

# Meer Kuyavskis

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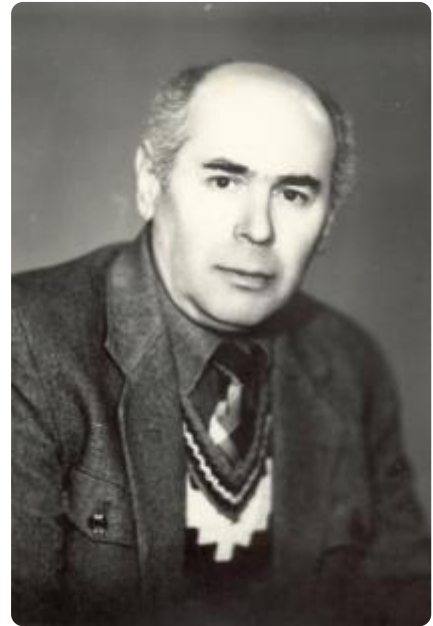
Kaunas

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

Date of interview: June 2005

*Meer Kuyavskis is living in a wonderful three-room apartment in Kaunas, in the district constructed in the 1970s. A pretty lady of the typical Lithuanian appearance – stepdaughter of Meer Aldon- opened the door. Meer keeps to bed after a severe operation. Meer is a good-looking man, who is trying not to pay attention to his physical condition. At any rate, he takes it with humor. His room is neat and tidy. If he had not been half way covered with a counterpane, it would be hard to tell that there is a sick person in the room. There Meer's wife portrait on the wall. She died more than 10 years ago. When Meer tells about his life, it looks like he is telling this story to his wife rather than me. He has been bonded with her for many years, having deep affection and vivid reminiscence.*



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## My family background

My name is Meer Kuyavskis. I was born in a large Polish city Lodz [about 130 km from Warsaw], nee Kuyavskiy. Lodz was then the second largest city in Poland, its industrial and commercial center. Before Second World War its Jewish community was considered to be the second largest in Europe after Warsaw community. It numbered 300 thousand Jews. There were a lot of synagogues in the city, as well as Jewish schools, cheders, Jewish hospitals. There was a fully-fledged Jewish life. As a rule, Jews dealt with commerce- from small-scale up to a large-scale. There were a lot of Jewish stores in our and adjacent blocks. Small grocery stores were in almost every house.

My father's parents lived close by, but I did not see them very often. I do not remember my grandparents treat me very tenderly, give me a hug or a kiss. It was not only with me- at that time it was common to bring up children very strictly and it was very hard to get grandmother's fondling. My father's parents were born in Lodz in the 1860s. My grandfather's name was Fishel

Kuyavskiy. I cannot recall my grandmother's name. She died in 1930, when I was a baby. I just remember that she looked like a lean, petite old lady. She always wore a wig, dark skirt and blouse. Grandpa Fishel also resembled most of elderly Jews- the denizens of our street- not tall, humpty old man with a hat. I remember that grandparents' had a one-room apartment with a small corridor where grandmother cooked food. I think that grandfather was a craftsman, not a rich one to boot, barely scraping through. When he grew old (at that time 60-year old was considered an old man), grandpa was afflicted with cataract. He was almost blind, and all he could do was pray day in, day out. He often held his prayer book upside down being mocked by his numerous grandchildren. When grandmother died and Fisher stopped working, he lived with his children by turns. He stayed either with his sons, or with his daughter. Grandpa was so religious as it was accepted in Jewish circles at that time- he observed kashrut, Sabbath, went to the synagogue almost every day, when his health permitted. Fisher died at the beginning of 1939 being lucky not to have known all that atrocity that Jews underwent in occupied Poland [1](#).

Grandfather had many children, but by the time when I started perceiving my surroundings, there were not many of them- some of them died. Others left for America and Canada looking for better life. I only remember father's brother and sister. Father's brother Shmuel Kuyavskiy, who was about two years older than he, owned a grocery store in Lodz. He was a well-heeled man and did not think much about us as we were his poor relatives. We were not trying to impose ourselves. Everybody had his own life. I saw his wife and daughters couple of times. I do not remember their names.

My family got in touch with father's sister Chava more than with Shmuel. Her husband died long before the outbreak of war and Chava lived close by with her daughter Edya. Chava died in ghetto [2](#) during occupation and Edya managed to survive it. When Great Patriotic War was over she happened to be in Canada, where she married an American Jew. She is still alive and healthy.

My father Shlema Kuyavskiy was born in Lodz in 1884. He went to cheder in his childhood as it was customary for the families of righteous Jews. He did not go on with his education. He learnt the rudiments of reading and writing, which was enough to run his business. Father made all calculations in pencil at the door jamb. Every Friday we witnessed one and the same scene. Mother wiped out father's notes from the door while cleaning the house before Sabbath and father indignantly would cry out, «Oh my God, what have you done. I will go bust», reproaching her that he would not know who owned him. Mother calmly replied that he could start his calculations next week. Father cooled down until next Friday. Then the story started all over again.

Father had a rather stable business. There was a workshop at home, where six women worked under father's supervision. Mother was in charge of them. They sewed quilts for sale. The quilts were given to the store, which paid us money when they were sold. It was a rather stable income, though it was not very big. It was the so-called family business, ran by parents. I do not know what my father did for a living before getting married. As I said our family had a strict morale, so I even did not think of asking father about his previous life.

