

# Ronny Sheyn-Kuznetsova

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Tallinn

Estonia

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*I met Ronny Sheyn-Kuznetsova, when I was interviewing her aunt Maria Sorkina, who was 104 at that time. Her niece Ronny came by. Ronny saw me off and we had a talk. The subject of the conversation was the horrible fate of Ronny, unfortunately typical for her contemporaries, born in Estonia - deportation [1](#), exile. I had to leave soon at that time and Ronny had to take care of other things.*



*Ronny looks reserved and even a little aloof, but when she feels that her interlocutor is close to her, she changes immediately and becomes open. She is very emotional and witty. Ronny is a person who does not accept compromise. Probably, not many of us could say that they had always followed their line without overcoming hurdles, allowing no compromise with themselves and with the circumstances. It seems to me that Ronny is a person without compromise. She was raised by the hard fate of an exiled child, an enemy's spawn, as children of enemies of the people [2](#) were called in the USSR.*

*Ronny is a person of integrity, knowing the goals and achieving them. She overcame such difficulties in childhood and adolescences, which could have broken even adults. She remained charming, smart and confident and even chivalrous, if a woman can be called that. Honor, decency, nobility are not empty words for her, but vital notions.*

*We had our interview in her place. She is living with her husband in a two-room apartment in a new district of Tallinn. The house is the last in the street, straight by the forest. In winter she goes skiing there. Ronny's apartment is full of light. The air is clean. The walls are light-colored; there are huge windows, no extra things and a lot of open space. The principle of 'no extra things' does not refer to the books though. There are a great many of them - in the bookcase, on the shelves.*

*Ronny is very hospitable and amicable. After this interview we had another meeting downtown. She showed me 'her' Tallinn - a small café in the old town, where her father used to take small Ronny for hot chocolate. The café still looks pre-Soviet, pre-war. I saw another Ronny there - a little girl, who had no childhood, was bereft of her father, whom they tried to break and whose soul they wanted to cripple. She got over it and remained herself.*

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## **My family background**

The lineage of the Sheyn family can be traced all the way back to my great-grandfather Naftole-Herz-Efraim Sheyn. Grandfather lived in Tallinn. His grave is in the Jewish cemetery now. My cousin, Irina Sheyn, the daughter of Herz Sheyn, my father's brother, translated the inscription on his grave. It was made in Ivrit and it literally translates as follows: 'Here a great Torah follower and a wise man lies. Died on 17 adar of 5657 year,' i.e., in 1897 according to common chronology.

I didn't manage to find out anything about my great-grandmother. We don't even know the name.

Before moving to Tallinn my great-grandfather lived with his family in Piarnu, Estonia. Their three children were born there: my paternal grandfather, Sholom-Iosif Sheyn, his brother Chari-Moishe and sister Tsvirl. Unfortunately, we know nothing about grandfather's siblings.

Grandfather was born in 1866. He lived in Piarnu for quite a long time. When he was an adult, on 2nd September 1892, he married Chaya-Leya Teyman, who was born in the Lithuanian town of Panevezhis in 1873. The synagogue record of Piarnu contains an entry regarding their marriage registered by the rabbi of Piarnu.

Grandfather sold cattle and grandmother was a housewife. They probably moved to Valga after they got married, as their children were born there. The family was large: six sons and three daughters.

The eldest was Roche-Gitle, born in 1893. The second child, son Efraim, my father, was born in 1896, the third was Naftole-Herz, born in 1898. He was named after Grandpa Naftole Herz-Efroim, who died one year before Naftole-Herz was born. Daughter Ester was born in 1900, her younger sister Ella in 1902. Four sons were born after Ella: Leib in 1903, Abram in 1904, Isroel in 1906, and the youngest, Pesach, in 1911.

When Grandpa moved to Valga he dealt with timbering and in time became a rather large timber merchant. His elder sons Efraim, Herz and Leib started working at a rather young age. The family was large and so they had to help their father.. They didn't get any other education, but cheder. It seems to me that Father also went to Realschule, but I am not sure whether he finished it. The three of them were timber merchants and worked with Grandfather.

All my grandfathers' daughters and younger sons also got secular education in addition to a Jewish one. All of them finished the Russian lyceum in Valga.

Father's elder sister Roche-Gitle married a doctor named Moses Levitin. They had a son, Grigoriy. Roche-Gitle died young, in 1919.

Naftole-Herz married a lady from Riga called Evgenia Goldberg. Their daughter Irene was born in 1932.

Father's younger sister Ester entered the Dentistry Department of Tartu University, but didn't finish it. She married a doctor from Tallinn, Max Brodovski, when she was in the second year of her studies. Max graduated from the Medical Department of Vienna University and lived in Tallinn after he finished his studies.

Ester moved to Tallinn when she got married. She dropped her studies and became a housewife. Their only daughter Ruth was born in 1925. She was the first child, born into the family of Father's siblings, so she was loved and pampered.

Ella was married, but I don't know the names of her husband and three children.

Leib was married to Polina Rapoport. She was born in Tallinn in 1912. Her father was a timber merchant. He died young and her mother took over business. Polina had two younger brothers. Samuel was born in 1917 and Simon in 1924. After getting married, Polina moved to Valga. In 1936 their only son Solomon was born.

Abram, Isroel and Pesach also had families, but I don't remember the names of their spouses and children.

My father's elder sister Roche-Gitle and younger Ella were housewives. The younger brothers had their own businesses.

My grandparents were very religious. There was no synagogue in Valga and so a prayer house was set up in my grandparents' place. The kashrut was observed at home as well as Jewish traditions. All members of the families went to the prayer house on Sabbath and on Jewish holidays and marked them at home. Yiddish was spoken at home. Everybody spoke good German and Estonian.

The roots of my mother's family are in Latvia. My great-grandfather lived in Kurland, in Friedrichstadt. My mother told me the family story of my grandparents. I don't remember all the names though. The Gelbart family, i.e., the parents of my great-grandfather, was rather well-off.

When my great-grandfather grew up and started his own business, he built a house. The family was looking for a rich wife for him, but he met my great-grandmother and fell in love with her. She came from a poor family – in other words: not a match to my great-grandfather. Of course, his family was against such a marriage, but my great-grandfather's decision was final and he married the lady he loved. Their marriage was a happy one.

They had ten children: five sons and five daughters. All of them were as beautiful as my great-grandmother. My mom and aunt told me about that. My aunt Masha, my mother's younger sister, is still alive and living in Tallinn. She told me a lot about her family. Of course, I don't remember when they were born, but I can name almost all of them in the right order.

The eldest was Isaac, then came Abram, then another child whose name I can't recall, then Leopold. In 1867 my grandmother was born and everybody called her by the Russian name 3 of Ida; her Jewish name was Ita-Bashe. As for the younger children, I remembered only Mariasha, who died young.

Great-grandfather was the bread-winner and Great-grandmother took care of the house and children. The family was nice and friendly. It was definitely a traditional Jewish family. Only Yiddish was spoken at home. Sabbath was observed, Jewish holidays were marked.

All children got both Jewish and secular education. The family was rather well-off, so all of them finished lyceums. Grandmother Ida went to a German girls' lyceum.

Grandmother's brothers were entrepreneurs. They were married and had children. Grandmother's sisters got married, had children and became housewives. All of them were prosperous – none of them was childless and poor. All of them remained Jews and stuck to Jewish traditions.

Grandmother Ida was a very beautiful lady. She met my grandfather Efraim Giliyas Kaplan and they got married shortly after that.

Grandfather was born in 1862, but I don't know his place of birth. His father, my maternal great-grandfather was a kohen. The family was religious. Grandpa got Jewish education in his childhood. He went to cheder. He could speak, read and write in Ivrit. I don't know whether Grandpa had secular education.

When he got on his own feet, he moved to Latvia. He settled in a small town, not far from Aluksne. Grandpa dealt with commerce and became a merchant. When he got married his family moved to Aluksne, which was included in the [Jewish] pale of settlement [4](#), and Jews were permitted to live there.

Grandfather purchased pelts from local hunters and then sent them to the factory. Grandpa was an honest man. He was trusted and his business was fine. Grandmother took care of the household and raised the children. They were well-off.

There were five children in the family. Their only son, Sakhne, was born in 1898. He was mostly called by his Russian name Sasha. My mother Rosa, Jewish name Reizl, was born in 1900. Her sister Maryasha [Maria] was born in 1901. She was called Masha in the family and I am going to call her that as well. Revekka was born in 1903 and the youngest, Raya, was born in 1905.

There were only a few Jewish families in Aluksne. There was neither a synagogue nor a prayer house. Everybody prayed at home. Grandfather paid for rent and set up a prayer house for the Jews of Aluksne. He paid with his own money for that. He also ordered a handmade Torah and gave it to the community. In addition, he founded a cheder for boys.

There was no rabbi in Aluksne and Grandpa was acting as rabbi, kohen. Grandpa was respected by everybody in town. He spoke only Yiddish at home, though everybody knew German and Lettish. Of course, Jewish traditions were strictly followed at home. The kashrut was observed in line with the rules.

The children went to a German lyceum where tuition fees had to be paid. In 1914 World War I began and my grandparents decided to send their elder daughters –my mom and Masha – to Yaroslavl, where some of our distant relatives lived. Both of them went to a Russian lyceum there. They spent a year there and came back to Aluksne.

Then my mother went to study in Riga, to the specialized lyceum, where students were trained to enter Medical University. Upon graduation my mother entered the Dentistry Department of Tartu University. There was no admission quota for Jewish students in Estonia [5](#), existing all over tsarist Russia, including Latvia.

First, Mother got by with Russian, which she had improved in Yaroslav, and German. Then she also learned Estonian. Tuition was required for education. Grandfather worked and could cover it.

