

# Rachel Rivkina

*Rachel Borissovna Rivkina is a modest, intelligent, and well-preserved woman. She's almost 80 years old, but she doesn't look her age; her features carry that Jewish nobleness, which can be noticed in the photos of her grandmothers and grandfathers. During the interview she keeps absolute calmness, occasionally holding back her tears, when our conversation reaches her most painful recollections. Her memory is tenacious, and her speech correct. Rachel is extremely benevolent, willingly answering all the questions, truthful, and impartial. She lives in a small two-room apartment which is well cared-for and cozy. She makes an impression of a person who has lived her full life with honor and self-respect.*



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### **My family background**

My name is Rivkina Rachel Borissovna. I was born in 1925 in Khotimsk shtetl of Mogilev district [160km north-east of Gomel, today Belarus]. My paternal grandfather's name was Nachman-Ishe Rivkin. He earned his living by repairing ironware in the shtetl. My father was born in 1887 in Khotimsk, his name was Boruch-Afroim Rivkin, and Russians called him Borukh Nakhmanovich. He studied in a cheder. In 1910, my father married my mother, Mira Yakovlevna Slutsker. She was born in 1888. She also lived in Khotimsk. My parents had six sons and one daughter, and I was the youngest. Aunt Mussya, my mother's only sister, lived with us. My mother was always busy because of the large family.

For the most part, Aunt Mussya took care of me. I remember her singing Jewish lullabies to me. She gave me a pet name, Chillinkess, an affectionate version of Rachel. I keep in memory the following lullaby in Yiddish: 'Unter Chillinkess's vigele, shteyt a klor-vays tsigele, dos tsigele iz geforn handlen, dos vet zayn dayn baruf, rozhinkes mit mandlen, slof-zhe, Chillinkess, shlof.' It means: 'Under Chillinkess's cradle stands a small white goat. The goat travelled to sell his wares, this will be your job, too. Trading in raisins and almonds. Sleep, Chillinkess, sleep.'

After Aunt Mussya graduated from a chemical technical school, she started working as a foreman in a chemical co-operative in Gomel [450km south-east of Minsk]; they produced violet ink. She didn't get married. When my mother got married, Aunt Mussya had a fiancé, Meir, who was my father's younger brother. But according to Jewish laws, blood sisters can't marry blood brothers of another family. Therefore, she parted from him.

In 1927 we moved to Gomel. Leaving Khotimsk, we sold our old house, and spent the money on the construction of a new one in Gomel. Even in comparison with modern houses, it was a large house, on Vetrenaya Street 77. In comparison with the neighboring houses, our house was very presentable: there were five rooms, and in front of the house there was a small courtyard. We had a cow, Ryabutka, a lot of hens and geese. The furniture was old: we brought it from the shtetl. As time went by, we bought new things: a cupboard, for example. My family members wore modest clothes, but they tried to dress me up, as I was the youngest, the best way. Gomel was a very clean and well-kept town.

On our street there were mainly private houses. Local residents kept order in the street, especially on the road adjacent to the houses. One half of the road had to be cleaned by the residents from one side of the street, and the second half of the road by those from the opposite side. Gomel had electricity, but not every house had running water. A water tower was situated rather far from our house, and therefore my father arranged water- supply for our house only in 1935. He engaged workers at his own expense. The houses next door had no water supply, and our neighbors came to us for water. Our relationship with our Russian neighbors was remarkably good; there were no disagreements with regards to nationality between us.

There was a radio set in our house: a large black 'plate.' I remember we already used it when my grandfather was still alive. He liked to play tricks on me, 'My dear granddaughter, tell them that I can't hear them when they are speaking, I can hear them only when they are singing.' I didn't understand so I asked him, 'Grandfather, explain please, how shall I tell them?' He replied, 'Pull out the plug from the socket and speak into its holes. They will hear you.' I felt that there was a snag in it, but nevertheless shouted into the socket, 'My grandfather can't hear you, sing please!'

In Gomel there was a very large market called Horse Market. It was situated near our house. Peasants from neighboring villages went there on carts with products and goods. My father always bought hay from the market. We had a cow and so it was necessary to store hay for the winter. The carts loaded with hay came into our courtyard, and all the children helped to move this hay to the hayloft.

In the town they organized military parades on October [1](#) and May holidays and we used to watch them, just like most of the Gomel citizens. I remember that we sang the song 'If a war breaks out tomorrow.' My brother Mendel, born in 1917, liked the song from the film 'Seven Hearts of Oak' very much. When my brother Haim, born in 1920, left for the army, he asked me to sing the song 'Our armor is strong and our tanks are fast' for him. He listened to me and cried. It happened on 27th May 1941.

Jewish drama groups often came to our town. My parents were true theater- lovers: they didn't miss a premiere, neither in a Russian nor in a Jewish theater. I also watched Jewish performances. In Gomel there was a large circus. All performances were put on stage there. I remember some of them: 'Tsvai Kuneleml' was a play about two people who always got into absurd situations, and 'Dutyke Shpas' which means 'Bloody Joke,' and was about a tragedy 'Overseas.' Once, an American circus came on tour to Gomel.

I also remember that one day a Jewish variety performer named Dorothy, a native of Gomel, came. She arrived with a troupe of forty lilliputians. She was an illusionist. Her brother, a peasant, lived next to our house. So he went to watch his sister's performance with all his children. He dressed

them as well as he could. He worked as a loader for my father, provided for a large family, and lived in misery.

In our house there was a small library. There were books in Russian by Sholem Aleichem [2](#) and Mendele Moykher Sforim [3](#). In general, Gomel was considered to be a Jewish town. Before the war, there were several hundred thousand residents, and probably 80 percent were Jews. In Gomel there was a synagogue, but in the 1930s it was closed down, and its building was given to a military registration and enlistment office. When the synagogue was open, my father took me there with him, but I remember almost nothing. In the town there was a Jewish bath-house, and a mikveh functioned. My mother visited it together with me. But later this bath-house was also shut down.

In 1927 it was still permitted to be engaged in private business. My father organized the manufacture of rubber, i.e. a private workshop for whetting scythes. There were no hired workers: only my father, Aunt Mussya and the senior children. Later, my father closed that workshop, firstly because the taxes were excessive, and secondly he did it for the sake of his children. My elder brothers weren't admitted to the eighth grade at their school because they were the children of a private craftsman. They finished seven classes and left school for a technical school. Later they got jobs in order to gain seniority, and only after that they finished an evening school.

My father took Zussy, my elder brother, born in 1912, to Moscow, because in Gomel he couldn't find a job. Zussy lived in a small room at my father's cousin's place. He spent the nights on the floor. When they took my father around Moscow, they took him to the Svobody ploschad [Square of Freedom], and he said ironically in Yiddish, 'A dank dir far der svobodee' [Thank you for the freedom].