My maternal grandparents, born in Lodz in the 1860s were rather well-heeled. Unfortunately, I cannot recall the name of my maternal grandfather. His last name was Rosenblum. It was my mother's maiden name. My grandfather was considered to be a fabricant, though there were only two workers there, including him. Nevertheless, it brought stable income. The factory was located

in special premises, where cotton-wool making machine was installed. It was operated in two shifts. I think that was the reason why parents started going in for quit sewing business. That was the reason for establishing the so-called family business. Grandmother Noma was a housewife. She never went to work. She took care of household and children. Grandparents rented a large apartment in Lodz Jewish district near the largest synagogue. There were two furnished rooms. The furniture was nice and solid, though it was not luxurious. There was a large stove in the center of the kitchen, where grandmother cooked. She tried her best to cook for Sabbath. On Saturday both of them went to the synagogue – grandfather, a tall handsome man with a long beard, in winter wore a large fur hat and in summer a hat or a kipah and grandmother wore a wig, laced cape and a dressy outfit. As a rule after the service in synagogue the kin used to get together in the drawing room in grandfather's house. There was cholnt and other Sabbath dishes on the table. I still remember their taste. After having meal grandfather used to sit in the arm-chair, surrounded by sons and sons-in-law. He took Torah, read it and explained every other word to children. He was a very literate man, and could truly interpret Torah. Apart from reading Torah, which usually took several hours, we had tea and pastries, which grandmother cooked exceptionally well. Being a boy, I did not stay in for a long time, willing to go out with my friends. Sabbath evenings in grandfather's place is embossed in my memory for ever. I often wished I could paint that wonderful idyllic picture. I also remember the following episode. Grandfather was a smoker and since smoking was forbidden on Sabbath it was a real ordeal for him. I remember once he was standing by the window looking out for a first star to appear in the sky to light his Saturday cigarette. Grandparents died in late 1930s. First grandpa died and then in less than a year grandmother did. Fortunately, she had not lived to see fascist occupation.

There were a lot of children in the family. All of them were given elementary education. Then boys became apprentices of the best furrier in the city. Fur business was lucrative and mother's brothers became famous furriers. I remember her youngest brother Nohim, who was born in 1900. He was married to Genya. They had a son, born in early 1930s. When the Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the city was occupied, some Jews were taken in other cities. Nohim happened to be in some small town, where he became the chairman of Judenrat [3](#) of the local ghetto. As per Nohim's request his family was taken to the same town. Judenrat members counted on that fascists would be lenient with them. When ghetto was liquidated, all Judenrat members were also executed, including uncle Nohim and his family. I remember mother's brothers-Hiller and Eizek. Both of them were furriers. They had families. Hiller and his family vanished during the first days of occupation. They most likely became one of the first victims of the occupants. Eizek and his wife also perished. Eizek's children- Yurek and Telya survived all ghetto atrocities and lived to see liberation. When the war was over, they went to Lodz. Neighbors opened the door and let them in. Then at night some armed people came to take them. Nobody knows who those people were, either punitive army, or the soldiers of Armia Krajowa [4](#). What happened to Yurek and Telya remains unknown.

Mother's elder sister Ruzha, born in Lodz 1882 was carpet mender. She married a merchant Moishe. She gave birth to two children- son Meer and daughter Freidl. In the 1930s Meer and Freidl were fond of Zionist [5](#) ideas of foundation of the Jewish state and left for Palestine. In 1936 Ruzha and Moishe followed their children and also went to Palestine. Ruzha died in the 1960s and Meer and Freidl are currently living in Israel.

My mother Ella Rozenblum was born in 1886 in Lodz. She finished elementary Jewish school and couple of classes of lyceum. Judging by the fact that my elder brother was born in 1914, my parents were married in 1913. I do not know how they met: whether it was arranged by shadchans or they met in the company of some Jewish people. Parents did not have their own house. They rented an apartment, where we were born and spent our childhood and adolescence. Mother was considered literate for those times. She could read and write in Yiddish and Polish. Moreover, she was multitalented. She was actually in charge of quilt making workshop. She was the one who created the patterns, she controlled the quality. She was a pretty good administrator. Father was responsible for purchase of necessary raw materials, equipment and for the sale of the end product as he had the contacts, who owned the stores, where the quilts, produced by our family, were sold.

## **Growing up**

Work did not interfere with her main purpose- she gave birth and raised four sons. The first-born Moishe was born in 1914 on the eve of the first world war, during which our family and close relatives stayed in Lodz as well as many other Jews, considering Germans to be quite positive. They thought that Germans had a good attitude to Jews, bought different goods and products from them. Of course some people were killed in action, but practically nothing changed for peaceful citizen, including Jewish population. Another evidence for that is that my brother Isaac was born in 1917, when the World War One was in the full swing. The twins were born on 16 January 1925. I was the older one. My brother Benjamin came into world 15 minutes later.

Jews made almost the third of the population of the prewar Lodz. The total number reached 300 thousand people. They were almost in all districts of the city, but the better half of them was concentrated in one district. Our apartment was in the heart of Jewish district, on the street call Zhydovskaya. At that time the word 'kike' was not an insult in Poland it was just the name for a Jew. There were a lot of stores, chandleries and workshops in this street. Most of the Jews here were craftsmen and salesmen. There were stores in almost every house. Poles from other districts preferred to buy groceries in Jewish stores - kosher or not.

Our apartment was on the ground floor of the four-storied house. It consisted of two rooms. There was a workshop in the first room. Eight women worked here from morning till night. They sewed, quilted and embroidered the covers. Each worker brought some food with them. Mother gave them tea or coffee. There were two large beds in the second room, which was considered to be parents' bedroom. Very often there was a lack of working space and seamstresses worked in bedroom. There other beds in room- sofa, camp bed, arm-chairs. We, children, did not have a place for recreation. We had been loafing until evening waiting for the seamstresses to leave and at times we fell asleep either at the sofa or at the cot. When I was a little boy, I often fell asleep before others, and parents tucked me in bed while I was sleeping. Even now I am still wondering how mother managed to cope with everything- to run the workshop, sew, cook, feed a large family, make clothes for us and do laundry. She cooked food on large stove in the first room behind partition. The whole family usually had meals at a specific time. Mother cooked porridge, curds pancakes or casseroles for breakfast. Lunch was substantial, consisting of three courses- soup, broth or borsch, meat course, compot or kissel. Mother demanded that the elder brothers, who were adolescence with their plans, showed up for lunch on time. Everybody dined separately. Usually I had dinner with parents and younger brother Benjamin. Moishe and Isaac came home rather late. They just had milk or tea with rolls and went to bed.