Within a few years, when Mother's younger sister entered university, Grandfather got severely ill and couldn't work any longer. Mother started giving private lessons and paid for her sister's studies. Besides, Mother had finished the university already and worked as a dentist, so she sent some money to Masha. Mother and Masha were always very close and my mother treated her younger sister as if she was her own daughter.

Mother's elder brother Sakhne had his own business in Aluksne. He got married. He had two children: son Menachem and a daughter.

Mother's younger sister Revekka finished medical courses. She was a dentist's assistant. She married a doctor named Rivlin from Riga in 1927 and moved there. They had two children.

Raya married an entrepreneur from Riga, Kolya Gorosh, in the early 1930s. Their daughter Efros was born in 1936.

Of course, all of the siblings married Jews and had traditional Jewish weddings, as Grandpa wouldn't have allowed marriages to non-Jews.

Mother stayed in Estonia upon finishing her studies. She worked as a dentist. Mother met Father on the train. They were traveling to Valga from Tartu. They met, had a conversation and soon after that Father proposed to Mother. They got married in 1925 and Mother moved to Father in Valga.

Of course, my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. My grandparents were not the only ones who were deeply religious, they also raised their children Jewish.

For a while after getting married, my parents used to rent an apartment, then they bought their own house. I recently was in that house, where my happy childhood began and ended. It was a wooden house with a stove. I think there was water supply and toilets.

During the Soviet regime the house was dilapidated and all communications were destroyed. Since 1941 there have been many denizens, and none of them used to own the house.

I don't remember how many rooms there were in the house. There was Father's study, my parents' bedroom, a drawing-room, a dining-room. Mother had her office with the reception desk, where she received her patients. She kept working as a dentist after she got married.

## **Growing up**

I was born in 1936. My name, Ronny, was chosen by my parents from a book of Hebrew female names. When I was a baby, our family was well-off and happy. It was a traditional, decent, prosperous and caring Jewish family. My parents took good care of me. After I was born, Mother kept working. I had a baby-sitter.

Grandfather Kaplan died in 1927. There was no Jewish cemetery in Aluksne, and the family didn't want to have Grandpa buried in a common cemetery. He was taken to Valga and buried there, in the Jewish cemetery. The funeral was a traditional Jewish one and a tombstone was also set up.

Grandmother Ida didn't want to stay in Aluksne after Grandfather's death, though her elder son lived there with his family. She lived with her younger daughters in Riga or in our place. My father loved and respected her as if she was his own mother.

German was spoken at home and I started speaking that language, too. Of course, Estonian became my second language. My parents knew Yiddish and Russian. Father also knew English. Mother knew Latvian very well as she was born in Latvia. Both of them spoke Estonian like all Jews, Russians and Letts who lived in Estonia. No matter what language was spoken at home in Jewish families, all of them were fluent in Estonian.

Nobody forced anyone to study the language. It was natural to know the language of the country where you lived, the country that had become your motherland. One has to respect the rites of Estonian people, and the nation. It should be like that as it stands to reason. Nobody paid money to people for them to study the state language, the way it is done now. Besides, Valga was on the border with Latvia and almost all inhabitants of Valga spoke Latvian and the denizens of Latvian Valka, a frontier town, knew Estonian. It was very natural.

There were quite a lot of Jews in Valga. I cannot tell you exactly what the population was. The town was small, but the Jewish community was considerably large. There was no synagogue in Valga, only a prayer house. All Jews of the town got together there on holidays. My parents also went there.

Jewish traditions were strictly observed in our house – kashrut, Sabbath, celebration of Jewish holidays. Mother cooked the food herself, though we had a maid almost all the time. Mother was a very good cook. She cooked traditional Jewish dishes. In general she knew how to cook, sew and knit.

I can't think of anything that she could not do. She probably didn't know how to milk cows, which was a skill that was very handy in exile. She could not learn how to do that, but as for other traditional women's work, she was very skillful.

Nobody would ever have thought that our family would be turned into outcasts, when all vital things for us collapsed because of the Soviet regime.

Mother had all kosher utensils. There were separate dishes for meat and dairy products. Mother strictly followed the kashrut in her cooking. Mother always got ready for the holidays the way it was supposed to. We always had matzah on Pesach as well as other traditional dishes.

We didn't mark all holidays at home, but also in the house of my father's parents. It was a family tradition for children and grandchildren to get together in your father's family's place. The whole family got together. Candles were lit. The dishes were beautiful. On Pesach Grandfather carried out the seder.

All holidays were marked in my grandparents' place until the late 1930s when Grandpa Sheyn started getting ill. Then the family reunions were in our house, as Mother was the eldest daughter-



in-law.

There were not only Jews among my parents' friends. The affectionateness of my parents wasn't dictated by nationality, but by the traits of people. I played with Jewish children as well as Estonian and Russian ones. My parents had many Estonian friends and all of them treated us with respect.

I don't remember any anti-Semitism in pre-Soviet Estonia. In general, I don't remember any adults mention any oppression due to nationality. Jews considered Estonia to be their motherland and were full-fledged members of the community in independent Estonia [6](#).

There were no restrictions. Even in tsarist times, when Estonia was Russian and an admission quota for studies existed for Jews, the latter were admitted to any universities in Estonia without any quota. The only condition was to pass the entrance exams and pay tuition. Though, the last one was not mandatory. For example, there was a Jewish students' aid fund at Tartu University. Rich Jews made donations to pay for the tuition of gifted children, who came from needy families.

People were employed without the nationality factor being considered. If there was a need for you, i.e., your skills or profession and you could cope with work, it didn't matter whether you were an Estonian or a Jew.

Mother's sister Masha often came to see us. Mother was much closer with her than with her other sisters. She studied at the Dentistry Department of Tartu University, wherefrom Mother had graduated. My parents tried to help out Masha the best way they could. They sent her money. Though, Masha was very independent and earned money for her tuition.

Masha met her future husband, David Sorkin, at university. David also studied at the Medical Department. He wanted to become a therapist. He came back from Tartu. They had some joint lectures. Masha came back to Latvia when she finished her studies and started working as a dentist in Siguld. David found her there and proposed to her.

Grandpa Kaplan was not alive any longer, so my parents arranged a wedding party. Masha wanted it to be modest, only for close people, but my parents insisted on a lavish party. A chuppah was made at home and a rabbi was invited. There were a lot of guests and the wedding turned out to be really good.

After the wedding Masha and her husband lived in Estonia, in the town of Tyrva. David worked as a therapist and Masha as a dentist. They didn't have any children of their own. They cared for me.

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

In 1939 when the Molotov -Ribbentrop Pact [7](#) was signed in Estonia, Soviet military bases were built [8](#). In 1940 Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union, occupied to be more exact [9](#). All people who held some post the new regime was seeking, had some property, needed by the new hosts, were declared enemies of the people. New red terror and repressions started.

It was a scary time for our family. Our house was needed by the Soviet authorities. All of us were forced to settle in one room and the rest of the house was occupied by a Soviet officer. First he lived there by himself, then his family moved there, too. They lived in our house, and there was such a feeling as if they owned it, and we were importuning dwellers. Our families did not

communicate. The officer had two children, but I never played with them.

Father's enterprise was nationalized. Fortunately, Grandfather died in 1939 and didn't have to witness that. Father shared warehouses with someone and some other premises. He also owned several hectares of land and the Soviet regime took it all in 1940. I remember that Father stopped working after that and it was very strange to see him in the house.

Mother's dentistry equipment was also nationalized. She was told to give it to the polyclinic. However, after that Mother was employed there as a dentist. All the property of my father's brothers was nationalized, too.

However, that wasn't the biggest sorrow for our family. Father and his brothers were taken to the commander's office, to the NKVD [10](#). There were interrogations and searches. Mother was told to hand in her jewelry, but she didn't have anything, except for a wedding ring and a small golden ring. The Bolsheviks [11](#) didn't believe it.

You see, Mother had never been pampered, not even in childhood. My maternal grandfather Kaplan couldn't afford to buy posh clothes and jewelry for his daughters. The only thing he could give them was education. Mother remained modest all her life. There were no extra things. Mother had one dressy suit and a couple of skirts and blouses she was wearing at work. She didn't wear jewelry. Maybe she didn't like it.

So Mother gave them both of her rings, but they kept on ransacking the place. When it was really bad, my mother said that she had a string of synthetic pearls and glass beads. I don't remember if those beads were mine. When she gave them to the NKVD officers, they finally calmed down; maybe they thought them to be genuine pearls.

I remember another terrible case. In 1940 my paternal grandmother Chaya-Leya Sheyn was on the brink of death, she asked all children and grandchildren to come over to say goodbye. All of us got together. At that moment they came for a search. In spite of everybody asking to postpone the search for a couple of days and let Granny die peacefully, the NKVD officers were not listening. Grandmother was dying and the house was searched. This was the Soviet regime.

### **The deportation of Estonian citizens**

Then the 14th of June 1941 came – deportation of tens of thousands of innocent people. It was a fatal horrible day. I was five. I remember some episodes. It was early morning and Mother woke me up. She was in tears. I woke up and saw a soldier with a rifle at the door. There were some strangers in military uniforms in the room. Dad came up to me and said, 'Get dressed, little daughter. We are leaving.' He said it quietly. His eyes were streaming with tears. I asked to take my favorite red cat with me and they didn't let me. I was sobbing and said to him, 'Good bye, Willy!'

We were taken outside and convoyed to the truck. We were driven to the train station as if we were prisoners. At that time my poor parents didn't know that they saw their home for the last time. There were cattle carriages with barred small windows without glass. Mother and I were put in one car and Father in another. They said we would be together later. It was a mean lie. I saw my dear daddy for the last time.



There were double bunks in the car, and a hole in the floor, which was used as a toilet. There were women and children in the car. We saw Evgenia, the wife of Father's brother Herz, and their daughter Irene. We moved to them. Soon the door was closed.

Later we were told by some people, who were standing on the platform, that when our train started, there was such a deep groan as if it was coming from the earth. People started singing the national anthem of Estonia. After that the town was as if dead, there were no people in the streets.