Before the war, Zussy worked as a manager at a soup-kitchen which belonged to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, in Moscow. They persuaded him to enter the Party, but he refused. In general, he spoke negatively about the regulations of this department. In the first days of the war Zussy left for the front. He served as a sanitary instructor. Near Rzhev their front-unit was marooned. We received letters from him, when they were encircled. He wrote that food and mail to the soldiers were dropped by parachutes from airplanes. He also wrote that they killed many horses, hinting probably, that the soldiers ate horse meat so as not to die from starvation. In one of his last letters Zussy wrote that he would hardly manage to get out from this mess. Later, we received a notification that my brother had disappeared without a trace. After the end of the war I tried to find traces of him, but in vain.

My parents dressed like everyone else, they had no special Jewish clothes. Later, my father worked as a warehouse manager at a sewing manufacturing firm. In 1927 Jewish schools were still functioning. I studied at a Jewish school for a year. It was me who asked my father to take me to the Jewish school, because a teacher of this school came from the shtetl. Her name was Chaya Soboleva, she sang perfectly, and I also liked to sing, therefore I asked my father to enroll me in this school. But I managed to study there for only one year, because all the children knew the Jewish language well, and my Yiddish was very poor, though at home my parents spoke it. I remember that we studied the Jewish language and grammar. Shortly after, Chaya Soboleva left Gomel, and I felt absolutely lonely at that school. I was moved to a Belarussian school. Half of our class was Jewish, and the other half was Russian. I was on friendly terms with the Russian girls.

Our family lived a traditional Jewish life: all Jewish holidays were celebrated. We celebrated Sabbath according to the Jewish traditions. My mother didn't wear a wig, she only tied a kerchief round her head, and lit candles on Friday evenings. My grandmother wore a wig. We had a photo of my grandmother, and I asked my mother, 'What does grandmother have on her head?' And my mother answered, 'She wears a wig.' My grandmother died when my mother was a bride-to-be, and therefore it was necessary to postpone her wedding.

When my father worked as a private craftsman, he visited the synagogue every Saturday. At that time the synagogue still operated in Gomel. When he started working at a state enterprise, he visited the synagogue only on holidays, but he prayed every morning before going to work. He put on a tallit. When the Jewish holidays came, my father usually took his off days.

I liked Pesach very much, especially at the moment when Pesach plates and dishes had to be taken out from the garret. The day before the holiday, my father went around the house with a chicken feather and swept out bits of bread. During Pesach we ate only matzah. For Chanukkah, the children got some money. In general we rarely received presents, our life was hard: it was necessary to support, and dress the members of such a large family.

I remember quite well that my mother always cooked tasty meals for Jewish holidays. For Sukkot we built a sukkah in the courtyard near the back entrance. I remember that for some reason during Sukkot it was always raining. My mother carried meals into the sukkah, and the children were carefully dressed in order to keep dry. We didn't stay in the sukkah for very long and hurried back into the house, because of the rain.

It was the Soviet period, and our parents didn't explain to us the meaning of the different holidays. We perceived Jewish holidays as a national custom. My father visited the synagogue, but his children lived their own lives.

The families of my parents were religious. My mother observed the kashrut strictly until her last days. She bought vegetables at the market, and a Jewish shochet brought us meat. When we didn't have enough money to buy meat, I carried our hens to a well-known shochet.

The Jewish lifestyle was natural for me, though I was brought up according to Soviet rules. I was a pioneer [4](#), and so was my elder brother. That wasn't the point where our parents pressed their children down, they gave us the freedom to choose. Aunt Mussya became a candidate party member even before the war. My brother Isaac, born in 1913, also entered the Party when he was 18 years old. After he finished technical school, he studied at a flying school in Stalingrad [today Volgograd]. The only thing that my mother forbade was to eat non-kosher meals. In evacuation if someone brought a sausage, at that time we were all hungry, he ate it somewhere in the corner, keeping it on a sheet of paper.

In our class there were 40 pupils: Jews, Russians, and Belarussians. But no one had a particular dislike for Jews. My parents were nonpolitical people. I don't remember them talking about Trotsky [5](#) or Stalin. When my elder brothers became adults, they liked to talk about politics, especially when Isaac visited us. He was a faithful communist, and Zussya always put a wet blanket on him. He was much more sober-minded.

The first time I got to know about Nazism was from my father's elder brother, who had left for America as early as before the Russian Revolution of 1917 [6](#). I was seven years old, when in 1933 he came to visit his brother in Gomel. During his stay I listened to his stories about American Jews who would buy nothing in German shops in protest. Probably, they began doing it after Hitler attained to power. I remember well that it happened in 1933, because that year my paternal grandfather died.

We had no troubles caused by the arrival of our American visitor. Besides, before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [7](#), in Soviet newspapers there appeared a series of articles about impotence of fascism. I remember my brothers discussing the anti-Nazi film 'Professor Mamlock' [8](#). In 1939 a lot of Polish Jews fled to Gomel from the fascists after the beginning of World War II [9](#). These refugees told everybody about the prosecution of Jews in Poland. At that time many people had a presentiment of the war. Isaac, who visited us in Gomel traveling transiently, told my mother a week before the war began, 'Mum, if an air-raid warning happens, be sure that the war has begun. There will be no more training alarms.' And when on the early morning of 22nd June [10](#) the bombing of Gomel occurred, my mother said, 'Children, this is a war!'

On 25th or 26th June 1941 my brother came to us from Brest [today Belarus]. In Brest before the war Isaac worked at the Brest Communist Party Committee. In Brest his first wife perished. She worked in a district Komsomol [11](#) Committee, and he worked in the regional Communist Party Committee. When the bombing of Brest began, his wife ran to the Komsomol Committee to find her documents, and was killed on her way. My brother ran away from Brest, which had been besieged by fascists. He went on foot, wore out his boots and reached us barefoot. According to wartime laws, he had to register at a regional military registration and enlistment office [12](#).

### **During the war**

Gomel citizens started evacuating from the first days of the war, but my mother said that she would move nowhere, until she received a letter from Haim. Haim had left for the army at the end of May 1941. And then Isaac said, 'Mum, I'll be put before a tribunal, but I'll not go to the regional military registration and enlistment office until you leave Gomel.' My mother nearly had a heart attack, but she took her son's advice. On 27th June we left.

First we arrived in Voronezh region. When the train stopped, we all saw drays and horses waiting for evacuees. They took us to the village of Sredniy Karachan near Borissoglebsk. All the evacuees were standing on the drays and looking out at the village houses, because we were told, that each family could choose a house. Many houses were empty and nailed up. Suddenly a man approached the dray where I sat, and turned the horse around. I shouted, 'Daddy, Daddy, he's taking me away!' My father was at a meeting in the center of the square. The point was that this man liked me. My father approached the man and explained that we were many: I, my father, mother, Aunt Mussya, brother Samuil and Shura, my brother Semen's bride. But that wasn't all. Aunt Mussya was a Communist Party member.

