

# Friedrich Falevich

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Slutsk

Belarus

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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*Friedrich Falevich was having a hard time at the time of this interview. His wife was severely ill. Their sons live in another town, and there are just the two of them to take care of each other. Friedrich has to take care of the household work and of his wife.*

*This requires a lot of time and effort. I didn't have a chance to visit him at home. Such visits would not be appreciated considering that there is a severely ill member of the family at home. I conducted this interview at the hotel where I was staying.*

*Fortunately, Friedrich lives across the street from this hotel. He could come for the interview a few times a day. He did everything he had to at home, and then found an hour and a half to come to see me at the hotel before he rushed back to his wife.*

*Friedrich's life has never been cloudless, but he has never lost optimism and his sense of humor. Friedrich is a stout man of average height. One can tell he spent a lot of time doing sports when he was young. He has very kind eyes.*

*It was very hard for Friedrich to speak about all the horrors he went through in his childhood during the war. He was prisoner of two ghettos in Slutsk.*

*His family was among the few survivors. In his childhood Friedrich understood that the main value in life is doing good things for other people, and he's lived his life according to this principle. He still follows this principle and finds possibilities to help people despite his own hardships.*



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- **My family background**

My father's family lived in Lyakhovichi, Brest region [about 100 km from Minsk], a small town in Belarus. My paternal grandmother and grandfather came from Lyakhovichi. I hardly know anything about my grandfather Isroel Falevich. He was a cabman. My grandfather died in the early 1930s,

and my father didn't tell me much about him. I knew my grandmother Rieva. I don't know my grandfather or grandmother's dates of birth. I sometimes wish I knew more about my family. I would like to know more details of our ancestors' life, now that I've grown old enough. I think it would be interesting to know, but there is nobody to ask.

My father was the youngest of four children. I know that my father had two sisters, but neither my brother nor I can remember even their names. All I know is that long before the Great Patriotic War [1](#) one of them moved to Vilnius, Lithuania, and another one moved to Tallinn [today Estonia]. They were married. The one from Vilnius visited us once and wrote a few letters, but then our communication stopped.

We have no information about her or any of her family or children. As for another sister, I've never met her. I knew my father's older brother Yakov. I think he was born in 1902. My father Iosif was born in 1905. I know nothing about my father's childhood. My father had some education. I think he finished seven years. My father's family spoke Yiddish at home.

It's hard to say how religious the family was before the revolution [Russian Revolution of 1917] [2](#). At least, when I knew grandmother Rieva, from what I remember, she didn't observe Jewish traditions. Or maybe, I just didn't know that she did. I was too young to understand things of this kind.

Lyakhovichi was one of many such towns in Belarus. Jews constituted almost half of its population. I've never visited my father's home town, but that's what my father told me about it. The origin of the Falevich surname is interesting. There is a small Belarus village by the name of Falevichi not far from Lyakhovichi.

Almost all villagers have the surname of Falevich, but there are no Jews among them. Once, when I was in the Naroch recreation center in the vicinity of Minsk, I met Faina Falevich, a plain village girl. She worked as a medical nurse in the recreation center. Her father's name was Iosif, like my father's. Perhaps, one of my kin came from this village. I don't know. I don't think my father would have known. My father didn't tell me about Lyakhovichi, his home town either.

When Yakov and my father grew up, they left Lyakhovichi for Slutsk, Minsk region [about 100 km from Minsk]. Slutsk was a bigger town, and it was easier to find a job in a bigger town. Yakov went to work as a firefighter. He married Anastasia, a Russian girl. They had four children. Their older son's name was Vladimir.

This was a very popular name at the time. This was the name of Lenin, the leader of the Soviet proletariat. The second child's name was Raisa, then came their son Anatoliy and their daughter Ludmila. My grandfather and grandmother moved to Slutsk. They lived close to our house.

My father was very enthusiastic about the revolution and establishment of the Soviet power. This is so natural, considering that he came from a poor family, and the Soviet regime gave him all he had. My father joined the Communist Party when he was very young. This happened in 1925 when he was 20.

Having no special education, he was appointed to managerial positions when he became a party member. These people were called promoted workers. It meant that the Soviet regime promoted

and supported them. They were fit considering their social origin and class of origin.

My mother came from Kopyl, Minsk region [about 100 km from Minsk], a small Belarusian town. Her father and my grandfather, Girsh Abramovich, was also a cabman and Grandmother Sarah was a housewife. I remember my grandfather and grandmother's house. This was a big and stable wooden house.

There was a big yard and household structures in the yard: a cow shed and stables where Grandfather kept his horses. There was an orchard and a vegetable garden near the house. My brothers and I often visited and stayed with my mother's parents. Kopyl is not far from Slutsk, and often one of our acquaintances gave us a lift or our father took us there by car.

I remember my grandmother and grandfather well. Grandfather Girsh was a tall and strong man. He had no beard, but from what I remember he hardly ever looked shaved. I remember him standing by his tackled up horse with a whip in his hands. I remember my grandfather slapping on his bootleg with the whip. Then he usually got into his cab and left for work. He came back after dark, when we were asleep, for the most part. I thought this was the way strong men should have looked. My grandfather was a bit rugged and taciturn, but he loved his grandchildren and was happy, when we were visiting. My grandmother was a nice, short, snub-nosed and round-faced lady.

I remember her wearing a dress and an apron. Her sleeves were always rolled up. When we were naughty, my grandmother pretended she was yelling at us waffing her hands as if she was chasing away flies. In summer we liked sleeping in the hayloft on the fragrant straw, stored for the cow and horses. We played in the garden and ran around in the yard. My mother's parents only spoke Yiddish at home.

I don't know if my grandmother and grandfather were religious. I don't remember ever seeing my grandfather pray. In the morning he had breakfast, gave everybody an errand to be done before he was back and left. He didn't pray after coming back home in the evening either.

I know that there were five children. My mama was the youngest. I've never seen Mama's two brothers and don't know anything about them. I know that Mama also had a sister named Masha [affectionate for Maria], but have no information about her. I only knew Mama's sister Rishe. She was  $\frac{3}{4}$  years older than Mama. My mother was born in 1906. She was given the Jewish name of Judes.

Later Mama started to be addressed by the Russian name of Yulia [common name] [3](#), and this was the name that she had in her passport. However, she had the name of Judes indicated in her birth certificate. Neither Mama, nor her sister Rishe managed to get any education. They were illiterate, and the only thing they could manage was writing their names.

Mama and my father met in Slutsk. Mama left Kopyl for Slutsk looking for better job opportunities. I don't remember the details of their acquaintance.

All I can say for sure is that this wasn't a matchmaking process since there were no matchmakers left at the time. They got married some time in 1924-1925. Undoubtedly, they didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding. I don't know, maybe they organized a party for their families.

Mama didn't work after getting married. My father occupied a rather responsible position at the time. He was director of the Slutsk vegetable storage base Belploodoovoshsch and was a member of the bureau of the Slutsk district party committee. The salary he was paid was quite sufficient for the family.

### • Growing up

Our family lived on Komsomolskaya Street in the center of Slutsk. There were several wooden houses in the street - each for two families. There were two different entrances to each apartment. We lived in one of those houses. There was a big garden in the yard, and there was also a Forpost sports ground. Forpost was something like a sports ground and a club at the same time. Children liked it and spent a lot of time there. My brothers and I were no exception.

My oldest brother Igor was born in 1926. He was the only one who didn't have a brit milah. I don't know if my brother has a Jewish name. In his documents his name is stated as Igor, while Grandmother called him Izia at home. Izia was affectionate for Isaac or Israel. My next brother, Boris, was born in 1929. Both of them still knew Grandfather Isroel, our father's father.

He died shortly before I was born. I was born on 1st May 1934. The 1st of May was a Soviet holiday. My father selected a name for me from the communist calendar. One day in late April was Friedrich Engels' [4](#) death anniversary, and that's how it happened that I had the name of Friedrich given to me. This is what Mama told me.

I remember the house where we lived before the war. We had three or four rooms in our quarters and a big kitchen. There were high ceilings and big windows. There was a big living room. The living room was called a hall at the time. The family sat in this room on holidays and also, we received guests in it.

On two walls of this room, from the floor to the ceiling, there were big portraits of all members of the politburo of the Central Party Committee in frames behind the glass. I guess all party members had such portraits. These portraits were sacred to my father. Our apartment was always clean and well-maintained. Mama and Grandmother kept our home very clean. Mama was very particular about cleanliness. Everything, including the dishes, was shiny.

We were a well-respected family in the town. We were the family of a top level official. Nevertheless, one of my childhood memories is that Mama often took piglets for fattening. We had sheds behind the house, and that was where Mama and our neighbor kept pigs. Our neighbor fattened pigs to 20 poods of weight [1 pood = 16kg].

They couldn't even move and waited there till the food was brought to them. We didn't have such giants, but still, when my parents slaughtered a pig, the family had pork fat and meat that lasted for months. We didn't observe Jewish traditions at home. The party struggled against religion [5](#) and relics of the past in people's minds, and my father was a dedicated communist.

The Jewish population prevailed in Slutsk before the war. There were 14,000 Jews out of 22,000 residents. For the most part, we had Jewish friends. Our father or mother never told us that we shouldn't play with Russian or Belarusian children. My father was a convinced internationalist and

just couldn't teach us things like this, but it happened so that we played with Jewish children. We didn't disassociate ourselves from Russian children, and played with them whenever they came to our yard. Never in my prewar childhood did I hear the word 'Jew' or 'zhyd' from a child or adult.