People met us at every station where we stopped. They were crying, trying to give us some food as they were aware that we were not fed. At one of the stations, Mother's sister Masha found us. She came from Tyrva just to see us, as she knew that we were being deported.

Masha had managed to find out the itinerary of the trains with people that were being deported. She took money and food and headed to the station where those trains were supposed to stop. She saw our train and found the car where we were. She managed to give Mother some money and food through the bars. When she was going back, one of the guards told her that her turn would come, too! Masha remembers with tremor the minute when the train started to move.

On 16th June the cars with women and children were detached and taken to the side track. When it got dark, echelons of men headed in an unknown direction. I will tell you about their fate according to the words of those who happened to witness it.

At the next station we found out that there were no cars with men, and all of us were in despair. Women were crying and gave their rings to the guards to find out anything they could about their husbands, but it was in vain.

We traveled for three weeks. It was hot and stuffy. Children were crying, saying that they were thirsty, but there was no water anywhere. Suckling babies died. There were cases when children, who got sick, were taken out of the train and their mothers headed farther on without them, no matter how hard they pleaded to be left with their children. What can we say about the NKVD officers who were escorting us? In one word: Beasts. All of us were exhausted.

In Novosibirsk we were told to get off the train with our belongings. Here we had to deal with the malice of criminal authorities. Everybody who came here had to write that he came here on his own accord for 20 years. Those who refused to do so were simply told to fulfill the order or they would be put into prison.

At night we were taken on a barge. It was so cold and damp! When we woke up in the morning it was crammed: some people were in the hold, others on the top. We headed northwards along Ob' river. There was no food and water. We were afflicted with dysentery. I couldn't avoid it either.

Only on the 25th of July did we arrive in Ust'-Galka [more than 3000 km from Moscow]. We took the carts and traveled another 20 kilometers. Finally, we reached our destination. It was a settlement called Vavilovka, in Bakhcharsk district of Tomsk oblast. It was an irony of fate that this kolkhoz [12](#), where we settled, was called 'New life.'

The whole village came to see us. In reality, it was an unusual scene. Nicely dressed ladies, wearing high heels and holding umbrellas looked like aliens in that filth. We were housed with local kolkhoz people. They had small, old ramshackle houses. There was a bunk around the house for

the vegetables not to get frozen. The toilets were outside. There was a bathhouse near the garden.

The family of our hosts consisted of five people. Five more people were accommodated with them. I don't remember how all of us could settle in one room. I still suffered from dysentery. I was taken to the district hospital. They couldn't do anything, and in order not to spoil the statistics they sent me home to die. Our hostess, an elderly Ukrainian lady saved my life. She cured me with the infusions of healing herbs and bird cherry. I will never forget her.

I have to say that local Russian peasants, who were exiled from Altay during the dispossession of the kulaks [13](#) in the 1930s, sympathized with us. They helped us the best way they could. In time they also were bereft of everything, ousted from their motherland and taken to dense forest. There were very few survivors.

Thus, we started a new life in a place called 'New life.' All of us were checked by the NKVD. Every month we were supposed to sign a document given to us by the commandant and verifying that we were there. We were not permitted to leave the bounds of the kolkhoz. We were like prisoners. We were not integrated, but differentiated. We were called 'new contingent' and locals were called 'kulak mugs' and those who were at power – 'comrades.'

It was harvest time and the entire so-called contingent was sent there. We worked from dawn till sunset without a break. We were given some kind of porridge to eat – cabbage leaves with scarce grain. We were given 300 grams of bread per day. It was chaff rather than bread.

We spent the night in the place where we worked, in some squalid shed on bunks. I was there with my mother. We were not paid money for our work, but given the so-called trudodni [14](#). The next year we received 50 grams of grain per one trudoden and the taxes were deducted.

My mother, a dentist, and Aunt Evgenia, who had graduated from conservatoire, didn't have suitable clothes and shoes for such work, and there were many people like that. By autumn the shoes were no good and they had to walk on dirty land and thorny grass. Their feet were grazed and covered with blisters. People felt really bad. I had boils all over and it was an ordeal. I still have scars from them.

The severe Siberian winter arrived. By that time local men were drafted into the lines, only old men, cripples and commanders stayed behind. All men's work was to be done by women. It was hard on everybody, especially on the new contingent. Locals had quilted coats and valenki [warm Russian felt boots], and potatoes in the cellar. We had nothing. We had to make boots from potato burlaps and ropes. People had to exchange the things they had for potatoes in order to survive. We didn't have anything to exchange and were starving.

The temperature reached minus 50° Celsius. The huts were covered with snow, the roads were blocked up with snow. The snow banks were higher than the wicker fences.

Ladies, who didn't have small children, were sent to cut wood, others were involved in work in the village. Mother worked at the brick plant. It was hard work. It was manual labor, starting from clay and up to filling the moulds. My aunt dug wells. Instead of horses she and two other Estonian ladies moved the winch lifting a bucket filling in circle.

My cousin Irene and I stayed in the house all winter long, as she didn't have clothes to put on. By spring we were famished. When there was no snow on the earth we went out into the fields to look for frozen potatoes and cabbage leaves. It was the only food we could have.

Children and old people died one after another. All were lice-ridden and we could not escape them either. There was an epidemic of typhus fever and tuberculosis. Gnats and midges tormented people in spring and summer. Before going to bed, we made a smoky fire, but it didn't help all that much.

One day Mother and I got a letter from Dad. He said that he lived in the settlement Sosva of Sverdlovsk oblast [about 1700 km from Moscow]. Mother cheered up. There was another letter with a picture, which he had signed with the words 'Remember me.' He knew that we didn't have photos.

Then we received a message about his death from emaciation. He died on 14th June 1942. That news killed my mother, who could hardly stand on her feet. She wouldn't have survived in those conditions, if fate hadn't had pity on us.

The district center of Bakhchar had remained without a dentist for some reason. Mother was called there as there was no other option for them. The chief of the polyclinic was an old lady without any education, but she was a party member. When she looked at Mother's diploma from Tartu University she told my mother, 'You will get the wage of a nurse as we equal that bourgeois university to a Soviet medical college.'

Mother didn't know what to say to such unprecedented boldness. There was no use in objecting. Nevertheless, Mother was very lucky, as she worked in warm premises and in her profession. She wore a white coat and her ragged clothes were hidden and went unnoticed. We were given a place with a bed in a room, where an obstetrician lived with her daughter.

Meanwhile Aunt Evgenia stayed in Vavilovka and transported milk cans on the back of bulls. Very often a bull got out of the harness and ran away. She could not catch it and bridle it. However, she had kept her sense of humor. She went up to a bull and sang the Toreador song from Bizet's opera Carmen: 'Toreador, be brave and start the fight!' This way she cheered herself up.

I remember that Mother found out that there was a piano in the district kindergarten and nobody could play it. She went to the chief and recommended my aunt. The comrades took a long time to discuss whether a stranger to the regime should be allowed to play music for children, but they had no choice. They made a decision in my aunt's favor. Mother gladly told Evgenia about that.

There was another problem: She didn't know what to put on. All she had was a skirt made of burlap and bast sandals. I don't know what she did with that, but in any case she started her job. She was paid as a janitor and her diploma didn't count at all. She still was happy with that.

Then, in January 1953, when the doleful Doctors' Plot [15](#) commenced, local authorities were on vigil and dismissed Mother from work. She wasn't sent to the kolkhoz. She worked as an administrator just in case the comrades would have a problem with their teeth, as they could not trust their jaw to a young specialist, who came from Tomsk. Mother had enough work to do as commanders showed up rather often.

I always told my mom that if I had been in her place I would have pulled out their healthy teeth. Mother was probably fed up with my talks and she said if she followed my advice, I would live in an orphanage. I was not willing to have such a prospect and I stopped rebuking Mom.

Life went on and we still felt helpless with the new regime. NKVD guys had to show that they were not paid in vain while their compatriots shed blood in the lines. People were imprisoned for mere trifles. One grandpa was sentenced to five years in prison because he said about his wife: 'Lies like a Soviet radio.' Another called the filth around his house 'Soviet fat.' He was also put in jail. People were constantly charged with espionage and imprisoned.

I remember there were times when there wasn't enough bread supply in the stores, so we had to go and stand in line from evening till morning in order to get bread. Our mothers had to sleep before work, so they sent teenagers to queue.

My cousin Irene and I went there together. There was a local NKVD office not far from the store. Every night we were involuntary witnesses of some people being convoyed somewhere. There was shouting and shots there. It was terrible. Such was the life of the 'new contingent' in a country where allegedly rights and liberties were guaranteed and equal for all.

We were given a plot of land. It was far from the place where we lived, in the fields. We planted potatoes there. Mother always took me there. I had to pull out the weeds. I was little and got tired very quickly. Mother worked and I followed her pulling out the weed somehow.

When I grew up, I started working in the field myself and Mother helped me a little bit after work. Of course, we had to do it manually, with a spade. We planted potatoes, then weeded. We put the harvested potatoes in the cellar. We also planted a little bit of onion and carrot. It was our main food.

We had to get bread by food cards [16](#). Mother's salary wasn't enough for everything. At times, she could buy a little bit of milk from a neighbor. That was it.

Life was easier on us, when Mother's sister Masha started helping us. Of course, Mother could not write her the truth about our life, as all letters were censored. God forbid writing that life was bad and there was nothing to eat! Such a letter would land in the litter bin at best; in the worst case scenario one could be summoned to the NKVD and get arrested for slandering the Soviet regime. People in the Gulag [17](#) died of hunger and still wrote that their life was good.

Masha managed to find out the truth about our life and started helping us out. Of course, she couldn't do much, but the money and parcels she sent from time to time helped us survive. Everything she sent was handy for us. I remember one parcel from Aunt Masha with her husband's ripped underpants. We made use of them. We darned them and put them on under our skirts when it was very cold, and we felt much warmer.