When Western Belarus was annexed to the USSR in November 1939, my aunt was sent somewhere near Brest according to the Party's permit. There she got acquainted with a woman, whose name was Khanka. When German troops attacked Belarus, this woman walked from Brest to Gomel, where we lived at that time. And when we decided to leave, we took this lonely woman with us. She was also Jewish. So we were seven in total. The owner of the dray said firmly, 'You will all live

with me.' And the peasants said, 'Go with him, his house is the best in our village.' When we approached his house, we saw a wonderful garden and strong walls. The richest family in the village lived there. The owner's name was Ivan Ivanovich Khamov, he worked at a factory. His wife, Vera Andreevna, was a former devotee of Christ, and their children were already adults and lived separately.

The owners gave us their best room, and moved to a smaller one. Ivan Ivanovich promised to help us with footwear as there was black and rich soil everywhere. The owners weren't old yet, and it seemed to me that they were atheists. I saw no religious icons in the house. When the authorities started the prosecution of monks [Editors note: in the 1930s, according to the general anti-religious program of the Communist Party, they closed churches and monasteries, and persecuted ministers of religion], Vera Andreevna left her monastery, and got acquainted with Ivan Ivanovich. She won him from his wife, married him, and therefore, having changed her social status, avoided repressions. I remember them now and comprehend that they were as good as gold.

Later, Ivan Ivanovich was drafted into the army. The regiment where Isaac served was located near Voronezh. He managed to get to our village and told us that we had to leave. Sredniy Karachan wasn't situated far from the railroad, and my brother realized, that a sudden attack of German troops wouldn't give us enough time to escape. He said, 'The Germans will come here. Make preparations to leave.' We left at night, got out through the window, and I was ashamed, because we had no time to say goodbye and thank Vera Andreevna for her kindness.

Isaac took us all to Gribanovka [Voronezh region] railway station. There my father got a job at a factory. Isaac's regiment was still near Voronezh. After some time Isaac came to us again and said again, 'Leave, leave immediately!' He went to the Gribanovka military registration and enlistment office and said to them, 'I'll go to the front. I only ask you to evacuate my family.' We received seven military permits and left. I remember that we moved in a heated goods car.

From Gribanovka we moved to Tashkent [today Uzbekistan], because Iosif, my father's brother, already lived there. He had been evacuated from Moscow. Our journey was very hard, because, first of all, we were short of money. In Gribanovka we got money by selling our belongings. My mother and I used to go to Borisoglebsk by train and sell our bed sheets there. Bed sheets were in demand, and so we sold them quickly: people had no fabric at all. My father and Aunt Mussya worked in a kolkhoz [13](#), but they weren't paid. On the way my father didn't let us go anywhere from the train. He did everything himself: brought water, food and boiled water. I remember that at some stations they gave out bread for free. My father brought us two loaves of bread and cried like a child, 'I offered them money, but they gave me bread free of charge' and added in Yiddish, 'Azoy vey, they give me bread as if I'm a beggar.' The conditions were awful: there were no toilets in the car. During stops, people crept under the car to answer the call of nature. It was terrible. My mother had a heart condition.

At one station, the train stopped for a very long time. My mother awoke and found herself in a car packed with people: about thirty people were lying on berths. My father was sleeping, and my mother said to my uncle, the husband of Alta, my father's sister, 'Eysof, I need to go out.' He answered, 'Go out and under the car.' He helped her get out, and as soon as she left, the train started off. He tugged at my father's sleeve and cried, 'Bonya, Bonya, Mira went out!' And my father couldn't see anything without his glasses. He jumped out of the car barefoot. We were in the



second last car. He shouted, 'Mira, Mira!' but he didn't see her. My mother had managed to grasp the hand-rail of the last car. The brigade-leader of that train stood there on the platform. He asked her, 'Where are you climbing to?' She explained to him that she was one of the passengers. Meanwhile, my father was running, following the train and seeing nobody under it. My mother cried out, 'Bonya, Bonya, I'm here!'

On the grass near the train there were baskets with strawberries which peasants sold to passengers, and my father, having no glasses, took it for spots of blood. However, he managed to jump onto the last platform. We were crying in the car, because we didn't know what was going on. My parents had disappeared. And as ill luck would have it, the train was moving to the next stop for a long period of time. Only when it stopped at last, my parents appeared. It's difficult to express my feelings.

On our way to Tashkent we lost Aunt Mussya. It happened in Kazakhstan at Ak- Bulak station. My father felt unwell, and Aunt Mussya said, 'I'll go and get some water.' She took a teapot and went out for water, and when she was getting past the other trains, our train started off. I shouted, 'Mussya, Mussya, Mussya!' All day long my father ran around the car, feeling guilty because usually it was he who brought us water. We couldn't sleep, and I couldn't stop crying. At midnight, the train was still moving, and Aunt Mussya knocked on the window of our platform.

Mussya was lucky to be left behind with two military women, who went by our train in a special car. They took a fast train to catch up with ours. These women took Mussya with them. We were so happy to see Aunt Mussya again. So we arrived in Tashkent. There we lived in one room at my uncle's place: 28 people. My uncle had a family, and we were seven, and then the family of Alta. The room was about 18 square meters, and we spent the nights lying on the floor along the walls. There were no beds. My brother was rather tall and our feet were very close to each other. The floor was earthen. When somebody wanted to turn over, he warned everyone, 'Hey, I'm turning!'

My father got a job as a door-keeper in a commercial soup-kitchen, and later as a supplier at 'Rodina' co-operative. At the end of 1941 the commercial soup-kitchens still functioned. My father worked every other day, for day and night work he earned one loaf of bread. In Tashkent my father became more religious. First of all, all his sons were at the front, and for some time we received no news from them. My father had a hard time.

In April 1945 our family got to know that Haim was in Buchenwald [today Germany]. We lived in Tashkent, where a lot of Orthodox Jews lived. I never met these sort of Jews in Gomel. Families of these Tashkent Jews strictly observed the Sabbath: nobody worked on Saturdays. They didn't buy milk from the Uzbeks, and if it was necessary to buy, they watched the process of milking. We wouldn't have survived if it hadn't been for the money certificates of my brothers who were at the front. [Editor's note: A money certificate in the Soviet Army was a financial document given out to a military man and members of his family during the war time for receiving money allowance.] One of them was a major, and the other a captain. When we received their money certificates, we were allowed to get meals in the officers' soup-kitchen. I used to go there for meals, which was after eight or nine stops by tram.

I had a small milk-can with me. It was very hot in Tashkent, and they filled my can with hot soup. The can became red-hot, it burned some people in the tram, and they forced me to get out. I walked, and then got on the tram again, and they pushed me out again, and I walked. That was the

way I reached home with dinner.

In Tashkent, Samuil entered a branch of the Voronezh Aviation College. He had studied there for half a year, and then all the students of his course were taken to the army, to a Navigation School in Kokand [today Uzbekistan]. My parents, Aunt Mussya, Shura and I stayed in Tashkent. There I watched the last performance of Mikhoels' [14](#) Theater, before their tour to America. I also watched 'Freilekhs' [Joy] with Zuskin [15](#). Leaping ahead, I shall say that when Mikhoels was killed, many Jews were suspicious about the official version of the great actor's death.

In evacuation my father had been ill with Asian flu, and he felt really horrible. In Tashkent my mother was unwell every day: she had a heart problem and it was difficult for her to endure the Central Asian hot weather. She almost didn't go outdoors. We lived in a hostel of the Central Asian University, where there was a cool tunnel. It was some sort of a cellar. And so she used to prepare dinner for the family and go down into this tunnel to get away from the heat. All the time she waited for letters from her children who were fighting at the front. In Tashkent it was especially difficult to observe the kashrut. When Jews from Odessa [today Ukraine] arrived here, my mother used to buy one kilogram of meat for a week from them, in order to prepare Saturday meals.

In Tashkent we celebrated Pesach. In some Jewish houses they made matzah, and my mother and Aunt Mussya went there to help. We couldn't afford to buy flour; therefore we bought corn and went to a mill for milling. And one year, I remember, they made matzah at our home, on the stove in the kitchen. The process lasted for two days: it was very difficult to make matzah of high-quality. I remember the constant feeling of hunger.

Aunt Mussya worked at the Tashkent Chemical factory where they made soap. There Aunt Mussya was admitted to the Party. As a Party member, she was frequently sent to pick cotton in Bukhara region [today Uzbekistan]. It was always hard to part with her, but what a pleasure it was, when she came back: she brought a lot of food. My aunt was a representative of the Regional Party Committee, and the local authorities gave her food presents: melted butter, cotton-seed oil, and corn meal.

The first year in Tashkent I didn't study, I was to either work at a factory or enter a technical school to get a profession. I decided to get advice from Mendel and wrote a letter to him. I received his answer. I still have his letter. In his letter Mendel addressed our parents, 'Don't permit her to start working. The war will end some day. Let Rachel finish school and then enter a college.' And I decided to go on studying at school. I was in the eighth grade.

The local people treated Jews unkindly. The Uzbeks repeated every minute, 'Tashkent is mine, I'm the master.' Before the arrival of evacuees, the Uzbeks, in general, didn't know who Jews were. But in Tashkent there were a lot of Russians, who had been exiled there before the war. It was from the Russians that they learned to offend Jews. They called us 'Jillya': that was 'Zhid' [an offensive way to call a Jew in Russia] in the Uzbek language. In evacuation I improved my Yiddish, because in our presence the Uzbeks spoke only their native language, and Jews, to provoke them, spoke only Yiddish.

In 1942 we received a notification about Zussya's death. In July 1944 another notification was received: it was about Mendel's death. We kept it from our parents. It happened the following way. It was necessary to go to the regional military registration and enlistment office to re-register



officers' certificates. Aunt Mussya also received a certificate from Mendel, but at that time she wasn't able to go there and asked me to go instead. The manager of the financial department told me, 'It's good Mussya Yakovlevna hasn't come. Mendel Borissovich has been killed.' I cried, 'Tomorrow my parents will come here to receive their certificates. If my mother gets to know that her second son is gone, her heart will break.' I was sobbing so painfully that they decided to call the chief. He ordered his subordinates not to show Mendel's documents to my parents when they came. The employees of the regional military registration and enlistment office hid Mendel's documents so meticulously that when these documents were required for putting his name on a memorial board of the College, where he studied, they couldn't find them.

I took this notification and went to a girlfriend, because I couldn't return home. I was still crying. I asked her, 'Ida, what shall I do?' She answered, 'Tell your mother that you have a toothache, and that's why you are crying.' When I went home, my mother started to apply lotion on my teeth. Aunt Mussya returned from her work. I said, 'Mussya, let's go for a walk.' I told her everything. My aunt was a party member and always had her party card with her. We went into the courtyard and she put this notification inside her party card. Ten days later, my mother had to go to the regional military registration and enlistment office to receive money according to the certificate, which was 400 rubles. We had a relative in Tashkent. Mussya and I went to him. He said, 'Don't worry, I shall give 400 rubles every month and you'll take the money to your parents.' But it was necessary to undersign the certificate.

My uncle was skillful in forging signatures. And so, every time, when it was necessary to receive money according to the certificate, I went to him and he forged Mendel's signature. My mother probably felt something was wrong because when she looked at the forged signature, she used to repeat, 'Oh, something is wrong with this signature.' And at this moment my hands and legs trembled. This went on until New Year's Day. The next year we didn't receive Mendel's certificates. Up to the end of their lives my parents thought that their son was missing. We deceived them all their lives. This weight still sits heavily in my heart.

Mendel had a wife: Raissa Mariamova, a Jew, she lived in Kazan. During the war my brother got a ten-day leave. He went to Kazan, and they got married there. They had no children. After the end of the war we sent to Kazan Mendel's personal belongings: watches and something else.

We lived in Tashkent till 1945. They wanted to enroll my father too, though he was already fifty years old. We changed many residences, we lived under dreadful conditions, because rent prices were exorbitant and we didn't have enough money. Sometimes we lived in houses with the warning: 'This house is dangerous for residing, its roof can collapse.'

I'd like to tell you about the destiny of my brother Haim. His military unit was sent to Western Ukraine or Western Belarus, I don't remember exactly. I remember, that he had mentioned Ossovets Fortress, where they were located. My brother hadn't been attested yet, when the German troops captured that settlement. The commanding officers offered the soldiers to run away. Haim was captured by the fascists. He borrowed the name of his Russian friend Sergey Maslov. He didn't look like a Jew. As a prisoner of war, he was taken to the concentration camp in Buchenwald [16](#). Haim said that every year on 12th December, he exchanged his portion of bread for a cigarette. He smoked that cigarette in memory of me. 12th December is my birthday, and that was the way he congratulated me.

Among the Russian prisoners there was a person, a scoundrel, who blackmailed Haim. He used to tell him, 'I know a lot about you.' But none of the prisoners betrayed him. In April 1945 the prisoners were transported from Buchenwald to Dachau [17](#). On the way Haim and two of his friends broke off the floor in their car and escaped from the moving train. Later, while roaming around, they ran into a Soviet military unit.

At the beginning of May 1945 we received a telegram from Haim saying that he was alive. We immediately informed Isaac, who was a commissar of the regiment. It turned out that the commissar of the military unit, where Haim was caught, was Isaac's friend. He helped Haim, and Haim managed to avoid examination by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. In September 1945 he was demobilized. He returned to Gomel, and there security services started to call him for night interrogations, trying to find out how a Jew had survived in a concentration camp.

During the Holocaust our family lost many relatives. In Khotimsk my father's brother, Moses, perished with his wife. The parents of my father's cousin were lost, and also his cousin. She was married to a Russian. She had a small child, who was brought to Khotimsk during the summer. A Russian woman, a neighbor wanted to save this child, but she was also shot. All the members of my future husband's family were lost: his father, mother and two siblings. They lived in Klimovichy shtetl of Mogilev region [today Belarus]. In Klimovichy there was no ghetto. The fascists separated its Jewish population: men, and women with children, lived separately. Then the men were forced to dig graves. Before the fathers' and brothers' eyes, the women and children were shot, and then the men were shot, too. Gheisha, my mother's brother, was lost in Novozybkov. He was a member of a partisan party.

## **After the war**

After the end of the war our family returned to Gomel. The city was in ruins; our house was burned down in 1943. We knew about it when we were in Tashkent: Mendel wrote about it. A military unit, where his comrade served, went through Gomel, and he informed Mendel, that the house on the opposite side of the road remained safe, and our house had been burned down. Neighbors told us they saw the Rivkins' piano burning on the road. At first we lived at Semen's house. He worked as a chief engineer at the machine- tool factory named after Kirov [18](#). They placed at his disposal a room of eleven square meters, his wife and two-year-old daughter lived with him. And then we came along: me, my parents, and Aunt Mussya.

When the factory administration got to know that the parents of their chief engineer came to him and were impelled to live in one room, they gave my brother a two-room apartment: a room of 20 meters, and another of ten meters. We occupied the larger room. When my father asked who was going to live in the second room, Semen answered, 'Dad, the factory lacks living space. I can't occupy two rooms. We will all live in one large room.' My family members decided to build a house. The small room was empty until the arrival of Fridman, a metal turner of high class. He hadn't made up his mind to start working, because the factory director told him that they had nothing for lodging. Then Semen said, 'Why do you say we have no place for lodging? In my apartment there is a spare room of ten meters.' So the second room was occupied by this turner and his family. The apartment was turned into a communal apartment [19](#).

When Fridman's sister and wife arrived, it was finally decided to build a house. Isaac returned to Gomel. He was still unmarried. In 1945, after finishing school I entered the Gomel Pedagogical

College. I had already passed the exams in Tashkent, because I was going to enter the Tashkent Pedagogical College. My examination marks were good and were accepted in the Gomel College. Generally speaking, I wanted to enter a medical college, but in Gomel there were no colleges of that kind, and my parents told me that they would never let me go to Minsk alone. I cried for a whole week. It's necessary to say that after the end of the war in Gomel, there was an anti-Semitic state of public opinion. Gomel was practically burned to ashes during the battles.

After their return, Jews quickly built new houses. It caused feelings of envy and enmity. So, the Novo-Vetrenaya Street, where we lived, was named Tashkent Street by the Russians. Another street, where many Jewish families built new houses, was named Wall Street. We hired workers to build our house, and my father and brother assisted them.

In my college there were also many anti-Semites. Many students lived in Gomel during the occupation and absorbed the fascists' anti-Semitic propaganda. In our group, for example, there studied a woman who had worked for the Germans as an interpreter. She was recognized by the mother of a student: when she saw her, she cried broadly in her face, 'You, German freebee!' After that, this former interpreter was expelled from the college.

After the end of the war, Aunt Mussya continued to work at the chemical enterprise, she was the workshop manager. In 1947 I got acquainted with my future husband, Isaac Samoilovich Ryvkin. He was seven years older than me. He was a professional soldier, technician-lieutenant, and Communist Party member. He joined the Party at the front. He fought at the Leningrad and Moscow fronts. Isaac was awarded a Medal for the Defense of Leningrad, and a Medal for the Defense of Moscow. My husband was religious, but we didn't observe Sabbath. On Jewish holidays he went to the synagogue, but without me.

In 1948 we got married. The wedding ceremony was in accordance to the Jewish tradition, under the chuppah. We did it to meet the wishes of my husband and parents. There was no rabbi at our wedding, the ceremony was conducted by a shochet, and there was no synagogue in Gomel. The wedding ceremony was carried out in our courtyard. The chuppah was made from a canopy and four poles. We signed the ketubbah: a marriage certificate. The ceremony was carried out on a point of order, as my father remembered a lot, and my husband grew up in a religious family. Our Russian neighbors weren't invited to our wedding, only our relatives. One of the English language teachers got to know about our wedding from somewhere and asked my friend, 'Is it true that there was a Jewish wedding at the Rivkins?' I felt uncomfortable in her presence and refused to meet her anymore.

After demobilization, my husband left for Leningrad, where his elder brother lived. Later in 1948, I arrived in Leningrad. When in 1948 the State of Israel reappeared [20](#), my husband was 'on cloud nine' with happiness. We lived on Bolshaya Moskovskaya Street, near the Vladimirsky square. We had an eleven meter room in a large communal apartment, where there were nine more rooms. All our neighbors were Russian. We were the only Jews there. Our relations with the neighbors were normal. We had no incidents regarding nationality problems.

I continued my studies via correspondence in the Gomel Pedagogical College. I graduated from it in August 1950, and in November of that year my son Mark was born. According to my husband's wish our son was circumcised, but it didn't take place in our apartment. By the way, one of the participants of the circumcision ceremony denounced to security services. This man, also a Jew,

worked for my husband as his assistant. At that time my husband worked as a workshop manager at Primorsky industrial complex.

In 1951 he was arrested by the KGB [21](#). KGB trumped up great cases apparently connected with 'Zionistic plots,' taking into account the increasing anti-Semitism level of state authorities. Large amounts of people, about thirty, were arrested, and all of them were Jews. After my husband was released, he never talked to me about the reasons of his arrest.

In our communal apartment there lived a person who worked in 'Bolshoy Dom' [Big House - this was what Leningradians called the large grey building where the NKVD [22](#) Department was situated]. He told us that our house had been shadowed; and my husband also felt like he was being watched. I don't exactly remember, but it seems to me, they were accused of the creation of an 'Anti-Soviet Jewish organization.' Our neighbor who worked in the KGB told me after the arrest of my husband, 'I'll get Sasha out. I'll get some help from our guys.' The Russian neighbors in our apartment called my husband Sasha. Later he came and said, 'I can do nothing, there is a large group there. If Sasha was the only one charged, maybe I could do something for him. But now I have been advised to keep away from this case.'

My husband was arrested on 3rd May 1951 in my absence. At that time I was living in Gomel with my five-month-old son. Isaac took us to Gomel at the end of April and then returned to Leningrad to work. He was arrested at work and I knew nothing about it. Whenever he got back to Leningrad, Isaac always sent me a telegram notifying me that he had arrived safely. And that time I got no telegram. I made a long-distance call to my brother, 'I didn't receive a telegram from Isaac. What's the matter?' And my brother answered, 'I can't talk to you. I have a toothache.' I understood him at once.

When I went back with Mark and Aunt Mussya, we decided to stay at my elder brother's place, because the door of our room had been sealed up. Both my brothers and Aunt Mussya didn't believe that Isaac was guilty. He had served in the army for seven years. The KGB workers had left their telephone number, so that I could call them. I called, and by the appointed time two KGB workers appeared, opened our apartment and asked, 'Where does your husband keep his weapons?' I answered, 'Earlier my husband was a military man, and now he is a civilian and has no weapons.'

They said that during their previous search they found Isaac's hunter's certificate. I answered that my husband was a hunter, but he didn't have a weapon. All his things were confiscated; they also took away the ketubah, our marriage certificate, and the documents in regard to my son's circumcision. My things and documents weren't touched.

