

# Ruth Strazh

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I conducted this interview with Ruth Strazh at her home. Ruth has lived alone in her two-room apartment after her husband died. The apartment is shining with cleanliness, and one can tell that its owner puts a lot of care in everything around her. Ruth is short and slim. She looks amazingly young. She has a beautiful face, hardly touched by years, and one can only notice wrinkles, when looking closely at her. She has bright eyes. Ruth has a tidy haircut. She is nicely dressed, and wears makeup. She has a pleasant low voice and a special manner of speech. Ruth speaks slowly considering each and every word. She has had a difficult life. Life has never treated Ruth kindly, even recently, when she faced the most horrific loss, when her only son died prematurely. However, Ruth has stood up to the blows of fate, holding to her optimism and the strength of mind. I cannot imagine how strong a person must be to remain charming and optimistic, like Ruth is, having been in exile, a camp and prisons and facing the hardships of everyday life during the Soviet regime.

My father's family lived in Tallinn. Estonia was then the Estland Province of the Russian Empire, and Tallinn was called Revel. I don't know where or when my paternal grandfather was born. He was commonly addressed with the Russian name of Yakov [1](#); his Jewish name was Yankel. His surname was Brodowski, and my grandmother's name was Johanna Brodowski.

In 1884 my grandfather Yakov graduated from the Pharmaceutical Faculty of the Moscow State University [2](#) with honors. Perhaps, for this reason the tsarist government awarded the title of 'citizen of honor' and the right to reside in Tallinn to my grandfather. There was a Pale of Settlement [3](#) during the tsarist regime, and only Jewish merchants, lawyers or doctors were allowed to live in bigger towns. Our family kept my grandfather's gold medal for his university successes for a long time. My father wore it on his watch chain.

My father was a middle son of three children. He was born in 1890. His name was Max. His Jewish name may have been Moshe or Moisey, I don't know. His older sister's name was Dora, and his younger brother was Leon.

My father's family was very religious. In Tallinn my grandfather was a rabbi in the synagogue [4](#) of Tallinn. My grandfather's photograph was there in the Tallinn synagogue office until the early 1940s. My father had a similar, but enlarged, picture over his desk. The family did observe Jewish traditions, followed kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. It couldn't have been otherwise in a rabbi's family. My father and his brother received Jewish education, as was common with Jewish families. I don't know what language they spoke in my father parents' family. When I first saw my grandmother Johanna in 1937, the only language she spoke was German, and my father could speak fluent Yiddish.

All three children were given appropriate secular education. They finished a gymnasium and continued their studies. My father's older sister Dora graduated from Tartu University with the diploma of a dentist. My father and his younger brother Leon went to Vienna and entered the Medical Faculty of Vienna University.

My grandfather died in 1914. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. My grandfather's grave is still there, and there is also an engraving in Yiddish on the gravestone.

In 1917 a revolution [5](#) took place in Russia. During the revolution my grandmother and her older daughter Dora moved to Rostov-on-the-Don in Russia. I don't know why they decided to move there. All I can think is that they wanted to move where nobody knew them and where they could feel safer, considering that my grandfather was a rabbi. My grandmother and my aunt may have been afraid that Bolsheviks [6](#) might question this part, while when they moved they might have changed their family name.

Perhaps, this was the reason why Dora married a widower who was much older than her. She adopted her husband's surname of Ginzburg. I don't know whether my guesses are true, but there is nobody to confirm or deny them. Ginzburg had a son and a daughter from his first marriage. In 1920 their only son Yakov was born. Dora entered the Conservatory in Rostov-on-the-Don. After finishing her studies, she, her family and grandmother moved to Moscow, where my aunt lived for the rest of her life. My father's younger brother, Leon Brodowski, moved to his older sister in Moscow after finishing Vienna University. In Moscow he got married and had a daughter. I never met my uncle Leon.

After finishing his studies my father returned to Tallinn. To obtain his diploma, he had to work in a clinic for six months. My father married Mama in 1923, and they moved to Berlin, where my father worked as an internship doctor in a clinic in Berlin. My father specialized in general medicine and skin and venereal diseases. After finishing his internship practice my father returned to Estonia, but his Austrian diploma was not sufficient to be allowed to work in Estonia. My father had to take exams to prove his diploma at the Medical Faculty in Tartu University, and he passed them successfully. This was when my father could go and work as a doctor.

My mother was Esther, nee Shein; her parents lived in Valga, an Estonian town on the border with Latvia. My maternal great-grandfather, Naftole- Herz-Yefroim Shein, lived in Tallinn. There is his grave in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. My cousin Irene Shein, my uncle Herz's daughter, translated the engraving on my great-grandfather's gravestone. The engraving is in Hebrew and reads the following, word by word: 'Here lies a great man in Torah and wise. Died on 17 adar 5657 jor', i.e., in 1897 in traditional chronology.

Before moving to Tallinn my great-grandfather and his family may have lived in Piarnu, since my mother's father, Sholom-Iosif Shein, was born there in 1866. My grandfather had a brother, Hari-Moishe, and a sister, Zvirl. My grandfather married Haya-Leya Teiman, who was born in Panevežis in Lithuania in 1873. My cousin Irene found a record in the synagogue register of Piarnu, which says they were married on 2nd September 1892, and their marriage was registered by the rabbi of Piarnu. My grandfather was a cattle dealer, and my grandmother was a housewife. They must have moved to Valga after getting married since all of their children were born in Valga. The family was big: they had six sons and three daughters.

The oldest daughter Rohe-Gitl - this was her Jewish name - was born in 1893. Then came a son, Efrayim, born in 1896. The next was Naftole-Herz, born in 1898. He was named after his grandfather, who died one year before Naftole-Herz was born. My mother-to-be, Esther, was born in 1900, and her younger sister Ella was born in 1902. After Ella four sons were born: Leib in 1903, Abram in 1904, Isroel in 1906, and the youngest Peisach in 1911.

After moving to Valga my grandfather took to timber business, and in due time he became a rather prominent timber manufacturer. His older sons Efrayim, Herz and Leib went to work at an early age. The family was big, and they had to help their father to support it. Besides studying in cheder they had no further education. My grandfather's daughters and younger sons received Jewish and secular education. They finished a Russian gymnasium in Valga.

Mama's older sister Rohe-Gitl married Moisey Levitin, a doctor. They had a son, whose name was Grigoriy. Rohe-Gitl died young in 1919. Efrayim married Rosa Kaplan. Rosa came from Aluksne in Latvia. She finished the Dental Faculty of Tartu University and worked as a dentist. Their only daughter Roni was born in 1936. Naftole-Herz married Yevgenia Goldberg from Riga. Their daughter Irene was born in 1932. Ella was married, but I don't remember her husband or children's names. Ella had three children. They lived in Riga.

Leib was married to Polina Rapoport. Polina was born in Tallinn in 1912. Her father was a timber manufacturer. He died young, and her mother took up the timber business. Polina had two younger brothers: Samuel, born in 1917, and Simon, born in 1924. After getting married Polina moved to Valga. In 1936 their only son Solomon was born. Abram and Peisach also had families, but I don't remember the names of their wives or children. Isroel was single.

My mother Esther entered the Dental Faculty of Tartu University after finishing the gymnasium, but she never finished it. When my parents got married, my father told my mother that one dentist in the family was enough, and a married woman should take the responsibility for her children and the house. Mama quit her studies when she was a 2nd-year student. She was a housewife. Mama's sisters were housewives after getting married too. Her younger brothers were businessmen. They had their own businesses.

My grandmother and grandfather were very religious. There was a synagogue in Valga, and my grandfather set up a prayer house at his home. They followed kashrut and Jewish traditions at home. All members of the family went to the synagogue on Sabbath and Jewish holidays and celebrated holidays at home. They spoke Yiddish at home. All of them also spoke fluent German and Estonian.

My parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. Both families were religious, and all of my mother's and father's brothers and sisters had Jewish weddings. My mother and father stayed in Berlin for six months while my father had practice in a clinic there before they moved back to Valga. They rented an apartment. It was a big apartment, and my father also established his office where he received patients. I remember that my father never allowed my sister or me to enter his office. He was a very tidy person, and he suffered even when a pencil on his desk happened to be in the place. Nobody, but Mama, was allowed to clean his office.

I was born in Tartu in 1925. Mama went to Tartu to have her first baby in a clinic there having been told that there were the best doctors and conditions in this clinic. Everything went well despite her

concerns, and after I was born Mama and I returned to Valga. I was the first girl, born to the family after Mama's older sister Rohe-Gitl died, and so I was given the name of Ruth starting with the first letter of her name. This is an old Jewish name.

My younger sister Sofia was born in Valga in 1929. Mama delivered her at home, and my father and a midwife attended to her. My sister's Jewish name is Soreh, and in her documents she had the name of Sofia. In the family we spoke Yiddish, German and Estonian. Mama also spoke fluent Russian. My sister and I already spoke three languages, when we were children.

My sister and I had a nurse, but my mama's family spent a lot of time with us. My grandmother and grandfather lived quite nearby, and my sister and I often visited them. We probably spent as much time with our grandparents as we did at home. My grandmother and grandfather loved us dearly, and my childhood memories are closely attached to them. Mama's brothers also spent a lot of time with us. I also loved them dearly. I never addressed them with 'Aunt' or 'Uncle', but just by their first names.

They were religious and observed Jewish traditions. I remember Grandpa putting on his tallit and tefillin to pray in the morning and in the evening. We knew that we were not allowed to disturb Grandfather, when he was praying. When he didn't, he took us out and told us stories from the Bible [Old Testament] that were very much like fairy tales.

Valga was a small town, but there were many Jews there. My childhood friend was my father's colleague Doctor Poliakovskiy's daughter. She had an older brother, but we were not friends. My friend and I went for walks and to the cinema. We often went to the Lily café after a movie. Mama bought us nice cakes. Regretfully, my friend died prematurely.

In 1931 my parents decided to move to Tallinn. I don't know why they decided to do so. Besides medical practice, my father took to business in Tallinn. He bought a fabric store. He didn't work in this store, but he checked reports and took part in major decision making process. Mama took care of the house and the children.

Mama followed the kosher rules. We had an Estonian maid. She had served in a Jewish family before and knew the rules. Mama did the cooking herself observing the kosher requirements. We had two tables in the kitchen: one for meat and one for dairy products. We also had two cupboards for meat and dairy products. My sister and I did not need to be reminded about using different spoons for meat or dairy products. Also, the dishes, tableware and utensils for Pesach were kept separately. I often watched Mama cooking meat and knew how to make it kosher. Mama left meat sprinkled with salt in a bowl to have the blood drained from the meat for two or so hours, and then it was left in water, and the water had to be replaced a few times, before it was ready for cooking.

I met Mara Shaz, whose family moved to Tallinn from Riga. Her house was the one next to our neighbors'. I knew that theirs was a non-kosher cuisine. I often visited them, and her mother often invited me to meals. I just loved sausages, and they often had sausages, but I knew that they were non-kosher and had blood in them, and I couldn't eat them. I couldn't even imagine swallowing one little bite. This is just a matter of habit, the way one is raised.

Mama used to say that we were to watch closely that there was no non-kosher food at home. What if Grandmother and Grandfather dropped by and we had nothing to offer them. I often watched

Mama cooking for Sabbath. Mama always baked challah for Sabbath, though she could have just bought it from a Jewish bakery. I used to make little challot for my dolls from the dough Mama gave me. Mama baked them for me, and I liked eating them, crispy and very delicious. I know how to make challah from four pieces.

On Sabbath we always had minced herring, liver paste, gefilte fish and chicken broth. Mama cooked food for two days, and on Saturday the maid heated and served it. On Friday evening Mama lit candles and prayed over them. We celebrated all Jewish holidays following the rules. We had matzah at Pesach, and my father conducted seder.

I wouldn't say that my parents often went to the synagogue, but the whole family went there on Jewish holidays. On Yom Kippur my parents spent a day at the synagogue and fasted. My sister and I had meals on Yom Kippur before we went to school, but when I studied in the gymnasium I fasted like my parents.

On Jewish holidays we visited Mama's parents in Valga. I was off from the gymnasium on Jewish holidays. My mother's brothers and sisters living in Valga, and their families, got together at my mother's parents'. I remember Grandfather swept bread crumbs onto a wooden shovel before Pesach. My father didn't do it at home.

My father wanted us to learn languages and sent us to the Hebrew gymnasium [7](#) in Tallinn. We studied all subjects in Hebrew while we didn't speak Hebrew at home. In summer our parents rented a villa at the seashore in Pirita. Our grandmother and grandfather stayed with us there, and Mama and Papa visited us at weekends.

Mikhelson, our teacher at the gymnasium, also spent vacations in this town. He was Jewish and his wife was Estonian, but she spoke better Hebrew than any Jewish person. One should listen to her! She made gefilte fish and forshmak from herring on Sabbath. My father talked to Mikhelson about teaching me Hebrew. We went to the beach where we spent three to four hours speaking Hebrew. We didn't read or write, just lay in the sun and bathed, but we never spoke a word in other languages.

Before the start of the academic year I spoke as fluent Hebrew as was my Yiddish. I had no problems with Hebrew at school. I learned the alphabet in the first grade. We had very skilled teachers. Many of them, including Samuil Gurin, our director, were Polish Jews that had moved to Estonia. There were four girls and twelve boys in my class. We had nice uniforms: dark blue gowns with white collars and black aprons. Girls wore dark blue berets, and there were diagonal stripes of silvery bands on the side. The number of stripes indicated the grade the girl was in. There was also a gymnasium emblem and the name of our Jewish gymnasium. On holidays we wore large white silk collars with flounces. Boys wore dark blue suits, shirts and ties.

During the longest interval a canteen was open at school. Ladies from the WIZO [8](#) Zionist organization, schoolchildren's mothers served us. Schoolchildren had free lunches and could buy sandwiches, rolls, milk, kissel and tea.

There was no anti-Semitism in Estonia before the war. Even when Hitler came to power in 1933 [9](#), the attitude to Jews did not change in Estonia. I never felt myself different from others. Jews were never abused for their Jewish identity. Life was very quiet, and even at night the streets were safe.

Schoolchildren of the Jewish gymnasium wore uniforms that were easily identifiable, but Estonian or German children never teased us.

There were a few children's and young people's Jewish organizations, both leftist and rightist ones. My friends joined some and I also wanted to join one. When I mentioned this at home in my father's presence, he said I had to study instead of going into politics. So I never joined Betar [10](#), or Hashomer Hatzair [11](#). My father had nothing against my attending children's centers, etc., as long as they had nothing to do with leftist or rightist Zionist organizations. This was strictly forbidden.

I attended a Maccabi [12](#) gym going in for gymnastics. I also had two Russian and two English classes per week besides school. I also took music classes twice a week and also, practiced playing at home. I was learning to play the piano. My parents bought a piano. Mama played the piano well, and listened to my playing, when I practiced at home.

My husband-to-be, Yakov Strazh, and I were friends. We often went out or to the cinema after we were done with the homework. When it was time for me to leave to meet with him, I tried to finish whatever I was doing quick, but Mama used to insist that I had to do this or that drill. She put a clock on the piano, and I was to play at least 45 minutes, or Mama would not let me go. I was getting nervous. 'That's enough...' and then Papa came into the room saying, 'That's enough. The girl has had enough of it...' and then I rushed to meet with my friend Yakov.

Yakov was two years older than me. He studied in the same gymnasium. He was born in Tallinn in 1923. His father, Abel Strazh, came from Tallinn and his mother, Fanny Strazh, came from Tartu. They moved to Tallinn after getting married, and their sons Yakov and Zalman were born in Tallinn, Zalman in 1927. Abel owned a hat shop. I met Yakov in the gymnasium, and we became close friends.

My father looked closely at my successes at school. Every evening he checked my record book with my grades. Every now and then he gave me tests in arithmetic or physics, and I had to do them in his presence. It made me nervous. My father was very short-tempered, though he composed himself quickly. If I did something wrong, he yelled, 'How come you don't understand? How can one not understand this?' I was paralyzed with fear during those home-based tests. In the gymnasium I had the highest grades on these subjects, and my father was bewildered about how I could be doing so well at the gymnasium, when I could not give simple answers at home.

When I was 12 or 13, a course of popular dances opened in the gymnasium. I joined it, and my father had nothing against it. All of my classmates attended the course. We enjoyed dancing so much! Once after a dancing class a friend of mine told me she'd seen an announcement of a dance party in Betar and she suggested we went there together. I didn't say anything about it at home, and we went to the party. I was late for dinner. We had a strict rule that the family got together for dinner. We had breakfast at our own time; my sister and I were the first ones to have breakfast before we went to the gymnasium. My father started work later. We also had lunch at different hours, and only dinner was for all of us. I was 10 or 15 minutes late. My father asked me where I had been and I told him the truth. It goes without saying that I was punished. My father was not so mad about my being late as about my going to a Zionist organization when he had forbidden me to do so.



We knew very little about life in the Soviet Union. Since Papa's sister, brother and Grandmother moved to the Soviet Union we did not have continuous contact with them. Correspondence was no problem with us, but those living in the USSR had to be cautious about corresponding with their relatives abroad [13](#). My parents must have known about it, and they sent letters on occasion. My father was very unhappy about his relatives living from hand to mouth while we were doing so well.

In 1933 my father decided to visit his relatives. Obtaining visas from the Soviet Embassy was a difficult thing to do, but my father managed somehow. He was horrified when he returned. We had no idea what a shared apartment [14](#) was about, and my father was shocked when he saw that Dora, Leon and their families and Grandmother lived in a stuffed shared apartment with a few other tenants in it. He told us that buying plain food products was a problem in the Soviet Union, and what awful clothes people wore, and how much effort one had to spend to get the most necessary things.

My father decided that Grandmother had to come and stay with us for whatever the price. He had to obtain permission and it took him a year before he managed to obtain all necessary papers for his mother to come and stay with her son. Before my grandmother was to arrive Mama often told my sister and me that Papa's mama was no different from our grandmother Haya-Leya and we were to love and take care about her.

When my father was to go to Moscow to pick his mother I wrote her a long letter sending it with him. I wrote to her that we had a five-room apartment and Mama has prepared a cozy room for her to live in. When Grandmother arrived, she had all new clothes bought for her. My grandmother couldn't believe it that she had a room of her own and there were no other tenants in the apartment. In Moscow it would have been five families living in a five-room apartment. We took care of Grandmother, but unfortunately, she didn't last long. My grandmother died of a heart attack in 1936. My grandmother was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn according to the Jewish traditions.

In 1937 my father died. Flu affected his kidneys. He had a long course of treatment, but medicine had limited capabilities then. My father died of heart thrombosis. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery near my grandmother's grave in Tallinn according to Jewish traditions. Mama became a widow at 37. She was to raise two children. Mama's brothers provided us support and assistance. They formed a close family: one for all and all for one. My father's fabric store supported us all right. Mama could not have possibly managed the store had it not been for her brothers' advice and assistance.

When in 1939, after the execution of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [15](#), Soviet military bases were established in Estonia, I don't think Estonian people protested against it. It was clear that Hitler was a real threat, and they probably hoped that presence of the Soviet military might protect us from this threat. The situation was peaceful and quiet, and the Soviet military were friendly. Therefore, there was no apprehension, when in August 1940 Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union and became a Soviet Republic [16](#).

Thus, our troubles emerged soon. First, our store was nationalized. Mama's brothers also suffered from the new regime. The older brothers lost their timber business, and the younger ones lost their shops. Grandfather Shein died in 1939, and my grandmother moved in with Efrayim. She fell seriously ill in 1940. She was dying, when NKVD [17](#) officers came to search Efrayim's house.

Efrayim's wife Rosa begged them to leave his mother alone, but they were merciless. All of Grandmother's children got together at Efrayim's house to bid farewell to their mother. They were crying, and the NKVD people were turning the house upside down. They didn't even respect death.

Almost immediately after Grandmother died, they forced Efrayim's family out of the house. Shortly afterward we were also forced to move out. Soviet authorities decided to make a military recruitment office in our house. None of these NKVD people cared about where a woman with two daughters was supposed to go. Even before we moved out they came to our home and took away all money and jewelry.

Our landlord was a Polish Jew from Belostok, and his wife was local. They had a son and a daughter. They were very nice people and sympathized with us. Mama hoped that those people would leave us alone having taken away everything from us. We were to learn to live in this new situation. Mama went to work to a scarf shop [18](#). Mama took out threads to make fringes on scarves and fixed the edges. She often took work home and I helped her in the evening. Next day she brought the scarves back to work.

Our gymnasium was closed. Instead, they opened a general education Yiddish school. I had no problems with that since Yiddish was my mother tongue. There were arrests, but they were not so numerous. For the most part, they arrested politicians or those who spoke openly against the Soviet regime.

On 14th June 1941 [see Deportations from the Baltics] [19](#) early in the morning our landlady dropped by. She said that her maid had been to the store where they told her that the Falstein family, whom we knew well, were arrested by the NKVD early in the morning. Nobody knew why they were arrested, for what allegations. Soon our doorbell rang. There were three individuals at the door: one wearing a marine uniform, another one was a civilian and the third a militiaman. They were armed. They asked for Mama and I said she was at work. They asked me the address, but I didn't know it. Then one of them said my sister and I were to go with them and they would keep looking for Mama. I said we were not going with them when Mama was not there. Then one went to look for Mama, and the two others stayed with us.

They told us to pack our things. I was at a loss. I had a celluloid doll in a woven pram, a birthday gift. When my father was ill and bedridden, he asked me what I wanted for my birthday, and I said it was this doll. Mama bought it for me. It seemed to be of the highest value for me, and I grabbed the doll, but I was told to leave it. The militiaman seemed to be a nice guy, and he told me in Estonian that we were to be sent to Siberia and I had to take warm clothes with me. I started throwing warm clothes and underwear from the wardrobe into suitcases.

Our maid lived with us. She considered us as her family and we also treated her as one of us. She asked these people where they were sending her mistress and the children and kneeled before them begging them to leave us alone. The civilian man answered that this was what had to be done, and that this was not to be helped. Then she asked them to allow her go with us.

At that time my Mama came home. Her two brothers also happened to visit us at the moment. Uncle Leib and his wife had recently moved to Tallinn from Valga and were staying with Polina's relatives. Polina's mother and her two younger brothers had already been arrested and taken to the railways station. Leib and Polina were not in the deportation lists and they were staying. Leib



had called his brother Peisach immediately, and they hurried to our place. I had a plain watch on my wrist. Uncle Leib took it off my wrist and replaced it with a golden watch, when nobody was looking. We had no money at home. Our uncles gave us 400 rubles, all that they managed to get for us. We boarded the truck, and the militiaman helped our uncles to load our luggage onto the truck. One could tell it was a hard job for him. He was a decent man, and there were other decent people as well.

When we came to the station, we were taken to a freight train. It consisted of cattle freight carriages. We boarded the train. When the guards left the carriage, we saw somebody waiving his hands to us from the carriage next to ours. This was Mama's brother Isroel, we didn't know he'd been arrested, too. Then somebody else waived his hand to us. It was Mama's acquaintance. Mama asked the guard permission to move to this other carriage saying there was her brother there. The guard did not allow this. He said we would meet at the point of destination.

When the train started moving, we found out there were many other Jewish families in the carriage that we knew. The Rubanovich family that we knew was sitting not far from where we were. Rubanovich himself was not there, just his wife and children. Later we learned that men were sent to the Gulag [20](#), and their families were sent into exile. The woman told us that Mama's brothers were looking for us on the platform asking people, 'Where's the Brodowski family?' We didn't hear them.

I don't remember all places that we passed. At some point we boarded a ferry. Finally we got off at the village of Molotovsk, Kirov region [about 900 km from Moscow]. All those from Estonia were accommodated in a local school. Our guards were waiting for an order from Moscow. They probably didn't know what to do with us next. There was a canteen at school where we could buy something to eat. The situation was terrible; nobody knew what was to happen next.

We went outside to look around. It was pouring with rain. We saw the locals wearing horrible looking striped potato sacks with holes for heads and arms, held by ropes on their waists. They also had bast sandals on their feet. We were staring at them, and they were staring at us. Men, women and children were following us and staring. Our women were taken to the train from home or from work, and they were nicely dressed, had high-heeled shoes and fine stockings on. The locals must have never seen such clothes.

Next day we were registered as exiled citizens and were assigned to new locations. We were sent to the kolkhoz [21](#) in the village of Slobodskoye. There were four other Jewish families in exile there. They went to sell their clothes at the market every Sunday. We still had the money from Mama's brothers, and we couldn't understand how one could take off one's own clothes and sell them. Thus, we knew what it was like later.

Soon other families started arriving at the village. A Jewish family of an older man, a tinsmith, and his two older daughters - they must have been single - from Riga was accommodated in the house next to where we were staying. The older daughter's name was Pintsia, but I don't remember the name of the younger one. This tinsmith organized a shop in the village. He employed us and other Jewish people. All Baltic Jews supported each other.

My sister was twelve and I was 16. Shortly after we arrived, my sister and I went to the local school. I went to the 10th grade, but actually I had already learned what they were teaching at my

school in Tallinn. Anyway, I had to quit school to go to work at the shop. My mother, my sister and I worked at home. We knitted jackets from cotton packthread. We had never knitted at home, but Mama knew how to knit, and I had also learned it at the gymnasium. We were to make five jackets each per month, and Mama and I managed to make three times as much, including my sister's scope. The shop provided knitting needles and paper patterns, and we spent many hours per day knitting.

We had to do this work. You see, the shop gave us bread coupons [22](#), for 500 g bread per day, and the rate for non-working people was 200 g bread. Of course, the bread was terrible, it contained bran, sawdust and frozen potatoes, but there were such long lines to get this bread in the store! We had to stand all night long in the line, and it was only delivered to the store before noon.

One day we met another Jewish man from Riga. Almost immediately after he arrived, he was appointed an accountant at the meat factory. He was not in exile, but in evacuation and the state trusted him. He offered Mama the job of an accountant clerk at the meat factory. The factory employees could buy meat bones almost for nothing. Well, these bones were stinky, and it was next to impossible to eat soup with them. There was a sausage shop at the factory, and every now and then employees received coupons to buy 300 g of sausage. The shop was at a different location, though also in the village. Mama went to work at the factory, and my sister and I stayed at the shop.

Once Mama gave me the sausage coupon and asked me to go and pick it. The shop manager was a Chechen man, demobilized from the army as an invalid. He asked me where I was from, took me to the storeroom. Instead of cutting 300 g sausage he gave me a whole piece. I told him it was too much, but he told me to take it easy and enjoy eating it. He also told me to come back, when we finished it. When I came home with this sausage, Mama asked me where I had got it. I told her that I gave my coupon to the shop manager and that he invited me to come back there. Mama told me to forget it and that we didn't need his sausage. So I never went there again.

We lived in a local house and this was terrible. Our landlady lived with her two grandchildren, her son's children, who was at the front. The children's mother hanged herself, and the villagers said it was her mother-in-law that was the root cause of it. The landlady had never seen Jews and was sure they were the most horrible beasts in the world. When she learned we were Jews, and that we were in exile, she started poisoning our life as much as she could.

Once her son came home on leave. He came into our room and started asking us where we came from and what was happening in the village, when his mother saw that he was in our room. She broke into the room yelling, 'Get out of here, they are traitors, they are enemies of the people! [23](#)'. We didn't even know what enemies of the people meant.

Shura, another local woman, whose husband was at the front, and she lived with her two children, invited us to move in with her. She said she'd been watching us and we were good people, but our landlady would really give us hell, and that she felt sorry for us. We moved to her house, and our situation really improved. Shura was a nice person. She had a cow and we bought milk from her. In winter my sister and I fell ill with jaundice. We didn't know it was a contagious disease. Thank God, Mama didn't get it from us. A very nice doctor visited us. She was in evacuation. She worked in the Sovetskoye clinic, and each day she came to our village to bring us medications. She was one of the dynasty of doctors, and her husband was a front-line doctor. I think this nice lady really saved

our lives.

We never lost hope that the war would be over and we would go home. We didn't know then that there was nothing for us to wait for. The men were imprisoned in the Gulag camp. Most of them were sentenced to five years in camps, and in 1946 the survivors started to be released. However, members of their families were in exile for a lifetime. When in 1946 most prisoners were released, it turned out there was hardly anybody left to do the work there.

One day the commandant ordered Mama and me to make our appearance, and we were told we had a week to pack our things. We didn't know what was to happen, but somehow we believed they were sending us home, but, as it turned out, they were sending us to the closed zone Bukhino near a Gulag camp. We were to join their workforce. Only women with younger children were not bound to move to the zone, and the rest of us were convoyed there. The zone was fenced with barbed wire and guarded. There were barracks inside the area and fields and woods around. Every morning we woke up to the strikes of a bell. We lined up in the yard to listen to our assignments for the day. Even after a day's work the inmates might be woken up to go back to work. The three of us worked in the field.

There were also German prisoners-of-war in the camp. Once I was told to go to work at the threshing site where Germans were working to measure the grain. Mama got so scared that she was beside herself. She said those Hitler soldiers would kill me the moment they get to know I was a Jew. I tried to calm her down, but I was afraid. I went to work. I stood by the scale where the Germans brought bags with grain from the storage facility. I was to weigh the bags and write down the values, and then the prisoners were to take those bags back to the storage facility on horse driven wagons. There were about ten of them in the crew. They spoke German to one another, and I understood everything they were saying, but they didn't know it. They never said a word about me.

I worked on the threshing site till all grain was removed, and through this whole period the Germans were very friendly with me. They were allowed to receive Christmas parcels, and they used to bring me a chocolate, candy or a few cookies. After work they carved things from wood. They gave me a spoon and board that they made, and this was very touching. I knew that the prisoners were given more bread for working over the quota and occasionally I recorded a higher output value for them. They noticed it and warned me telling me to record actual figures, when there was going to be an audit.

I had other encounters with Germans as well. Once I severely injured my foot working in the field. There were no medications or bandages, and the wound got infected and developed into a phlegmon. I fainted at work. My temperature was 40°?. Our zone was about 10 kilometers from the center of the camp, and there was a prison hospital in the center. My guard called a doctor from the hospital. The doctor was an older German man from Povolzhiye [24](#). He had served a sentence in the camp, and when his sentence was over, he stayed to work there. He visited patients around the camp. He acted as a surgeon, obstetrician or venerologist. The inmates thought much of him. All personnel in this hospital were from among the inmates: attendants, nurses or assistant doctors.

I was taken to the hospital, but had to wait there for a long time until they issued a permit of access to the closed zone. The doctor also had several other patients, and we were given a ward

for inmates from Estonia. I was taken for surgery. The doctor did the operation very well and I stayed in the hospital for some time. Twice a day the doctor replaced the dressing and we chatted in German. A few days later Mama was delivered to the hospital. She had avitaminosis and had ulcers all over her body. Mama stayed in hospital about two weeks before she was released, but I had to stay there longer. The doctor was very sympathetic with me. Whenever he had to visit a patient in our neighborhood, he offered me to go with him so that I could see my mama.

When I was in hospital, I heard about amnesty. One day I saw numbers of young women with small children and pregnant women. As it happened, only young mothers and pregnant women were subject to amnesty, and many women rushed into pregnancy. The doctor was a member of the medical commission. There was an equipment yard near the zone where male prisoners worked, but they were not political prisoners. All pregnant women were asked, who the father of the baby was, and all of them replied that it was one from the equipment yard. Nobody cared about who the real fathers were. The amnesty was over, and the rest of us fell into depression.

Later our family and four or five other families were identified as incapable of doing any field work. Other Estonian inmates tried to convince us to stay, and they might send us to the peatery, which meant certain death, but Mama and I decided that we had to get out of the zone and see what happened next.

We were sent to a village and accommodated in a local house. There was only one room in this house, and we all shared this room. The landlady had a daughter. The girl slept on the Russian stove bench bed [25](#), and the rest of us slept in this one room. We were to make wool jackets for the kolkhoz. This was hard work, and we had never made clothes before. Mama, my sister and I worked together in order to make the standard number of these jackets. A few days later Mama said we were going to starve to death if we were to stay there longer. She took a day off from work and went to the town of Slobodskoye in about 5 kilometers from the village we were staying in, looking for a job. She found a job as a music teacher in a kindergarten. We moved to the town.

We were to register our presence at the commandant's office where we were to make our appearance on certain days, every week at first and then, every ten days. Our passports were taken away right after we came to the point of our exile, and we were issued certificates instead. We were to present them for the militiaman to register our appearance and confirm that we were staying at the location directed.

Later an acquaintance of mine helped me to get a job at the wine factory office. All employees in the office were young girls, and the manager was an older man. We were paid peanuts for our work. I faced no intimidation for my status of an exiled person. I worked as an accounting clerk in the alcohol and wine shop, when the shop manager told me to bring a bottle and she would fill it with vodka. I told her that nobody in our family drank vodka, but she explained that we would sell it to get some money. Vodka was rather expensive at the market. It was hard currency and was bargained for food products. Vodka was not accounted for in the shop.

I remember once feeling thirsty and asking someone to pour me a glass of water. When they gave it to me, I drank it to the bottom in one gulp, when my inside started burning. There happened to be pure alcohol in the glass. I had never drunk anything stronger than wine at Pesach before. Many young girls ruined themselves by drinking, but fortunately, I never felt attracted to drinking.

I managed to somehow find my school friend and future husband Yakov Strazh. We parted in 1941, when our family was deported, and since then I had no information about him. Yakov's father died in 1938, one year after my father had died. Yakov and his younger brother worked in their father's hat shop. In 1940 the Soviet regime nationalized the shop. It became a state run shop. Yakov's family escaped deportation. When the German forces were close to Estonia, they managed to evacuate.

We parted, when I was 16, and Yakov was 18. When we were in the Gulag, I received a letter from Yakov. He sent me his field postbox number. I hesitated for some time before sending Yakov a letter. He replied and wrote that he agreed to evacuate to Siberia hoping to be close to where I was. Yakov was regimented in 1942, when he was in evacuation. He served in the Estonian Corps [26](#). He wrote me from the front line that had been under terrible firing several times, but he survived, because it was God's will that we reunited after the war.

Later I received a letter from a friend of mine, when Tallinn was liberated. She wrote me that Yakov was eager to run to see me, but he did not dare. So many years had passed, and he was afraid I did not need him any longer. I thought: Do I want him to arrive and see me living in a barrack with 300 other tenants? I wrote Yakov that I was eager to see him, but that at the moment I didn't want him to arrive, maybe later, when we left the zone. When we moved to Slobodskoye, Yakov was still in the army, but he could take a leave since the war was already over. As soon as I gave him my new address, he arrived.

Yakov insisted that we got married immediately. Our wedding was as plain as our circumstances. Mama could not leave her work, my sister studied at a vocational school, so, we went to the registry office. The registry officer went to the executive committee [27](#) financial department on the second floor and returned with two employees of the finance department. They witnessed our wedding. There was a market across the street from the registry office where a vendor was selling draft vodka. We went there and Yakov had 100 g and I had 50 g vodka shots. We also bought a bottle of vodka to take it home. In the evening we drank this vodka. Yakov had some food with him that we hadn't seen for many years: herring, sausage and meat. Our landlady was our only guest at the wedding. This is what our wedding was like.

Yakov stayed with us for a month. He brought with him a certificate from the military office in Tallinn. It said that I was welcome to the town as the wife of a war veteran. Yakov went to Slobodskoye and Kirov to arrange for my release. He visited all local management, but it didn't work. Though officially I was already Yakov's wife, the local leaders thought that ours was a pro forma marriage. Yakov had to go back to Tallinn. His vacation was nearing its end. Upon arrival he demobilized from the army and continued to work on my release from exile, and again, with no results.

Some Estonians started coming back from exile on their own, without waiting for any permission. Yakov wrote me that they were returning from exile, and there were no follow-up actions undertaken against them. He said that I had to go back to Tallinn, particularly considering that I was married to a resident of the town. I was afraid, of course, particularly because I had no passport, but then I finally made up my mind and took a train to go home. Mama and my sister stayed in Slobodskoye. Our landlady went to the station with me. She carried my suitcase to the carriage on her shoulder. Fortunately, there were no ticket collectors in the train, and I reached

Kirov without any disturbances.

In Kirov I bought a ticket to Leningrad and sent a telegram telling my husband I was on my way. In Leningrad I stopped by at my cousin sister's, my uncle Leon's daughter. Leon was killed during the war. He was in captivity and perished in a concentration camp for prisoners-of-war. My cousin bought me a ticket to Tallinn. My husband and his family were waiting for me at the platform. This was in February 1948.

There was Yakov, his brother Zalman and my mother-in-law, and also, my mother-in-law's three brothers and her sister with their children and grandchildren. I had never met the latter ones before and felt rather ill at ease. I had awful valenki boots [warm Russian felt boots] and my mother's coat on. Mama lost a lot of weight in exile and wore my coat that I had grown out of at the age of 16. Mama gave me her woolen one and a purple silk dress that she had had before the war. Mama also gave me a pillow, a blanket and two sets of bed clothes that we had with us when leaving home. This was my dowry.

My mother-in-law arranged a family dinner after we came home. Her brother, who was a shoemaker assistant, measured my foot and two weeks later he gave me three pairs of shoes: walking shoes, sandals and a pair of fancy patent leather shoes. My mother-in-law's brother, who was a dressmaker, brought me two dresses of my size. My friends bought me two cuts of fabric: black-and-white checkered wool and fair silk. These were not available in stores, but they managed somehow. My husband's brother Zalman received a coupon for a men's suit and somehow managed to bargain it for a cut of fabric to make a coat. My mother-in-law's brother made me a nice coat. To cut a long story short, they dressed me from feet to head. But this was later on.

The following day after my arrival Yakov suggested that we went for a walk in the town. My mother-in-law gave me her old boots that were too big for me, and I had to wear thick woolen socks. My husband took me to a restaurant, and we danced all night despite those awful boots that I had on. Other ladies had fancy shoes on, but I didn't care.

Shortly afterward I knew I was pregnant. There were no indications of my new condition, but I started gaining weight. It had happened before, when we moved to Molotovsk, and the doctor attributed this to the change of climate. So, I took it easy, but my mother-in-law didn't. She kept telling me to go to see a doctor. Having no documents, I could not go to the polyclinic. Yakov's cousin's wife Yevgenia was pregnant and visited a private doctor. My mother-in-law asked her to take me with her. I told the doctor that I had no passport and I had been in exile and came back waiting for no permission. I thought he would tell me to get out of his office, but he examined me and told me I was going to have a baby. This doctor was the head of the gynecology department in hospital. He told me he would watch over me and when the baby was due he would take me to his hospital without any documents.

When I came back home, I made the announcement to the family. Frankly speaking, I was afraid of having a baby. I didn't know if I could manage. My mother-in-law merely laughed at my fears. My pregnancy caused no trouble. Every night I met my husband from work and we went for a walk. I visited my friends. One night, after we came back from my friend's, labor began. I didn't want to bother the rest of the family and tried to suffer silently, when my mother-in-law came into the room and told me to go to the hospital. She was very caring.



Yakov's brother accompanied my husband and me to the hospital. The weather was terrible. It snowed and was windy. There were no cars around. There was a truck passing by, but when it stopped, the driver, seeing that I was pregnant, said he did not want me to have a baby in his truck. Finally, my husband stopped a car. He convinced the driver to take us to the hospital. He speeded up and it took us minutes to get to the hospital.

No members of the family were allowed even to the reception. Yakov and Zalman left the hospital. The nurse called my doctor at home, and he came to the hospital. A few hours later my son was born. I was happy, since my husband wanted a son so very much. We gave him the name of Maxim after my father. When we returned home from hospital, my son had a brit milah ritual. My mother-in-law made a nice dinner, and we partied.

Gurevich, the cantor of the synagogue in Tallinn, conducted the ritual. The synagogue was no longer there. It burned down during the war. The authorities provided a house that was rearranged into a prayer house. Gurevich asked my husband and me whether we had a Jewish wedding with a chuppah. We told him about our wedding, and he knew there was no way to make a chuppah where we were in exile. Then he added that he was going to conduct the wedding ceremony before the brit milah ritual, so that our son would be legitimate according to the Jewish law. We had a makeshift chuppah installed. Gurevich recited all required prayers, and conducted the wedding ceremony. Then brit milah occurred after the ceremony.

Actually, Jewish people observed Jewish traditions in Tallinn after the war. However, it was not safe for public officials or party members [see [Struggle against religion](#)] [28](#). My nephew, Yakov and Yevgenia's son, had been born two months before Maxim. He also had his brit milah. Yakov's cousin's brother was a member of the Party and worked in the Prosecutor's office in Tallinn. He went to another town on business at this period, so that in case somebody found out, he could say that everything was done without his knowledge. When our son was three weeks old, I was arrested - on 16th December 1948. I was allowed to take my son to jail with me. I refused to have him with me. I knew he might die in jail. I was taken to the jail in Tallinn, and my son stayed with my mother-in-law and my husband.

I had tried to obtain a legal status before my son was born. My former schoolmate Tarel was Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Estonia, I think. I went to see him. I told him my story. He gave me a note and told me to take it to the KGB [29](#) and tell them I came from him. My mother-in-law told my husband I should not go to this office alone. When we came to the building, Yakov was not allowed inside. I went along long dark corridors. The employee I came to see told me that he advised me to leave Tallinn immediately, so that when there was a request for my whereabouts received, I was not there. In case of issuance of an official request I was to be sent back to Kirov with a convoy.

Mama wrote me that the commandant's office in Slobodskoye already registered my absence. The commandant told my mother that if I returned on my own will, he was not going to apply any sanctions against me, but if I were to be convoyed back, I would be in trouble. I showed Mama's letter to my family. They told me that nobody was going to do any harm to a pregnant woman, and then, when I had a baby, they would not dare to disturb me. I told the KGB I was pregnant and they wanted me to submit a doctor's statement that I needed continuous medical observation. I brought them this statement, and then the KGB officer told me to come back after I had the baby to

register my presence. When my son and I were released from the hospital, my family told me to forget about going to the KGB since they must have long forgotten about me. As it turned out, the KGB never forgot anything or anybody.

I spent half a year in jail in Tallinn. I was allowed to see my family. Yakov and Zalman came to see me. They brought my son's pictures with them. The prison cells were overpopulated. There were different people there. There were mothers, fiancées, wives and sisters of Estonian patriots, accountants and directors of various enterprises, religious people, persecuted for their faith, and criminals. All were in prison.

On 16th June 1949 I was taken to the office of the warden and he told me he had received my verdict from Moscow. I was sentenced to three years in a camp. He told me to familiarize myself with the verdict and sign it. Shortly afterward I was moved from a common to a holding cell. I stayed there for some time before some Russian women, thieves, and I were taken to a photographer's office. These thieves knew everything that was happening in jail. They communicated with other prisoners using the Morse code. They told me I had nothing to worry about. I didn't know there was a law on amnesty for women having children under seven years of age. All those with me were released, but I was deported to Kirov region.

I was released from camp imprisonment, but I was still to spend three years in deportation. I was kept in Kirov deport prison for a few weeks. There were other Estonian prisoners that had left from exile without an official permission, and there were also criminals, and even murderers in this jail. In the train to Kirov there was a whole carriage with murderers that were going to a jail in Kirov. I was taken to Slobodskoye. There were other women going with me. One had a four-months old baby.

My mother-in-law kept writing my mother and sending money for me. She told my mother that I was to arrive at Slobodskoye, and my mother came to the platform every day. I saw Mama on the platform when our train arrived. She had a bunch of field flowers for me. The guard told the five of us to hold hands as if we were criminals. They didn't allow me to hug Mama or exchange a few words with her. We were told to board a truck. There were two armed militiamen and a dog in the truck. We were taken to a pretrial detention ward in the militia office in Slobodskoye.

A young militiaman came to our ward asking who wanted to take a shower. I asked him to take me to the shower, and on our way back to the ward I asked him to tell my mother where I was kept. I explained to him that I had been in exile there before I left for my hometown, and that now I was taken back there. The militiaman told me he was not allowed to disclose any information about me. I asked him to give me a pencil and piece of paper where I wrote my mother's address and asked him to keep it just in case.

Mama told me later that somebody came to see her and told her where she could find me. Mama came to see me. She had 400 rubles, a coat and rubber boots for me. We only had those clothes that we were wearing, and had no money with us in prison. We moved on to Nagorsk, 160 kilometers from Slobodskoye. We walked several nights, and stayed overnight in various militia offices. We were exhausted, but we tried to move on without sitting down. When you sat down it was impossible to force yourself to stand up. We also took turns to carry the baby.

In Nagorsk a militiaman met us. There was a huge barrack in the middle of a field, and there was only a field and a forest around. There were two-tier plank beds inside the barrack, and a stove with pipes sticking out in the center of it. There were families of Povolzhiye Germans living in the barrack. They had children there, celebrated weddings and buried the dead. The militiaman said we could spend that night in the barrack, and on the following day we were to find lodgings. There were no vacant beds inside and we slept on the floor. We were so tired that we didn't really care. The most important thing was that we were going to sleep and nobody was going to wake us up.

There was another Jewish woman with us. She was an old woman from Hungary. I was 23, and she was 50 at the time. Her name was Madam Yakobson. When Hitler came to power in Germany, Hungarians were after the Jews in their country. The Jewish community of Hungary appealed to Jewish communities in other countries to marry Hungarian Jews and take them out of the country. This was how Madam Yakobson happened to get to Latvia, from where she and her husband were deported in June 1941. Her husband died in the camp. They had no children, and she happened to be all on her own. Yakobson told me that we had to stay together, being Jewish. We did so.

The following morning I shared my mother's money with my co-travelers. They didn't even have money to telegram their families asking them to send them some money. We went out looking for lodging. The locals were apprehensive about us. It took us some time to find places to stay at. Mama told me she was trying to arrange for my moving to Slobodskoye. She was told at the commandant's office that I could move to Slobodskoye, if I had my son with me. Mama wrote to my mother-in-law, and she brought my son to Slobodskoye. Maxim was ten months old. I was allowed to move to Slobodskoye and some time later my husband arrived.

My husband, my son, my mother and I lived together. I went to work at the timber storage. I worked as an accountant clerk, releasing saw timber. Yakov also went to work at the timber mill. I was so upset that Yakov had to live in such conditions. He had not been deported and could live in Tallinn and have a good job. However, my husband told me otherwise. He said he could only be happy where I and our son were. Yakov earned well, but I knew this way of life was a burden on him, and there was nothing I could do to change it. Yakov brought a bed and a pram for our son. My mother-in-law sent us parcels every month. In those years it was hard to buy food products even in towns, and in that abandoned village it was impossible. She sent cereals, sugar, butter, clothes and shoes for Maxim. I should give her credit for having Maxim growing up a healthy child, bright and strong.

We continuously went to register in the commandant's office. We had to be there every ten days, but later it came to once a month. When my son was about five years old, a colonel from Kirov visited the commandant's office. He demanded that I come to register with my mother. My family came there with me, my husband and Maxim. He was as pretty as a doll! He had nice clothes on. My mother-in-law sent me clothes that her friends and acquaintances gave her after their children grew out of them. The colonel looked at Maxim and said that it wasn't necessary to take the child with us, and that it would be much better if the child knew nothing about the commandant's office. I replied that there was nobody to stay with him at home. The colonel gave my son paper and pencils to draw while we were busy.

Some time later the chief of the local KGB office summoned me to his office. I told my manager that I had to go there and that I was very concerned. He comforted me telling me that if they

wanted to arrest me they would have come for me themselves. On my way I went to see Mama in the kindergarten where she was working. I told her where I was going and said that she should not worry, if I didn't come back. When I came to this officer's office, he sent his secretary to fetch some paper, which he then gave me to read and sign. The paper said that effective that date my son Maxim Strazh, born in 1948, was released from exile. I didn't even know that he was registered as a deported person. So in 1953 the child was released.

I was released from exile in 1956. The fact that my husband was a veteran of the war expedited the matter. My mama and sister weren't released until 1960. My sister was deported at the age of twelve. She worked in the field and then worked at a plywood factory, before she entered a vocational school where she was given training in consumer services. She became a manicurist. After finishing her school Sofia worked at a local hairdresser's. When she returned to Tallinn, she went to work as a manicurist. Sofia married Vladimir Popov, a Russian man. They lived a good life together. The only sad thing was that they had no children.

After the war we had no relatives left in Tallinn. Mama had only her brother Herz left. He was released from the Gulag in 1947, and he moved to Estonia. In 1948 his daughter Irene returned from exile. When in 1948 they were again arresting those that had been in exile, Herz and his daughter moved to Tashkent. His wife was still in exile. She was only released, when rehabilitation [30](#) of the victims of persecution [Great Terror] [31](#) began. She also moved to Tashkent to reunite with her family. Herz died in Tashkent in 1985. His wife died in 1999. Irene returned to Tallinn from Tashkent in 2000, when Estonia was independent [32](#).

Two of my mother's brothers perished in the Gulag. We only know that Efrayim died on 14th June 1942. In his death certificate the cause of death is stated as dystrophy, but we know nothing about the circumstances of his death: whether he starved to death, or it was a disease, whether he died in an accident or was killed. We have no information about Isroel. He just disappeared in the Gulag. Leib, Abram and Peisach were killed in Estonia by fascists and so were their sons. Mama's sister Ella, who lived in Riga with her family, also perished during the occupation of Latvia. So, that's our account: Hitler killed four of the Shein family, and Stalin killed two members of the family. My father's sister Dora died in Moscow in 1947.

My husband and I visited Valga several times after we returned to Tallinn. It was so dear! Every year I visited Valga on the death anniversary of my grandmother and grandfather. I went to their graves. I also visited the town on holidays. We also observed Jewish traditions at home during the Soviet period. What was happening at our home was nobody's business. We were the ones to choose between Jewish and Soviet holidays that we wanted to celebrate. We did not want to celebrate the evil and the losses that the Soviet era brought us.

We only went to the synagogue on holidays. After we returned, we had no opportunity to follow kashrut. There was no place to buy kosher products. However, we did our best. We were sure to have matzah on holidays. We could buy it at the synagogue, and when it was not available there, we made it at home. We fasted on Yom Kippur and conducted the Kapores ritual. We utilized money instead of chickens, and then sent the money to the synagogue.

Our son did not get any Jewish education, but he knew all Jewish traditions and watched us observing them at home. Before he was to turn 13, he was prepared for the bar mitzvah. Maxim did not know Hebrew, and I wrote him the prayers in Russian letters, and he learned them by heart.

There was a lawyer in Tallinn. His name was Levitin. Later he moved to Israel. His father was a great scholar in Jewish rituals and traditions. He trained Maxim for the bar mitzvah. We bought Maxim a new suit, shirt and tie for the bar mitzvah. My mother-in-law gave him a watch when we returned from the synagogue. Maxim was doing well at school, but he never joined the pioneers [33](#), or the Komsomol [34](#) at school. It was his decision, and his teachers failed to convince him otherwise. My son was always good at standing his own ground.

Anti-Semitism developed in Estonia during the Soviet regime. I never faced it myself. I was always treated in a fair manner. A lot depends on the personality, but I couldn't help seeing that the attitude to Jews was different from what it was like in pre-Soviet Estonia. Soviet authorities were against anti-Semitism by word, but in reality, they were spreading it.

After we returned my husband and I went to work at the mechanical factory. We worked in shifts, and sometimes these were night shifts. We tried to work the same shifts. Later my husband went to study, and then he started advancing at work. When he became a shop superintendent, he only had to work regular hours while I continued working in shifts. It also happened that Yakov left for work, when I had just returned home. My husband wanted me to find another job that would be more suitable for us. My relatives helped me to find a job as a commodity expert, but it involved business trips all over the Soviet Union to purchase goods. I knew this would affect my family and my son and declined this offer.

Then I was offered a job at the same commodity stocks storage. I had to choose between jewelry and souvenirs. I was concerned about work with jewelry, gold and diamonds. One had to be honest, but one also depended on others, and then it involved responsibility, if something went wrong. So I decided for the position of an accounting clerk at the souvenirs' department. Later I worked at a steel storage. When a new hotel opened in Tallinn, I went to work there as a room maid. I worked 24 hours and then had three days off. It was difficult work. I already received a pension and I decided it was my time to retire finally. I finally retired at 62.

My husband and I lived together 37 years. He was promoted to chief engineer and then factory deputy director. It was hard work, and it was strenuous. He had three heart attacks. He died after he had the third heart attack. My mother-in-law died in 1980, and Yakov died in 1983, three weeks before his 60th birthday. We made a restaurant reservation and had cards printed out. It was a sudden death. Yakov and his mother were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. My mama died in 1985, two years after my husband's death.

After finishing school my son entered the Automobile Transport Faculty of the Polytechnic University in Tallinn. Upon graduation my son went to work at a car company where he was well promoted. Maxim married Margarita, a Russian girl. She is two years older than my son. Margarita was born in a town in Lithuania. When she was a child, her family moved to Tallinn. Margarita worked as a planner in the department for light industry.

Their son Vadim was born in 1969. Their daughter Angelina was born in 1976. Though my daughter-in-law is Russian, my son's family observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. Margarita learned to bake challah and cook traditional Jewish food. She asked me for recipes and wrote them down. They raised their children Jewish. My grandson Vadim studied in Moscow. After finishing the Road Transport College he returned to Tallinn. He works in a car company. Vadim married Nastia, Anastasia, a Russian girl. They have a son, whose name is Alan.

Angelina, my favorite, studied at school with advanced study of the English language. She was eager to become a lawyer. When she was still at school, there was a student exchange program introduced. Angelina submitted her papers to participate in this program. There was a stiff competition, and the requirements were very challenging. Angelina won the competition. My son wanted her to go to study in the USA where she could get good education and have best prospects for life, but at the last moment my granddaughter got scared. She was crying and I was telling her that she could always come back home if she didn't like it there.

Angelina went to America with two suitcases. One was smaller where she packed her clothes, and the bigger one was full of books. She was staying with a family in Miami. There were two daughters in the family, and one was having problems with mathematics, and the parents were hoping that Angelina would help her. My granddaughter had the highest grades in mathematics. The family welcomed Angelina cordially. They treated her like she was one of them. Angelina entered a Law College. A year later the family decided to make a present for Angelina. They visited Tallinn with her and met her family. They stayed with us for a month.

After finishing the College Angelina entered the Law Faculty. She rented an apartment with another student. Before graduation, students were to find a place to have pre-graduation practice. My granddaughter sent letters to five places, and three invited her. She decided for Washington. Angelina's tutor was a skilled lawyer. He took her with him to all proceedings, even to the White House.

Angelina met her future husband at university. He studied at another department. His name was George Ekkey. He was an American Jew and came from a traditional Jewish family. My son and daughter-in-law went on tour to Israel, and Angelina and George also came there. My son liked George very much, and this was very important for Angelina. Her father was the highest authority for her. They were very close.

One night the telephone rang at my son's apartment. My son was alert. Night calls hardly ever bring good news, but this time it was Angelina. She told her father that George had proposed to her and asked if her father had no objections to her marrying him. My son replied that she had to decide for herself, but that he quite liked George. The following day he had a call from George's father, who asked him whether he gave his consent to their marriage. My son told me about it and we were waiting for the wedding.

We went to America to the wedding. I've been at a Jewish wedding and I can tell the difference. Angelina's wedding was a traditional Jewish wedding. It was very nice. George's parents arranged the wedding party. They liked Angelina very much. I gave Angelina our family relic. It was the gold medal that my grandfather Yakov Brodowski received for his successes at Moscow University. On the right side of the medal the engraving says 'Year 1884' and 'Yakov Brodowski' along the circle edge. On the underside is the tsarist coat of arms and the inscription 'Moscow State University.' Now my granddaughter has this medal, and she will give it to her children as the memory of their background.

My great-grandson Dilan-Matthew was born in 2000. At the time of birth he was given one name and that was Dilan, after George's mother Dina. She had died some time before Dilan was born. His second name of Matthew he received after my son, who died half a year after Dilan was born. It happened in 2001.



I knew nothing about my son's disease. He lived ten years after he found out that he was ill. My son didn't want anybody to tell me about his disease. Maxim was very strong and never complained. Once my sister asked me on the phone how Maxim was feeling. She knew and everybody knew about his disease. I was the only one in the dark. I didn't even understand why he always had a scarf wrapped around his neck in my presence. He did it because the tumor on his neck was quite visible then, and he did not want to make me worry. Later I incidentally found out that my son was taking a course of chemotherapy. I asked him why and he said it was for preventive reasons.

He worked a lot and often went on business trips. I didn't know there was a problem. Once I was told that he went on business to St. Petersburg. I didn't worry, but I thought the trip was strangely durable. When he arrived and called me, I was concerned about his hardly audible weak voice. I went to see him and saw how weak he was. He stayed at home three days. When hemorrhage began, he was taken to hospital. And only then I got to know that he wasn't on a trip, but was in hospital where he had marrow transplantation. He did not withstand this transplantation. He died shortly afterward. I don't know how I could fail to see how ill my son was. I was sort of blind. I don't know why God punished me. I've lost all close people. I've outlived my own son. Now I live alone.

When the Soviet Union broke up, I wasn't upset. I think it was good for Estonia. Our current life in independent Estonia proves I was right. Some people still believe life was better in the Soviet Union, but I am not one of them. I'm glad that our country does not have to wait for directions from Moscow, but can build up its own life.

I'm well provided for. Our government believes that those who had been subject to deportation, were victims of repressions, and takes every effort to make our life easier. I have a higher pension than other pensioners. When counting years of work experience they take one year in exile for three, and at my age of 80 I have formally 80 years of work experience. My pension is sufficient to support me. There are other benefits granted to repressed people. I can always feel that my country cares for me, and this is very nice.

The Jewish community [35](#) was established in Estonia during perestroika [36](#). It's grown bigger and stronger. I think, it's a very important course. Many Jews moved to Estonia after the war. They have no relatives and there are many lonely people among them. They visit the community and find things they can do there. It's very important for lonely people. I think all Jews should support each other. It doesn't matter whether they were born here or have moved here from other places.

I attend the community rather frequently. Former students of the Jewish gymnasium have monthly meetings at the community. It's a pity there are few of us left. Some perished during the Holocaust, and others died after the war. I was a member of the Women's Zionist organization WIZO in our community. WIZO takes care of elderly and lonely people. I can't continue this work now. I visit the community on Jewish holidays. I like spending time with the people I know and like.

Glossary:

## **[1](#) Common name**

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish

names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

## **2 Lomonosov Moscow State University**

founded in 1755, the university was for a long time the only learning institution in Russia open to the general public. In the Soviet time, it was the biggest and perhaps the most prestigious university in the country. At present there are over 40,000 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students at MSU.

## **3 Jewish Pale of Settlement**

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

## **4 Tallinn Synagogue**

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

## **5 Russian Revolution of 1917**

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

## **6 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action

(the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **7 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium**

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

## **8 WIZO**

Women's International Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920 with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. A network of health, social and educational institutions was created in Palestine between 1921 and 1933, along with numerous local groups worldwide. After WWII its office was moved to Tel Aviv. WIZO became an advisory organ to the UN after WWII (similar to UNICEF or ECOSOC). Today it operates on a voluntary basis, as a party-neutral, non-profit organization, with about 250,000 members in 50 countries (2003).

## **9 Hitler's rise to power**

In the German parliamentary elections in January 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won one-third of the votes. On 30th January 1933 the German president swore in Adolf Hitler, the party's leader, as chancellor. On 27th February 1933 the building of the Reichstag (the parliament) in Berlin was burned down. The government laid the blame with the Bulgarian communists, and a show trial was staged. This served as the pretext for ushering in a state of emergency and holding a re-election. It was won by the NSDAP, which gained 44% of the votes, and following the cancellation of the communists' votes it commanded over half of the mandates. The new Reichstag passed an extraordinary resolution granting the government special legislative powers and waiving the constitution for 4 years. This enabled the implementation of a series of moves that laid the foundations of the totalitarian state: all parties other than the NSDAP were dissolved, key state offices were filled by party luminaries, and the political police and the apparatus of terror swiftly developed.

## **10 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.

### **11 Hashomer Hatzair ('The Young Watchman')**

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer- movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

### **12 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.

### **13 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

### **14 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.

### **15 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.

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

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

## **17 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.

## **18 Artel**

A cooperative union of tradesmen or producers involving shares of overall profit and common liability.

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

After the Soviet Union occupied the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in June 1940 as a part of establishing the Soviet system, mass deportation of the local population began. The victims of these were mainly but not exclusively those unwanted by the regime: the local bourgeoisie and the previously politically active strata. Deportations to remote parts of the Soviet Union continued up until the death of Stalin. The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. Deportations were reintroduced after the Soviet Army recaptured the three countries from Nazi Germany in 1944. Partisan fights against the Soviet occupiers were going on all up to 1956, when the last squad was eliminated. Between June 1948 and January 1950, in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodged from labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life' from Latvia

52,541, from Lithuania 118,599 and from Estonai 32,450 people were deported. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Lithuanian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable to reject the regime. Most of the exiled died in the foreign land. Besides, about 100,000 people were killed in action and in fusillade for being members of partisan squads and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

## **20 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.

## **21 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.

## **22 Card system**

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

## **23 Enemy of the people**

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

## **24 German ASSR**

Established as Labour Commune of Volga Germans or Volga German AO within the Russian SFSR on 19th October 1918. Transformed into Volga German ASSR on 19th December 1924, abolished



on 28th August 1941. The official state name was Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of the Volga-Germans. The city of Engels is the former capital of the Volga-German Republic.

## **25 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

## **26 Estonian Rifle Corps**

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

## **27 Ispolkom**

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

## **28 Struggle against religion**

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

## **29 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.

## **30 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.

### **31 Great Terror (1934-1938)**

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

### **32 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic**

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

### **33 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.

### **34 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.

### **35 Jewish Community of Estonia**

On 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, a resolution was made to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first

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

### **36 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.