There was no such national segregation or anti-Semitism. We spent almost all of our time in the yard. We did sports in the Forpost or played in the yard or in the garden. We did our own things. Mama checked that we were in the yard every now and then. We weren't supposed to go to the street, but we really didn't have to.

There was sufficient entertainment for us in the yard. My older brothers spent time with their own friends, and I played with my friends. There was sufficient space in the yard. On weekends our parents and we went to swim in the Sluchanka River not far from our house. Sometimes I went to the river bank with my older brother. I had a happy childhood.

Our grandmother Rieva, my father's mother, also lived in Slutsk. She had a house on Volodarskaya Street not far from our house. My grandmother seemed very old to me, but now I understand that she was probably younger than I am now. My grandmother was bow-backed under the load of her years. She wore a large warm checked shawl with tassels. Grandmother put it round her head, and it fell onto her shoulders and back like a mantle. Many old Jewish women in Slutsk wore such shawls.

My grandmother loved her grandchildren dearly, and we loved her as well. Grandmother didn't bore us with moral teaching and understood us. My grandmother was very easy-going and loved talking to us. She listened to what we had to tell her and gave us her advice. She would have called us to order when we were naughty, but this didn't happen often.

My grandmother spent almost all of her time at our home. She only went home to sleep. I don't think my grandmother was religious, at least she wasn't when I knew her. Considering my father's position, my grandmother's religiosity might have done him harm in his party-wise and work career. I hardly ever visited my grandmother's home on Volodarskaya Street. My grandmother might have had a book of prayers and she might have observed Jewish traditions, but I know nothing about it.

All I can say is that we didn't have a kosher household. Mama didn't separate meat and dairy products and moreover, we often had pork or pork fat. I cannot be sure that my grandmother ate pork fat as well, but she joined us for meals and ate from our non-kosher dishes. I remember Mama pouring wine into Grandmother's glass, and Grandmother dipped a bun into it and ate it. I wish I knew more about my grandmother, but in those years I had different interests and I wanted to spend more time with my friends, rather than communicate with my grandmother.

My grandmother taught us a lot. She taught me and my brother Yiddish. We couldn't read or write in Yiddish, but we can still speak it fluently. We also spoke Yiddish with Mama's family in Kopyl. We haven't forgotten the language and today it is still our mother tongue, the language we speak. My older brothers went to the Jewish elementary school.

I think there was more than one Jewish school in Slutsk before the war. Igor, the older one, finished three or four years in the Jewish school, and Boris, the middle brother, finished two grades. From what I remember, the Jewish schools in Slutsk were closed in 1938 or 1939, and the students went

to Russian schools.

Mama and Grandmother raised us. We rarely saw our father. He went to work early in the morning and returned home late at night. However, we waited till Father came back home in the evening. We looked forward to his coming home, but he often came later than usual, and work was the usual excuse he had. We often went to bed before he had returned from work.

We rejoiced so much, when Father found some time for us. When Father came home from work, the three of us humped onto his neck. Father laughed at us, calling us his tank crew. We were very proud when he did. I remember my father well, though we have no photos of him. He was tall and slim. He was well loved and respected in Slutsk.

My father was very kind and helped many people. Some people in Slutsk, who are over 80, still remember Iosif Falevich. We didn't just love him. We adored him. Of course, we missed his love and care. When we grew older, our father started treating us more strictly. However, I was the youngest in the family, and my father spoiled me, paying more attention to me. In 1940 my younger brother Grigoriy was born.

We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home. I don't even remember if we celebrated birthdays. However, we did celebrate Soviet holidays: 1st May, 7th November [October Revolution Day] [6](#), and they were festive holidays. There were parades in Slutsk, and all enterprises participated in them. My brothers went to parades with the school.

I was too young for school, and my father, Mama and I went to parades with my father's colleagues. Mama gave us neatly ironed white shirts, and my older brothers wore their red pioneer neckties [see All-Union pioneer organization] [7](#). People were carrying flags, flowers and slogans.

The town was nicely decorated. There were red flags and slogans on red cloths. People were rejoicing and smiling. Everything was very festive, and patriotism and inspiration could be felt. People didn't come to parades to get an extra day off or following their management orders, but because their heart dictated them to be there. I think people were different then.

They were able to believe and knew how to rejoice. I particularly liked the 1st May holiday, because it was also my birthday. After the parade there were concerts and festivals. Mama made festive dinners and we had guests. Our relatives and my father's friends were visiting us. They danced and sang Soviet and Ukrainian songs, and it was a lot of fun.

In 1937, during the period of mass persecution in the USSR [see Great Terror] [8](#), my father was arrested. I was too young to understand what was going on, and all I know about it is what my mother and brothers told me. My father was arrested following a mendacious accusation. My mother didn't leave it at that.

She went to the district party committee and NKVD [9](#) office, and her effort was a success. My father was released two or three days later. We didn't know any details, which is natural, and we might never know any, but the most important thing was that my father was free, and was no longer accused of anything.



The officers found out that my father was belied and left him alone. He came from a poor family and was a dedicated member of the Party and it must have been true that there was no reason to persecute him. He wasn't even expelled from the Party, and no reprimand was issued to him.

Upon release my father was appointed to the position of director of the Slutsk guild of invalids 'Red Star.' This was a service provision enterprise. It included a shoe shop, a tailor's shop, and there were various services provided, including fixing and repair works. My father kept this position till the beginning of the Great Patriotic War.

I often visited him at work, and he gave me a ride in his car. I remember this. Of course, some of my father's acquaintances weren't so lucky, but really I was too young to take any notice of these occurrences. I know that my father was helping many people. When my father was director of Belplodoovoshsch, Voinilovich, a Belarusian man, whom my father knew, addressed him. In the early 1930s Voinilovich was dispossessed [see kulaks] [10](#) of his property and imprisoned.

When he was released, he came to see my father, telling him that he needed help and wanted a job. He couldn't find any job. Employers feared to employ a former prisoner. My father gave him a job as a worker, and he kept this job till before the war. Now I understand that my father was facing a risk, employing a former prisoner, an enemy of the people [11](#), and Voinilovich valued my father's attitude a lot. During the war Voinilovich and his family gave us a lot of support in the memory of my father, but I'm going to describe this later.

### • During the War

When in 1939 Hitler's army attacked Poland [see Invasion of Poland] [12](#), our family wasn't concerned. My father wasn't recruited to this war, and it was over when the Soviet troops came to Poland. Western Belarus was annexed to the USSR, and this gave us even more confidence in the strength and invincibility of the USSR. Probably, things weren't so quiet near the Belarusian border with Poland, but we lived in the rear of Belarus, and there were no Jewish refugees from Poland coming to our town.

They went past where we were: from Baranovichy to Minsk. Shortly after the war with Poland, the war with Finland [see Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)] [13](#) began, and my father was recruited to the army. We were very much concerned about my father, but he returned home pretty soon. The war didn't last long, either. We were sure there would be no more wars, and Hitler realized he was no good at fighting the Soviet Union. Our family stayed calm.

Mama's sister Rishe also lived in Slutsk. She was married to Simche Ongiberg. Simche was a cabman, and Rishe was a housewife. I remember Rishe's husband well. He was an arrogant and showing-off man and always wanted to insist on his own ways. They had six children. The three older children's names were Lubov, Mikhail and Asia. I don't remember the other three. The oldest of the girls was a little older than me, and the others were younger. Rishe's family lived not far from where we lived, and we were friends with their children.

In spring 1941 the tension was growing in Slutsk. Even the children could feel it. There is a heating power plant in Slutsk. The boiler's stacks were high and could be seen from afar. We started seeing some weird strangers near the power plant. Even militiamen often chased them away. Pioneers

and schoolchildren were taught to be observant at school and watch strangers, since they could be spies or diversionists.

We were on guard and could tell that those people were sort of looking for something. Adults also were suspicious about them. Our windows faced the plant, and we could see many things. These people were coming there more and more frequently. They looked like diversionists, but this subject wasn't allowed to be discussed aloud.

There was a ban on spreading rumors and having discussions that might cause panic. However, the town officials were discussing things like that. They knew there was something dangerous about them. My father knew more than the others, being a member of the district party committee. I don't know whether he shared what he knew with my mother, but he didn't mention this subject to his children.

The 22nd of June 1941 was a Sunday, one of those rare Sundays, when my father was at home. We were happy about it and were making plans for the day. We were in the garden, when one of our neighbors told us that Molotov [14](#) was going to speak on the radio. We rushed into the house, and were there just on time to hear the speech.

What he was saying was that the German/fascist invaders had attacked the Soviet Union without declaration of war. He also said that we were standing for the right deed and that we were going to win. A few minutes after his speech the German air force attacked Slutsk.

German bombers were heading to our power plant, but then our fighters fought them, and the bombers flew away after having dropped a few bombs. That day they caused no damage to the plant, but the town suffered losses. German bombers fired their automatic guns on the houses. There was an air fight right above our house.

We rushed into the garden hiding behind the trees. My friends and I ran under the car trailer with no wheels in our yard. When the fight was over, we went back into the house and saw that all portraits of members of the politburo had been knocked off from the walls by the fire burst. The broken glass pieces were all over the floor, and there were bullet holes in some portraits scattered on the floor. This was scary. This is how the war began for us.

On the first day of the war my father left us and went to the front. He was a tank man, a reserve lieutenant and commanding officer of a tank platoon. When we were saying 'good bye' to him, he said to Mama, 'Yulia, take care of the children!' He kissed us and went away. That was all.

This was the last time we saw him. We know very little about what happened to Father. My father's brother Yakov Falevich was a firefighter in Slutsk. When the fire brigade evacuated, Yakov happened to be in Mogilyov. Somebody told him that his younger brother Iosif was in hospital in Mogilyov.