For a long time they didn't accept any parcels for my husband. When I asked for a reason, a KGB worker answered, 'Your husband doesn't co-operate during interrogations.' My husband was sentenced to ten years of labor in Vorkuta by the famous 'Court of Three' [Editors note: in Russian 'Troyka' - it was a special commission, which substituted normal courts. Troykas were empowered to pass sentences according to their personal opinions] in 1951.

Before he was deported, I unexpectedly got permission to meet him. I took a parcel to the notorious prison 'Kresty,' and there they suddenly informed me about the meeting with my husband. I was taken aback: I was alone, without Mark. He was at a dacha [23](#) in the suburb of

Leningrad; I wanted to show Isaac our son. But I was told, that probably at night many prisoners would be sent out and possibly it was my last chance to see my husband. Certainly, I went there to meet him.

Our meeting reminded me of an episode from 'Voskressenie' [1899, Resurrection] by Tolstoy [24](#): two prison-bars, on one side were prisoners, and on the other were their relatives, and there were jailers walking between us. My husband's hair had been shaved off. He immediately asked me, 'Where is our son?' I asked him, how many years he had to stay imprisoned. He answered, 'Ten.' At that moment I felt sick, and he said, 'Don't be afraid dear, this is the shortest term they could give.' Our meeting lasted ten minutes. His last words were, 'Everything will be fine, take care of our son.' So I left, keeping his words with me. Later, I started to make complaints and took forward petitions about a second hearing of the case. My husband's brother was a lawyer. It was he who advised me to write letters to the Supreme Court and General Office of the Public Prosecutor.

The Doctors' Plot [25](#) occurred when I was in Gomel. It was terrifying to see these sinister articles in the newspapers, feuilletons with anti- Semitic cartoons. But in Gomel there were no pogroms. Soon after Stalin's death, I was permitted to see my husband in the camp. I will never forget the day of Stalin's death: 5th March 1953. At that time I lived in Gomel, I understood nothing and took his death as a terrible misfortune for the whole country, and for me personally. Gomel was full of black flags. I also cut my black skirt to make a flag. I wrote to my husband, who was in his camp, describing the country in sorrow. After his return he said, 'I was ashamed to read your letter.'

In contrast to me, my father seemed to understand a lot more. I remember an episode which took place during the Doctors' Plot. My father usually prayed in his bedroom, but that day he went out to the dining-room in his tallit and said in Yiddish, 'They attacked Jews, but they won't get away with it.' In Yiddish, country means 'melukhe.' And my father repeated with bitterness again and again, 'Such a melukhe!' Mark was a little boy and he asked me, 'Mum, what is grandfather talking about? Who is 'melukhe'? And I answered, 'She's a bad woman.'

In September 1953 I got permission to visit my husband in the camp. Mark was two years and eight months old then. Our family council decided that I should go there with my child. David, my husband's elder brother, who lived in Moscow, went with us. Immediately after our arrival in Vorkuta, carrying my luggage with me, I went to the administrative department of the Vorkuta labor camps: they were a part of the Soviet Gulag [26](#) system, which was situated in the center of the city. So carrying my luggage and child, I went there. When I showed them the letter from Moscow, the employees started running and bustling, asking me, 'And who is your husband?' They probably, thought that Isaac was 'a high-ranker.' I was surprised.

Then they found my husband's personal file and were amazed, 'How did you manage to get such a sanction?' I answered, 'I wrote complaints to Moscow.' They gave me an order for hotel accommodation, and told me that I could go to mine no. 40 to visit my husband. My visiting time was two hours. I had to reach that mine by bus. I left my belongings in the hotel, but my husband's brother had no place to stay. We took the bus and went to the mine. On our way, patrols stopped us several times, let us through and immediately informed by phone, 'The captain's wife is coming with her child.' They gave us a 'green light' everywhere. The patrol soldiers probably thought that I was the wife of the chief of that mine. When we arrived at the mine, I saw watch-towers around it and soldiers on the sentry.

All that time, my brother-in-law stood aside, and at that moment he disappeared somewhere. So I stood alone with my child, carrying a heavy suitcase. I had taken along food. It was cold in September, and everything was already covered with snow. The mine was situated rather far away, and on my way there it was necessary to jump over drains. I took Mark, carried him for a certain distance, left him there, went back and dragged the suitcase. And so on and so forth. Suddenly, a soldier from the watch-towers said, 'Hey, woman, don't be afraid, no one will take your suitcase here.' But nevertheless I was afraid that the suitcase would be lost, and so I continued and reached the mine.

When I showed the papers at the mine, they also started running around and became nervous. They had never arranged visits to political prisoners before. A lot of people came to look at me: the situation was strange. I was standing and waiting, and the officers were running about, probably preparing a room for our meeting. And at that moment I saw a woman, probably a prisoner without a guard, filthy and dirty. Her child was also dirty, wearing rags, and lacerated gumboots.

Mark stood beside me well-groomed, wearing a fur coat, beautiful fur-cap, and an elegant scarf. As for me I was also dressed decently: expensive coat with an astrakhan collar. At that moment one of the officers said to that woman, 'Get away with your bastard, now you see the way children of normal people are dressed.' She got hold of her son and disappeared. I wished the earth would swallow me up, with shame.

At last we were let into the meeting room; one of the guards had still been washing the floor. He asked Mark, 'Does your mum wash the floor the same way?' And my son answered, 'My mum doesn't wash the floor, we have Anya to do it.' Anya was our relative. And at that moment I saw my husband, running towards me. He made a move towards me, but the prison guard ordered at once, 'Don't hurry up, sit down.'

Our meeting happened in that room with a guard keeping watch over us. My husband embraced me and our child. I opened my suitcase, and started to take out food. Suddenly an officer entered the room, 'The bus leaves in half an hour, and there will be no more transport today. You have to go now.' I was dumbfounded, 'I have permission to spend two hours with my husband, I have just arrived, and we haven't even talked to each other.' He answered, 'The warden has permitted you to visit your husband tomorrow.'

It was hard to talk in the presence of a guard watching us. I spoke mainly about our relatives, their health status, because during the period of my husband's absence, my father had an insult to the brain. And the officer hurried me up, 'Faster, faster, or you will miss the bus!' I left and got onto the bus. An employee of the mine accompanied us, and David masked that we were acquainted. When we arrived, the employee carried Mark to the hotel. I was afraid, that the boy would cry, but everything turned out all right. The employee opened the room for me, and stayed with us for some time. He had probably been ordered to do so. I said, 'Excuse me, but I have to put my boy to bed.' Only then he left.

There were two beds in the hotel room. As soon as my son fell asleep, a woman walked in. She was probably on a business trip or a private eye. She took the second bed. I went out of the room to talk to David and explained to him that the next day I was going to have a second visit to my husband. He said, 'I have no place to spend the night.' I replied, 'Come to our room late at night.' At about 1am, he entered very quietly. That woman was already sleeping, and David put his leather



coat on the floor and prepared to sleep. I lay without batting an eyelid, and because David coughed, I also started coughing, and all the time I was afraid that it would wake that woman. David left at dawn.

In the morning the woman asked me, 'It seemed that at night a man was coughing.' I calmed her, saying that it was me who had had an attack of cough. I went to the mine with the first bus. We were together for one hour, and again in the presence of a guard. All the time my husband held our son in his arms and talked to him. Mark had waited for this meeting very anxiously. During his father's imprisonment, I had showed him photos of his father and read him his letters. Mark also wrote letters, he simply scribbled something in my letters, to his father.

I hadn't only told Mark that my husband was in the army, but I had told everybody else: I couldn't confess to my husband's arrest. I couldn't find a job, and it was necessary to fill in a special form. When we entrained to go to Leningrad, Mark suddenly asked, 'Why didn't dad wear a name-plate?' He thought that his father was a military man. I was puzzled, I said, 'You probably didn't notice it.' But he insisted, 'He had no name-plate.' We drew him away from this dangerous topic somehow. My second meeting with my husband happened the next year, in 1954. I went there alone. At that time we were allowed to spend two days together in the special room for meetings.

At that time visits of relatives were already permitted and there were a lot of wives who had arrived expecting meetings with their husbands. I remember the Ukrainian women, the wives of Bandera [27](#) band members. So, we had to stand in a queue. During my stay at the mine his friends came to us very often to eat, listen to the news from outside, and just to look at a civilian.

My husband was rehabilitated in 1956 [28](#) by one of the first circuit courts in Vorkuta. When they rehabilitated him, he already lived in exile. My husband underwent the most arduous trials, when he worked in the terrible cold. Later, he managed to finish courses for technical inspectors and checked the quality of coal right in the mine before it was loaded into the tubs. As my husband was a Jew, it was especially dangerous for him, because in the mine there were a lot of Ukrainian Bandera band members and also German prisoners of war. One day a Bandera band member called him 'Zhida.' My husband immediately struck him on his head with a miner's lamp. Later, the Bandera band members laughed at their fellow worker, 'Zhida struck you on your head!'

Immediately after rehabilitation, Isaac received a room in a new house on Aviatsionnaya Street. So our family's life began again. It was very difficult to get a job. He managed to find one in a purchase department of a military unit in Leningrad.

I went to work in a polyclinic as a registering clerk with the salary of 37 rubles per month, because the Regional Education Department refused to place me in a job of a teacher. They also refused to employ me as a school librarian. I worked there for a year and a half. Later, using my personal connections, I found a vacancy in a department of Glavleningradstroy, a Leningrad Building Organization. In this department there worked both Russians and Jews. All of them were very nice to me. Later, I bettered myself and started working as an engineer-economist. I remember that for half a year, a Jew with a PhD, worked with us. All of us were surprised, because our department didn't carry any research work. Only later we got to know that he had immigrated to Israel, and had worked for the company only to get a good reference.

My husband took the victory of Israel in the Six-Day-War [29](#) of 1967 with great enthusiasm. He discussed details of the war with my brothers. However, they being members of the Party regarded Israeli problems warily. Probably it could be explained by the fact that my brothers were persons in high positions: Isaac was the director of a factory producing crockery in Gomel, Semen was the chief engineer at the Kirov factory in Gomel, and Samuil was the chief engineer at the 2nd Moscow factory, producing watches. After my husband's return from the labor camp, he never joined the Party. In general, his camp experience taught him not to get involved in any political activities.

When Mark grew up, my husband always pulled him up for speaking something 'anti-Soviet,' 'Mark, times have changed.' When in the USSR Jews started to leave for their historical native land, I understood quite well that if our family left for Israel, it would interfere with the interests of my brothers and their families. That is why I didn't want to leave, and my husband understood. All his relatives had left.

Our son was growing up, he knew little about Jewish life, but he saw his grandfather praying and putting on a tefillin and tallit. My husband also had a tallit. At home we had a siddur. In Gomel my son never came across any anti-Semitism. As far as Leningrad is concerned, I don't know as he never complained. My grandfather was pretty tactful regarding religion: he always prayed in a separate room. At the mathematical school where Mark studied, there were many Jewish children and among the teachers there were Jews. So during his studies he didn't face any anti-Semitism.

Our son entered the Leningrad College of Telecommunication, named after Bonch-Bruевич, and graduated in 1970. He was a very good student. In the process of assignment, the dean characterized my son as an excellent specialist and offered the commission members to send him to one of the defense industry enterprises. But a representative of that enterprise objected, 'No, we can't invite him. He lives too far from us.' And we lived only a stone throw away from that organization. Then that person started talking nonsense about their branch in Petrodvorets, but the college teachers insisted. When Mark called me and said that he got that job in 'Pentagon,' that was the way we called that organization, my whole world turned upside down.

All the relatives of my husband had already left the country by that time. Samuil's brother-in-law was highly connected in Moscow, and he did something for my son, so that he could leave that enterprise. Several times Mark was asked in their staff department, who petitioned for him in Moscow. But my son told them nothing. At last he was informed that he was permitted to move on to another job, and do it immediately without taking an off. He found a place in another organization: 'RudGeoPhysics.'

He got married in late 1988, at the age of 37. My daughter-in-law is Russian. In 1936 my elder brother Zussya married a Russian woman from Yaroslavl region. Her name was Fasta, but we called her Fanya in the Jewish way. And it was a real tragedy. My father's sister questioned him, 'How could you allow it?' When Zussya got married, my mother went to Moscow, where he lived. After their talk my brother wanted to commit suicide, because he felt guilty having disobeyed his parents. However, it was a false alarm: she appeared to be a person of excellent qualities. In 1938 twins were born to them. They weren't circumcised. One son died, and the second one lives in Moscow at present. Before his marriage, we talked a lot to our son regarding the problem of choosing a bride. But it happened.

Our son informed his father about his wedding the day before. As for me, I had a presentiment that my boy was going to marry someone. It seems to me that our son knew our possible reaction; therefore he told us nothing beforehand and placed us before an accomplished fact. There was no wedding ceremony. There were no scandals, only my silent tears. It seems to me that my daughter-in-law visited our house for the first time, when their daughter was already born. My husband was already sick at that time.

Now Mark is interested in Jewry more, than he was when he was younger. Earlier he never spoke Yiddish, and now he tries to. Since he was six years old, he visited Gomel in summer time, and my parents spoke only Yiddish, and so he remembered some words. He doesn't visit the synagogue.

I have a granddaughter, Ira, who's 14 years old. When she was born, my daughter-in-law had no wish to baptize her. By the way, when the girl was on a visit to her maternal grandmother and grandfather's in Novgorod region in the summer, they frequently asked her, 'Why aren't you baptized, why don't you have a godfather?' She came to me with this question, and I said, 'My dear! You have a lot of relatives, why do you want a godfather?'

At present my granddaughter is very interested in Jewish life. In general she is more interested in Jews than Russians. When she watches television or reads newspapers, she frequently asks us, 'Is this person a Jew? Is it a Jewish surname?' After my husband's death in 1990, I visited the synagogue several times and took my granddaughter with me. I don't know how to pray. Ira was in the synagogue with me during Rosh Hashanah. My husband was buried according to the Jewish rites. A coffin with his body was brought to the synagogue. At the Jewish cemetery the minyan was headed by Rabbi Levitis. I remember that the rabbi didn't speak Yiddish, only Russian.

At present many relatives of mine live in Israel and America. Semen's grandson left for Israel for studies: at first he studied at a technical college, but later he started observing every Jewish ritual, gave up his studies and entered a yeshivah. At present he's already married, but still goes on studying.

Only I and my son's family stay in Russia. I receive assistance from the Hesed [30](#) Avraham Jewish Welfare Center. They give me medicines; and the EVA organization brings me food packages every month, because my pension is small.

My brother Isaac left for Miami, USA, after Perestroika [31](#) in 1990, and his daughter immigrated three years earlier. My brother didn't want his daughter to leave, but she didn't obey. He took it so hard that after her departure he went into an apoplectic condition. But nevertheless, later, he also left according to the family reunion program. In his letters he was very impressed about the hearty welcome he received there. The authorities gave him a very good furnished apartment, with a television set and refrigerator, free-of-charge. He died in 1998. I have been invited to visit both Israel and America, and they are ready to pay the expenses, but I can't do it because I'm rather old and sick.

In the middle of the nineties, when Jews began to leave Gomel, my brother Haim also wanted to immigrate, but said, 'If Chillinkess goes, then I'll go, too.' He loved me very much. My son doesn't want to immigrate to Israel or Germany. In 1973 when Mark graduated from college, our relatives from America came to visit us and offered to make an invitation for us. But at that time I refused to go: I was afraid to cause trouble for my brothers. We were afraid, possibly having in mind the

arrest of my husband. When in the seventies a relative of my husband immigrated from Riga [today Latvia], Isaac went to Moscow to see him off, because at that time all emigrants left the country via Moscow. After that my husband went to visit my brother in Moscow, and he made his way from the airport circuitous, being afraid of being followed. The first question he was asked by my brother was, 'Did you come directly to me?' And my husband calmed him down, explaining that he was sworn to secrecy. My brother and his wife were law-abiding Soviet people, and took immigration to Israel as it was suggested by the Party propaganda.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 October Revolution Day**

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

### **2 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

### **3 Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835-1917)**

Hebrew and Yiddish writer. He was born in Belarus and studied at various yeshivot in Lithuania. Mendele wrote literary and social criticism, works of popular science in Hebrew, and Hebrew and Yiddish fiction. In his writings on social and literary problems Mendele showed lively interest in the education and public life of Jews in Russia. He was preoccupied by the question of the role of Hebrew literature in molding the Jewish community. This explains why he tried to teach the sciences to the mass of Jews and to aid the people in obtaining secular education in the spirit of the Haskalah (Hebrew enlightenment). He was instrumental in the founding of modern literary Yiddish and the new realism in Hebrew style, and left his mark on the two literatures thematically as well as stylistically.

### **4 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.

## **5 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In 1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

## **6 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **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 Professor Mamlock**

This 1937 Soviet feature is considered the first dramatic film on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism ever made, and the first to tell Americans that Nazis were killing Jews. Hailed in New York, and banned in Chicago, it was adapted by the German playwright Friedrich Wolf - a friend of Bertolt Brecht - from his own play, and co-directed by Herbert Rappaport, assistant to German director G.W. Pabst. The story centers on the persecution of a great German surgeon, his son's sympathy and subsequent leadership of the underground communists, and a rival's sleazy tactics to expel Mamlock from his clinic.

## **9 German 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.

## **10 Great Patriotic War**

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

## **11 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.

## **12 Residence permit**

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the residence permit and kept everybody's whereabouts under control. Every individual in the USSR needed residential registration; this was a stamp in the passport giving the permanent address of the individual. It was impossible to find a job, or even to travel within the country, without such a stamp. In order to register at somebody else's apartment one had to be a close relative and if each resident of the apartment had at least 8 square meters to themselves.

## **13 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.



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

Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry.

#### **15 Zuskin, Benjamin (1899-1952)**

One of the leading actors of the Moscow Jewish Chamber Theater. A close friend of Solomon Mikhoels, he headed the theater for the last few years of its existence. In 1949 came the Party order to liquidate the theater, and Zuskin was arrested along with other members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. He was tortured and died in prison.

#### **16 Buchenwald**

One of the largest concentration camps in Germany, located five miles north of the city of Weimar. It was founded on 16th July, 1937 and liberated on 11th April, 1945. During its existence 238,980 prisoners from 30 countries passed through Buchenwald. Of those, 43,045 were killed.

#### **17 Dachau**

The first Nazi concentration camp, created in March 1933 in Dachau near Munich. Until the outbreak of the war prisoners were mostly social democrats and German communists, as well as clergy and Jews, a total of approx. 5,000 people. The guidelines of the camp, which was prepared by T. Eicke and assumed cruel treatment of the prisoners: hunger, beatings, exhausting labor, was treated as a model for other concentration camps. There was also a concentration camp staff training center located in Dachau. Since 1939 Dachau became a place of terror and extermination mostly for the social elites of the defeated countries. Approx. 250,000 inmates from 27 countries passed through Dachau, 148,000 died. Their labor was used in the arms industry and in quarries. The commanders of the camp during the war were: A. Piotrowsky, M. Weiss and E. Weiter. The camp was liberated on 29th April 1945 by the American army.

#### **18 Kirov, Sergey (born Kostrikov) (1886-1934)**

Soviet communist. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1904. During the Revolution of 1905 he was arrested; after his release he joined the Bolsheviks and was arrested several more times for revolutionary activity. He occupied high positions in the hierarchy of the Communist Party. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as well as of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. He was a loyal supporter of Stalin. In 1934 Kirov's popularity had increased and Stalin showed signs of mistrust. In December of that year Kirov was assassinated by a younger party member. It is believed that Stalin ordered the murder, but it has never been proven.

#### **19 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with

each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

## **20 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

## **21 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.

## **22 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.

## **23 Dacha**

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

## **24 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)**

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as *Sevastopol Sketches*, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

## **25 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.

## **26 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.

## **27 Bandera, Stepan**

(1919-1959): Politician and ideologue of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, who fought for the Ukrainian cause against both Poland and the Soviet Union. He attained high positions in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN): he was chief of propaganda (1931) and, later, head of the national executive in Galicia (1933). He was hoping to establish an independent Ukrainian state with Nazi backing. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the OUN announced the establishment of an independent government of Ukraine in Lvov on 30th June 1941. About one

week later the Germans disbanded this government and arrested the members. Bandera was taken to Sachsenhausen prison where he remained until the end of the war. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Munich in 1959.

## **28 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

## **29 Six-Day-War**

(Hebrew: Milhemet Sheshet Hayamim), also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Six Days War, or June War, was fought between Israel and its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It began when Israel launched a preemptive war on its Arab neighbors; by its end Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

## **30 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

## **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.