My mother was raised in a religious family and strictly observed Jewish traditions. She always wore wig and only in postwar times she took it off keeping abreast with the times. We only had kosher food. Meat and poultry was bought only in kosher meat stores. Live poultry, purchased on the market, was taken in synagogue to shochet by some of the elders. When I grew up a little bit, it became my responsibility. I always observed how shochet made a precise cut on fowl's throat, put it on the hook over the funnel, where blood was trickling down. By the way, the meat purchased in kosher store was twice or thrice more expensive than non-kosher meat. I remember such a case from my childhood. Mother was sick and was put in the hospital. Father asked one of the ladies who worked with us to buy meat for us and gave her money for that. When she brought the meat, father was surprised that there was so much of it. It turned out that the lady bought us non-kosher meat as she did not stick to the traditions despite being a Jew. Father decided to conceal that blatant fact from mother, but some of the workers told her about it later on. Mother said to my father: «Well. Shleime have you saved a lot of money? - Now buy me new dishes». She threw away all the dishes, including spoons and father had to buy new one.

We were looking forward to Friday. On that day mother worked only half a day. Then parents cleaned the apartment and made the house ready for Sabbath. We also helped mother, otherwise she would not manage to clean everything for Sabbath. We bought Sabbath challachs in special bakery as mother did not have time to bake them. As for the rest of the dishes- chicken, all kinds of tsimes from beans, carrots and potatoes as well as the main Sabbath dish-gefilte fish- were cooked by mother. On Thursday we went to the bathhouse. On Friday we put clean clothes on. When father came back from the synagogue, mother lit the candles and we sat at the table. On Saturdays parents went to the synagogue and took us with them. It was very tedious for me and I could not wait to go outside to play with children, who were waiting for their parents to come back from the synagogue. On Saturday we ate cholt, which had been placed in the stove since Friday. Very often after Sabbath meal we went to maternal grandmother, where his relatives got together to have tea and to listen to Torah in grandfather's interpretation.

In general, we were typical Jews. We were neither rich nor poor. Now our living conditions might seem rather constraint, but in our environment they were considered normal. We were not perturbed by the fact that there were no rooms for all members of the family and we had to sleep together. On the contrary it was fun. On holidays we went to eat ice-cream in the park sometimes or hired a cabman to visit our relatives. In 1930s there were taxis in Lodz, but it was extremely expensive. There was also radio, which was a luxury for people. Every summer we went to dacha. Father rented two poky rooms at the farmstead not far from Lodz.

Brother and I liked Jewish holidays very much. First of all, the workshop was closed and our apartment was to ourselves. I loved Pesach most of all. First of all, long before the holiday, it could foretaste it, being in festive spirits. The apartment was thoroughly cleaned- windows were washed, curtains, tulle, tablecloths were laundered. We had a very beautiful table dishes and silverware. Pots and pans were koshered - the fire was made right in the middle of the yard, where all those utensils were placed in a huge pig iron pot. Father bought a bottle of kosher wine for the holiday. Probably it was our annual doze of alcohol as on other occasions we did not drink. Matzah was brought from the synagogue in a big hamper covered with white cloth. During the first evening of the holiday father carried out Pascal seder, reclining on the pillows. Afikoman was hidden under it. We pretended that we could hardly find it. Father made it so that Benjamin found it as he was

younger than me and in general he everybody's favorite. Benjamin also asked four traditional questions regarding the holiday. At the end of sedder father left a glass of wine for prophet Iliah. Mother flung the door open and father prayed for the prophet to come. He tried to rock the table stealthily. The wine spit and father gladly said: «Well, Ilia came in our house!». Then he turned to mother and said: «You can close the door now!». We started feeling perturbed saying that we had not seen the prophet, but father used to say that we should have looked better. At night we all went to bed, and elder brothers tied to outsmart each other to drink the wine meant for Iliah. The fete did not end with the first sedder. It lasted for the whole week. All that time we used to stroll in the yard, only coming home to eat. Mother fried matzah, made pancakes from it, baked all kinds of pastries. It was a real treat for us. As a rule, we went to the grandfather for the second sedder. During the week we also came to see mother's brothers. At times they visited us.

I also enjoyed Jewish New Year- Rosh Hashanah. It was the time of early spring, when people did the harvesting and basked in the fruits of their labor. The tables were full of fruits and pastries. During this holiday, the table is decorated with herbs, making it look very beautiful. For that holiday mother cooked the tastiest gefilte fish from a huge pike and gave father the head of the fish as a symbol of the head of the family. In a week after Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur came. Parents were fasting. The children were given less food than on other days. In the evening, when parents came back home from the synagogue, mother gave everybody a week broth with semolina, which was good for the stomach. Then they started eating other food. On Sukkot we did not make our own sukkah as we rented our premises. The landlord made it for everybody in the yard. Father gave him some money for that and we used it. There was an interest holiday Simchat Torah after Sukkot. I liked the tradition, which was characteristic for our location. On that day the water was taken from the wells, sanctified and people danced around it. Of course, there was a festive procession of Jews carrying torah, accompanied by songs and dances. All that pleased us.

On Channukah we lit channukia.; one candle was added every day. Those candlesticks were placed on the window sill and the entire Zhydovskaya street was radiant with Channukah lights. Mother baked potato fritters and father gave us channukakh gelt according to the tradition. Purim was also marked in our family – mother baked hamantashen, make festive dinner. As a rule we took shelakmones to our friends, cousins or some other relatives.

