fixed bicycles, though nobody taught him to do it. After finishing the seventh grade, Beines left school. My mother was very disappointed. She had always wanted her children to get a good education, particularly considering that she never had a chance. However, my brother insisted on having his own way. At 17 he went to Tallinn where he became an apprentice car mechanic. My mother went with him to find him a place to stay. When my brother started working he went to an evening school.

Beines had his bar mitzvah at the age of 13. There was a big celebration in the family. He was given a tallit for his bar mitzvah. It was different from the tallit of an adult man: woolen and white and black. His was a silk one with tassels and blue edges. His tallit was in a little silk bag with a hexagonal star embroidered in gold. There was also a scroll on thin parchment, an extract from the Torah. My mother had this bag with her during the evacuation. It lived through all the hardships of our lives and even its owner. I kept it for a long time not knowing what to do with it. Later, I gave it to our granddaughter Rosa. She lives in Israel and keeps this family sanctity.

I went to the Estonian school. We studied all the subjects in Estonian. We also had German classes every day. The school was accommodated in a small wooden house. There was one teacher for two classes. I was the only Jewish student in my class, but in all those years I can't remember one single incident of unkind attitude towards me or any emphasis on my origin. When the rest of the class had a religious class, my teacher didn't force me to study the Orthodox religion. She gave me a Bible, a thick book with pictures, and I looked at the pictures. Every morning there was a prayer before our classes started, but I was allowed to go to school after the prayer. On the eve of Jewish holidays my teacher told me that I could stay at home. This respectful attitude to a different religion during the period of the first Estonian independence [11](#) was absolutely natural for us. Our uniform was a dark blue dress with a little white collar and an apron. On holidays we wore a bigger white collar, which we tied in a bow, and no apron. We were raised in strictness. I liked running along the streets, and when I saw a policeman, I slowed down and greeted him making a curtsy before him. This was the rule considering that he guarded the nation. If a boy and a girl walked together, the boy was to let her pass before he went through the door. We were taught this in our childhood: this was the way things should have been. Later, after the Soviet occupation [see Occupation of the Baltic Republics][12](#), when Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1940, our school was closed, and all the schoolchildren were sent to the Municipal Estonian school. I never faced any anti-Semitism in my old or new school. This subject was never discussed at home either. I had Jewish and Estonian friends. They visited me at home, and my mother always treated them nicely.

My mother wanted me to study music. I had classes with a music teacher, and was successful. My mother hoped that I would go to the conservatory in Tallinn after finishing school.

We often saw my mother's parents. My grandfather opened his own hat shop after some time. Alexandr worked with him. He had a difficult life. He was a student of the Medical Faculty of Tartu University. Then he fell in love with a girl. His fiancée was from Riga. Alexandr was going to marry her, but being a student, he couldn't provide for her, and Alexandr had no intention to wait till he finished his studies. He left university and went to my mother in Rakvere. She raised him and was like a mother to him. Alexandr got married and started his own business. However, he didn't have a business-oriented mind and went bankrupt. At that time he already had a son. His wife left him and went to Riga with their son. Alexandr returned to his parents in Viljadi. He went back to work with my grandfather, and his life improved. He remarried. In late 1940 Alexandr's son Adir was born. When the war started, he was seven months old.

I remember my grandparent's house well. There was a small store on the ground floor, a small room. The front door led to this small room, and there were shelves with hats on them starting right from the entrance. There was another door which led to the living quarters. There was a big dining room, my grandparents' bedroom, a staircase to the second floor where Alexandr and his family lived.

I loved my grandmother and she was my role model. One wouldn't have said she was beautiful, but she radiated dignity and nobility. My grandmother was always nicely dressed. She wore dark blue or gray gowns with snow-white collars. Her hair turned gray when she was young, but it was always nicely done. My grandmother had no education, and signed papers with three crosses. However, she was good at discussing various subjects. She went to concerts and listened to the radio. She was very tolerant, smart, and never imposed her own opinion. Even when I asked for her advice, she always told me to do what I believed was right, but only after thorough consideration. She said she could give me no advice since another person can just listen to me, but the decision was to be mine. I remembered this through my whole life. And when I happen to get angry with my dear ones for not doing right in my opinion, I always tell myself to stop and recall my granny. And then my irritation disappears.

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

I couldn't give thorough consideration to the annexation of Estonia to the Soviet Union considering my age. All I remember about it is that Rachmil lost his store. He went to work as a tailor in a state owned shop. Our lives didn't change as much. However, there was also a great joy in our life. My grandparents could finally see their daughter Dora and son Naum who lived in Moscow. Dora invited her parents to visit them. She was the director of a textile factory. She was also a deputy and was awarded an order for her work. When Dora turned 40 she went to study in the textile college. She was a strong-willed person. The factory employees respected her a lot, though she was strict and demanding. Dora dedicated her life to her work at the factory. She took great care of the employees. They were women, and there were many single women after the war. Many had children, and my aunt opened kindergartens and nurseries at the factory. Dora and Naum were altruistic and idealistic people. They believed in communist ideas and wanted everybody to have a good life.

Uncle Naum was very talented. He wrote poems, liked and understood music, and had artistic talents. His friend was Solomon Mikhoels [13](#), a famous Jewish actor, who tried to convince him to act in a theater. However, the [Communist] party sent uncle Naum to study in Germany, which he

did. He believed it was the duty of a communist to do what his country told him to. When he returned from Germany, he was appointed as the director of Mosgorenergo, a huge power company, where he worked in this position till the Great Patriotic War [14](#) began.

### **During the war**

On 22nd June 1941 we heard that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union. Molotov [15](#) spoke on the radio. He finished his speech with the words, 'We will win since our cause is right.' We believed that the war wasn't going to last long. However, the Germans were advancing fast, and my parents decided to evacuate. Uncle Rachmil and his wife wanted to stay in Rakvere, but my mother insisted that they went with us. She did so as if she had some kind of premonition. Finally they joined us. Uncle Alexandr and his family also joined us. My grandparents were visiting Aunt Dora at that time. I think this trip saved their lives. They stayed with my aunt in Moscow after the war.