Masha sent groats, pig fat, old dresses. We needed it all. Of course, if Masha had been a party member, or held some important position, she wouldn't have gotten away with sending things to help her exiled relatives. But she was an ordinary doctor and everything was OK.

In our letters and in Masha's we had a great life. By the way, many other common people who lived in Estonia helped the exiled, even if they were not relatives or friends, but just acquaintances. I

would like to thank all those who supported and helped us survive.

When I went to school at the age of eight, I was wearing a coat which I wore in Valga, when I was five. I didn't have any footwear. I had some booties made of old burlap and wore them even in winter. People had to work no matter whether they had footwear or not. When I had to go to the first grade, my mother's colleague gave me old worn-out valenki of her kid. Mother mended them and I put them on as I didn't have anything else.

People either swapped some goods for clothes or bought them. Everybody wore quilted coats as there were neither coats nor fur coats. People made quilted coats themselves. Any rags that couldn't be used for anything else were used to make underwear. All was old, ripped, discolored.

I got a new dress before going to school. Aunt Masha sent me brown wool for a school uniform and Mother had it made for me.

There was only one school in Bakhchar. Exiled children and children of local authorities went there. It was a multinational school as Bakhchar was a place of exiled. People were exiled as per different articles and for certain terms. Only Old Believers [18](#) were aboriginal inhabitants. They didn't live in Bakhchar, but in some small communities in the forest.

Another category of the exiled was formed by Russian and Ukrainian peasants who were disposed during collectivization [19](#), 'kulak mugs.' There were exiled Germans, Tartars, Moldavians, Romanians. [Editor's note: The forced deportation of Germans in the Soviet Union was carried out without exception in 1940. Men between the ages of 16 and 60 were sent to "Trudarmija," a special prison camp, where they were treated as enemies of the state. Their possessions were seized and they were not permitted to return to their communities.]

Some of them were exiled in the 1930s, others in the 1940s. People from the Caucasus appeared in the 1950s. Most of them were representatives of such an exotic nationality as Assyrian. There were Azerbaijani, Armenians. I think it was an official pretext, in actuality it was warm and nice there and someone wanted to live there instead of them. Those people had to come here to try another climate.

Of course those folks were of different character as they came from the South. It was easier for them as the whole families were exiled, including men. They were mostly peasants. They made gardens in the severe Siberian climate, planted fruits and in general did their ordinary business.

Thus, the school was multinational. I should say that all of us were very friendly. We never sneaked up on each other; we stood up for each other. Nationality did not matter. All of us had one and the same fate and we stuck together.

There were also children at school, who were not exiled – the children of the guards and local authorities. When I was in the first grade the teacher had me sit with the son of the chairman of Ispolkom [20](#). That boy had warm clothes. He brought some buns and pies to school. He ate them during the break. They put me, an 'enemies' spawn' next to him. He would crib from my notebook and he wouldn't even be given bad marks for it. When the teacher asked him to go to the blackboard, he gave me his coat to get warm. Sometimes he gave me some rolls. He was a kind boy ... There were very few like him, most of children were 'enemies' spawn' and 'kulak mugs.'

Teachers were also different. Some of them were from local 'kulak mugs.' They were knowledgeable, bona fide, otherwise they couldn't have stayed at work. They treated us fairly. Other children were party members and knew nothing. They considered us to be the offspring of enemies and treated us accordingly, even without concealing anything.

The most colorful was the principal of our school. His name was Volkov Irinarch Fedorovich. He was Chuvash and spoke broken Russian. He was absolute uneducated, unkempt with a big paunch, often muzzy. He taught physics and astronomy in senior grades and math in some classes. Poor children! He never explained anything because he didn't know a thing and couldn't explain anything.

He came to a class, sat at the table, called someone to the blackboard, put his hands on his head and fell asleep. The student could do anything he wanted, he could rewrite the formulas from the textbook, talked to the class and waited for Volkov to wake up. At last he was awake and said, 'good.' He never gave excellent marks. If someone asked him to explain something, he got angry and said, 'you empty-headed cabinets, all you can do is to have tea with cucumbers.'

We had a thirst for knowledge and tried to get it no matter what. We read those few books that were in the library. There were such books as manuals for agricultural adjustments. We made use of our parents' knowledge to get to know at least something, though we were aware that we wouldn't be able to enter the institute and would have to be involved in timbering.

It was known to everybody that the Soviet regime was full of hypocrisy. They couldn't say expressly that the children of the exiled couldn't have higher education. How could it be otherwise? – Everybody was equal in Soviet Union! So, school-leavers were put on a truck and convoyed to Tomsk to take entrance exams to the institute. The management of the colleges and institute were ordered not to admit the exiled. The scenario didn't change over the years.

School-leavers could enter any institution and any department. Their documents were taken, they had a chance to take an exam, but were then given a poor mark for the first exam in Russian literature, e.g. essay-writing, and they had no right to take other exams. When entrees asked to be shown the compositions, they said – you are not allowed to see them.

Most of those 'failures' had excellent marks at school. It was a real mark as in our school we had a very strict and skilled teacher in Russian literature. She always gave objective grades. All of those students got their documents back and they had to return to Bakhchar in a convoyed truck. None of them stayed in Tomsk. They said that we had a right to get higher education. I don't know maybe some exiled had a chance to enter, but no one from Bakhchar could do so.

The only chance to escape entrance exams was to obtain a medal at school upon graduation. [Editor's note: The golden medal was the highest distinction in secondary schools in the USSR. A student was supposed to have straight excellent marks (100%) to get the golden medal. A student was supposed to have 90% excellent marks to get a silver medal]. Medalists were supposed to be exempt from exams and those who entered were supposed to be taken out of record in the commandant headquarters.

The problem was that it was impossible to get that medal: even if a student knew all subjects excellently, he would be given two 'good' marks. Usually they were given by comrade-teachers,



party members. In our school, Volkov was the one who did it. He taught two subjects, so it was easy for him to put two 'good' marks in the certificate. His wife could also do that. She was also a party member and a teacher at our school. They had enough like-minded people. That is why I don't remember any school graduates who had the chance to enter an institution of higher education.

We had both pioneer [21](#) and Komsomol [22](#) organizations at school. I don't know why all of us were included in the pioneers and then in the Komsomol. All enemies, enemies' spawn were included in the organization without them even asking for our consent. If we didn't become pioneers, there would have been no Komsomol unit for the exiled [Editor's note: Komsomol units existed at all educational and industrial enterprises. They were headed by Komsomol committees involved in organizational activities].

There would be only five to six people for the entire school as the rest were exiled, children. Komsomol activists wanted to have their bread and butter. They wouldn't go into timbering ... That is why they had to shut their eyes to our non-proletarian origin.

They started to raise us ideologically. We were made to sing Soviet songs in chorus and say, 'thank you to Comrade Stalin for our happy childhood.' Stalin's portrait hung in every classroom. There were real paradoxes: during the festive concert the chorus of enemies' spawn sang songs like 'The party is our helmsman!' They didn't have a sense of humor.

The attempts to raise us as Soviet patriots brought no results. Of course, it could have affected us if since childhood we had been inculcated with one and the same thing. When we were in the 1st or in the 2nd grade some of us believed what we were told. But it passed with age.

I had no feeling of patriotism towards the USSR. I had lived in Estonia for five years, feeling good. I had a good life, a good family in contrast to those who were raised in the Soviet Union. Who from our ideologists could make me believe that my father was an enemy, gangster, exploiter, or that my mother was an enemy, who should be isolated?

All of us, the spawn of enemies, were very skeptical about all those things and we took Soviet slogans and Soviet actuality with irony. When our company got together to sing songs and play guitar, we never sang Soviet songs. Our repertoire consisted of old camp songs. There were people who had gone through the Gulag among those who were exiled and we heard those songs from them.

We could go anywhere we wished in the settlement, and that was it. As soon as we learned how to write, we had to go to the commandant's office and check in like our mothers did. Even if children didn't come at certain time, they searched the whole settlement for them.

It was my favorite entertainment in childhood to have those comrades run all over the village looking for me. I would hide somewhere and saw those comrades searching the whole village. I wouldn't have dared to joke like that if I had been older. NKVD officers were responsible for every man. They took it really serious.

In 1947, Father's brother Herz was released from the Gulag when his six-year term was over. He had the right to come back home, but his wife Evgenia and daughter Irene couldn't come back from exile, as their term was longer. Herz left for Estonia. He was not permitted to live in Valga, so

he settled in the small town of Johvi. In 1948, Irene went to join her father. Evgenia stayed in Bakhchar by herself. She worked as an accountant at a dairy farm.

From the letters of Herz and Irene we knew a little bit of their lives. In 1948, when the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' [23](#) began, they started getting worried. There were rumors that former Gulag prisoners would be sent back to the Gulag and those who had left exile would be exiled again.

Father's brother Isroel was also exiled from Valga. We could not find out anything about him, he simply died there, in a Gulag camp.

Father's sister Ester and her children were exiled from Tallinn. They were in Kirov oblast, in the village of Molotovsk.

The rest of the members of our family were murdered by fascist. In 1941 Father's brothers Leib, Abram, Pesach with their wives and children were shot in Estonia. The family of Father's sister Ella was executed in Riga.

My maternal grandmother Ida Kaplan died in 1944 in evacuation. She was with Masha. The latter was the only one who survived. My mother's elder brother Sakhne and his family were slaughtered in Aluksne. Her sisters Revekka and Raya perished with their families in the Riga ghetto [24](#).

We remained in exile. Suddenly there was a search for Irene as they wanted to send her back into exile. We knew that she and her father left for Tashkent. They seldom wrote, and their letters came to us via unknown people. The last name Sheyn was not in the return address.