My education started at cheder which was typical for the boys of that time. I went to melamed, who also taught my elder brothers. At times there were up to 30 people in the class, but sometimes there were only four. We were taught how to pray in Yiddish, but I was not eager to study as I wanted to play with children outside. I went to cheder for half a year, but my elder brothers insisted that Benjamin and I should go to the school where subjects were taught in Polish. There were all kinds of Jewish educational institutions in Lodz. There was Yiddish elementary school not far from us, but my brothers fairly thought that I should study for having a chance to continue education in state language. Many guys who went to Yiddish school spoke broken Polish and they could not think of continuing education their education in the institute. My elder brother Moishe and Isaac finished Jewish school, where subjects were taught in Polish and thanks to them my brother and I also went to that school. Moishe and Isaac did not go on with their education as both of them became excellent furriers, they made fur coats and hats and earned pretty good money. They wanted their junior brothers to get higher education. They were willing to help us in that.

There were only Jewish children in our school, the teachers were also Jews with the exception of some Polish teacher and some other. It was prohibited to speak Yiddish in our school. We were told to go to Yiddish school if we did not want to speak Polish. Of course, we spoke Yiddish with each other as it was easier for us. Other than that, it was an ordinary compulsory school with the additional classes in Jewish religion, history and traditions. I was among Jews, and my friends were only Jews. We even had frays with the students from Polish schools, though there was nothing serious, just ordinary conflicts, taking place between the students of different schools and lyceums. Those conflicts had nothing to do with the nationality. I was a mediocre student, I liked sciences, though I never got higher mark than 'good'. My brother Benjamin since childhood happened to be gifted, especially in liberal arts - literature and history.

Jewish youth of the 1930s in Lodz was extremely political-minded. There were all kinds of Zionist organizations- Maccabi [6](#), Betar [7](#), Hashomer Hatzair [8](#). There were some Jewish people who were attracted by communistic ideas. They were underground communist and komsomol [9](#) members. There were none of them in our school. My elder brothers Moishe and Isaac became members of underground organizations. Brothers disseminated communistic fliers, literatures, attended underground meetings. Of course, our parents did not know anything about it, but my brother Benjamin suspected that and sympathized with them. Father was in shock when in 1936 there was a search at home because of my elder brother. I was on my way from school, when our neighboring kid cried out that there was police in our place. Moishe was detained in couple of hours. There was a real mess at home. They found underground literature during the search. Parents took son's arrest real hard. Moishe was imprisoned for two years. Luckily, Isaac was not arrested. It was a little bit comforting for parents. He assured parents, that he stopped all underground activities and he kept his word. Moishe also forgot about his interests upon his return from prison ( he was pardoned in 10 months for exceptionally good behavior). Elder brothers worked really hard and even managed to save a certain amount of money to open their own store.

In late 1930s anti-semitism [10](#) was streamlined in Poland. All of us knew about Hitler, about things happening in Germany and understood that there would be nothing good for the Jews, if Germans occupied Poland. Nationalistic Polish organizations appeared in Lodz. There was even a period of time when it was banned to sell kosher meat. Jews boycotted Polish butcheries and that ban was lifted. There appeared the following slogans in newspapers: «Do not buy from kikes!», but it did not affect our family. In June 1939 brother and I finished seven grades of our school and got school certificates. We had to think of our future. Our idea was to work for a year and save some money for the education. But our future was the war....

### **During the war**

On 1 September 1939 fascist German unleashed Second World War by attacking Poland. The first two days Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty [11](#) was effective, allowing people to abandon Poland via Soviet Union borders. Large groups of fugitives got together on the boarder. Elder brothers went there. They tried to convince parents that all of us should leave together. My parents were rather elderly and it was hard for them to go in nowhere, leaving the apartment and things that they have got by blood and sweat. They also could not let my brother and I go either as they did not know what might have happened with us. It happened so that on the first day of war we parted with Moishe and Isaac as we stayed in Lodz.

The first days of war were rather calm. The denizens got outside and looked at German planes in the sky. Fortunately, Lodz was not bombed as a lot of Germans were living there. In about a week German fascist occupied the city. Every there were some orders by the commanders, resulting in execution if they someone failed to fulfill them. There was a curfew. There were more restrictions for Jewish population than for the rest, the Jews were allowed to go outside from 7am to 5pm. Their actions against Jews, but they were not systematic. It was impossible to predict behavior of fascist barbarians. The Jews were allowed to walk only on the roadway as they were forbidden to step on the sidewalk. We were not permitted to go to all the stores. There were special ones for Jews. Most of the Jewish stores were closed. Plunder impoverished even well-off merchants. The worst thing is that people started disappearing. The whole families vanished. Mostly it referred to rich families. Something like that happened with the family of my uncle Shmuel Kuyakovskiy. In early October my father went to see him and found a huge lock on his door. His store was closed at the beginning of occupation. I remember that father came back in low spirits as he saw neither Shmuel nor his family. We still do not know what happened to them. Either they became victims of fascists or of those people who wanted to have their property. There is another option though. During the first days of occupation Poles took Jews to the forest, hid them there helping them to survive, and it cost a lot of money. I think that Shmuel and his family must have perished as their names have not been mentioned any more. They vanished into a thin air.

As per order of the commandant each inhabitant of the city was supposed to welcome the officer by making a bow and taking the hat off. If the order was violated, the person was punished. There were cases when Jews bowed and took his hat off and said «Guten Morgen», he was beaten by the fascist as the Jew dared to greet Aryan. People merely were afraid to go outside as Jews were often caught and arrested. My parents stayed in nearly all the time. Only brother and I walked in the streets until fascists got irritated with us. During the first day there was an imperative to wear a strap with yellow star, soon we had to have yellow stars in front.

In a while German officers came in our apartment. It turned out that there was a German hospital in Lodz, which needed quilts and they ordered a large batch of quilts from my father. They brought him all raw materials needed- cotton wool, cloth, threads. Father hired several ladies, who used to work for him before the war and the workshop was reopened. There was a lot of work. They took the readymade quilts in the truck. As far as I know, father received no money for his work. He was happy to stay alive. Father received several orders from commanders during occupation.