Yakov found the hospital and our father was there. My father was there after he had been burnt in a tank in a battle. Yakov left him there and this is all information we have about our father. We have no idea where else he fought or where he died. At the end of the war we were notified that he was missing. At that time, if, for example, they couldn't identify a dead man on the battlefield, they identified him as a missing person.



It was two days after the war began when we decided it was time to leave Slutsk. We shouldn't have delayed our departure till it was too late. If we had left at the very beginning, we would have reached Bobruysk or Minsk, and then we would have had a different life. But then, what happened was what we had.

We left Slutsk on 24th June 1941. I remember Mama discussing this subject of departure with her sister and her husband. Grandmother Rieva bluntly refused to leave home. She said she was too old to change anything in her life and be whatever there would be. Mama and her sister took their time thinking and considering how we should leave everything behind and face the unknown future.

Rishe had six children and there were also four of us. Rishe's older children Lubov, Mikhail and Asia, and my older brother Igor decided to move ahead. The adults were still in the course of discussions until Rishe's husband finally harnessed his only horse, and we left.

There was a lot of luggage, though we only had the necessary clothes and some food for a start. The children were sitting in the wagon, and the adults walked beside it. We stopped every now and then to feed the horse and give it a chance to rest. The highway was bombed by German planes, and we took the back roads.

We reached Bobruysk on 27th June. It was quiet, and this was different. When we were on the way, there was never ending roar of firing and explosions, but not in the town. We came to the central street of the town and saw a German soldier sitting on a bench by a fence. Soviet troops blasted all bridges across the river after leaving the town. There was no way for us to move ahead, and we went back to Slutsk. On our way back Germans stopped us occasionally. They arrested Mama's sister's husband Simche, and we returned home without him. We never heard back from Simche. The Germans must have killed him. We returned to Slutsk. We reunited with Grandmother and settled down in Rishe's house.

Right from the start the Germans started arresting and killing communists, Komsomol members [15](#), and activists. On the first day they killed 26 people. The Germans didn't act on their own. There were traitors, who thought the Soviet regime had mistreated them. All this mud had come up.

They were former prisoners in jails or camps [Gulag] [16](#), or those who had been exiled and had been hiding their attitude towards the Soviets regime. These people served the Germans and worked in the police. They helped the Germans to make the lists and showed them the right houses where communists or Jews lived. This was the first time I heard the word 'zhyd.'

During the German occupation it became a steady part of our everyday life. We stayed at home as if it was a cage expecting to be arrested or killed. Everybody in Slutsk knew we were the family of a communist and that we were Jews. However, people helped us even in this critical situation. Some policemen knew and respected my father. They helped us to survive; otherwise we would have been killed.

There was a ghetto established in Slutsk in early July. There were military residential developments on Volodarskaya Street, not far from where my grandmother lived. The area was abandoned, but there were wooden barracks left. The policemen fenced the area with barbed wire, and established the first ghetto.

The first inmates were old people and women and children, ill and disabled people. Policemen made the rounds of houses, sending the tenants to the ghetto. Chief of police Afanasenko visited us. Afanasenko knew my father before the war. He was also in prison, and my father had his part in his imprisonment.

I don't remember whether my father was prosecutor or witness of the prosecution at the trial. All we knew was that Afanasenko wasn't the one to show us mercy. He asked our surname and tried to remember whether he knew this surname. There was another Falevich, a Jewish man. He had his right arm injured, and he was lame. Afanasenko remembered him and asked us whether we were the family of that very man. We shouted that, 'yes, we were.' Afanasenko made a sign to the policemen and they left.

We were taken to the ghetto. Jews were convoyed there like cattle. Nobody had any luggage. There was no time to pack. Rishe's family, my grandmother and Mama with three children came to the ghetto. There were 30-40 inmates in each barrack room. There wasn't sufficient place for all on the plank beds, and the other inmates had to find a space they could fit in.

There were old people, women and children in the ghetto. The men who could go to work stayed in town for the time being, unless they were communists or Komsomol members. Initially they took only those people to the ghetto that were subject to extermination. The memories of the ghetto are very hard, but I know that I have to talk about it for people to know what fascism was like and to prevent this horror from happening in the future.

Adults and teenagers had to go to work every day from the ghetto. My mother and twelve-year-old brother had to go to work every day, and my younger brother Grigoriy and I stayed with our grandmother and Aunt Rishe. My grandmother grew very weak in the ghetto. She stayed on her plank bed. I walked with other children around the ghetto. There were severe restrictions in the ghetto. The gates were guarded by policemen and Germans with weapons. Inmates went to work through this check point. Children were allowed to run around the ghetto with no restrictions.

I don't know whether we would have survived, if it hadn't been for the kind people supporting us. They brought potatoes, beetroots or even a piece of bread, some milk and cereals to the fence around the ghetto. They shared whatever little they had with us, though their children were no less hungry.

They knew they were going to get no compensation - where would we have got money from? We had nothing to offer these kind people, but they didn't do it for the money. There were many nice people. Voinilovich found us in the ghetto. He lived not far from the ghetto. He started visiting us, bringing some food and clothes and did whatever he could for us.

This man had a great heart. I believe he rescued us. He mentioned once that my father gave him a hand, when he was having a hard time, and that now he was glad to be helpful to us. He passed away a long time ago, and so did his wife Anna. Their son Edward, who is the same age as I, lives in Slutsk. We are childhood friends and we still see each other. I've mentioned Voinilovich as an example that a kind action is paid back one hundred times more than the effort it took. Goodness generates goodness, that's what life stands on.

Inmates of the ghetto had no warm clothes. We were given no time to pack when we left our homes. Fall brought cold weather. It was cold and hard in the ghetto, but those who had to go to work suffered more. The winter of 1941-42 was very cold. Inmates were freezing and dying from diseases or the cold.

Once Mama found a ragged cotton wool coat in the street and she wore it during the war. Voinilovich also brought us some old clothes. Mama's acquaintances gave her food, when she saw them in town. I stayed inside the barrack, having no warm clothes.

My brother, who had to go to work, wore a few rugged shirts and trousers. The boots had almost fallen apart, and inmates had to tie them with some rags and ropes to keep them from falling apart, and that was how it was. It's very hard to tell about what we lived through and saw. I've forgotten many facts: the human memory is made so that it keeps good memories and dumps the bad ones. However, when my brother and I start recalling how it was, we cannot really understand how we managed to survive. These are horrible things to recall.

Mama and my brother had to clean the streets and apartments where the Germans and policemen were staying. They were also involved in loading activities. One day in October 1941 they were sent to clean barracks in the military quarters at the entrance to Slutsk. This military area was to be prepared for the arrival of German military units.

They had to remove broken pieces of furniture from barracks, clean them and wash windows and floors. All of a sudden they were brought together and ordered to run back to the ghetto across the town. Nobody explained to them what the rush was all about.

I was wandering about the ghetto with other children. There was a smaller building housing a kitchen in the yard, and inmates could cook there if they had things to cook. We ran into this kitchen, when policemen came inside. They kicked us out of the kitchen and took us back to the barrack.

Then the inmates were ordered to leave the barracks. They were encircled by German soldiers and policemen, who sorted them out by lists, segregating the weakest inmates, women with babies, who couldn't go to work. The inmates were divided into two groups. I ran to my mother and she held me tight. A German soldier called the name, the person came out of the crowd, and the soldiers assessed the person telling him or her, which group they should join.

Then they called the name of the man, standing beside us. I don't remember his name, but I remember that he was a tailor. He was sent to those that were to live. When they told him where to go, he took Mama and me by our hands and took us with him.

Then the group in which my brother Boris was returned from work. Boris saw us in the group of inmates who were to live and tried to get through to us. Our rescuer told the German soldier, responsible for sorting people out, that Boris was his son, and the soldier allowed him to join us. My grandmother and little Grigoriy stayed in the group to be exterminated.

This was happening before our eyes. The doomed ones were taken onto trucks. My grandmother couldn't climb the truck. Policemen took her by her feet and hands and threw her into the truck. They did it to all those, who couldn't get there on their own. When all inmates were there, they

were taken to the place where they were to die. The others were ordered to go back to the barracks.

The doomed ones were taken to the Selishche ravine eight kilometers from Slutsk. There was a beautiful birch grove there. The pits were already there, and the people were killed in this ravine. Some died immediately, and others were buried alive. There are few such graves there. In the 1990s our Jewish community, supported by the Slutsk executive committee [Ispolkom] [17](#), installed a monument to innocent victims on one grave.

There is an engraving on the black marble, reading 'To the memory of the living.' We visit the place every year on the anniversary of the shooting. We clean up the place and bring flowers. There is a chicken farm in the vicinity, and its employees take care of the graves, and local schoolchildren also help them.

I have another horrific memory associated with that day. During the sorting process an open car drove into the ghetto. There was a tall and handsome German man sitting in it. He stopped the car, watching silently for some time, and then stood up in the car and addressed us in Russian, 'What sin could you, Jews, have done to be killed so mercilessly?' He had a 'God be with us' sign on his uniform cap. This was terrifying. Then we were ordered to go back to the barracks.

Life in the ghetto followed its usual routine, when all of a sudden, in April 1942, a policeman, who had known my father before the war, came to the ghetto, approached my mother and said to her, 'Yulia, you'll be done with tomorrow. You must run away.' He helped us to escape. We went back to Aunt Rieva's house and settled down there. The following day the inmates were taken to the Selishche ravine where they were killed. Mama's sister Rishe and her children were killed then. We survived, and again, kind people helped us.