Beines went to Leningrad [today Russia] on business before the war. He was to deliver a vehicle there. My mother was very worried, but she hoped Beines would take care of himself, and we couldn't stay any longer in Rakvere waiting for him. We packed a few things and went to the railway station. The trains were leaving, filled with people. The station was overcrowded. The crowd separated our family. My father and I failed to board the train whereas my mother and sister managed to get on. My father decided to go to Leningrad where his brother lived, but the train went past Leningrad. We stopped at a station in the suburb for a long while. There we met with my brother, who was on his way back to Tallinn. We told him to join us, but Beines said he had his orders and had to go back to Tallinn to report the completion of his task. This was the last time I saw my brother alive.

When he returned to town, German forces were close to the town. Beines was captured by Estonians. They executed him in the Tallinn jail. In 1962 I obtained a certificate of his death from the archives. It's strange that all the archives were kept, but this was only because of the Estonian love for order. According to this certificate and the documents of the central state archive, Beines Patov, a car mechanic, was arrested in Tallinn during the German occupation on 1st September 1941 for being Jewish. Based on this charge Patov was to be executed before 6th October 1941. When my husband and I were in Israel, we visited the Yad Vashem [16](#). I was given documents to fill out. I filled them out in Ashdod, Israel, and sent them to Yad Vashem. About a month after that, Yad Vashem sent me a letter saying that they had my brother's data.

My father and I were sent to Yaroslavl [today Russia] where most of the Estonian citizens were sent. Somehow my father managed to find out that my mother, sister and Rachmil and his wife were in Mariyskaya SSR [about 600 km from Moscow]. My father got in touch with them, and we went to Mariyskaya SSR where we reunited with the family. We didn't stay long there. Dora managed to arrange for us to go to Cheliabinsk [about 1,500 km from Moscow] where we were accommodated in a small house. Uncle Alexandr and his family joined us. Our family shared one room, Uncle Rachmil and his wife stayed in another room, and Alexandr, his wife and their son lived in the third room. Alexandr went to work at the military plant, which released him from military duty in the army. Alexandr worked from early morning till late at night. When he returned home, he often fell asleep at the dinner table. My father and Rachmil were tailors in a shop. One year later, my father was mobilized to the army. My father was assigned to the Estonian Rifle Corps [17](#).



Uncle Rachmil had lost one eye, which released him from service in the army. My father served in the army for one year. He fell seriously ill at the front and also, he was overage. He was demobilized and returned to Cheliabinsk.

We didn't starve in evacuation thanks to my mother and her abilities. She traded clothes for food at the market. We always had some extra bread besides the ration we received for cards [see Card system] [18](#) and potatoes. My mother made soup with peeled potatoes. As for the peels, she washed and ground them to make pancakes. She worked about the house all day, but we had sufficient food thanks to her skills.

I went to school even though I didn't know any Russian. I had no choice. There were only Russian schools in Cheliabinsk. I was admitted to the sixth grade instead of the seventh grade where I belonged. Because of not knowing Russian, I had to go to a lower grade. I got along well in my class. My classmates sympathized with me and provided assistance. I remember my first day at school. I wore a vinous pleated skirt and a knitted cardigan. I had ribbons in my plaits. The children, who had never seen any beautiful clothes before, crowded around me touching my clothes and even the ribbons. I didn't know what to do. Of course, I felt like a stranger in my class at first, but soon I made friends with my classmates. However, there were no anti-Semitic demonstrations. I never heard abusive words addressed to me. I remember my first accomplishment in my studies. We were studying the history of ancient Rome. I learned these pages from my textbook by heart. My teacher asked me to tell it, and I told the whole story in Russian. My classmates applauded me. Another time I wrote my name on the blackboard in Russian. These were my first steps, and later things gradually improved.

In summer schoolchildren went to work at the sovkhoz [19](#). I also worked there. My mother taught me that one had to do any work without waiting to be told. She said, 'Dirty floors? Don't wait till someone asks you or till someone else does it. Do it yourself.' I was raised in this way, and this upbringing helped me in my life. Perhaps, that's why my life is easier than anyone else's.

I remember my 16th birthday in evacuation. When I turned twelve in Rakvere, before the war, Uncle Rachmil gave me a present and said that for my 16th birthday he would give me a car. Of course, I forgot this promise. On my 16th birthday Uncle Rachmil knocked on our door and gave me a big box. I opened it, and there was a smaller box in it, and another smaller box. When I finally opened the last box, I saw a toy car. This was very touching.

I met Uncle Naum in evacuation. We became very close and he influenced me a lot. Naum had forgotten Estonian, and we spoke Estonian with him [so he would learn it again]. He had high blood pressure and was released from military service. He evacuated to Sverdlovsk [Yekaterinburg at present, about 1,600 km from Moscow] with a military plant. He was appointed the director of this plant. Naum's family life was rather unfortunate. He divorced his wife, and their two sons stayed with their mother. He kept in touch with his sons. Uncle Naum, like my mother's other brothers, was a success with women. I wouldn't call them handsome in the common sense of this word. Uncle Naum was bald and had a potato-like nose. However, they all had some charisma. They radiated charm, love of life, tenderness. They were elegant, polite, could dance and sing well, and they were courteous, which was valued much more than physical attraction.

We followed up the military advancements. In 1944 the liberation of Estonia began. We listened to the radio with great interest. The day when we heard that Tallinn had been liberated from the

fascists, it became a holiday for us. And of course, the end of the war was a great event for us. People were dancing, singing, hugging and greeting each other. We could finally go home. Naum and Dora told us to stay in Moscow, but we couldn't even imagine life anywhere else but Estonia. However, we didn't return to Rakvere. Rakvere was a small provincial town, and there were no higher educational institutions there as I had to continue my studies. We moved to Tallinn. My father was the first to go there to find accommodation. He managed to find three small rooms in a shared five-room apartment [see Communal apartment] [20](#). We had a front door leading to our rooms, and another family sharing two rooms had the entrance from the backdoor. We shared a kitchen and a bathroom. We were happy with this lodging. My mother's brothers also lived in Tallinn after evacuation. Rachmil was a tailor, and his wife worked in an accounting office. Alexandr, his wife and son also lived in Tallinn.