The three of us were summoned by the commandant, the NKVD. They couldn't find Irene, so they decided to interrogate us. I was also interrogated, even though I was only twelve. I remember how I was pulled during the interrogation in order for them to try and find out where my cousin was. My response was: I do not know. The NKVD officer said that I would be expelled from school, if I didn't remember. I had one standard reply: I do not know. Then he asked me if I wanted to have a biscuit. I can't recall whether I knew and just wouldn't tell or whether I really didn't know.

My cousin Ruth, the daughter of Father's sister Ester, was found in Tallinn. Ruth was married, had a six-month-old baby, but still she had to come back to exile. After a while her husband and baby came to join her. All of them lived in exile.

None of the people I knew believed in Stalin, in the Party. We did know about the meanness and hypocrisy of the Soviet regime by hearsay. We were aware that all of us, i.e., school-leavers that were taken to Tomsk for entrance exams to the institutes, wouldn't be admitted and would go work in timbering.

One could be released from prison, when the sentence was over, but there was no way to get away from exile. We had the same conditions as in prison, and without a prospect to gain freedom. I remember two of our Azerbaijani guys got poor marks for composition at entrance exams, caught the dean and threatened that they would kill him if he didn't admit them, as it would be easier for them in prison: they would be released at some point. If they came back to the exile, they would stay in lumbering forever.

## After the death of Stalin

Finally the year 1953 came. I went to the 9th grade. On 5th March 1953 the leader of all tribes and peoples, 'dear comrade Stalin' died. All ends in this world, and his life came to an end, too. I remember that day. There was a pulpit at school and the principal took the floor. Party comrades were grieving: our dear father has died. How are we to live?

We, on the other hand, were glad in our hearts. Of course, we couldn't show our feelings. We hoped for some changes for the better. Of course, none of us shed a tear. We were grown-up enough to understand everything very well. We still hoped for the better.

When Stalin kicked the bucket, some exiled were admitted in the institutes, beginning in September 1953 – to the unpopular institutions, unpopular faculties, but still people were admitted. There was a chance to enter colleges.

When I finished school in 1954, it was not a mass phenomenon, but still some people managed to enter. I decided to enter Tomsk construction institute, which had been opened a year or two before.

Before that I helped my friend with entrance exams. She had tried to enter the Biology Department three years in a row, but didn't manage to. When we found out that there were no rigid restrictions for 'enemies' spawn' she decided to enter the timbering college, as she would be released from exile, if she entered. Of course, she had forgotten mathematics completely and she had to pass that exam. She asked me to go with her and give her a cheat-sheet if possible. So I went with her.

We saw that the teacher was sitting right by the door and there would be no chance to pass a cheat-sheet. Then I suggested taking the exam instead of her. The problem was that she took the written exam herself and I had to take the oral exam for her. She had cropped hair, but I had braids, so I had to put a kerchief on my head. I put a school uniform on – I didn't have any other dress – and went to take an exam.

My answer was excellent, the teacher praised me for it and asked why my written test was so poor. I was frightened that our deception would be divulged, as I didn't know what tasks there were in written exams. Then I pulled myself together and asked him to show me my paper. I said that I had a toothache and couldn't think properly.

He showed me my friend's test and there were teacher's corrections in red ink all over. There was a satisfactory mark. I read the tasks and solved them right away. The teacher said that he would give me an excellent mark for the oral exam and I would have a good mark on the average. It would be enough to be admitted, to get a scholarship. Thus, my friend was admitted to college. I went to take entrance exams at the construction institute.

The first three exams were rather beneficial. The written and oral exams in mathematics and physics were passed with an excellent mark. The next one was in Russian literature, where everybody got poor marks. We had to write a composition. The scenario didn't change. I always got a good mark at school, as excellent marks were not given. I never had poor grades, but I understood that it didn't matter. If they had to give me a poor mark, they would do it anyway, but I decided not to give up the fight.

My Assyrian friend came with me to the exam. She was the best student at school in Russian literature. I wrote a composition. I had nothing to lose. I asked for permission to go to the toilet and took the composition to my friend. She checked it and found a couple of mistakes. So I was 100 percent sure that there were no mistakes.

The last exam was also oral, in Russian literature. My answer was good. Then the teacher asked what school I went to. I replied. Then she started asking some more question. I said that I wouldn't answer until she tells me my mark for composition. She must have felt sorry for me and said, 'satisfactory.' I still could be admitted, but I was hurt as I knew that my composition was well written. When I asked her to show me my work, she said that I wasn't allowed to see it. I felt calm as people were admitted with score 18, and I had 22.

All those who took exams, came back to Bakhchar, but I stayed to wait for my results. When the list of entrees was hung up, my name wasn't there. Then additional lists were hung up and there were three exiled: I, Lett Berezin and some guy. We were probably the first exiled who were admitted in that institute. We were admitted to the automobile faculty.

Although we were admitted to the institute, we still were on record in the commandant's office. We had to check in there until 1956. Once during the lectures we heard, 'Sheink, Berezin! To the commandant!' None of the students could get why we were called there.

Then there were elections in the Supreme Council [25](#). Propagators came and made the list. I couldn't vote, as I didn't have a passport. The exiled weren't given passports. I went to the commandant and asked what to do. They gave me some paper and I voted.

Then in 1956, after the Twentieth Party Congress [26](#), the exiled were released. We knew about that congress. We didn't know the details and we definitely didn't hope for any changes after that. But still, life was easier after it. Exiled people were released. My aunt Evgenia was released a little bit earlier, as she was incapacitated, and she went to Tashkent. Almost all Estonians came back home. I stayed in Tomsk and Mother in Bakhchar. I studied at the institute. In general we had nowhere to go.

I always tried to avoid social and Komsomol events at the institute. All of us students were forced to attend Soviet demonstrations. We tried to escape that as we were poorly dressed and it was cold. At times we could avoid them.

I was fond of parachuting in the institute. I jumped from a plane, not from a tower. It was interesting. The plane was small and open. There was a cockpit in the front and an open space for jumpers behind. The sky-divers had to get on a wing to make a jump. Parachute straps were fastened in the cockpit. My first jump was in winter time as I thought it would be better for my legs if I jumped on the snow bank. I was very light so I was dragged along. Some people caught and stopped me. I remember that after the jump I was given a meat patty.

Life was hard from a material standpoint. The scholarship was miserable. Mother couldn't assist, but Aunt Masha helped out a little bit. My roommates in the hostels were as indigent as I was. The room was made for four, but seven people lived in it. We did chores together.

I think our scholarship was 200 rubles, I don't remember exactly. Each of us gave 150 for common expenses, 50 was left for oneself. We bought potatoes, cabbage and such things for the collected

money. Every day we bought canned meat and beans. Our daily lunch consisted of soup with canned meat and beans. The soup was for seven people. There was enough bread at that time.

For dessert we had tea with sugar, each of us got one teaspoon of sugar. Later my roommates got parcels with food. It was mostly pig fat. In the evening we fried potatoes in pig fat and had tea with rusks, which were also sent to the girls.

Aunt Masha sent me 100 rubles every month. I spent them to buy paper for drawing, pencils and notebooks. Sometimes my stockings were spoiled and I had to buy new ones. There were other contingencies.

We did our homework at the table in turns. We had to put large sheets of paper and there was no space in the room even in the aisles between the beds. We got by somehow. We put some rods on the backs on the bed and a board on top of it and made the so-called table for drawing.

There was one lamp for all and we had to draw in poor light conditions. We became short-sighted because of that. Those who went to bed pulled the blanket over their heads, so that the light wouldn't disturb them. We slept until lunch as it seemed to us that it was still dark and the night was not over.

There were several exiled students at the university. We understood that they knew everything about us in dean's office and would get rid of us as soon as they got a chance to. That is why we studied better than other students, so that nobody could reproach us that we didn't do well.

The mathematics teacher like me a lot. I even taught practical classes instead of him. I loved math. If I had had the choice, I wouldn't have entered the construction institute, but the Mathematics Department of the university. Nothing doing about that...

I never felt anti-Semitism. Of course, it was always there during the Soviet regime. Yet it turned out that everybody was the same in exile. We were children of one doom, so what kind of anti-Semitism can we be talking about? There were Tartars, Germans, Ukrainian and Assyrians among my friends. I never felt anti-Semitism at work either.

We studied for five years at the institute. Then the exiled got mandatory job assignments [27](#) like anybody else. Those who studied well had a choice. I ranked among the ten top students. There was one place in the Bridge Design Institute and I was eager to get that job. The management of that institute wanted to take me as well.

When I came to take the assignment it turned out that the place was no longer in the list. Then I found out that a daughter-in-law of one big boss lived nearby the institute and wanted to work there. In this case, I think, it was neither a biased attitude towards me having been exiled nor anti-Semitism. It was much simpler than that.

When I got to know that the place was no longer there, I took the second place in the list: foreman in a construction company. It was a job right at the construction site and I never regretted that I came to work there. It helped me a lot for my professional skills. It was the construction of a foundation, not exactly my specialty. I was also offered to teach at the institute, at the chair of material resistance, but I turned it down and decided to work in construction.

I remember my first working day. A fragile little thing in a dress showed up at the construction site. I went up to the crew of workers and asked with a trembling voice where my crew was. I was asked, 'Hey you, girl, are you looking for your dad?' Then I was told that one mason, a drunkard called Vasya, saw the new foreman, then got drunk and said, 'What kind of life is that when I have a child that will boss me around!'

I took to work. I cannot say that I felt bad. I knew my job, learned things I didn't know. I read a lot of professional literature, asked experienced people. I always tried to make things in a way that the laborers could work well. Their job was really hard. They did it in good faith. My crew respected me. The workers appreciated the fact that they didn't have to do things all over again because of me. If the manager was illiterate and incompetent, one and the same job was to be redone several times.

I did not have problems with workers, but with bosses. At the very outset of my work I had to connect the pipeline of the plant with the existing storm water sewage. There was a high fence around the plant which made it impossible to see what was going on. It was a hard task, as we could miss the level of the well if we made a wrong layout of the location.

I did the job and asked the site manger to check it, as I did it for the first time and didn't want my workers to suffer from possible mistakes I made. The site manager would be responsible for my mistakes anyway, as I was a young specialist and I had not right to do certain work independently for a while. The manager said that the institute had trained me for it and that he wouldn't check anything. Fortunately, I got by with that and the connection was done the right way.

Then that manager was reduced in rank and became a foreman. Then it turned out that he didn't have any special education and had previously run a laundry house. So our head of construction finished only elementary school and at times held the design drawings topsy-turvy! But, you see, he had been a party member for years and in the USSR that was more appreciated than professionalism. There were all kinds of things. It darkened our lives. Thanks to that I learned how to rely only on myself.

I got married, when I was in the fifth year of my studies. I met my future husband, Alexander Kuznetsov, in the hostel. He had finished Tomsk Polytechnic Institute by that time. He came to us with his friend, whose sister was my roommate. We met and shortly after that got married.

We were given a room in a hostel. Then the company where my husband was employed built houses. Those who were willing to have a house were given materials for a wooden house. One construction expert ran the process and the denizens built their houses themselves. Thus, Alexander, along with some others, built a house consisting of eight apartments.

We got a two-room apartment in that house and brought Mother from Bakhchar and took her in right away. Finally, Mother lived in good conditions. I bought her a dress from my first salary. I was happy to give my mom at least that. I went to the construction site in pants and in winter time I was given a fur coat. I thought I didn't need anything else.

My husband, Alexander Kuznetsov, was born in 1932 in Bashkarstan, in some sort of settlement. His father Ivan was a worker and his mother Praskovia was a housewife. They were very good people, tactful and affable, though uneducated. They treated me very well.



There were ten children in the family. I don't know why Alexander's family moved to the Far East. Alexander finished school there. Then he entered the Physical and Technical Department of the Polytechnic Institute.

My mother wasn't very happy with my marriage. She didn't like the idea that I was married to a Russian. She didn't protest though, as she wanted it to be my choice and for me not to blame her for anything.

When I was working, I had a chance to go on vacation to Tallinn and visit my aunt Masha, or to Tashkent, to Uncle Herz's family. I went to Tashkent. Herz had been in Sosva Camp, where my father had been, too, and I wanted to know the details of my father's life there. Herz never told his family about his life in the camp. His tale was very scarce. I have the following impression about life in Gulag from many conversations with people, who were exiled there from Estonia.

Uncle Herz was not with my father. He was sent to the camp with fortified security, while Herz was in the ordinary one. Recently I read a book, published in Estonia in 1995, recollections of one deported Estonian called Aine Tigennik. It also added to my impressions.

It was dreadful what I found out. I don't understand those former prisoners who keep silent about what they had been put through and even trying to forget about it. Those things cannot be described with the words we are used to, such as 'scary,' or 'terrible.' I simply cannot find a word for it. All I can say is this was the Soviet regime. I don't know the details about my father. All deported Estonian men were in Sosva. It was not just one settlement, but a whole network of camps under one name.

On 16th June 1941 when in Pechory the cars with women and children were taken on a side track, the cars with men were to go in an unknown direction. Echelons crossed the border with Russia and headed for Sverdlovsk.

On 17th June they arrived at Ilbosk station at dawn. Estonians got together there. They found out that there were no cars with women and children. Soon the train started. They were past the Estonian border and said good-bye to their motherland. Some of those men would not see it again. There were tears in their eyes.

On the way to Moscow the train stopped at some station and two men were allowed to bring water, they also could buy porridge with their money. That porridge was shared with all prisoners. It was the first meal for them in six days. From Moscow they headed further on without stops and on 20th June they arrived at Starobelskaya station, where all of them were told to get off and go to the prison which used to be a monastery before

On 22nd June people were searched and afterwards all precious things and dishes were taken away from them. After lunch a boss showed up and said, 'Those who would like to join their families, should write applications.' There was a whole cart of those applications, which was taken though the gate. Everybody was hoping to see his family again.

It was Beriya's [28](#) lie: they just wanted to have a list. Men were exiled without preliminary list and they came up with that idea to identify the names of the exiled males. That day 2000 men, according to the list, were escorted to the train stations and put in the cars. There were headlights and guns on the top of the cars.

The cars, where the men were put, were loaded with manure. They were given stale bread and salty fish and a couple of buckets of water, which spilled out because the car was shaking too much. The train doors were shut and they headed towards Sverdlovsk.

It was sultry and the car was crammed like sardines. There was a danger of asphyxia. Everybody was dying for water after that stale bread and salty fish. Two men from Piarnu became demented before they arrived in Sverdlovsk. In four days the train reached Sverdlovsk on the side track.

Everybody was thumping at the door and asking for water. Everybody was so thirsty that nobody even thought of asking for food. The guard was calmly walking in front of the car and said that there would be water. But they didn't give them water and people were berserk. Many people were raging.

There was help from Heaven. There was a downpour and water was seeping through the walls of the cars. People licked drops of water from the walls or soaked the rags in water and wrung them out. Their thirst was not stilled though, as there were only a few drops of water.

Next morning the train headed further and stopped near dense forest during lunch time. The guards had circled the train and set the guns before the men were allowed to get off the train. All were exhausted and thirsty. There were moats full of water by the train station. People started ladling out that water and drinking it to quench their thirst. Then people washed themselves.

The convoy said that men were taken to a destination where they could reunite with their families. At that time, of course they couldn't imagine that it was such a bold lie, and kept hoping to see their families. That hope gave them strength to overcome hunger, thirst and hardship of the tormenting trip.

On 26th July the train stopped at some station in the taiga. The men were told to go to some meadow. They stayed there for more than three days. They were to find out that the worst thing for people in the taiga were gnats. There were a great many of them on the uncovered parts of body.

The next day they moved on. There was a stop at night and the men were ordered to leave the cars. There was a camp with barbed wire. People thought that they had arrived at the final destination, but it turned out that it was a transit prison. People were searched again, and all precious things were taken away from them. Some men swallowed their wedding rings and they were incarcerated, kept until the rings 'came out.'

After a few days people were told to leave their things as they would be sent on their way in a couple of days. There was a long distance to cover on foot: 60 kilometers, and very few things were to be taken. Most men didn't only have their personal belongings, but also the things of their wives, children. At the platform they were told that they would join their family so the men took heavy luggage. They took all they could and headed on.

They were divided into groups of 15 people each. The guard with the rifle walked in front of the group and at the back there was another guard with a gun and a dog. It was hard to walk as it was hot in the day time and the gnats were giving them a hard time. They came to a river bank and crossed it in small boat. They counted people and moved on.

Everybody was so tired, that they could not talk of anything else but rest. They were walking all night long and reached the camp only in the morning. There were barracks fenced with barbed wire on the bank of the river. Everybody was very tired, bitten by gnats. The barracks were full of them, too.

Within a day more and more Estonian groups came. By the end of the day there were 1500 prisoners. All were ordered to leave the camp and walk to the square in front of the camp. There were gunned guards around it. Everybody was given salty fish, a slice of bread and a mug of hot water. Then there was an order to go back to the camp through prison premises.

When the prisoners came back to the camp, they were divided up into crews of 25-30 men each and sent to roll logs to the river bank under the convoy of two guards, one with a rifle and another with a gun. In the morning and in the evening people were given some dark mishmash with several rye grains.

In the morning the men received 400 grams of under-baked, raw bread. That bread couldn't even be put on the table as the criminals took it away at once. As soon as deportees came to the camp, the criminals joined them. The latter had a more privileged position and the guards condescended to them. After that people started hiding the bread beneath their shirts and then ate it quietly inch by inch.

Work started at 6am and ended at 9-10pm. People were not fed during the day and some were so weak they couldn't even manage to come back from work. It didn't last long, and then the prisoners were to fell trees in the forest 15 kilometers away from the camp. People had to walk a long distance and then take logs to a certain place.

The men were very weak and one log was to be hauled by 30-50 people. Their attire and footwear were spoiled. They were emaciated, and could hardly drag their feet. They died in the forest, on the way and other prisoners had to bring the corpses back to the camp for the guard to keep record. All they were interested in was the number, not in the fact whether someone was alive or not.

Each crew had their norm and in the evening they were not allowed to leave work until their norm was done. Very many people came back in the middle of the night. It was cold in the barrack, but there were so many people that it got warm because of people breathing. A cell of some 12 square meters held more than 30 people.

There were a lot of fleas and gnats. One man could kill between 300 and 350 gnats at night. The drenched clothes were put on the bunk so that they would dry a little bit by the morning; it was a cold October 1941. Every night about 20 to 30 people died. The neighbors on the bunks took off all clothes from the deceased and took them.

By the beginning of 1942 more than half of the Estonians had died in the camp. The prisoners were made to dig holes two meters deep not far from the barracks. It was especially hard in winter, when the temperatures were minus 40-50° Celsius and the earth got frozen up to two meters. About 50 naked corpses were put in each one of the holes, then they put earth over it and evened out the land for nobody to ever find their kin.

Any very minor misdemeanor resulted in a lock-up. It was as frosty there as outside. There was an icy iron bed there. There were no bags or blankets, nothing to speak of linen. There was an outbreak of dysentery in the camp. The sick ones were put in the sanitary unit. They were lying there on the oil cloth in their own defecations. There was no medicine, no medical aid at all. Those people couldn't eat anything, but they brought them rations. Those prisoners who were working as nurses there were able to survive having those rations – small pieces of bread.

NKVD officers in the camp had to show that they worked very hard. People fought in the lines, but they in the rear. Thus, they had to show that they disclosed some things, their activity. They had to justify their earnings. So, they blamed the prisoners for organizing an uprising.

People from the camp were called for interrogations, and they had them confess that they organized the rebellion. They were beaten black and blue, summoned at night, tormented in all kinds of ways. People were tortured, they put a board against their feet and beat and hammered them. A man couldn't walk after such an interrogation.

Can emaciated, weakened people be blamed for not withstanding the ordeal and finally assuming their guilt? How could they have instigated a mutiny if they couldn't even stand on their feet?

The contingent of the camp prisoners changed constantly: people were buried while others were brought in. Nobody believed that it would be possible to survive in such a hell. In actuality, very few survived – those who worked as nurses or were involved in other work on the territory of the camp. None survived out of those who were felling trees. They say that by 1943 most exiled people from Estonia had died.

I tried to ask Uncle Herz where my father's grave was. I understood that there were a lot of unknown graves all over Sosva, but I thought that they should have kept at least some kind of record during the burial, i.e., put down the ID number of the prisoner. There were no records, there were even cases when a person was sentenced to death although he had died a long time before that. I did not find out anything about Father's fate. He died, that I know, but how and where and why I'll probably never find out.

Those who survived will keep silent until death and will not tell what was happening there. I don't think that Gulag camps were any better than German concentration camps. What a deception, what hypocrisy! Those wretched prisoners were not killed, they died. None of them was guilty. Hitler's regime, fascism was condemned by everyone at the Nuremberg trials, but who would remember about the victims of Stalin's camps and indict criminal communistic ideology?

It was the scariest thing in our lives and not only in the extreme conditions – in exile, in the Gulag. That injustice and unavailable law, when the NKVD could do anything to anybody, even to the most harmless people is most dreadful in the life of any person, not only the exiled, but for any free person.

We were considered to be free, but were we really free? We couldn't leave the USSR – just the boundary of our exile expanded. We couldn't speak our minds. Good thing that we were not bereft of the right to think. We were pushed to do what the comrades made us do. We were never free in the USSR.

During my studies at the institute, when I was a Komsomol member, I came to work to the construction site and threw away my Komsomol membership card. If I was asked if I was a Komsomol member, I briefly said no. Suddenly my Komsomol membership card was sent to the committee of the construction company. The Komsomol organizer came up to me and demanded that I should pay the membership fee for the entire time I had worked in construction. I flatly refused.

People were good and they didn't want to do harm to me. The Komsomol organizer tried to convince me to pay membership fees, saying that he would arrange for me to pay minimal fees as a student. In my case, the matter was not the money and I didn't change my mind. Our poor Komsomol organizer paid membership fees for me to avoid trouble.

Then they started trying to talk me into joining the Party. At our site we had only one party member – a drunkard. I tried to get off with a joke here saying: Should I be in one party with him? Shall we share the post of the secretary of the party committee or will we try to govern in turns? I was kidding and kidding and God had mercy on me. There were good people in my surrounding and they had a good attitude towards me. I wasn't in anybody's way and didn't taken anybody's place. People were good to me and nobody informed against me.

I have never been a party member. I would never have joined it no matter what benefits I might have gotten. My husband was of the same opinion. Alexander was not as harsh in his assessment of the Soviet regime, he was more loyal. We were like-minded. It couldn't have been otherwise. Our friends and acquaintances were like us. We had new friends and we also remained friends with those who were in exile with me. We have so much in common that they are closer than relatives to me.

I got another offer from the institute to teach resistance of materials, construction mechanics and the theory of resilience. I got that offer during my mandatory job assignment, but I turned it down at that time. Now I decided to accept it. They needed a teacher and they didn't look at my nationality or the past.

The work of the teacher of sciences had nothing to do with the ideology and it was good for me. Even here I had to deal with the Soviet system. My Komsomol membership card was sent to the Komsomol committee of the institute. In a month I was to turn 27 – the age when people were automatically expelled from the Komsomol. And here the secretary of the Komsomol committee, a mean lady, wanted me to be a Komsomol member for the last month. I had to be rough with her and finally she left me in peace.

Then, they started talking about joining the Party. There was no way I could do that no matter what. I hated the Soviet regime and the Party. There were all kinds of things. A lot of nonsense.

All employees of the institute had to subscribe to the party paper Pravda. They also demanded that I should subscribe to it. I didn't want to. Why should I? They tried to convince me, saying that my husband was subscribed to it and we had that paper in the family. Of course, I should have said that we had it, but I firmly said that I didn't want to and wouldn't read it. I could not and was not willing to concede to that regime. Strange as it may be, I always got away with that.

During my childhood and adolescence I always had to come across injustice. Having felt it personally, I always strove to be fair with my workers, students, subordinates. There was one case during my work at the institute, which refreshed my memories from exile. I had one Chechen student. It was the time when they tried to get rid of them. He did well and was a gifted boy. All of sudden, he didn't show up at the exam and I met him by the dean's office. I asked him why he hadn't come to the exam and he said that he was to be exiled because he didn't pass the exam in resistance of materials. And he hadn't even taken that exam!

I found out from him that he was late for the exam. He was not given a paper to retake the exam stating that he was late. What could I do? I had a special paper for the day of examination and if someone had to take an exam on another day there should be a permit from the dean's office. I told him that I would take the exam from him right away.

Then he started worrying for me saying that I would get in trouble for examining him without a permit from the dean's office. But it was up to me. I gave him a task and he solved it. He got good marks from me and I put a good mark in his credit book.

Then I went to the dean asking him to give the permit to the student as I had already taken exam and given him a good mark in his credit book. The dean got angry with me saying that I had no right to do that and that he wouldn't consider that mark.

It was clear that the decision had been made – to oust that student. He was a good and capable student. How could that be allowed? I told the dean that he didn't know the provision of higher schools, according to which I was entitled to give a grade to the student in line with his performance. It was definitely the case and the student was saved. Every time I saw injustice I tried to help. I did my best all the time.

Our daughter Margarita was born in 1968. Beginning from early childhood I told her about all injustices I had come across. She knew about my fate, my childhood. Of course, none of us could assume that the Soviet Union, a horrible empire, would collapse. I thought that my daughter would have to live under the Soviet regime and would try to live decently in that system. I would not have been able to prevaricate and say that I liked that regime. I also had my opinion of other things and didn't hold it back from her. My daughter was my friend and I shared things with her.

Margarita was skeptical about the Soviet regime. She was a pioneer, then a Komsomol member at school. She did not file any applications, as people were admitted there by the masses. Those events were not reflected on her outlook. It was a mere formality for her, which she couldn't avoid. She was never involved in social work and tried to skip the meetings.

We didn't mark Soviet holidays at home. We marked New Year and birthdays. Soviet holidays were simply additional days off. I was eager to mark Jewish holidays, but it was impossible in Tomsk. We didn't have a Jewish calendar and there was no way we could get one. There was no synagogue in Tomsk, where we would have been able to get information about the holidays.

Mother and I always marked Sabbath. On Friday evening we observed Sabbath in accordance with traditions. Of course, on Saturday I had to go to work, but I couldn't change that. Mother and I didn't do any house chores on that day and put it off till the next day. We didn't wash the floors, didn't do the laundry. At least we were somewhat able to observe Jewish traditions.



When in the 1970s Jews were permitted to immigrate to Israel from the Soviet Union, almost nobody left from Tomsk directly. If someone applied for immigration, he would be fired right away. Our good acquaintance from Novosibirsk also wanted to leave for Israel. He was an assistant professor, chief of laboratory. He was sacked, and remained without job. Before his departure he was on odd jobs.

Most people left via the Baltic countries. Most single people went to Baltic countries, found a job, a room in a hostel and after having lived there for a couple of years, immigrated.

We didn't think of immigration. My husband is Russian, what would he have done in Israel? Both of us worked and had a settled life. My mother, daughter and I couldn't go to the Baltics. I understood that Mom wouldn't get over it. Thus, we stayed in Russia.

During my work at the institute I wrote a candidate thesis [29](#) and defended it. I understood that they might put a spoke in my wheel. There was a chance to defend a dissertation without post-graduate studies, if the work was excellent. I was used to being independent and wrote my dissertation myself, without a supervisor, without post-graduate department.

In 1972 I defended my thesis in the Moscow Engineering and Construction Institute and got a unanimous vote of the board. I chose that institute myself. I knew if my work was good it would be approved there, if I did it in some hick places, there would be one or two unskilled specialists and the result couldn't be predicted.

There were true, excellent, fair professor of the old school. I was conferred a degree of the candidate of science. I hadn't changed my job and obtained the title of assistant professor. That was it, there was no new fear for me; I had just improved my educational level.

When my daughter Margarita finished school she entered Novosibirsk Agricultural Institute, the Zoology Department. She loved animals since childhood, horses in particular. That is why she chose that specialty. Upon graduation Margarita worked as a chief zoo technician in Tomsk oblast. Then she left for Novosibirsk.

My daughter got married right after she finished her studies at the institute. There was a time when she dated my friend's son, a Jew named Arkadiy. He loved my daughter and I really wanted my daughter to marry him. He was so good! Of course, it mattered for me that he was a Jew, but it was not the most important thing.

During the Soviet regime Jews degenerated. I should say that there were quite a few Jews in the KGB [30](#). There were Jewish prisoners in the camp, who used to work for the KGB. The deputy KGB chief in Tallinn was a Jew named Yakobson. He was a scary man. You see, there are different kind of Jews as well. That is why I didn't want my daughter to marry any Jew, but Arkadiy.

When Margarita called us from Novosibirsk and said that she was going to get married and invited us to come over and meet her future husband, I blew my top and said that I didn't care whom she was to marry, even an ape, if she liked it. Of course, we met.

Margarita's husband, Alexander Kasper, is also from a family of exiled. He was born in the village of Proletarka, Novosibirsk oblast, in 1968. His grandparents were exiled and Alexander's father was a baby when he was brought into exile, or perhaps he was born there. I cannot tell for sure. At any

rate, my daughter's husband lived in exile. They love each other and that's enough for me.