In early 1940 ghetto was founded in Lodz. Our Zhidovska street was inside the ghetto. There were Jews from cities there as well. One young lady housed in with us. Her parents disappeared during the one of the first actions of the occupation. I cannot recall her name. First everybody thought that everything would be OK. Judenrat was established in ghetto consisting of prominent Jews, which was supposed to take care of people there. Its function was not only provision with primary good food given by cards, but also providing them with work. My brother and I had odd jobs at the sewing factory. Ghetto was surrounded with barbed wire. There were armed guards at the gate. Very soon we understood that the life there could hardly be called living, it was a bitter existence. None of its inhabitants knew what the next day had in store for him. One of the main functions of Judenrat was to fulfill the orders of the commanders, including supplying people for all kinds of actions. As a rule, Germans wanted to get rid of the ballast – old people, children, disabled and feelings, i.e. those who were incapacitated to work and bring the benefits to Reich. The most

dreadful action was the execution of children, when mothers were preliminary warned that they were supposed to bring their children. There were women on ghetto streets leading their kids to death. The children were dressed up – in lacy dresses, having nice bands. Ladies gave their children to policemen, who shoved them in the car making ladies go nuts instantly. I remember one lady singing a wedding song and dancing after she had given her daughter to the policemen. I do not know what happened to those demented ladies. They were most likely killed the same day. There were several children actions during existence of the ghetto. Sick people were also killed. There was a hospital in ghetto, but nobody left it. Trucks stopped by its gate, the sick people got in that and taken in unknown direction. That is why people in ghetto tried not to get sick. If they did, they were concealing it. There were frequent deaths in ghetto. I do not remember a single day, when there were no defunct taken out of the houses. People were buried in Jewish cemetery, which was located on the territory of the ghetto. There was also the largest synagogue on its territory. I do not remember my parents go anywhere during the occupation. They tried not to attract attention and prayed at home. People were struck by the variety of actions against Jews. It seemed to them it was not interesting for them to merely kill the Jews and they thought of certain performances. Once, there was an announcement that ghetto would be closed down for couple of days for disinfection. People got out of ghetto, but my parents decided that we all should stay in. All those who left ghetto, never came back. They were taken somewhere in the trucks waiting by the gates.

We are what we could get. We got some kind of gruels by food cards. At times we got semi-rotten vegetables. We were given tainted horse-flesh for couple of times. My mother was very ingenious and could concoct some dishes for us. These were horrible years, nevertheless it was my adolescent and part of my life. There were good days as well. I had friends, with whom I had a good time. I worked at the factory and gradually I became a tailor, which became useful in my life later on. In spring 1942 I and some more young people were called in Judenrat. We were suggested to make a charity dinner, and the money raised there would go for canteen for ghetto inhabitants. Strange as it may be but we managed to succeed in that- verses were recited, Jewish and Polish songs were sung and of course dancing. Those ghetto inhabitants who still had money attended that evening. There were cabmen, ladies of the most ancient profession etc. All collected money went to the fund of the future canteen and some people even gave their ration there. I have one very precious thing- the picture made during that evening. My brother and I including ghetto as well as other young people who took care of the organization of that event, were in that picture. One lady Franya managed to keep that photo, but cut the place, where she was in the picture. She was afraid if someone found the picture, she could be shot, but she managed to take the picture out of ghetto and save. I got it in many years after war when I was in Israel in the 1990s. At that time I met the son of one of my comrades from ghetto. He kept it like an apple of his eye and then gave that photo to me.

They took my father during one of the actions of 1944. We did not know what happened with him and considered him to be dead. In August 1944 we felt that fascists were having problems in the war, judging by their behavior. In actuality, soviet army [12](#) was at Visla in front of Warsaw. Evacuation of ghetto began. Every day there were announcement regarding evacuation of certain streets. Brother and I thought hard how to make it so that we would not leave with the others, but stay in the city. We knew that the Soviet army was on its way, but there was no chance to wait for liberation in our native city. Upon evacuation mop-up operation was planned in ghetto and the rest

of the people were to be executed

In early August 1944 we were put in the carriages and taken to the west. We did not know exactly where we were heading. The only thing we knew that ghetto was evacuated to work in Germany. Germans assured us that we were going to work in Germany and our plants and factories would be evacuated along with us. It was really warm and stuffy in the cars. There was no water, we had to relieve ourselves straight in the corner of the cars. The Germans who were escorting us gave bread to those who was hungry. We took the bread but could not eat it in such a heat. We could not wait to see the end of this trip. Mother had been constantly praying, asking God for us. In several days the car stopped, the door opened and they ousted us from the car. There were policemen in two lines outside. All of them were armed with clubs. They had us walk towards the columns of the policemen beating us black and blue. Some people fell failing to reach the columns of the policemen. In couple of minutes we had such an ardent pain, that we stopped thinking of our future. I supposed we even were not looking like human beings. Those who passed through the column of policemen were lined up in two columns- men and women separately and started sorting. Young and relatively healthy people were put in one column and elderly, sick and 'unwanted' people were lined up in another column. The only thing mother managed to cry out was: «Children, stay together. I am so lean!» My poor mother got right away that they were to face death. Those were the last words of my mother. Only 300 people (including me and my brother) out of 5 thousand of those who arrived in Auschwitz, were taken to the camp. We saw mother and other people getting on special trucks. They were burnt in crematorium the same day.