## **After the war**

When we returned to Tallinn we got to know about the horrific happenings during the war. Estonia was the first European country to report its territory Judenfrei [21](#), or Jew-free to Hitler. Thinking about it now, I'm trying to remember whether we were scared of living here after the war, what our neighbors thought about us and what we thought about them knowing about what was happening, but these issues never came up at that time. We got along well with our neighbors. We had good neighborly relations. You can say, 'What kind of people were you? How could you forgive this?' Then I would ask, 'And what kind of people are those who move to Germany nowadays? How can they walk the streets that had been flooded with blood? Why don't they move to Israel instead?' As for what I think about Estonians, I know these people aren't to blame for what had happened. Perhaps, a big part of the blame is on the Soviet regime.

After the deportations in 1941 [see Soviet Deportation of Estonian Civilians][22](#) many Estonian residents believed the German forces to be their liberators and rescuers from the Soviet threat, so they readily fulfilled orders of the occupants, accepting their rules and hoping for a better life. However, not only the Estonians but also the Jews were looking for ways of escape from the Soviet regime. Many Jews refused evacuation for this very reason. They thought there was nothing to be afraid of regarding the Germans. My parents had a nice friend in Rakvere where we lived before the war. He was a chemical engineer and a Jew. I liked him a lot. He was single and often visited us. He used to read to me while holding me on his lap. My mother had tried to convince him to evacuate, but he said that when the Germans were in Rakvere he would wear a yellow star and life would go on. He was more afraid of having to evacuate to the USSR. Many Jews thought in this way and paid for this with their lives right after the German armies occupied our land.

My grandmother's older sister Ida stayed in Riga during the war. She was a very beautiful woman. Ida spoke fluent German. However, somebody reported to the Germans that Ida was a Jew and she was sent to the ghetto. Ida survived. When the Soviet army advanced to Latvia, the Germans forced the remaining inmates of the ghetto to march to Germany. The Germans killed those who couldn't walk. When in Germany, Ida fell from exhaustion and a German soldier shot at her. The bullet was slightly grazing her head, but didn't affect any vital parts. When the rest of the column left, Ida got to her feet and started on her way back. She stayed with a local German family, who gave her food and sent her to the hospital. A German medical officer treated her in the hospital. He managed to keep Ida there for a week before he released and showed her in which direction she had to go. She managed to get to the Soviet units where she mentioned her niece Dora's name.

Dora was found and she helped Ida. What was amazing was that Ida had diabetes and lived on insulin injections, but she managed without any insulin during the war and she survived. Ida died in Tallinn at the age of 80.

In Tallinn our family also followed Jewish traditions. We celebrated Jewish holidays and followed the kashrut to the extent that we could, considering the lack of food during the postwar years. The beautiful synagogue in Tallinn [see Tallinn synagogue] [23](#) was gone. It was ruined by the Soviet air force during their attack on 8th March 1944. The Soviet regime struggled against religion [see Struggle against religion] [24](#), but the Soviet authorities gave the Jewish community in Tallinn a small and shabby wooden house for the synagogue. However miserable it was, people came there to pray and celebrate the holidays. On Pesach they could buy matzah at the synagogue. There was no rabbi in Tallinn, but those who knew the Jewish religion and Jewish traditions performed this ritual. There was also a shochet in Tallinn. My father was a member of the Jewish community and took part in its activities. Members of the community got together every week. There was no Chevra Kaddishain Tallinn after the war. When Jewish people died, they were to be buried in accordance with the rituals. Somebody who knew Jewish traditions usually performed this ritual, and sometimes my father conducted Jewish funeral services. There was a Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. It was amazing that the Germans never ruined one single gravestone in the cemetery. After the war Jews continued to be buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Though my father was a deeply religious person, he must have been shocked with what was happening in Estonia during the German occupation. My father expressed rebellious ideas saying, 'What kind of God do we have? Is he deaf and blind allowing such horrors and crimes to be committed?'

We were very poor after the war. My mother did her best to feed us, but it was impossible to get shoes or clothes. Everybody wore white tennis shoes cleaning them with toothpaste. Also, if we could buy calico, we made calico dresses.

Of course, the Soviet regime affected our lives radically. Many things seemed strange and weird to us. However, I don't think we gave much thought to them at that time. We just lived our lives. Perhaps, this was the only right thing to do. We also adjusted to the ideology since there was no other alternative. Perhaps, things were easier with our family. We never wanted extra riches. We were used to doing things with our own hands and making do with what we had.

Shortly after the war, my older sister Rachil married Boris Kulman, a violinist of the Tallinn symphonic orchestra. In 1946 their first son Armir was born, and in 1951 Rafail, the second son was born. My sister was a housewife.

In Tallinn I went to the ninth grade of the Russian school for girls. Children in Estonia studied in school for eleven years. We had more subjects than the rest of the USSR schools. We studied logic, mineralogy, history of arts and other subjects which weren't taught at schools in the USSR. There weren't many children at school. In 1944 many people were still in evacuation. There were many children of the military serving in Tallinn. There were also children of the former prisoners returning from Siberia and the Volga [today Russia] areas.

I didn't join the Komsomol [25](#) until finally my school friend convinced me to do so. She told me that I had no future after finishing school if I didn't join the Komsomol. So I did. I have to say I was very

serious about it. I had to learn the statute and answer questions about the international situation. I was questioned at the district Komsomol committee [Editor's note: Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities]. I answered all questions and was awarded my Komsomol membership certificate. All new members and I went to a cafe to celebrate this joyful occasion. We had cakes, but no alcoholic drinks.