There were still Jews in Slutsk, and the Germans established another ghetto in the center of Slutsk, not far from the building of the executive committee. This neighborhood was called Shkolische before the war. This was a Jewish neighborhood with adjoining wooden huts. There was Respublikanskaya Street and Paris Commune Street that formed the neighborhood called Shkolische.

The area was fenced with barbed wire and there was always a guard at the gate. All the remaining Jewish population was taken to this ghetto. They were chased away from their homes, and there were three thousand of them taken into the ghetto that time.

When we came to the ghetto, we managed to settle down in a small wooden house with 40 tenants in it already. The Germans established the Jewish committee [Judenrat] [18](#), to manage life in the ghetto. I remember the chairman of the Jewish committee. I didn't know his surname, but I can still see him before my eyes: he was a tall man with his head shaved, wearing the breeches type of trousers, boots and walking with a stick.

It goes without saying that the Jewish committee couldn't care less about the inmates of the ghetto. All they cared about was their well-being. All inmates of the ghetto were bound to wear yellow hexagonal stars pinned to their clothes. People wearing such stars weren't supposed to walk on pavements.

We, boys, used to run away from the ghetto every now and then. We left our stars behind and ran away through a trap-way. What we saw in the town was horrifying. There were wooden gallows posts installed along the central street in Slutsk, a circa 200-meter stretch along the street, and there were always dead bodies hanging on them. People were hanged for whatever fault, and not only Jews.

People were hanged even for trying to give a piece of bread or some flour to inmates of the ghetto. Jews were hanged, if they were noticed walking without a star. The gallows made a horrible sight, and we returned to the ghetto exhausted by what we had seen. I really don't know how our children's hearts could bear all this!

I will tell you another episode of our life in the ghetto. It is imprinted on my memory. This is one of the most horrifying memories. I would be happy to forget, but this scene is just there before my eyes. The boys were running around the ghetto. We were in the Paris Commune Street. Aunt Rishe's husband's relatives lived in this street. I think that was his aunt.

This woman's daughter-in-law was sitting on the porch breastfeeding her baby, when two German soldiers came around. They were walking along the street looking inside the houses. They came along to the house where the woman was sitting with her baby. The Germans approached her. One of them took her baby from her and threw it aside like a log.

Then he kneeled before this woman and tried the milk from her breast. He must have liked it, because he started sucking her breast till it was empty. The baby was screaming all this time. There were five of us standing still there. We were shocked and couldn't move. Another German soldier was standing there waiting. The one that was sucking the breast stood up, brushed off the dust from his knees and burst into laughter. They left, and we were standing there for a long time before we could move.

The Germans started building four houses not far from the ghetto. They made the pits and started working on the foundations. All men from the ghetto worked at this construction site. They were forced to carry gravestones from the Jewish cemetery for the foundations. There was a Jewish cemetery a few kilometers from the site before the war.

Men were to carry those huge and heavy granite and marble slabs, and moreover, they had to run carrying them. Policemen or the Germans were following them, and when one of them stopped, they whipped him on his head, neck or back. If a man fell and couldn't stand on his feet, they killed him. These houses are still there, standing on Jewish gravestones, and the cemetery was eliminated.

The inmates of the ghetto also had to do other work. They were taken to farther sites by trucks. When they returned, there were a few missing. Occasionally, they sorted out families with many children, weak and ill inmates and drove them away on two or three trucks. None of them ever came back. Conditions of living in the ghetto were severe. Life was easier in summer.

At least, we didn't suffer from the cold. In winter we tried to take advantage of any chance to warm ourselves up. We broke furniture or fences for wood: anything to stoke the stoves. We weren't allowed to pick wood anywhere outside and had to do with what we had at hand. However, we ran out of this opportunity pretty soon.

Mama went to work at the power plant. The power plant operated on turf produced at the turf factory in Slutsk. The factory also dried the turf supplied to our boiler. Turf was delivered by rail from Radichevo to Slutsk. Mama worked at the loading/unloading ramp at the factory. She also took my brother and me to work. We were digging the turf with sharp knives.

The knives were so heavy that I could hardly hold one, but there was no alternative to it. We were working at turf quarries standing knee-high in water. We loaded turf sheets onto the train that was called 'cuckoo' train and sat on top. Then we unloaded the turf at the boiler and went back to Radichevo.

In the evening we delivered the turf back to Slutsk and returned to the ghetto. It was a lot of luck that Mama had this job, since they only involved strong men, prisoners-of-war, in these operations. There were also Jewish men working there, and Mama was acquainted with them.

In August 1942 one Jewish prisoner-of-war told Mama that they were plotting an escape to the woods from Radichevo where they were hoping to find partisans. This man promised Mama that the three of us would also join them. They were planning an escape for the end of August. On the set date we arrived at Radichevo and found out that the group had already gone leaving us behind.

This was mean of them, to do this to us. We had to think it over. When working at the turf factory, Mama met a woman from the village of Ulanovo near Radichevo. This woman, Uliana, also worked at the factory. Uliana told Mama to find a way to get to her house in the village, and then she would try to take us to the woods, but at that time Mama decided it was better for us to run away with those men to eliminate any risk for Uliana.

After the men were gone, Uliana was our last hope. Mama found her in Radichevo and told her our story. Uliana said she would think about what to do. In the evening we went to Uliana's home. This was Sunday. In the evening my mother and Uliana ran a bath for my brother and me and shaved our heads.

On Sunday morning Uliana brought embroidered shirts that farmers used to wear, and we put them on. Mama also put on a peasant dress and a white kerchief that Belarusian women wore. Uliana harnessed the horse, and we climbed the wagon and moved on. We were riding in the middle of the day and nobody paid any attention. We stopped every now and then to feed the horse or have some water to drink. People were going back from the church and there were policemen all around, drinking and enjoying themselves.

We reached the woods in Kopyl district before dark. Uliana halted the horse and told us this was the farthest she could take us and that she had to go back home. So she left wishing us good luck. It was dark and we didn't know the way in the woods. Uliana gave us some food. We went farther into the woods and had a meal.

Then we picked some pine tree branches for makeshift beds and fell asleep. We had to sleep over it, in order to know what to do. At dawn we heard some noise and people's voices. We took shelter in the bushes and watched. We saw men with guns and a woman among them. We knew they were partisans and approached them. They encircled us and asked us where we came from.



The woman asked Mama our surname. When she heard it was Falevich, she asked if Mama was Falevich's wife. This woman happened to be the secretary of the district party committee of Slutsk and she had known my father well. Then the partisans felt easier about us knowing that we hadn't been sent by the Germans. So we joined the partisan unit and were free.

Mama joined the unit, but it was not for my brother and me to be there. There were civil refugee family camps a few kilometers from the partisan unit. My brother and I were sent to this camp. People in the camp had escaped from the Germans and left their villages. When people in the villages heard about the German raids, they escaped to the woods, and partisans took them under their protection. The camps were located five to ten kilometers from partisan bases. There was communication established since the Germans could attack any time.

People in the camp made earth huts and tents from pine branches. They also had pine and fur tree branches on the floors to keep their lodgings warm. My brother and I made a fire, and when the ground was warm enough, we put the fire down, covered the ground with pine tree branches and slept on them before we learned to make an earth hut.

We also covered ourselves with branches to keep warm. Food was a bigger problem. In fall and winter we looked for potatoes in the fields left after harvesting. In fall potatoes were all right, but they were frozen in winter. We also begged for food in villages. Some people gave us food and others chased us away. My brother and I always knew the whereabouts of the partisan unit, and occasionally we managed to get there to see Mama. We needed to be close to her and she needed us...

About a year passed. In 1943 the leadership of Kopyl district decided to send us across the frontline to the rear on a plane. The partisans helped us to get to the partisan air field in Luban district, Minsk region. It was a long distance away. We walked from Kopyl district across the woods and swamps to Luban district. It was over 200 kilometers away.

This was a very hard trip, but we managed. However, then the leadership decided it was unreasonable to take such high risk for the sake of one family, and we stayed in Luban district. There were no family camps there, though there were partisan units. We lived in villages trying to be closer to partisan units. We lived in the villages of Kalinovka and Polichin. This was a partisan controlled area, and Germans were rare there. The locals knew who we were, but nobody reported on us to the Germans.

So we lived there until March 1944, when the Germans started to blockade this area. The villagers were running away taking whatever shelter they could find. Mama, we and three locals were hiding away in the bushes in a swamp. We had no food or water for five days. The Germans were finishing their blockade.

They marched in a row across the woods and the swamp, when they came across us. They captured us and took us to a village with irrigation channels on the swamp. We were exhausted, hungry and thirsty. We stayed in the village. There were Germans in the village, and there was no way to escape.

We sat there and then I could bear it no longer and told Mama I would ask the Germans for a piece of bread. Mama didn't mind. We had nothing to lose. I approached a group of five or six Germans.

They were sitting around the fire having dinner. They were having tinned meat and cocoa. I can still remember the smell of this cocoa.

I approached them with the words, 'Mister, give me some bread!' They could understand the words bread, milk or eggs. They looked at me. Of course, I didn't look well. One of them went to their tent and brought a loaf and a half of bread that he gave me. He also poured some cocoa into his pot. I returned to Mama and my brother and we feasted. We could have half a loaf of bread each plus cocoa. We had dinner, cuddled up and fell asleep.

In the early morning we were ordered to get up and move to Kalinovka where the German staff was located. About six of us were taken to a house and ordered to stand with our faces to the wall. I saw that Boris took a piece of bread from his pocket and started eating it. I don't know how long we were standing like this before the German soldier told us to turn. We saw that there were Vlasov [19](#) soldiers in the house besides the Germans. We got scared. Vlasov soldiers were said to be more cruel and merciless than the Germans. A Vlasov soldier came in with a rope in his hand.