We had to go through sanitation. We took the shower. They shaved us bold. Our clothes were taken away and we were given striped prisons' clothing. Then we were taken to the barrack, where there were no bunks. We had to lie down on the floor, very close to each other. Every morning we had to get up very quickly, find the boots as they were in one pile. Then run out from the barracks being beaten and shouted at the policemen who were waiting by the barrack with the clubs. There was a roll call in the yard, after which we were given a piece of bread. It was good lump of bread. We were given such in ghetto. Then we had lunch- a thick soup in metal can. We had neither spoons nor forks. If we were lucky, we could find some chip to eat with. If we could not find it, we lapped it up right from the can, like dogs. The policemen teased us turning the can upside down and observing us eating the soup from the ground. In the evening we were given weak tea. That was the last meal of the day and we fell asleep without knowing what was there for us tomorrow. During the day were taken outside and sorted - those who did something wrong (walked and stood improperly) were taken aside and placed in gas chamber. Gas chambers could not idle. Usually people arriving from the East went there. At that time railroad was heavily bombed by soviet army and the carriages were not coming on time, so they had to put camp prisoners in the chambers. We were willing to survive even more than at the beginning of war as we understood that the victory of the soviet army was coming. At times we had to be at the drill square for three/ four hours. We learnt how to march even better than soldiers. We had stayed in Auschwitz for two weeks, which seemed like months to us.

In two weeks, we were placed in goods cars and taken to the Western Germany, where there was not only a lack of soldiers, but workers. Before departure, we were given bands with numbers and were told to sew them on the collars of the clothes. We came to Landsberg, which was 50 km from Munich. There was one of Dachau camps [13](#), where the prisoners worked on construction of the

underground aerodrome. Those were the most dreadful days during the war. It was a real drudgery – 15 hours of work per day breaking slabs in the mine. We slept underground on earth. We were barely given any food to be able to hold sledge hammer. We were involved in this construction for couple of weeks and then we headed towards the west, to another Dachau camp. We had been moving from one Dachau camp to another for several month and very many people died meanwhile. I do not know what helped my brother and I, probably because we followed mother's last words- to flock together. The trains transporting the prisoners were bombed by American planes for couple of times. I was struck by that. They saw the striped clothes and knew that they bombed the prisoners.

### **After the war**

In April 1945 we happened to be in Landsberg. Here Benjamin was affected with typhus. He and other sick people were separated from the others. They merely were left to die. Fascists were escaping to the West, and they even did not have time to shoot the sick people. I was afraid to part with my brother and went to the place where people suffering from typhus were. Benjamin told me to leave, just asked me for water. When I came to fetch water, my brother was not there. I thought he had been shot as I noticed the policeman who did the mopping-up. Then I darted from the barrack to the heap of the cadavers and it saved me as I was taken for dead. I fainted and when I came around I was in the camp among Americans, who liberated us. It was on 27 April 1945. By that time I was absolutely despondent. I became numb- having neither fear, nor joy when I saw the Americans. I even did not come up to them as I was indifferent. I was in dumps for having lost my brother. We were housed in the former barracks for soldiers. We were fed very well. I was surprised by the fact that Americans did not only feed former captives, but also Germans. For them all people were equal. They thought that German women and children were to blame; thus they should not be refused in the primary goods. Though, some of the former captives, a Jew, were perturbed with that. So they just opened up another buttery hatch for Jews and Germans not to bump into each other. Then we were housed in German barracks in the city. Here we lived like lords. German captives were there to serve us. We had great meals, were given cigarettes, chewing gum, cigars. Americans talked us into going to the West, America, Canada. Many people decided to leave. I just dreamed of finding elder brother hoping that they survived the war in Soviet Union. When I was in the camp, I met some Jews from Lithuania, who lived in Kaunas before war and I decided to go with them. In autumn 1945 we took the train to Lithuania. It was strange that they even did not watch who was getting on the train. Though, we had to stay in the barracks for a while. We were called for interrogation for several times.

In postwar Kaunas all Jews who had survived the war, came to the synagogue. We were temporarily allowed to live there. I had nothing- no money, food. All I had is just a change of clothes that we were given in Germany. I was astounded by friendly attitude of Kaunas Jews. They helped us the best way they could, they had a pretty hard living after war. People brought food, clothes to the synagogue. They tried to help us find work. My pals from the camp with whom I came to Kaunas, found their relatives and moved in their place. I tried looking for a job. I was assisted by one Jewish doctor, who was working in Kaunas hospital. He recommended me to work in the hospital as a tailor. So my apprenticeship in ghetto was very handy for me now. I had a lot of work in the hospital- I had to sew bed linen, clothes, robe, furniture covers. There were some patients who were about to recover and they helped me with my work. I lived in a small room in the hospital.

There was a bed, sewing machine, table and a chair. It seemed a luxury to me at that time. I had meals in the hospital as well. Besides, I was paid money for my job.

I started looking for my brothers right after my arrival in Kaunas. I sent letters in many places- Red Cross, central search bureau, but they had no information on Kuyavskiy. If brothers looked for me, we might have met, but they decided that Benjamin and I died and they made no attempts in finding us. I understood that I was left alone in this world. At that time I found out from one of my pals, with who I was in Germany, that my father perished in early 1944. He was taken out of ghetto with a group of Jews. They were taken from one camp to another, but nobody wanted to take the group of elderly people and all of them were executed.

I had worked in the hospital for a year, then started working in the atelier as a tailor. I was pretty good money there. My skills got better and better and soon I became a good cutter of men's and ladies' garment. I had my own clients and had a rather comfortable living. I rented an apartment from one Jewish lady. It was not far from my work. In couple of years I went to work to the factory, where I was promoted to the foreman. I was offered to join komsomol, though I was indifferent to social work and communistic ideas, but I had to do it. I was an active komsomol member, I just paid membership fee and attended the meetings regularly. At times, I went to the cinema, dancing, to the recreation center for the machinist. At the dancing party I met Stephania Vakayte, a young Lithuanian lady. I liked her instantly. Stephania was born in Kaunas in 1926. She was in occupation during the war and she knew about all horrors Jews had to go through. Stepha and I started dated and fell in love with each other. Stepha had a small daughter Aldona, born in 1946. I took her as my own child. I never asked Stepha who the father of her daughter was. I did not care what her past was. In 1949 I proposed to Stepha. It did not matter to me that Stepha was a Jew. She was my soul mate. Stepha's parents were not very happy about our marriage, but on the other hand they understood that it would not be easy for her to raise her daughter by herself. In 1949 Stepha and I had our marriage registered. Her daughter and she moved in my place.