Their daughter Rosa was born in Novosibirsk in 1992. My mother's name was Rosa and Alexander's grandmother was also called Rosa. Thus, my granddaughter was named after both her great-grandmothers.

My mother died in 1981. Mother had never mentioned anything about her funeral and flatly decided that she would be buried in accordance with the Jewish rite. It was a horrible time, anti-Semitism was in full swing.

My husband and I did what we were supposed to. In that horrible time we managed to find ten Jews to form a minyan. Many Jews refused to attend the funeral as they were party members and were not willing to take risks. Nevertheless, my husband brought two of them, leading them by the hand.

We found a man, who knew prayers and traditions. He was not a rabbi, but he carried out all the rites. All teachers from my chair and my husband's chair came to the funeral, but still Mother was buried in accordance with the Jewish rite. After the funeral ten people read a prayer at home, just the way it was supposed to, disregarding the times.

When perestroika [31](#) began in the Soviet Union during Gorbachev [32](#), I found it meaningful. I was happy! I never read papers before that. I just browsed through the ads. But after that I started reading papers and magazines. I was not sure if that feeling would last, but I enjoyed every minute of it.

I won't mention everything that perestroika brought us, but let me say this: I think liberty of word, which came along with it, was everything for us, especial since that right was not enforced during the Soviet regime. It was interesting for me. All of us read a lot and exchanged information.

### **After the fall of the Iron Curtain**

I was happy about the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. I was happy that Estonia became independent [33](#), that it no longer belonged to a wicked empire. My daughter was glad, too. I had prepared her for that, so she was prepared. Many people were shocked about the breakup of the USSR and didn't know how to take it. For us, it was a joy.

I often went to Estonia. Before leaving for Tomsk, I dropped a coin in the sea hoping to come back. There was such a tradition. I have always thought Estonia to be my motherland. I didn't think of coming back as I spent all my life outside the country.

When my husband and I retired in 1995, Russia was fraught with communists' revenge. When the first term of Yeltsin's presidency was winding up and his rating was down, there was a real danger that communists would come to power again. [Yeltsin, Boris Nikolayevich (1931-2007): first president of the Russian Federation, serving from 1991-1999.]

I understood that I didn't want them to gain power again. If prior to that I had pondered over whether we should leave for Estonia, hesitated, weighed all pros and cons, in this situation all my doubts vanished. There was no choice, we had to leave, while there was a chance to. My decision was final and my husband and I moved to Estonia right away. Fortunately, the communists didn't come to power in Russia. Nevertheless, I don't regret my decision. My daughter supported my

decision to leave for Estonia.

When we came to Estonia, I started studying the Estonian language right away. I certainly wasn't easy at my age. At first, when I had to go to some official institutions, my cousin Ruth, who lived in Tallinn, accompanied me. The matter was when the officials understood that I didn't speak Estonian and started speaking Russian with me, I was vexed by that. I told them that I didn't speak Russian and Ruth spoke Estonian for me.

I took all school textbooks in Estonian, From the 1st to the 10th grade and studied. Then I used phrase books. Later I got books and newspapers in Estonian. I started listening to the radio, watching TV in Estonian. I worked hard, and gradually one could see the results. Now I am fluent in Estonian.

I'm not going to work any longer, though I might act as an adviser and perform certain tasks. I'm not for active life any more. I am a retiree now.

Of course, the Estonian mentality differs from the Russian one. People are more reserved here. It is not customary here to talk to the neighbors, just because you are neighbors. It is probably good. I don't like to have importuned relations just for the sake of communication. I have friends. Even if they don't live close by, we still remain friends. I write to them once in a while. Sometimes they come to see me. We know things about each other and remember past events.

My cousins Irene and Ruth, the daughters of my mother's younger sister Masha, who is 104 years old now, live in Tallinn. Aunt Masha is a part of my family, a part of my bereft childhood. She is always happy to see me.

Sometimes I go to the Jewish community [34](#) on holidays. There are interesting events there. For example, recently there was a meeting with the president of Israel. It was very interesting. I often go to the synagogue.

We always mark Jewish holidays at home. I cook gefilte fish the way my mother did, boil chicken, bake strudels and challah. I light candles on Sabbath like my mom did.

I read the Old Testament in Tomsk. I read all of it. I read the Torah from cover to cover. I often reread it and find it engaging. I read the Torah in Russian, not in Ivrit, but the translation is very good. I do it with pleasure and always find something in there which is topical for our times.

My daughter also observes Jewish traditions. When she lived in Novosibirsk and the Jewish community was open there, my daughter Margarita and Rosa went there. Unfortunately, my daughter didn't stay in Estonia. There were difficulties in processing her citizenship. It took so long. Finally, she couldn't stand it anymore and immigrated to Germany with her family.

My daughter works in her basic professional education. Alexander also found a job. Rosa goes to school. My granddaughter is a good girl. Recently, in 2003, Margarita gave birth to another child, son Ronald. My daughter says that he was named after me, Ronny, Ronchik.

When Rosa turned 13 last year, I was in Germany. I went to see her bat mitzvah. I gave her a mezuzah. I was happy to see my granddaughter. She's a very nice girl. I love her very much. She goes to the Jewish community. Everybody loves her. Rosa sings in the choir of the community and I

have the records of their choir. She sings Jewish songs and reads in Ivrit.

They have a reformed community, where the rabbi is a woman. Frau Rabbiner came to like Rosa and she taught her how to read in Ivrit. She said that she was the first child who eagerly studied the letters; Rosa was very little at that time.

So, in our family we have a literate girl, who is smarter than her granny when it comes to the knowledge of Jewish traditions. She knows everything, the dates of the holidays, what prayers to read and how. In summer Rosa stayed in our place. Every Saturday she lit candles and read the prayer. Both of us do that, but Rosa is at the lead.

## **Glossary:**

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

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

### **2 Enemy of the people**

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

### **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 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

#### **5 Five percent quota**

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

#### **6 Estonian Independence**

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

#### **7 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

#### **8 Estonia in 1939-1940**

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

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

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet

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

## **10 NKVD**

(Russ.: Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del), People's Committee of Internal Affairs, the supreme security authority in the USSR - the secret police. Founded by Lenin in 1917, it nevertheless played an insignificant role until 1934, when it took over the GPU (the State Political Administration), the political police. The NKVD had its own police and military formations, and also possessed the powers to pass sentence on political matters, and as such in practice had total control over society. Under Stalin's rule the NKVD was the key instrument used to terrorize the civilian population. The NKVD ran a network of labor camps for millions of prisoners, the Gulag. The heads of the NKVD were as follows: Genrikh Yagoda (to 1936), Nikolai Yezhov (to 1938) and Lavrenti Beria. During the war against Germany the political police, the KGB, was spun off from the NKVD. After the war it also operated on USSR-occupied territories, including in Poland, where it assisted the nascent communist authorities in suppressing opposition. In 1946 the NKVD was renamed the Ministry of the Interior.

## **11 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevikize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **12 Kolkhoz**

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



### **13 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.

### **14 Trudodni**

A measure of work used in Soviet collective farms until 1966. Working one day it was possible to earn from 0.5 up to 4 trudodni. In fall when the harvest was gathered the collective farm administration calculated the cost of 1 trudoden in money or food equivalent (based upon the profit).

### **15 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.

### **16 Card system**

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

### **17 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.

## **18 Old Believers**

As their name suggests, all of them rejected the reformed service books, which Patriarch Nikon introduced in the 1650s and preserved pre-Nikonian liturgical practices in as complete a form as canonical regulations permitted. For some Old Believers, the defense of the old liturgy and traditional culture was a matter of primary importance; for all, the old ritual was at least a badge of identification and a unifying slogan. The Old Believers were united in their hostility toward the Russian state, which supported the Nikonian reforms and persecuted those who, under the banner of the old faith, opposed the new order in the church and the secular administration. To be sure, the intensity of their hostility and the language and gestures with which they expressed it varied as widely as their social background and their devotional practices. Nevertheless, when the government applied pressure to one section of the movement, all of its adherents instinctively drew together and extended to their beleaguered brethren whatever help they could.

## **19 Collectivization in the USSR**

In the late 1920s - early 1930s private farms were liquidated and collective farms established by force on a mass scale in the USSR. Many peasants were arrested during this process. As a result of the collectivization, the number of farmers and the amount of agricultural production was greatly reduced and famine struck in the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, the Volga and other regions in 1932-33.

## **20 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.

## **21 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.

## **22 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union.

The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

### **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 Riga ghetto**

Established on 23rd August 1941, located in the suburb of Riga populated by poor Jews. About 13,000 people resided here before the occupation, and about 30,000 inmates were kept in the ghetto. On 31st November and 8th December 1941 most inmates were killed in the Rumbula forest. On 31st October 15,000 inmates were shot, on 8th December 10 000 inmates were killed. Only younger men were kept alive to do hard work. After the bigger part of the ghetto population was exterminated, a smaller ghetto was established in December 1941. The majority of inmates of this 'smaller ghetto' were Jews, brought from the Reich and Western Europe. On 2nd November 1943 the ghetto was closed. The survivors were taken to nearby concentration camps. In 1944 the remaining Jews were taken to Germany, where few of them survived.

### **25 The Supreme Soviet**

'Verhovniy Soviet', comprised the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union and the only one with the power to pass constitutional amendments. It elected the Presidium, formed the Supreme Court, and appointed the Procurator General of the USSR. It was made up of two chambers, each with equal legislative powers, with members elected for five-year terms: the Soviet of the Union, elected on the basis of population with one deputy for every 300,000 people in the Soviet federation, the Soviet of Nationalities, supposed to represent the ethnic populations, with members elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each of the 15 republic of the union, 11 from each autonomous republic, five from each autonomous region, and one from each autonomous area.

### **26 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.

## **27 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.

## **28 Beriya, L**

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

## **29 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees**

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

## **30 KGB**

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

## **31 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.

## **32 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.

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

### **34 Jewish community of Estonia**

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