We knew this was the end and they would hang us, but instead, they started asking where we came from and how we happened to be in the swamp. We were telling them stories, of course, since we couldn't possibly tell them the truth. We were convoyed to Polichin, another village, where we were taken to a house stuffed with people. They were people from this and other villages.

There was no space left to even stand there. When we heard that this was Polichin, we got scared. We used to live in this village, and the villagers knew us and knew that Yulia's family was hiding from the Germans. However, again nobody reported on us, neither in Polichin nor back in Kalinovka. They could have easily whispered a word to a policeman that we were Jewish, being evil or just seeking favor, but none of them did.

The Germans left us in this hut and walked away. All those in the hut probably had just one thought knowing that this was probably our last night and we would be killed in the morning. This was a long and painful night. At dawn we were surprised by the silence. There were no steps or voices heard. Those who were stronger moved closer to the window. Everything was very still. We walked outside. There were no guards around. We knew we were free. The villagers ran back to their houses.

We returned to the old man and the old woman we had stayed with in Polichin before. We stayed there till Slutsk was liberated by the Soviet troops on 30th June 1944. We left Polichin for Kalinovka and saw our troops moving from the area of Mozyr. The Germans were no longer holding the blockade of Slutsk since our armies were advancing.

On the highway a military truck heading to Slutsk gave us a lift. On 3rd July 1944 we got off the truck on the main street in Slutsk near the government building. The moment we got off a German plane appeared all of a sudden and dropped a few bombs before flying away.

The war was over for us, and for the most part, it was not too bad for us thanks to my father. He did a lot of good to people, and they were helping us in the memory of my father. These people helped us to survive, and even policemen were helping us. Yes, these policemen were our neighbors before the war, and they knew my father and remembered that he had been of service to them.

None of them reported on us or told the Germans that we were the family of a communists and a Jewish man. The phrase 'Beauty will save the world' is very popular nowadays, but I disagree. I get angry hearing this. Kindness, not beauty, will save the world. If you do a good thing for a person, it will come back a hundred times to you. My father probably knew this, and his kindness saved our family.

The town was ruined, almost all of it. Lenin Street, the main street in Slutsk stretching all across the town, was in ruins. One could see the street from one end to another, see the destruction and everything the Germans had done. Slutsk burned down twice: when the German troops were advancing and when they were retreating.

The houses were wooden for the most part, and hardly any of them survived the fire. It's interesting that 11th July Street, where Mama's sister Rishe's house was, was hardly destroyed. All houses were there except Rishe's house, which must have been set on fire on purpose. Somebody must have known there were heirs to it. Hers was the only house in the street that had burnt down.

We were thinking of it as our temporary lodging, but there were only ashes that we saw, when we came there. After the war Rishe's daughters and son returned, but alas... They stood there by the site of the fire for some time before they left the place.

Mama went to the district committee that was already open to find out if there was news from Falevich. We had no information about my father or my older brother Igor. All of a sudden Mama was told that there was a letter from Falevich at the district committee. When they wanted to find it, it wasn't there. It just vanished into thin air. Somebody must have torn and thrown it away, and that was it. They never found it. We left the district committee feeling very sad. There was no information about my father or brother and we had no place to live. We stopped in the square and didn't know where to go, when this woman we knew approached us.

She lived near Aunt Rishe and her name was Pasha. She invited us to her house. She said since we had no house of our own, she could share hers with us till we found a place to live. She gave us shelter and shared whatever food she had. Mama kept visiting the party district committee and the municipal executive committee requesting a place to live until they finally gave us one room in the house where the owner was still in evacuation. The 3rd secretary of the Slutsk district party committee was accommodated in two other rooms of this shared [communal] apartment [20](#). We celebrated Victory Day, 9th May 1945, in this apartment.

This was so much joy, and a true holiday in the town. People came out into the streets rejoicing, hugging each other and crying. There was a monument to Lenin in the center of Slutsk, in front of the executive committee. When the Germans occupied Slutsk, they pulled the monument down, but the pedestal was still there. It was decorated with red banners and flowers on 9th May, and in the evening people danced and sang there.

When we were in the partisan unit, we heard about what happened to the second ghetto in Slutsk that we had left. Few people survived: the ones who left the ghetto and joined the partisans. They told us what they had seen. When we returned to Slutsk, local residents, eye-witnesses, told us the whole story in detail.

The ghetto was scheduled for elimination in February 1943. Fascists and policemen encircled the ghetto from all sides. The Latvian SS Legion [21](#) arrived there to be involved in the elimination. The inmates were ordered to get on trucks to be delivered to the shooting site. The inmates were actually prepared for this. I can't imagine where they got weapons, but they happened to be quite armed. When the Germans came to the ghetto, they were met with firing from houses and roofs. The inmates of the ghetto decided to charge a high price for their lives. There were several Germans and policemen killed.

The German units retreated and set the houses on fire from all sides. The houses were burning like candles, but people continued to shoot. They were dying while on fire, jumped from windows and roofs, but kept firing. They were fired at as well and fell dead from the roofs. The people who were doomed to die didn't want to die resignedly.

They decided to resist. They knew they wouldn't be able to kill all Germans and escape, but they didn't want to die like cattle to be slaughtered. There were screams heard from all houses. Women and children were burning alive. This lasted for three days. Three days the ghetto was on fire.

The dead bodies of inmates of the ghetto were there till the snow melted. The Germans didn't allow burying them. The Germans also had taken some inmates away to shoot them beyond the borders of the ghetto. The ones in the ghetto were there till spring. When the snow melted, the Germans allowed local residents to bury them. They were buried in the former ghetto in the center of Slutsk.

My older brother Igor found us. We received his letter and started corresponding with him. Igor was in evacuation with Rishe's older children. They went to some place in Stalingrad region, and when German troops started advancing, they moved to Central Asia. From there Igor was regimented to the front in 1944. After the war Igor wasn't demobilized, but stayed for mandatory service in the army. He served in Lithuania. So we knew where and how he was doing. Igor returned to Slutsk after his demobilization in 1950.

When we were already living in our new apartment, Mama received notification that my father was missing. We didn't lose hope that we would find him, but this hope was vanishing in the course of years. Since I was underage, I received a small pension for my deceased father, which I was to receive till I turned 18.

This was all the income the family had. Life was hard after the war, and this money was far from enough to cover all expenses. Mama couldn't work. She became very ill after we returned. It goes without saying that the sufferings and everything we had gone through, including hard work at the turf factory, often involving standing knee-deep in water, were the cause for this. It often happened that Mama couldn't leave her bed for days in a row. My brother and I had to take care of ourselves and Mama.

#### • **Post-war**

In September 1944 a school was opened in Slutsk. The former school building had burnt down, and another house was used to house the school. I went to the first grade. I wasn't the only overage pupil in my class. There were many others like me. Our teachers knew how much we had missed and did their best to help us catch up with the curriculum.

We covered the curriculum of two grades in one year, and in fall 1945 I went to the third grade. We started studying German in the third grade. I thought it was weird. The war had just ended and the Germans had caused so much grief for us, and then we were to learn their language? In protest I just ignored the subject and didn't attend German classes. However, this didn't cause much trouble. The teachers showed understanding to my attitude.

My brother had finished five or six grades before the war, but when he returned home, there was no chance for him to continue his studies. He had to think about earning money for the family. Boris became an apprentice to a locksmith at the Slutsk foundry. He was 15 then. The three of us had to make do with my miserable monthly allowance and the stipend of an apprentice.

These were hard years; even the memory of them is horrible. When my brother went to the army in 1949 life became even harder. Our main product was potatoes, but then we didn't always have it. In the morning the unheated house was as cold as a cellar. I got up early to stoke the stove. Whenever we had potatoes, I used to boil some in their skin.

I gave Mama her breakfast, put a potato into my pocket and rushed to school. It often happened that I ate the potato before I reached my school, and then I had nothing to eat at school and was hungry. Mama was also hungry at home. On my way home from school I was thinking of whatever food I could give to Mama and what I would eat myself. There was no hope for the better or any opportunity to earn some money. I don't know how Mama and I lived through these years before Boris returned.

When my brother returned home, he didn't even take a day's rest. When he saw how we lived, he was terrified. The following day he went to the plant he used to work at. When I finished school in 1953, Boris went to the evening school, and quit his studies after finishing the eighth grade. He never gave up his job at the plant where he worked 50 years less three-year service in the army.

My brother and I were raised to be patriots of our country. We were Soviet children: the pioneer organization, Komsomol and the Party were sacred to us. I was an active pioneer at school. When I turned 14 in 1948, I joined the Komsomol. I was an activist at school. I was an active member of the Komsomol committee of my school.

[Editor's note: Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities.]

I've never lost my child's love of Soviet holidays. Even after the war, during this hard and hungry period, our country and our town celebrated Soviet holidays like we used to do it before the war. I always went to parades with my school on holidays. I can still remember how overwhelmed with joy I was, when I marched in the column of parade makers, and there were flowers and flags around, and the sound of appeals:

'Long live the Soviet pioneeria and the Komsomol!' I remember how wonderful this was! This was great, beautiful, active and patriotic! Even now, when people of my generation get together and recall these parades on 1st May, October holidays, and Victory Day [22](#), tears fill our eyes. The people were living in it spiritually, and this was passed on from one year to the next. This was wonderful, just wonderful!

In 1948 the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [23](#) began, and anti-Semitism became apparent. People were changing. I didn't quite know these people before the war, but I understand that they changed at the end of the war, and the next stage was after the war. There was a lot of talking about cosmopolitanism, but smart people understood what was going on, while the fools accepted it from the positions it was presented to them: these Jews, what else could one expect from them!

However, this was the adult world, while we, children, didn't care much about it. We had our own problems to deal with. When the period of the Doctors' Plot [24](#) began, this was a noted case, schoolchildren were also aware of it. All of us were Soviet people and we were the followers of Stalin. All were indignant about those who dared to raise their hands on our Stalin. I remember the day of 5th March 1953, when we heard about Stalin's death.

Our school gathered in the conference hall. Everybody was crying, making no effort to conceal the grief; teachers and schoolchildren were wiping away their tears. It was so fearful to be left without Stalin that we had a feeling that this was the end of the world. This was so sincere that one would even lack words to describe how hard we took it. It was a terrible loss for me, too.

Our relatives returned to Slutsk after the war. Rishe's older children Lubov, Mikhail and Asia returned. My father's older brother Yakov and his family returned from the evacuation. He lived in Slutsk with his children, and only Raisa lived on Sakhalin [Island, in the sea of Okhotsk, about 9,000 km east of Moscow] with her husband. Uncle Yakov died about 15 years ago [1990].

He had a tumor on his neck, and he died. They lived near us. When he died, we went there and helped to bathe and dress him. His children, except Ludmila, have passed away. She still lives in Slutsk. Mama's parents died in the ghetto in Kopyl during the war. Asia is the only one living of Aunt Rishe's family. She lives in America now. Lubov died in Israel recently. Mikhail left Slutsk for Kharkov [today Ukraine] after the war. He died a long time ago.

After finishing school I entered the Finance and Economics College in Minsk. After my first year there I was regimented to the army. I was entitled to continue my studies after my mandatory service in the army. I served in Uzbekistan, at the Soviet-Afghani border in Termez settlement. I did very well in the army. Everything was fine. I was assistant commander of a platoon. There were 30 of us in the platoon.

I went in for sports in the army: sprint, football and handball. My supervisors favored me. There were no complaints or demonstrations of anti-Semitism during my service. I joined the Party in 1955, and went to study at the evening party school [25](#). I was elected a member of the regiment party committee. I have nothing to complain about. Everything was just right. I would wish everybody to have such smooth army service as I did.

The only burden was the climate. Termez was known as the hottest spot in the Soviet Union. The splitting summer heat was hard to bear. This was the only saddening thing at the time. In 1956 I was granted a month's leave and went to Slutsk. I got married during this leave, and I was a married man when I returned to my unit.

I've known Dora Liefshiz, my wife, since school. We were in the same class and we were friends. Dora was a Jew and also came from Slutsk. Dora's father, Boris Liefshiz, was a notary in Slutsk, and her mother, Hana Liefshiz, was an accountant at the Zagotzerno grain stocks company. Dora's



older sister Galina was born in 1927. Dora was born in 1933.

During the war Dora's family evacuated to Kazakhstan. After the war they returned to Slutsk. After school Dora also entered the Minsk College of Finance and Economics. When I was in the army, Dora and I corresponded and sent pictures to one another. When I came on leave, we registered our marriage at the registry office and arranged a modest dinner for our close ones. One month's leave flew by and I went back to my military unit.

I returned from the army in 1957, worked till the academic year began, and in 1958 resumed my studies in the college. Dora had finished college before I did. She returned to Slutsk. She worked as an accountant. Our older son Boris was born in 1958. Slutsk is not far from Minsk, and I visited my family on weekends. I finished college in 1961.

I had a job appointment [see mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [26](#) to Slutsk. I worked as a dispatcher at the motor depot in Slutsk for about six months, and in November 1961 I went to work as an economist at the Slutsk Municipal Financial Department where I worked for eleven years. I was deputy department manager and department manager. In 1962 our second son was born. We gave him the name of Grigoriy after my younger brother who died in the ghetto in Slutsk. I finished another evening party school at the district party committee in Slutsk.

I was a communist, when the Twentieth Party Congress [27](#) was held. Initially, the speech by Khrushchev [28](#) in which he denounced Stalin wasn't published in newspapers. It was only read at closed party meetings. So, I knew what it was about before other people got to know about it. Of course, it was a surprise for all of us.

I wouldn't say I took every word Khrushchev said seriously. I was cautious about it. It's hard to say anything unambiguous about it. We, common communists, knew little about what was actually happening in the country. Therefore, I cannot give my assessment of how fair Khrushchev was about Stalin. One thing I can say is this: people keep saying that if Stalin was alive, there would be power and order, and the Soviet Union would be a strong and powerful state. Whatever there was, the events of the Twentieth Party Congress didn't shatter my attitude towards the Communist Party. I have always been an honest communist.

Our family couldn't share one room with Mama. We lived in a small wooden house that belonged to Dora's parents. The living area was about 20 square meters, and it was shared by six tenants. We enrolled in the queue for apartments at the executive committee, but it was such at the time that the priority was given to those, who had no place to live whatsoever.

Our house was small, damp and tumbledown. There was mould everywhere caused by dampness. There was even mould on the clothes in the wardrobe. There was no sufficient space to sleep or breathe. In 1963 an inspection commission from the executive committee visited us to inspect our living conditions. They looked at where we lived, and soon we received an apartment in a new building near the center.

Mama received an apartment in the house next to ours. I received the key to our new apartment, and when my wife and I came there, we started crying from joy. After we moved in there, we were overfilled with joy for a long time. I often went to see Mama. I supported her as much as I could.

My wife and I were working and raising our sons. We wanted to have a daughter very much, and we thought that we would have one, when our younger son grew a little older, but we didn't dare to have another child. Life was hard, and we decided that we had to raise our two sons, at least. I was raising my sons like my father had raised my brothers and me, to be true Soviet children.

They grew up to become good Soviet citizens. I'm very happy with what has become of them. They were members of the Party and dedicated communists before the breakup of the USSR [in 1991]. My wife and I spoke Yiddish at home. Our sons cannot speak it, but they can understand the language. I think it is very important that the Yiddish language is a living language in our family.

I felt the need to continue my education, since my education was no longer sufficient. I entered the extramural department of the Belarus Agricultural Academy, the Faculty of Economics. I went to Minsk to pass my exams twice a year. It wasn't easy to study, but I didn't fear hardships. I haven't been spoiled since childhood. After finishing my studies I received a diploma.

I have no complaints about the Soviet regime. The Soviet regime gave me an opportunity to study at college and the Agricultural Academy, and in evening party schools. Education was free of charge for all then. I also held good positions and had positive records at work. The regime gave us an apartment and a decent life.

In 1971 I left the executive committee. The chairman of the executive had left, and a new one was appointed to replace him. I was to be appointed financial manager of the executive committee, but the Chairman didn't approve me for this position. I had an argument with him before. The secretary of our party organization had quit and I was acting secretary.

The chairman recommended an incumbent for this position at the portback election meeting of the committee. Half of the staff voted for this new incumbent and the other half voted for me, and the chairman of the executive committee told me we wouldn't get along. I decided to quit.

This had nothing to do with my national identity. It was just this incident. I went to work at the construction trust. I started in the position of planning department economist and later I was promoted to financial manager of the trust. From there I was promoted to planning manager, and assistant trust manager for economics. In 1995 I retired at the age of almost 62.

My oldest brother, Igor, didn't stay long in Slutsk after his demobilization. He was proposed to marry a Jewish girl from Osipovich, a Belarusian town. Igor married her and moved to Osipovich. He had a son. His name was Yefim. Igor had no education and was a construction worker. They left Osipovich for Slutsk, and some time later they moved to Minsk. From Minsk they moved to Israel and settled down in Nathania.

My second brother, Boris, lived in Slutsk. When I was in the army, he married Zina, a Belarusian girl that came from Slutsk. My brother had two children. His older son Iosif, named after our father, is the same age as my older son, and his daughter Maria is the same age as our younger son. There's a couple of months' difference between them. Boris has three grandchildren.

Iosif is married to Galina, a Russian woman. They have two daughters. The older one is Tatiana, and the younger one is Anna. Maria married a Jewish guy. Her marital name is Kulesh. Maria has a daughter. Recently Maria and her family moved to Israel. I hope they will manage well. My brother

and his wife live in Slutsk.

My brother is very ill. He used to be a strong and healthy man, but life has overburdened him so much that he is fearful to look at. There is nothing to do about it. This is what life is like... There is only he and I of our family left in Slutsk. Mama died in 1986.

After finishing school my older son Boris entered the Heat Engineering Faculty of the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute in Minsk, currently the Belarusian National Technical University. Upon graduation my son got a job assignment to Latvia. I can't remember which town it was. Boris worked as a mechanic and then as director of a weaving mill. Before his departure to Latvia he married a girl from Slutsk. They were school-friends. My daughter-in-law, Yelena, is Russian, but what does it matter? It is important that they love each other and get along well. They have two sons.

The older, Alexey, was born in 1983, and Oleg was born in 1985. They were born in Latvia. My grandchildren are true Latvian citizens. They studied in a Latvian school and speak the Latvian language. They are students now. My son is commercial director of a company, and his wife works in a trade company. She monitors the trade sites of her company. This is all I know about her job.

Life in Latvia became more difficult after the breakup of the USSR, but my son and his family have no complaints about life. They learned the Latvian language and passed their language exams. They've obtained the Latvian residence permit. They've lived in Latvia for 36 years. My son and his family are happy with their life in Latvia and have no intention to leave it. They visit us once or twice a year, and I can see that they are doing well. God grant them everything good in the future: when the children are happy, their parents are always happy about it.

After finishing the tenth grade in Slutsk, my younger son Grigoriy entered the Higher Military Financial College. After finishing the College he moved from one military unit to another in the USSR. He was a military financier and also served in the Soviet army regiment in Germany. After returning from Germany he served in Belarus.

Now my son is senior lecturer at the Military Faculty of the Department of Finance of the Belarusian National Technical University. He is a lieutenant colonel. Grigoriy is married. His wife Lilia is Russian. They have two sons. Their older son, Boris, was born in 1986. The younger, Alexandr, was born in 1988. They are students at university. So our surname of Falevich shall not vanish.

My four grandchildren have inherited it. Grigoriy cannot visit us often. He has his job and his life, but he calls us almost every day. He cares about us and supports us as much as he can. Even a kind word is a good support for parents. I'm happy that my sons have their own way in life and that my wife and I have our part in it. Our sons also get along well with one another.

When the Jewish state of Israel was established in 1948, I was too young to realize the significance of this event. Later, when the Soviet Union terminated all diplomatic relations with Israel, I also had a rather reserved attitude thereto. However, when I saw that this country was getting stronger and kept improving despite everything, I changed my attitude.

The state is a state. If there is the Jewish people, why shouldn't they have a Jewish state? Of course, I wish this country were not surrounded by hostile neighbors. Now that our older brother,

his son's family and my brother Boris' daughter and her family live in Israel, Boris and I often talk about this country, and we are concerned about the life of Israel and its people. It's not by hearsay that we know about the horrors of war, and we are very concerned about Israel and our relatives.

Whatever country surrounding Israel you take, they are against Israel. This is alarming. There is some balance while America supports Israel. If it weren't for this support, nobody would know what it might end with. Of course, one can never tell what's going to be, but I think that Israel of today is a seriously developing state having its scientific and military potential.

Besides, an Israeli state is a guarantee of support to many Jewish people living in the former Soviet Union. Israel means protection of Jewish interests by our state. There are frequent demonstrations of anti-Semitism in some CIS countries nowadays. There were attacks on the synagogue in Moscow and in Riga. Israel responds sharply to this speaking out its protest and making statements. It's a good thing to do.

In the 1970s Jews were allowed to leave the USSR for Israel. Since then many Jews left Slutsk for Israel. There were fewer Jews left in Slutsk after the war, but there was still about one third of their prewar number. According to the statistics, there were only 165 Jews left in Slutsk in 2002. Many Jews have left, and older people died. There are few of us left here.

Many people condemned the Jews that decided to leave the USSR. I didn't approve of the people leaving their own country where they were born and grew up, and the country that gave them education and cared for them. I didn't consider departure for this very reason. I couldn't understand those who were committed to make this step.

However, later, when Jews started moving to Germany besides Israel and the USA, I changed my attitude towards those who left for Israel. I told myself that it was better that they moved to Israel, rather than moving to fascist Germany, this country that had caused so much grief to us. I cannot imagine, how I, a person who had seen all horrors of fascism and had suffered from them could move to Germany now, particularly in view of the fact that fascists started raising their heads there, and I'm personally very much concerned about it.

How can Jews venture to make this step? Whoever tried to explain this to me, I would disagree with whoever that is. There is an association of former underage prisoners of fascist concentration camps and ghettos. And there, the chairman of this association has moved to Germany. He was a skilled surgeon and a respected man here. And he gave it all up and left for Germany. Who can explain to me what he was driven by? I cannot forgive this, and I shall not forgive anybody.

Therefore, I believe that if Jews decide to leave their Motherland, I'd rather they went to Israel. Even though there is nothing sweet there and they have to adjust and find their place in the new life.

My niece Maria, Boris' daughter, left for Israel a couple of months ago. She attends a course of Ivrit. She attends to two lonely women. She doesn't earn a lot of money, but it is still some support for the family. It is no shame to do any job, only one must know how important and needed it is.

Our older brother has lived longer in Israel. He is doing well. He is a war veteran and has been granted benefits. Igor hasn't worked one day there, but he receives a sufficient pension and has an

apartment. It is true that pensioners have a good life in Israel. It's too bad that my brother is alone there.

Four months ago his wife died after a severe and lasting disease. His son and his family live elsewhere. After his wife's death Igor's son Yefim visited Slutsk. He came to see us and told us about the life of the family in Israel. He also brought photographs. Igor looks well, at least in his pictures, and he feels all right. Being our age, one comes to understand that health is the most important thing.

I didn't face any anti-Semitism during the Soviet regime. I got secondary and higher and special education, and both times I entered the educational institutions on the first try. I studied in party schools, was a party member and held important positions. I never kept my Jewish identity a secret, and it never impeded my life or career.

Of course, there was everyday anti-Semitism, and it appeared in the postwar time. When the Germans were here, it was allowed to exterminate Jews besides abusing them. This penetrated into some people's consciousness. Of course, I faced anti-Semitism, but I never kept quiet when hearing abuses.

Once I even hit a man on his face for calling me a zhyd. Yes, it did happen. At work I never faced any anti-Semitism. Perhaps, this was because we were one team, or maybe, the level was different. I don't know. At least, wherever I worked, there was no prejudiced attitude toward me.

I was negative about perestroika [29](#), initiated by Gorbachev [30](#), from the very start. Perhaps, our life should have been changed in some aspects, but it should have been done in a very different manner from how Gorbachev did it. Everything was camouflaged with beautiful words while actually, this generated lack of power. 'I do what I want.' It was allowed to speak out whatever one felt like, and write about such things in newspapers that one wouldn't want to read them.

Well, it takes time to discuss this, and everyone would have one's own opinion, but in my mind this wasn't the right thing to do. They started from lack of power, and it resulted in the chaos and breakup of the USSR [in 1991]. During the Gorbachev rule attacks on the Communist Party began while the Party was the force that united our Soviet Union and managed our life.

I was a member of the Communist Party for 40 years, and I'm not ashamed of it. Our father raised my brother Boris and me to be Soviet patriots. We were true and honest communists. We never took advantage of our party membership certificate to have extra benefits, and we didn't join the Party for career's sake.

This was what our consciousness dictated us. Therefore, the Party was sacred to us. For this reason we can hardly understand whatever is happening nowadays. We just cannot accept this. The people have changed, and I wouldn't say this change is for the better. Many people only think about themselves and want to get more for themselves while during the Soviet time we used to help and support each other.

They say many former Soviet republics have gained independence. Belarus is an independent country. Independent from what or who? I don't think Belarus wasn't independent within the Soviet Union. Our republic was wealthy and one of the most active republics in the former Soviet Union.

Our Belarus was ahead of all other republics considering the people's wealth and accomplishments. I don't think we were deprived of anything, when Belarus was a part of the USSR. I don't think the republics that are pouring mud onto the Soviet Union are doing the right thing. During the Soviet regime the Baltic republics enjoyed everything good we gave them, in all respects, when now they call Soviet people occupants.

I think many things happening now are horrifying. I still find the breakup of the USSR a painful thing to have happened. God, what a pity it is that the Soviet Union broke up! When this powerful state was still there, it was the world's base, and the world's progressive community could rely on it.

The Soviet Union provided tremendous assistance to the world's socialist and communist parties. And had the Soviet Union lasted, it would be strong and powerful like it had never been. America wouldn't threaten us, and Belarus wouldn't have listened to all those foul things from America. They wouldn't teach us how to live.

Take the Baltic republics or Poland, or all worthy and unworthy countries, they tell whatever they want about Belarus and they scold us! Terrible! They fund anti-government organizations in Belarus and try to shake our country from the inside. And it would never have happened, had the Soviet Union lasted.

These courtiers are eager to destroy present-day Belarus for its friendship with Russia; how they want to arrange the Ukrainian Orange Revolution [31](#) in Belarus and overthrow the current government! America, Poland and the Baltic republics provoke and finance those Belarusian that stand up against the government, our opposition.

That is why I am against Gorbachev who led our country, the USSR to the breakup. When the Soviet Union existed, Americans were quieter than water or grass. They were facing their rival, the powerful and overpowering Soviet Union. And then Western Europe applauded the Soviet Union, and there was no confrontation. Of course, there were some disagreements, but they feared the Soviet Union and knew that besides ourselves, we could also protect other socialist countries.

This provided balance in the world, but now America rules the world. It does whatever it wants, and there is nobody to stand against it. That is why I valued the Soviet Union, and I find it painful that this powerful country is no longer on the map of the world.

I love my Belarus and I love my Slutsk. I appreciate it that our government cares about us. Life in Belarus is improving with every coming year. Whatever they say about our country, we are happy with our life here. Here is a simple example. Over half of our Belarus has been provided with gas supplies. There are gas supplies to villages and smaller towns. Each week another settlement is being connected to gas pipelines.

The President himself attends each event of this kind. He tells people what is going to be done. These are not sheer words. These are deeds. Many things are done for the people. Perhaps, somebody may not like things, but I'm personally very happy with the government. My wife and I are well provided for. I receive the equivalent of \$190, my wife has about \$120, and utilities and food products are inexpensive. We can manage all right.



In 1995 the Jewish community opened in Slutsk. I had retired by then and started to work actively in the community. I am assistant of the chairman of our community. There are older people of over 60 in the community. There are some over 80. Young people take a little part in the life of our community, unfortunately.

We have a few young people, but mostly from mixed marriages. For example, my nephews: the father is Jewish and the mother is Belarusian. There are many such families and perhaps, this is the reason why they are not so active. However, we have programs for young people: a club for young people, or a family club, and they have gatherings occasionally. There are only men there, about 20 of them. They recite prayers, have tea and discussions. There is also a community of progressive Judaism in our community.

I've already mentioned that there are 165 Jews in Slutsk, based on the 2002 records. I don't know how accurate this number is. I was one of the managers during the census in 1999. There were fewer Jews then, but at that time many Jewish people identified themselves as Russian. Therefore, I don't think the data was accurate then.

Nowadays people are no longer afraid of acknowledging their Jewish identity. Vice versa, it is advantageous to be Jewish nowadays, considering the community assistance. Nowadays people that have identified themselves as Russian or Belarusian come to our community as Jews. There is a woman, for example, her father is Russian, and her mother is Jewish.

The mother determines the national identity according to our rules. She worked as a school teacher and was Russian, but when she retired and came to our community, she came as Jew. And there are many such examples, but we don't send these people away. The Jewish people have survived in the world due to this support that they've provided for each other. We need our community.

At least, it has united the Jews in Slutsk. We used to be disunited. We didn't know each other and didn't socialize, but now we are like a family. We get together three times a week. We celebrate Sabbath on Saturday. People get together to share opinions, joys and problems. About 40 people attend Sabbath each week. They pray, have tea and sandwiches and talk to each other. It's not just the ritual, but an opportunity to talk to each other. There are many lonely people. They meet each other and socialize in the community. They keep seeing each other beyond the community.

Our community is funded by Joint [32](#). It works in 90 countries all over the world supporting people. The Joint helps us to support many people. We have the charity service in the community. It provides assistance to the needy, and we provide medications for people for free.

They submit their prescriptions, and twice a month we receive medications based on prescriptions and deliver them to people. This is important. We deliver food packages three times a week. This adds about 30-35 thousand Belarusian rubles [?\$15] to the pension, which is a significant amount for a pensioner. Our charity service provides assistance to lonely and ill people.

We have four such individuals now. This is a twofold assistance: we support the needy and pay salaries to our employees. So, we also employ people. We visit patients in hospitals, provide assistance with funerals, and this is what the community is responsible for. This is a great support, and people appreciate it.

There is a Sunday school for children at the community. Some 15, 20 and up to 30 children attend it. When a teacher is available, they even study Ivrit. Young families have gatherings about twice a month. We also fund their gathering, so that they can have tea at their meetings.

We have an amateur performers' club. Considering it all, this makes a lot of actual work and apparent support. We have a computer, and youngsters can study to work with it. We have a washing machine, and people can do their washing for free. We pay a salary to the responsible individual. We buy good washing powder. Our Laundromat works three times a week. Our customers are satisfied with the quality.

Since my wife hasn't been feeling well, I also use our Laundromat services. Attending to ill people is very time- consuming. It takes a lot of effort. I know the advantages of being a member of the community.

We also have an emergency service in the community. Nobody knows what surprises await people in life. In the case of an emergency, when people need money urgently, we can help. We also have the so-called 'winter response' assistance, providing boots and warm clothes for people and wood to those that live in private houses. This is not minor assistance, is it?

This is what the Joint does for us, and it undoubtedly does a lot. Formerly the annual Joint budget was 50 million rubles, and they've allocated 30 million this year already. They explained to us that contributions go down all over the world, and there are fewer opportunities, and we need to be reasonable and understand that the Joint does everything possible. Of course, we understand that nobody owes us anything and that we have no right to demand or ask for something. We have to be grateful for what they do for us and for what we are given.

We have no rabbi or synagogue in Slutsk. We often receive letters from Israel or America addressed to the 'Rabbi of Slutsk.' The post office employees already know that they should deliver such letters to the chairwoman of our community. The Orthodox part has no rabbi either. The head of their community recites the prayers.

We celebrate Jewish holidays in the community. We celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Pesach and Chanukkah. These are the holidays that we do not miss, and as for the rest of them, we tell people about them during the celebration of Sabbath, and the whole community celebrates the three mentioned holidays.

The community makes some donations, and we collect some money from visitors and celebrate holidays in restaurants. Often rabbis visit our celebrations. They conduct the proper rituals and recite prayers. The Joint Republican leadership of the community visits us. Leonid Levin is the chairman of our Jewish organizations and communities. He often visits us, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by his wife. Life goes on, and our community tries to do as much as possible for the people.

We try to do everything we can to make people remember about the innocent victims of the Holocaust. Of course, many people were lost to this war, and there were many non-Jewish people, but only Jews were exterminated simply for being Jews. We must not forget this. We installed a monument to the victims of the Holocaust in Slutsk.

There are three monuments on shooting sites in Slutsk. Now our community is involved in the installation of the monument where the ghetto was in Slutsk. My brother and I initiated this. We happen to have been the only survivors of the ghetto, eliminated by fascists in February 1943. We are bound to do what we are doing.

We've generated this idea and talked to Leonid Levin. He is an architect. We proposed to install this monument to honor the heroic deed of these doomed people, but not to honor the ghetto established by fascists. Levin supported our idea and took to the development of documentation. Now the documents are under review at the Ministry of Local Lore in Minsk. In the near future representatives of the Ministry will visit Slutsk, and we shall meet with them. The executive committee treated our idea with understanding, and allotted a site in the center of the town, before the central gate to the former ghetto.

There are apartment houses where the former ghetto was located, and there is no way to install a monument there. Anyway, is it important, if the monument would be shifted a little from the location of the ghetto? What matters is that it will be there, and it will remind people of the heroic resistance of the people doomed to die. This will be the monument to their courage. Levin developed the documentation and the design. We have this in place. Now we have to wait till the executive committee transfers this ground to us. This is just a matter of days.

We would like to inaugurate the monument on 9th May, Victory Day, but I don't think we will manage. I hope we will manage to do it on 3rd July, the Day of the Liberation of Belarus from the German fascist occupants, and now we also celebrate the Independence Day of Belarus on this day. We've collected donations for the monument. We had some in Slutsk, America and Israel.

One of our former compatriots sent us 2.5 thousand dollars. An Englishman gave us one thousand. We need 7-8 thousand for the monument and we keep collecting money. On 3rd January the Belarusian Jewish community organized the Chanukkah celebration at the palace of pensioners in Minsk. Attendants were asked to donate 2 thousand rubles each for the monument in Slutsk. We've collected 516 thousand [?240\$]. It's not that much, but it is important that the people wanted to help us and took it close to their hearts. I was also invited there.

There was a concert of Jewish amateur performers. The performers came from different locations of Belarus. I was asked to make a speech. I told them the brief history of the ghetto in Slutsk and why we wanted to have this monument installed. I also thanked people for attending that event and for their however little share in the event.

I was given such a hearty welcome that I was really moved. There was lasting applause after my speech, and the audience greeted me with standing ovations. When I was walking off the stage, people were thanking me. I asked them why they were thanking me, and they replied that I deserve gratitude even for the fact that my brother and I have survived, and are involved in such an honorable event.

I was embarrassed and moved at the same time, and I was pleased, since gratitude of people is better than anything else. It's nice when people understand that the memory needs to be kept, that it isn't just a piece of marble, but the tribute of honor to the deceased that gave us an example that even in the most horrific conditions a person can preserve pride and dignity.

- **Glossary:**

**1** 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.

**2** 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.

**3** 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.

**4** Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895): Philosopher and public figure, one of the founders of Marxism and communism.

**5** 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.

**6** 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.

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

**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** NKVD: People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

**10** Kulaks: In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

**11** Enemy of the people: Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

**12** Invasion of Poland: The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France.

(To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland.

The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians.

On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

**13** Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40): The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannenheimer line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannenheimer line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

**14** 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.

**15** 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.

**16** 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.

**17** Ispolkom: After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets.

The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

**18** Judenrat: Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc.

Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.



**19** Vlasov military: Members of the voluntary military formations of Russian former prisoners of war that fought on the German side during World War II. They were led by the former Soviet general, A. Vlasov, hence their name.

**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** Latvian SS Legion: a national voluntary military formation, established by German commandment in Latvia during the Great Patriotic War. In February 1943 Hitler's commandment took a decision to establish the Latvian SS Legion. It included Latvian voluntary units that had been formed earlier and had taken part in combat action.

In late February and early March 1943, men born between 1919 and 1924 received letters at their place of residency in which they were ordered to appear at police headquarters. There, they had to fill out information cards and be inspected by a medical commission.

Mobilized individuals were enlisted, according to their own wishes, either in the Latvian Legion or in the service divisions of the German armies, or they were sent to build defense constructions.

On 28th March 28 of the same year, the 'Legionnaires' took this oath in Riga: 'In the name of God I promise solemnly in the struggle against Bolshevism an unlimited obedience to the supreme commander of the German military forces, Adolf Hitler; and as a brave soldier, I will always be ready to give my life for this oath.' They wore special insignia, were promoted to military ranks of the Latvian army and the orders were given in Latvian.

Of 150 thousand officers and soldiers of the Legion over 40 thousand were killed, and 50 thousand were captured by the Russian army. The rest escaped to the West. Only once the Latvian SS units (the 15th and the 19th) took part in combat action against the advancing Soviet army on 16th March 1944 in the vicinity of the Velikaya River, south-east of the town of Ostrov (Pskov region).

**22** 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.

**23** 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'.

**24** 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.

**25** Party Schools: They were established after the Revolution of 1917, in different levels, with the purpose of training communist cadres and activists. Subjects such as 'scientific socialism' (Marxist-Leninist Philosophy) and 'political economics' besides various other political disciplines were taught there.

**26** 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.

**27** 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.

**28** 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.

**29** 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.

**30** 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.

**31** Orange Revolution 2004: the events which took place in Ukraine between 21st November 2004 and 23rd January 2005, connected with presidential elections. The candidates for the presidency were: prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, backed by the government and the candidate of the oppositional party Our Ukraine, former prime minister Viktor Yushchenko. The name Orange Revolution comes from the orange color which represented the electoral campaign of Viktor Yushchenko.

**33** Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee): The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children.

It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries.

The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.