In 1950 our son was born. We named him Shlema after my father. I made pretty good money like other cutters. I could make my cuts. I do not want to share what I did. All I can say that it was impossible to live on salary only, so like other people working at the factory I saved a little bit on the fabric and then sold it externally. When our political offer suggested joining the party, I told him that I did not consider myself to be squeaky clean the way the communist should be. In 1953 Stalin died. All people around me cried, but I was indifferent.

In 1956 I received my first letter from brothers. My brothers Isaac and Moishe shortly after crossing Polish border, were taken to Siberia. Formally they were charged with evasion from army service. Brothers did not tell what was happening indeed. When Great Patriotic War was over, both of them returned to Poland in 1945. Then Isaac left for Israel and Moishe for Canada. Brothers had already had families by the time we started keeping in touch. Moishe married a Polish Jew Sonya. They had a daughter Chava. Isaac's wife was Bronya. He had two children, whose names I cannot recall. From their letter I found out that my twin brother Benjamin was alive. When we parted, while was unconscious, he was taken out from the camp. Benjamin decided that I died and left for Canada upon liberation. There Benjamin settled down well. He started fur business and even opened up his own store. Soon he married a Jew Enna. They had children and were very prosperous. Benjamin's elder daughter was named after mother Ella. I cannot recall the name of the younger daughter. I was so happy to have my family back, to find out that they were alive. I could see them in a while-

in 1988 when the iron curtain [14](#) was removed and perestroika commenced [15](#).

My life was good. In 1956 my second son was born. Stepha asked to give him Lithuanian name Alyukas as it was her father's name. In 1960 my third son Evgeniy was born. Our family was very friendly. Elder daughter Aldona had also treated me like father and I loved her as my own daughter. I work hard at the factory and also took private orders at home. I provided a good living for my family. Stepha and I never parted with the exception of the three months in 1957, when I had to go through additional training in the army. In early 1950s the factory granted us a small one-room apartment and in late 1960s I had the apartment built in cooperative building and paid my own money for it. I had a car. My family and I went to Palanga, Druskeninkai. We did not go anywhere but Baltic countries. In early 1970s I submitted my documents to immigration for Israel. We did not get the permit, because the elder brother served at the border with China. I was not willing to leave without son, though I regret it now, as later on sons left without me.

My children grew up in the true international family. Of course, we did not mark Jewish holidays, but we always had matzah at home for Pesach. We also respected Lithuanian traditions. My children went to Lithuanian school and considered Lithuanian to be their mother tongue. When the elder turned 16, he chose Jewish nationality for his passport. I had a serious talk with him and said that living with that nationality would not be easy. My son replied if he Shlema Meerovich was put as Lithuanian in his passport, it would make people laugh. Younger sons followed the example of their brother. All of them chose Jewish nationality for their passports.

Upon return from the army Shlema married a Lithuanian right away. They broke up. Shlema did not have a profession. He just had some odd job, and it was not enough for his wife. Having divorced, Shlema married another Lithuanian Edite and left for Israel with her. They are currently living in Haifa. He is working at the institute Technion as a janitor. This non-prestigious job makes his life materially comfortable. My grandchildren, born in marriage with Shlema's first wife, stayed in Kaunas -30- year old Renata, who has her own children, and 26-year old Thomas. Renata has lived in England with her family over the past several years as her husband is working there. I do not know anything about Tomas. He took his parents divorce hard. He is not keeping in touch with me.

My second son Alyukas, also became a tailor. He was also married to a Lithuanian, whom he divorced. His son from the first marriage named after my twin brother Benjamin, is living in Kaunas. Alyukas left for Israel. He met his wife Ira there and got married for the second time. They are currently living in Jerusalem.

Younger son Evgeniy is living Kaunas. He is an electrician. His wife, a Lithuanian Layma, is a nurse. They have a son Bandas, who is studying at the university, and a 7-year old daughter.

We had always stayed with the family of the elder stepdaughter Aldona. In 1993 my Stepha died. I retired in 1993 as my Stepha became bed-ridden. I had to quit work when she became disabled. I had to look after her. She passed away that year. I have lived with my daughter since then. Unfortunately, Aldona's husband died of infarction. His daughter Yustina, has her own children.. They are living in Kaunas, but we see each other very rarely as everybody has his own life.

My wife's death and my loneliness happened to take place in the period of state changes- Lithuanian independence. Finally, I got the chance to visit my brothers. I visited my elder brother Isaac in Israel. We have not seen each other for fifty years. In 1998 Isaac died and it was the last

time I saw him. His daughter Chava is living in Israel and keeps in touch with my sons. I also went to my native city Lodz, walked along the streets, where ghetto was located. At first, I could not even recognize that place. My house was not preserved. There was a modern building in its place. Big stone synagogue is not longer there either. As it turned out, fascists put all remaining Jews from ghetto and burnt it. People burnt down quickly, and the stone building of the synagogue was destroyed by artillery. It was hard to walk along the streets from childhood, where the blood of my kin was shed. It was the last time I was in Lodz. I did not go to Auschwitz for the same reason, though the society of ghetto prisoners invited me there on a number of occasions.

My biggest joy was when I met Benjamin. My son and I visited him in Montreal in 1995. Life parted us, but there are times when the twins can feel each other at the distance. Brother and I thought that we had never been severed, though our lives differed a lot. Benjamin became rather rich. He was in fur business. In the 1960s he had his own fur production and a network of fur stores. Now Benjamin lives on the interest from the capital that he earned. He can do what he wants. He gives free lectures on holocaust in the university. He opened up the exhibition of photographs on catastrophe. He cannot go to his motherland, Lodz, Auschwitz as neither I nor him can imagine walking on the streets that imbibed Jewish blood.