In 1948 the struggle against cosmopolitanism [see Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [26](#) began in the USSR. I knew something was going on. My parents discussed something lowering their voices, but they didn't have any such discussions in my presence. Our family wasn't involved in anything like this. My sister got married and had a son. We had to take care of our everyday routines and had no time for political issues.

I continued my music classes. I was doing well and was going to enter the conservatory in Tallinn. I had great plans of becoming an art critic. I knew that the career of a performer wasn't for me. I like peace and solitude and it's in my character, though I also love people. I got very confused having to perform in front of an audience and there was nothing I could do about it. Uncle Naum helped me make up my mind about my future profession. He said it was all right to know and practice music, but as for the profession, it was better to do something that was in demand anywhere life sent me. He said that considering my character, the best profession for me was medicine. I decided to follow his advice. There was a Medical Faculty at Tartu University, but I wanted to study in a bigger town. I visited Leningrad during my school vacations and I liked the city. In 1948 I finished school and entered the Medical Faculty of Leningrad Medical College. We had outstanding professors and lecturers. Life and study in Leningrad was a never ending festivity for me.

My parents rented a little room for me. There was a narrow sofa and a little desk in the room. The stipend I received was very insufficient. However, students managed to spend it on food and also, visit museums, theaters and concerts. This was a different time. We used to stand in lines for hours to get tickets to a concert in the Philharmonic. Of course, we only bought the cheapest tickets. We didn't care where we sat. All we wanted was to listen to the music. There were beautiful performers and conductors. Though many people lived from hand to mouth, the concerts were always sold out. The Philharmonic goes knew each other as they attended concerts regularly. I shall never forget postwar Leningrad. I saw all these wonderful places: the suburbs where emperors and nobility resided, the luxurious palaces and fountains, galleries and parks, which were all ruined. They were in the process of reconstruction and restoration. How dedicated those people involved in restoration of these historical monuments working for peanuts, or even driven by their spiritual calls, were. They even weaved upholstery for chairs following the pattern of a little patch which had been miraculously preserved. Restoration of these miraculous palaces, interiors and statues lasted from 1948 to 1954. This was a miracle and hats off to those people.

I was an active Komsomol member in my college. I was appointed to the cultural division. Every week I read lectures about outstanding activists of art and also told others about interesting things I had read in newspapers and magazines. I remember my lecture about Tchaikovsky [27](#). I tried to do my best.

I had some Jewish group mates and there were also Jewish professors in the college. In January 1953 the Doctors' Plot [28](#) began. It was very scary. People were afraid of speaking aloud. They

whispered things. Our Jewish professors disappeared, but everything was done quietly and there were no meetings held on this subject. Jewish students weren't involved, though.

During my student years, my best friend was Nastia [affectionate for Nadia] from Leningrad. She was half-Estonian and half-Russian. She survived the siege of Leningrad. She had a common family. Her father was a worker, and her mother was a medical nurse. They were nice people. Nadia and I walked in the city and went to theaters and concerts together. We never discussed any nationality related issues.

I got married when I was a second-year student. I met Henrich Kurizkes in Tallinn, when I was at school. My friend introduced him to me during an interval at a concert in the Tallinn Philharmonic. During the war he served in the Estonian Corps. After the war he continued his service in the Estonian Corps in Tallinn. Henrich was born in Tallinn in 1924. His father, Lazar Kurizkes, was born in Narva. He later moved to Tallinn. Henrich's mother, Rebekka, came from Tallinn. Henrich's parents were working. They raised him hardworking. He studied in a private Russian gymnasium and then in an Estonian English college. Henrich went home from school, heated and served dinner to his mother when she came home from work. Henrich studied well, and was offered to give private classes to weaker children. He earned money to buy his first suit by teaching.

Henrich and I saw each other while I was in Tallinn. When I went to Leningrad, we corresponded and only saw each other when I went on vacation to see my parents. We got married when I went on vacation in 1950. We just registered our marriage and I went back to Leningrad. I gave my mother my word that I would finish my studies and become a doctor. Henrich was transferred to the military recruitment office in Tikhvin [today Russia] near Leningrad, and he visited me on weekends. Our daughter Tatiana was born before my winter exams, when I was in my fourth year in college. I had to study and take care of the baby. It wasn't easy. I passed my exams. When the baby turned three months, I took her to my mother in Tallinn. Thanks to my mother, who cared about my daughter, I managed to finish college. I obtained a degree of a children's doctor. Henrich was transferred to Boksitogorsk [a small town 200 km east of St. Petersburg], where he received a two-room apartment in a new apartment building. I finished college in 1954. I requested for a job in Boksitogorsk for my graduate assignment [see mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [29](#). Members of the board were rather surprised that I wanted to go to such a distant town, and I explained that I just wanted to go where my husband was working. I went to work as a children's doctor in the municipal hospital in Boksitogorsk. I got along well with my colleagues. I also became a member of the Komsomol committee and was involved in their activities. I took my daughter with me, and we've always been together ever since.

In March 1953 Stalin died. He wasn't my idol. I had no idols. Many people grieved after him, as if he was their dearest person. I felt no grief. I can't say I was sure about certain things, but my intuition told me that he knew about all these horrors in the USSR and he must have given his orders. At the Twentieth Party Congress [30](#) Nikita Khrushchev [31](#) exposed Stalin's crimes, and I was horrified. It's one thing to assume, and a totally different thing when you hear the proof. We were hoping for improvement, but nothing of this kind happened. Anti-Semitism didn't disappear, and we were still separated from the rest of the world. The USSR was still surrounded by the Iron Curtain [32](#).

In 1955 the army re-organization began, and Henrich was offered another job. He decided to have it in Tallinn, though his management told him we would have no apartment in Tallinn. We moved

into my parents' apartment. Henrich's mother lived in one room in a shared apartment while my parents had three rooms. In 1956 our son Alexandr was born. We named him after my mother's brother. I worked as a children's doctor in a hospital. Henrich entered the extramural Military Faculty of Moscow Financial College. It was a hard time for our family, when Henrich spent all of his time working and studying, but we managed all right. Henrich finished his studies and obtained a diploma.

We observed Jewish traditions in our family. My husband and I were never ashamed of our Jewish identity. We believed our children had to know the traditions and follow them. Our people brought them through many centuries of oppression and persecutions, preserved them and we were to convey them to our children. Religion was forbidden in the USSR, but we believed we could do what we thought was right at home. We celebrated Jewish holidays and received guests. On Pesach we always had matzah and conducted the seder. Our children joined in our celebrations. My husband and I told them about each holiday and how it should be celebrated. They knew the history of the Jewish people and their traditions. We also celebrated Soviet holidays: 1stMay, 7thNovember [October Revolution Day] [33](#), and Victory Day [34](#). Victory Day was the greatest holiday. It was the holiday for those who had survived this hell. Other holidays were also good since we didn't have to go to work and could enjoy our free time with the family. We liked this opportunity to spend more time with our children. We spoke Russian to our children. They learned Estonian while playing with the other children in the yard.

When our children went to school, Henrich's mother helped us a lot. She picked up the children from school, gave them lunch and helped them with their homework. My mother-in-law was an excellent cook. She made delicious traditional Jewish food. After Henrich's father died in 1963, my mother-in-law moved in with us. I'm grateful to this wonderful lady for what she had done for us. She died in 1973. We buried her near her husband's grave in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

Our apartment was very cold. We lived on the ground floor of a wooden house with thin walls. In winter the house froze through, it was impossible to stand on the floor with bare feet. We had a stove which heated the house, and my household called me a 'stoker on duty.' I got up before everybody else to heat the house. When I came home from work, the first thing I did was stoke the stove. We also cooked on wood or on coal bricks. There was no hot water supply. We had a wood stoked water heater in the bathroom. I dreamed about an apartment of our own with central heating and hot water. When I mentioned this to my husband, he replied that so many people were poor and lived in basement apartments while we were so cozy at our home. What could I say? Many of my acquaintances had moved around several times when we still lived in a shared apartment. My husband was the financial and pension fund manager at the military office and also, chairman of the military housing commission, but he couldn't take advantage of his official authority to improve our own situation. We received a new apartment 30 years ago [in 1975] before the 30th anniversary of our victory. I remember I was taking a rest after my night-shift at the hospital. Henrich came home, shook a key ring with new keys before my nose and told me to get dressed. I told him to leave me alone. He waited till I got up, and we went to take a look at our new apartment. The first thing I did was taking a hot shower. I was so happy! We've lived here since then. However, I never had angina or a stuffed nose, when we lived in the wooden house. The air was different, I guess.

We had limited possibilities like most of the citizens in the Soviet Union. We lived on two relatively small salaries. Everything was limited. It was next to impossible to buy books or anything else. Only public and trade union activists were allowed to travel abroad. However, we made do with what we had and weren't unhappy. My work granted plots of land to their employees. I always liked dealing with plants. We also decided to get a plot. We constructed a little house. It was hard to get any construction materials. We had no car and had to use public transportation. Then we had to walk five kilometers. Our son was four, but we always took the children with us. We usually spent weekends at the dacha [35](#). We enjoyed spending time in the open air, and so did our children.

My mother died in 1964. We buried her in the Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish traditions. My father died in 1981. He had done a lot for the Jewish community and was buried near the central row of the section where the most respectable members of the community were buried. Aunt Dora also died in Moscow that same year. She was buried in the municipal cemetery in Moscow.

In the 1950s we met my father's sister Sophia and her family. My cousin Raisa graduated from the Medical University in Kiev. She was offered a job in a few towns, including Tallinn. She decided for Tallinn knowing that we were there. Raisa went to work and got married after she moved to Tallinn. Sophia and Boris visited her in Tallinn. Raisa has two daughters: Regina and Patz. Her husband works with repatriates in Sochnut [36](#). Raisa's second daughter also graduated from the Medical University. She works as a sanitary doctor. She is married and has a daughter. Raisa died, and we rarely talk to her daughters. We only occasionally call them, and rarely see them.

Tatiana finished school and entered the Faculty of Russian Philology at Tartu University. She married Rimantas Duda, a Lithuanian man, when she was a student. Their older son Matas was born in 1976. Unfortunately, I was working, and couldn't help Tatiana, like my mother helped me, with her children. Tatiana switched to the extramural department of the university. She worked at the library of the Polytechnic College. Her second son Simas was born in 1978. He had red hair like Grandfather Moshe. Later, Tatiana and her family moved to Vilnius [today Lithuania]. She has a very good family. Our grandsons did his M.A. at the Academy of Arts in Vilnius. The younger one is taking his Doctor's course. We also have great-grandchildren. Matas has two children: daughter Ione, born in 2000, and son Povilas, born in 2003. Simas has a daughter Leya, born in 2001.

Tatiana celebrates all Jewish holidays at home. Her sons, their wives and children get together and celebrate holidays in accordance with all Jewish traditions. They also celebrate Catholic holidays. There are no conflicts in the family in this regard. I used to think that children from mixed marriages have problems. Are my grandchildren Jewish or Lithuanian? Now I know I was wrong. This depends on how they are raised. My grandchildren know the Jewish traditions and Jewish history, and their children will also know these. They also have Catholic knowledge. These two religions may only enrich them. We are very close. Our daughter calls us every week. They visit us in summer. My husband and I enjoy having our children here and have the house full of children's voices. We also visit them every year.

Our son Alexandr graduated from the Teachers' Training College in Tallinn. His specialty is Physics and vocational education. He got his job assignment to a secondary school in Tallinn, but when a new vocational school opened, he was offered the position of a teacher of physics and vocation. Alexandr was well loved by his students and their parents. He married Margarita Rubinstein, a

Jewish girl from Tallinn. Margarita graduated from the Sanitary Engineering Faculty of the Tallinn Polytechnic College. She was an engineer in a design institute. In 1983 their daughter Rosa was born. In 1990 my son and his family moved to Israel. They settled down in Ashdod. In 1993 their second daughter Esther was born. They are doing well. My son and his wife knew that those who move to a different country have to forget their old self. Nobody owes them anything, and they have to do things by themselves, though they can be supported at the beginning. They have to learn the language. One has to know the language of the new country, because if one doesn't know it, one doesn't respect the country. One also has to accept any job. Even if you have to sweep streets or work as a dustman, it's all right. There are no shameful professions. My son's family agrees with that, and they've adjusted to life in Israel very well.

Rosa has been independent and hardworking since childhood. At the age of four she helped her mother with cooking and baking, and she could knit sweaters for her dolls. It's very important to teach children to work. I've seen many children that grew up in the USSR. We had guests from Moscow and Leningrad, they came with their children, and I was surprised that their mothers wanted to do the simplest things for their children. They even made their beds after them in the morning. Their children were spoiled and didn't know much about things when they grew up. I believe that there are no bad children. There are bad parents that do this harm. This is true, and one can't look for reasons outside. Everything is in the hands of the family. There is a father and mother, and when children grow up in the family where they helped one another and work together, the child grows into a good person. It's not necessary to tell the child all the time what to do and treat him like a minor. It's good to tell them about things every now and then, but they need to know themselves what they have to do. I saw how our acquaintances from the USSR didn't allow their children to do things, and left them sandwiches, when they had to go out. Can't a seven or eight year old boy make a sandwich or wash a dish? I even felt sorry for these helpless children. I'm not calling to exhaust children with hard work, but children are members of the family, and it must be natural for them to take some family responsibilities. We raised our children in this manner, and they raised our grandchildren in this way as well.

My older granddaughter Rosa knows Hebrew. She even studied poetic Hebrew. Her parents were at work, and Rosa attended a poetry studio. Their teacher was a poet from Israel. Rosa finished the gymnasium with good grades, and went to the army. In Israel it's common for a young man or woman to work at a gas station, nurse in a hospital or janitor in a hotel for six months after their army service. The Ministry of defense transfers their pay to a special account. This amount is sufficient for them to enter a university or pay the first installment for an apartment. Rosa worked at a gas station for six months and then entered a university. She passed the entrance exams so well that she was released from payment for her studies. My granddaughter finished her first year. She studies and works. Esther, studies in a gymnasium. Our son often calls us. In summer they sometimes visit us. They visited us last summer. Henrich turned 80, and the children decided to come for his jubilee. It was difficult. They work, and Rosa was still in the army, but they decided to visit us at the end of July. There were 15 of them. It was then that I showed my older granddaughter photos and said, 'Here are your roots. This is your great-grandfather and great-grandmother, your aunts and uncles. You can take what you want.' Rosa took many pictures which are the memories of our family. I also gave Rosa our family relics: the scroll of the Torah and the tallit which my deceased brother Beines received for his bar mitzvah. These possessions are more precious than any jewelry for us.



In the 1970s many Jewish people were moving to Israel. My husband and I were very happy that people had this opportunity. We supported them as much as we could, but we didn't consider departure. Besides everything else, my husband was a professional military, and had no right to move abroad. There was also another reason. Henrich and I are rather conservative. We like stability. Our home is the best shelter in the world for us. When we travel to Moscow or Leningrad, we enjoy seeing new places and meeting new people, but a week later Henrich and I buy tickets to go home. When we visit our daughter, we enjoy staying with our grandchildren and great grandchildren for a week or two, but then after that we know it's time to go home. Our home means so much to us, and it's not only our apartment. My husband and I know that there are more beautiful places on earth. We fret about the nasty cold weather, but we love our country: where we were born and grew up, where our parents and grandparents were buried. We look after many graves in the cemetery. They are of our relatives and acquaintances who no longer live in Tallinn. This is all that we call our home.

### **Post-communism**

We didn't travel much. When our children were small, we spent our vacations in Estonia. We never went to the south. I believe that our own climate is better for people. Our woods with mushrooms and berries are very good to go to. We've never traveled to Ukraine, my father's motherland. I have no regrets about it. I admire people who travel all over the world and want to see everything, but it's too much trouble for us. There is only one exception. My husband and I wanted to go to Israel. We visited it in 1995 and 1997. Israel is a miracle for me. We wanted to visit all the places there. We went to Eilat, the border with Lebanon and a kibbutz. It's a beautiful country. It's a country where people can live their full life. We weren't afraid of walking at night. At home we don't walk in the evening, fearing hooligans. We had no fears in Israel, but at some point we felt like it was time to go home. I've always been proud of being a Jew, but in Israel I even felt stronger about it. I felt togetherness with the people. I admire the people of Israel, and I straighten up thinking about them. I felt that they were my kin in Israel, even if we didn't know each other. I was proud to tell my neighbors that my granddaughter was serving in the army, and they were surprised and even jealous about it. The girl is in the army and is proud of having this chance to defend her country! However, moving to Israel and changing the way of life would be like relocating an old tree. It will not strike roots in the new place.

I've read the Torah to have a clear understanding of what our God is like. I also have a Bible. I found something important in these books. One shouldn't be religious and only recognize his own religion. This would do no good. One can have no religion, but it's important for one to know who he is and who is behind him, one's own origin and his people's traditions. You know, even if a Jew is baptized or has a different origin indicated in his passport, he remains a Jew. They will anyway call him 'zhid' or 'this damn Jew.' There are many such examples in life and one shouldn't pretend that since they've eliminated the item 'national origin' in our passports, and only indicate our nationality, we have stopped being Jews for the surrounding people or ourselves. If somebody says 'this Jewish woman' speaking about me, I don't take it as an insult. Yes, I'm a Jew, and it's my identity. I'm not ashamed of it.

I'm very grateful to Mikhail Gorbachev [37](#) for initiating a new course in the Soviet Union called perestroika [38](#). Perestroika granted the Soviet people many rights and freedoms. It gave us an opportunity to travel to other countries and correspond with people living abroad. My husband and

I visited Israel thanks to perestroika. The Jewish community of Estonia [39](#) was established. This was the first Jewish community in the USSR. Estonian authorities supported this idea. The community regained its former building which used to house the [Tallinn] Jewish gymnasium [40](#). I think this establishment of the Jewish community is very important for all Estonian Jews. It supports people, takes care of those who are ill, and old and helpless people, young people and involves younger people in the Jewish life. My husband was chairman of the community audit commission for eight years. He dedicated a lot of time to this work.

The Iron Curtain limited our freedom of traveling. It also limited our access to information, and many other things weren't allowed. I had a good medical education and was a good doctor, but I still believe I missed out on a lot, having had no opportunity to get the necessary education due to these Soviet bans. We had no lectures on genetics when I was a doctor. There was a ban on it in the Soviet Union. The science of genetics was called the 'venal wench of imperialism,' and those scientists who dared to study it, were sent to the Gulag [41](#) or executed. We studied human genitals, while sexual issues weren't considered, as if they simply didn't exist. Such things made doctor's activities very difficult. The thing is, if the genetics specialist identifies inherited diseases and what may jeopardize a patient's health in the future, it will be much easier to treat or prevent such diseases. It's very important for a doctor to know his patient.

I remember the words of an outstanding English cardiologist that if a doctor establishes no contact with his patient during the first hour, it's better that he doesn't start his treatment at all. Of course, I did many things based on my intuition in my practice, but it would have been much better if I was absolutely certain about what I was doing. I'm a hesitant person since one can't know everything in the medical field, while I felt the lack of knowledge in many regards. Nowadays, these books and knowledge are available. One can read and think about it. I continuously discover new things and I like to talk with young people. They are free in their thoughts and deeds, they have knowledge, and it's always interesting to talk to them. I'm happy that I've lived to the days when I can read what I want.

In 1991 the Soviet Union broke up, which was a historical event. There had been hard times before this happened, when perestroika declined resulting in the putsch [see 1991 Moscow coup d'état][42](#), arranged by the forces that were no longer the leadership of the country. They were communists and the KGB [43](#). I think that the breakup of the USSR was an appropriate and right thing. The announcement of Estonian Independence was the right step[see Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic] [44](#). Of course, some people believe life was better in the USSR. One can understand this position. Freedom is a hard thing to maintain. It's hard to be free and have to make one's own decision, choose one's ways and take responsibilities. It's easier to have no freedom. One doesn't have any cares and only needs to be led.

This wish to have the USSR back is nothing but this longing for non-freedom. We are given and we accept it. We didn't earn our salaries, we just received them. We were given some things paying for them with our freedom. Freedom is the most important right. I want to be free. It can't be that one can't have his own mind. I want to live my life following my rules rather than some forced ideology. Nobody gives me or Henrich anything. We receive our pensions which we earned. I have 44 and Henrich has 43 years of work experience. We earned the money which we are paid and try to manage with it. We handle it appropriately. We can't afford long telephone discussions of leaking taps, this is too costly. We also had to get used to the new order of things after the Soviet

times, when things were cheap and uncontrollable. I think now things are right.

Of course there were good things in the USSR, one has to admit. Somehow, they don't mention what was good in the USSR these days. Of course, it was a paradox of the country. During the war everyone who could hold weapons stood up to defend it, but during the peaceful times they forgot about it. Good things also happen in peaceful times.

I often listen to the radio. Every now and then they start anti-Semitic campaigns and publish articles in newspapers and then things calm down again. This happens in Estonia and other Baltic republics. I'm sure it has to do with politics. Somebody benefits from it. These politicians don't hate Jews. The reason is, if something goes wrong with industry or agriculture or policy, anti-Semitic articles serve as a distracting maneuver. Otherwise they would have to talk about their mistakes. If the government fails in some area and they discover corruption, or when something goes wrong, they initiate hostile nationalistic articles blaming Jews or Russians for their problems. However, this has to do with policy while people have a friendly attitude toward Jews. We are friends with our Estonian neighbors. We respect their traditions and rituals, and their holidays are our holidays. We speak the language of the country we live in. Jews and Estonians live on this land together, loving it.

Our home, our nature, the seashore that I love, even our disgusting climate give us our strength. We feel well in Estonia, and this is what matters. Of course, we wish our children lived nearer. Sometimes we grow very sad missing them. The older one gets, the more he wants to be surrounded with young people, but Henrich and I are happy. We raised good children. They are decent, intelligent, they have moral values and nice families. They have their traditions. We are happy that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren stay together, need each other and that we are truly one big family.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 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.

### **2 Estonia in 1939-1940**

on September 24, 1939, Moscow demanded that Estonia make available military bases for the Red Army units. On June 16, Moscow issued an ultimatum insisting on the change of government and the right of occupation of Estonia. On June 17, Estonia accepted the provisions and ceased to exist de facto, becoming Estonian Soviet Republic within USSR.

### **3 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

#### **4 Babi Yar**

Babi Yar is the site of the first mass shooting of Jews that was carried out openly by fascists. On 29th and 30th September 1941 33,771 Jews were shot there by a special SS unit and Ukrainian militia men. During the Nazi occupation of Kiev between 1941 and 1943 over a 100,000 people were killed in Babi Yar, most of whom were Jewish. The Germans tried in vain to efface the traces of the mass grave in August 1943 and the Soviet public learnt about mass murder after World War II.

#### **5 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.

#### **6 Estonian War of Liberation (1918-1920)**

The Estonian Republic fought on its own territory against Soviet Russia whose troops were advancing from the east. On Latvian territory the Estonian People's Army fought against the Baltic Landswehr's army formed of German volunteers. The War of Liberation ended by the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty on 2nd February 1920, when Soviet Russia recognized Estonia as an independent state.

#### **7 First Estonian Republic**

Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918, they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918.

#### **8 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.

## **9 Cantonist**

The cantonists were Jewish children who were conscripted to military institutions in tsarist Russia with the intention that the conditions in which they were placed would force them to adopt Christianity. Enlistment for the cantonist institutions was most rigorously enforced in the first half of the 19th century. It was abolished in 1856 under Alexander II. Compulsory military service for Jews was introduced in 1827. Jews between the age of 12 and 25 could be drafted and those under 18 were placed in the cantonist units. The Jewish communal authorities were obliged to furnish a certain quota of army recruits. The high quota that was demanded, the severe service conditions, and the knowledge that the conscript would not observe Jewish religious laws and would be cut off from his family, made those liable for conscription try to evade it.. Thus, the communal leaders filled the quota from children of the poorest homes.

## **10 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.

## **11 Estonian Independence**

Estonia was under Russian rule since 1721, when Peter the Great defeated the Swedes and made the area officially a part of Russia. During World War I, after the collapse of the tsarist regime, Estonia was partly conquered by the German army. After the German capitulation (November 11, 1918) the Estonians succeeded in founding their own state, and on February 2, 1920 the Treaty of Tartu was concluded between independent Estonia and Russia. Estonia remained independent until 1940.

## **12 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.

## **13 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi)**

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and

was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

#### **14 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.

#### **15 Molotov, V**

P. (1890-1986): Statesman and member of the Communist Party leadership. From 1939, Minister of Foreign Affairs. On June 22, 1941 he announced the German attack on the USSR on the radio. He and Eden also worked out the percentages agreement after the war, about Soviet and western spheres of influence in the new Europe.

#### **16 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'.

#### **17 Estonian Rifle Corps**

military unit established in late 1941 as a part of the Soviet Army. The Corps was made up of two rifle divisions. Those signed up for the Estonian Corps by military enlistment offices were ethnic Estonians regardless of their residence within the Soviet Union as well as men of call-up age residing in Estonia before the Soviet occupation (1940). The Corps took part in the bloody battle of Velikiye Luki (December 1942 - January 1943), where it suffered great losses and was sent to the back areas for re-formation and training. In the summer of 1944, the Corps took part in the liberation of Estonia and in March 1945 in the actions on Latvian territory. In 1946, the Corps was disbanded.

#### **18 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g.

However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

## **19 Sovkhoz**

state-run agricultural enterprise. The first sovkhoz yards were created in the USSR in 1918. According to the law the sovkhoz property was owned by the state, but it was assigned to the sovkhoz which handled it based on the right of business maintenance.

## **20 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.

## **21 Judenfrei (Judenrein)**

German for 'free (purified) of Jews'. The term created by the Nazis in Germany in connection with the plan entitled 'the Final Solution to the Jewish Question', the aim of which was defined as 'the creation of a Europe free of Jews'. The term 'Judenrein'/'Judenfrei' in Nazi terminology referred to the extermination of the Jews and described an area (a town or a region), from which the entire Jewish population had been deported to extermination camps or forced labor camps. The term was, particularly in occupied Poland, an established part of the official and unofficial Nazi language.

## **22 Soviet Deportation of Estonian Civilians**

June 14, 1941 - the first of mass deportations organized by the Soviet regime in Estonia. There were about 400 Jews among a total of 10,000 people who were deported or removed to reformatory camps.

## **23 Tallinn Synagogue**

built in 1883 and designed by architect Nikolai Tamm; burnt down completely in 1944.

## **24 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

## **25 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.

## **26 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'.

## **27 Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyich(1840-1893)**

One of the most famous Russian composers. He wrote operas, concertos, symphonies, songs and short piano pieces, ballets, string quartets, suites and symphonic poems, and numerous other works. Tchaikovsky was opposed to the aims of the Russian nationalist composers and used Western European forms and idioms, although his work instinctively reflects the Russian temperament. His orchestration is rich, and his music is melodious, intensely emotional, and often melancholy. Among his best known works are the Swan Lake (1877) and The Nutcracker (1892).

## **28 Doctors' Plot**

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

## **29 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.

## **30 Twentieth Party Congress**

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly



debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

### **31 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

### **32 Iron Curtain**

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

### **33 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

### **34 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

### **35 Dacha**

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

### **36 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)**

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.

### **37 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

### **38 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.

### **39 Jewish community of Estonia**

on 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, made a resolution to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first independent Jewish cultural organization in the USSR to be officially registered by the Soviet authorities. In 1989 the first Ivrit courses started, although the study of Ivrit was equal to Zionist propaganda and considered to be anti-Soviet activity. Contacts with Jewish organizations of other countries were established. KJCE was part of the Peoples' Front of Estonia, struggling for an independent state. In December 1989 the first issue of the KJCE paper Kashachar (Dawn) was released in Estonian and Russian language. In 1991 the first radio program about Jewish culture and activities of KJCE, 'Sholem Aleichem,' was broadcast in Estonia. In 1991 the Jewish religious community and KJCE had a joined meeting, where it was decided to found the Jewish Community of Estonia.

### **40 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium**

during the Soviet period, the building hosted Vocational School #1. In 1990, the school building was restored to the Jewish community of Estonia; it is now home to the Tallinn Jewish School.

### **41 Gulag**

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which

was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

#### **42 1991 Moscow coup d'état**

Starting spontaneously on the streets of Moscow, its leaders went public on 19th August. TASS (Soviet Telegraphical Agency) made an announcement that Gorbachev had been relieved of his duties for health reasons. His powers were assumed by Vice President Gennady Yanayev. A State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) was established, led by eight officials, including KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, and Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov. Seizing on President Mikhail Gorbachev's summer absence from the capital, eight of the Soviet leader's most trusted ministers attempted to take control of the government. Within three days, the poorly planned coup collapsed and Gorbachev returned to the Kremlin. But an era had abruptly ended. The Soviet Union, which the coup plotters had desperately tried to save, was dead.

#### **43 KGB**

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

#### **44 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic**

According to the referendum conducted in the Baltic Republics in March 1991, 77.8 percent of participating Estonian residents supported the restoration of Estonian state independence. On 20th August 1991, at the time of the coup attempt in Moscow, the Estonian Republic's Supreme Council issued the Decree of Estonian Independence. On 6th September 1991, the USSR's State Council recognized full independence of Estonia, and the country was accepted into the UN on 17th September 1991.