Now I am unwell. I became disabled after operation. I am bed-ridden. I live pretty comfortably- get 400 Euros (German pension to the camp prisoners). There was time when I got the compensation from Switzerland for being Dachau prisoner. All of that helps me to get by as well as my daughter Aldona. There is enough money for food, medical care. No money can make up for all those people I lost during war- my perished parents, brothers, with whom I had been severed for many years, and still being unable to be with them. I will not survive a trip to Canada, and they refuse to come to Lithuania. Moishe has a strong antipathy to USSR and I cannot convince him that we are living in a different country now, which is free. Benjamin is not willing to go to Lithuania either. Brothers are helping me. They call me. I am still hoping that I will see them again.

## **GLOSSARY:**

### **1 Invasion of Poland**

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

### **2 Lodz Ghetto**

It was set up in February 1940 city in the former Jewish quarter on the northern outskirts of the city. 164,000 Jews from Lodz were packed together in a 4 sq. km. area. In 1941 and 1942, 38,500 more Jews were deported to the ghetto. In November 1941, 5,000 Roma were also deported to the ghetto from Burgenland province, Austria. The Jewish self-government, led by Mordechai Rumkowski, sought to make the ghetto as productive as possible and to put as many inmates to work as he could. But not even this could prevent overcrowding and hunger or improve the inhuman living conditions. As a result of epidemics, shortages of fuel and food and insufficient sanitary conditions, about 43,500 people (21% of all the residents of the ghetto) died of undernourishment, cold and illness. The others were transported to death camps; only a very small number of them survived.

### **3 Judenrat**

Jewish councils appointed by German occupying authorities to carry out Nazi orders in the Jewish communities of occupied Europe. After the establishment of the ghettos they were responsible for everything that happened within them. They controlled all institutions operating in the ghettos, the police, the employment agency, food supplies, housing, health, social work, education, religion, etc. Germans also made them responsible for selecting people for the work camps, and, in the end, choosing those to be sent to camps that were in reality death camps. It is hard to judge their actions due to the abnormal circumstances. Some believe they betrayed Jews by obeying orders, and others think they were trying to gain time and save as many people as possible.

### **4 Home Army (Armia Krajowa - AK)**

conspiratorial military organization, part of the Polish armed forces operating within Polish territory (within pre-1 September 1939 borders) during World War II. Created on 14 February 1942, subordinate to the Supreme Commander and the Polish Government in Exile. Its mission was to regain Poland's sovereignty through armed combat and inciting to a national uprising. In 1943 the AK had over 300,000 members. AK units organized diversion, sabotage, revenge and partisan campaigns. Its military intelligence was highly successful. On 19th January 1945 the AK was disbanded on the order of its commander, but some of its members continued their independence activities throughout 1945-47. In 1944-45 tens of thousands of AK soldiers were exiled and interned in the USSR, in places such as Ryazan, Borovichi and Ostashkov. Soldiers of the AK continued to suffer repression in Poland until 1956; many were sentenced to death or long-term imprisonment on trumped-up charges.

### **5 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **6 Maccabi World Union**

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

## **7 Betar**

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

## **8 Hashomer Hatzair**

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

## **9 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **10 Anti-Semitism in Poland in the 1930s**

From 1935-39 the activities of Polish anti-Semitic propaganda intensified. The Sejm introduced barriers to ritual slaughter, restrictions of Jews' access to education and certain professions. Nationalistic factions postulated the removal of Jews from political, social and cultural life, and agitated for economic boycotts to persuade all the country's Jews to emigrate. Nationalist activists took up posts outside Jewish shops and stalls, attempting to prevent Poles from patronizing them.

Such campaigns were often combined with damage and looting of shops and beatings, sometimes with fatal consequences. From June 1935 until 1937 there were over a dozen pogroms, the most publicized of which was the pogrom in Przytyk in 1936. The Catholic Church also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism.

## **11 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.

## **12 Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- 2 years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- 3 years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On the 22nd June 1941 Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was 3 years and in navy- 4 years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to 2 years in ground troops and in the navy to 3 years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

### **13 Dachau**

was the first German concentration camp. It was constructed in 17 kilometers from Munich and was officially open on the 22nd of March 1933. Dachau became the first 'testing area; where the system of punishment and other forms of physical and psychological tortures were worked on prisoners. During World War Two Dachau was notorious for being as one of the most horrifying concentration camps, where medical tests were made on the prisoners. About 1100 people went through the tests. Preliminary 'anti-social elements' were imprisoned in Dachau. It was a preventive imprisonment of the opponents of national socialistic regime. Dachau was considered a political camp before opening, though after Krystallnacht about 10 thousands Jews were sent there. After 1939 Jews were sent from Dachau to execution camps. Hundreds thousand of people were starved to death or murdered. Dachau prisoners worked as free work power at the adjacent industrial enterprises. On the 29th of April 1945 concentration camp Dachau was liquidated by the units of the 7th American Army. The camp had 123 affiliates and exterior teams. The square of the territory equaled 235 hectares. About 250 thousand people from 24 countries were incarcerated in concentration camp Dachau during its existence. 70 thousand perished, and 12 thousand out of them were soviet military captives. There were 30 thousand prisoners, when the camp was being liberated. When the 2nd World War was over commandant of the camp and the security were indicted by International martial tribunal in Nuremberg. In accordance with the ruling of the tribunal as of the 18th of January 1947 commandant of the camp Piorkovskiy was sentenced to death and the 116 SS officers were sentenced to different terms in prison. At present there is a memorial complex on the territory of Dachau camp.

### **14 Iron Curtain**

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

### **15 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.

### **16 Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic**

On 11th March 1990 the Lithuanian State Assembly declared Lithuania an independent republic. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held in February 1991, over 90

percent of the participants (turn out was 84 percent) voted for independence. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 6th September 1991. On 17th September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations.