Bluma Lepiku

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Estonia
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
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I conducted this interview with Bluma Lepiku at her home. Bluma lives in a one-room apartment in a new residential compound in Tallinn. Her apartment is very clean, cozy, and full of light. Bluma is short and plump. Her black wavy hair with gray streaks is cut short. She has bright and young eyes. After her husband died, Bluma has lived alone. Her relatives passed away a long time ago, and Bluma is very lonely. Her forced loneliness is a hard burden on her. Due to severely ill joints she spends most of her time at home, and this causes a lot of suffering to her. She even complained to me that she begins to forget words having nobody to talk to. Bluma is sociable, very spontaneous and lively. She finds everything in the world interesting. She was very interested in hearing about Ukraine. Bluma reads and thinks about what she has read a lot.

My family history

My mother and her family did not come from Estonia. My maternal grandmother, Dora Gore, and my grandfather Gore were born in the Russian Empire, but I don't know the exact place of their birth. My mother Luba, nee Gore, her sister Fanny and her brothers Samuel and Lev were born in the Russian town of Yekaterinoslav [in 1926 Yekaterinoslav was given the name of Dnipropetrovsk, which is currently one of the largest administrative centers in Ukraine. It's located 400 km east of Kiev]. My mother's Jewish name was Liebe. My mother was born in 1897.

I don't know when my mother's brothers and her sister were born. I can't even say for sure, whether they were younger or older than my mother. I would think that Samuel and Fanny were older, but there is nothing I can say about Lev. I never met him. All I know about him is what my mother and grandmother told me. Regretfully, I've forgotten a lot. I am 80 years old already and my memory often fails me now.

My mother's family lived in Yekaterinoslav before the 1900s. When Jewish pogroms 1 started in Russia, they decided to move to where it was quieter. I have no information about my grandfather.

I don't know what he did or how he died. He might have become a victim of pogroms. At least, my mother's family moved to Estonia without him. It was my grandmother and her four children. Though Estonia also belonged to the Russian Empire, but Jews lived a very different life in Estonia than in other areas of the Russian Empire. The Pale of Settlement 2 was not applicable in Estonia. Jews were not restricted as to the area of residence and were treated as equal members of the community.

There were no Jewish pogroms in Estonia. There were no restrictions with regard to education or career applied to Jews. Jewish young people from all over Russia came to study at Tartu University. There was not only no quota 3, but there were even Jewish students' corporations. [Editor's note: Students of Jewish origin studied in Tartu University since the end of the 19th century, and they had their associations and corporations. The student's money box was established in 1874, and in 1884 the academic society with the name of Akademischer Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur (Jewish Academic Society of History and Literature). Jewish students formed the 'Hacfiro' society. There were two corporations: 'Limuvia' and 'Hasmonea.' The 'Limuvia' was a secular organization, and the 'Hasmonea' was Zionist oriented. Since there were relatively few numbers of Jewish students at the university, their organizations were small. In 1934 the Academic Society listed 10 members, the 'Hacfiro' - 20, 'Limuvia' - 43, and the 'Hasmonea' - 30 members. The societies owned large libraries: the 'Limuvia' had about 3,500, the 'Hasmonea' - 1,000, the Academic society 2,000, and the 'Hacfiro' had 300 volumes. Jewish students also had a cash box. This was the first Jewish students' organization in Estonia. The purpose of the cash box was to support Jewish students from poor families. Wealthy Jewish families made annual contributions to the fund, and the board distributed the amounts among needy students].

There were many wealthy Jewish families in Estonia, and they made contributions to the cash box to give talented students from poor families an opportunity to pay for their studies. This was not the case in any other areas of the Russian Empire. Jews have always been treated nicely in Estonia. Perhaps, this was why my mother's family decided for Estonia. They settled down in Tartu, the second largest city in Estonia.

My mother hardly told me anything about her childhood. I don't know how they managed without their breadwinner, but my grandmother managed to raise her children all right. They managed to get some education. At least, my mother, her sister and brothers could read and write. My mother's older brother Solomon was a sales agent. He supplied popular Czech imitation jewelry to local stores. My mother's older sister Fanny moved to America at 17. My mother attended hat making trainings and one year later she became a skilled hat maker. All I know about my mother's bother Lev is that he was regimented to the army at the beginning of World War I and disappeared at the front. His family kept hoping that he was captured or wounded and was in hospital, but he never came back.

My mother's family was religious. My grandmother was a believer. She observed Jewish traditions and raised her children to respect them. The whole family went to the synagogue 4 in Tartu on Jewish holidays. They also celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home and followed the kashrut. Each family member spoke fluent Russian since they had arrived in Estonia from Russia. However, the language they spoke at home was Yiddish. In Estonia all of them learned Estonian, including my grandmother. Though Russian was an official language in Estonia like everywhere else in the Russian Empire, the majority spoke Estonian, their mother tongue.

When my mother and her brother Solomon began to earn their own living, my grandmother moved to her older daughter Fanny in America. My grandmother corresponded with my mother and Solomon telling them about life in America. She was telling my mother that she should visit them in America. My mother finally decided to take the trip. This happened during the First Estonian Republic 5, after the war for independence was over 6, i.e., in 1920. My mother decided she would visit her folks and see whether she would be interested to move to America for good.

She had to get to Tallinn from Tartu to go on from there. Her brother traveled a lot, and he told my mother there was a little Jewish restaurant and an inn in Tallinn where my mother could stay overnight, if necessary. Solomon had stayed there himself on his numerous trips. He told Mama she should stay there as well. This was how my parents met. My mother came to the inn and told the owner her name, Gore. The owner of the inn and the restaurant, my future grandmother, Dora Reichmann, asked my mother if Solomon Gore was related to her. My mother told her that Solomon was her brother. The owner liked my mother a lot.

My mother heard someone playing the violin at the restaurant. It was beautiful. She asked who was playing so beautifully. The owner replied that it was her older son Yankl. She showed my mother into the restaurant where she introduced her to her son. They fell in love at first sight and there's no need to say that my mother cancelled her trip. She stayed in Tallinn and then went back to Tartu. Shortly afterward my mother and father got married. They had their wedding party in my grandmother's restaurant. It was a traditional Jewish wedding with a rabbi and a chuppah. After they got married my mother moved to Tallinn.

My father's parents came from Tallinn. My grandmother's sister, Martha Fridlander, also lived in Tallinn. She divorced her husband before I was born. I didn't know him. Martha had a son. His name was Hermann. He was tall and handsome. Marta was worried that he was single. I didn't know my father's father, Mendl Shumiacher. My father was born in 1897. His younger brother Michail was born in 1900. Their father died, when they were still very young.

My grandmother remarried. I don't remember her second husband's first name. His surname was Reichmannn. My grandmother had his portrait. He was a handsome man with moustache. They didn't live long together. Reichmannn died in a tragic accident. He was an electrician. One day he was killed by an electric shock. My grandmother never remarried again. She rented a house and opened a kosher Jewish restaurant and a small inn for traders and sales agents. When her business developed and she could afford it, she bought the building from its owner. The family resided in a rental apartment.

My grandmother was a terrific cook. I don't know a better one. Her inn and restaurant were always full, and a number of men proposed to my grandmother, but she refused all of them, since none of them wanted her children. They were talking about getting married and as for the children, they wanted to discuss this issue later. However, my grandmother did not agree to leave her sons on their own even for the time being. So, she never remarried again. She dedicated herself to the restaurant and her sons.

My father and his younger brother were very good at music. They studied at a gymnasium, but my grandmother could not afford to pay additionally to teach them music. It was too expensive. However, both of them wanted to learn music. Somehow, though I don't know how they managed it, they learned to play the violin. My father started earning money, when he was still very young.

There were musicians playing the music during silent film screenings. My father played the violin at the movie theater. This was his good luck. A teacher of music took notice of him and offered him free classes. He lived in Tartu and convinced my grandmother to let her son move to Tartu to take music classes. His teacher taught my father diligently, and when my father improved enough to continue on his own, he came back home.

Perhaps, it's not proper to say this about one's own father, but there was no other violinist like my father in Tallinn. Who didn't know Shumiacher! My father could not afford to study at the conservatory, but he became a skilled musician. He put his whole heart into music. My father played in the largest restaurants in Tallinn: Astoria and Linden. Many visitors went to the restaurant just to listen to Shumiacher playing. My father's brother Michail also became a good violinist.

After the wedding my parents rented an apartment from Penkovskiy, a Jewish owner. We had a three-room apartment with stove heating. It was nice and warm. I remember piled stoves in our rooms. The piles were polished so thoroughly that one could look in them like in a mirror. There was one stove to heat two rooms: my parents' bedroom and the children's room. There was another stove in the kitchen, and it also heated the dining-room.

My father earned all right and could provide well for his family. My mother didn't work after her wedding. My older sister Mena, their first child, was born in January 1922. After my baby sister was born, my mother's mother came from America. She lived with my parents helping them to take care of the baby. I was born in October 1926. I was given the name of Bluma.

Growing up

My grandmother stayed with us a little longer before moving to Tartu where her son Solomon and his family lived. Solomon married Yida, an Estonian Jewish girl. In 1922 their son Michail was born. My grandmother died in Tartu in early 1940. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tartu according to Jewish traditions.

We spoke several languages at home. My grandmothers and my parents communicated in Yiddish. Besides, my parents taught my sister and me German and Estonian. Actually, we learned Estonian playing with other children, and our governess Jenny was teaching us German. We also spoke Russian at home. Young girls from Pechory, a Russian town located on the border of Estonia and Russia, used to take up housekeeping jobs in Estonia. We also had one such housemaid. We heard our mother speaking Russian to her. My sister picked some Russian, but I couldn't speak any Russian.

Our father was not involved in raising the children or any household duties. My mother was responsible for raising the children and keeping the house. My father brought money home, and it was my mother's part to take good care of it. My mother was always alone at home at night. My father played at night-time. My mother and my grandmother became good friends. They went to theaters and concerts together. My grandmother liked my mother dearly. However, my two grandmothers did not get along. This is the case, when they say they were at daggers drawn with one another.

My mother was raised to strictly observe Jewish traditions. My father was not particularly religious, though his mother was a very religious woman. We followed the kashrut at home. My mother did

the cooking herself, and all food was kosher. As for my father, he did not follow the kashrut. He had meals at restaurants and told us he commonly ordered pork carbonade or chops with fried potatoes and a shot of vodka. He believed having a delicious meal was more important than kashrut. As for my mother, she followed the kashrut strictly. We never had pork at home: we only ate beef, veal and poultry.

My father ate this kind of food at home. My mother was religious. My mother and my grandmother went to the synagogue on Sabbath and Jewish holidays. There was a large choral synagogue 7 in Tallinn. Men were on the lower floor, and women sat on the balcony. Mama always celebrated Sabbath at home. She made a festive dinner, lit candles and prayed.

On Saturday afternoon my grandmother invited us to a festive lunch. My grandmother was a terrific cook, and I still cook what I liked eating at my grandmother's. She always made Jewish kugel with ground potatoes, onions, pepper and spices, all mixed and baked in the stove. I remember how my grandmother's kugel was rolling in fat, and when taken out of the stove, it was 'shedding' the drops of goose fat like tears. Kugel and chicken broth - this was so delicious! I think Jewish cuisine is the most delicious. My grandmother also made potato latkes, fried pancakes. My grandmother served them with bilberry jam. It goes without saying that there was gefilte fish, stuffed goose neck and the herring forshmak.

There were sweets, too. My grandmother made teyglakh, rolls from stiff dough with raisins. Alcohol was also added into the dough. They are cooked in honey with spices. They taste delicious. We also liked aingemakht from black radish. Ground black radish was also cooked in honey with spices. This was a festive dish, and we liked it as well. As for common meals, my father used to make ground black radish with goose fat.

We visited my grandmother to celebrate Jewish holidays. The whole family got together. My mother's younger brother Michail, my grandmother's sister Martha Fridlander and her son Hermann, my grandmother's friends also joined us. There were at least 15 people sitting at the table. All traditional Jewish food was on the table.

We always had matzah on Pesach. My father conducted the seder. He broke the matzah into three pieces hiding the middle part, the afikoman, under a cushion. One of the children, whoever managed first, was to find the afikoman and give it back for a ransom. I remember once finding the afikoman. I received a bag of walnuts in return. We celebrated all Jewish holidays. On Purim my grandmother made very delicious hamantashen pies filled with poppy seeds with raisins, honey and walnuts.

On Yom Kippur my grandmother and my mother observed the fast. They spent a whole day at the synagogue. When they returned, they could have the first meal of the day. They usually had some fruit for a start and then had a meal about two hours later. I remember this. We also celebrated birthdays. My grandmother used to make a bagel for each birthday member of the family. They were beautiful bagels! They were decorated with oak-tree leaves made from dough, sprinkled with sugar powder and ground almonds. Bagels of this kind remained fresh for a week. My grandmother made her last bagel shortly before she died in 1948.

My father did not take part in raising his children, but we obeyed him implicitly. He could shush us just frowning or looking at us with a definite expression. We were never beaten or told out. The

most severe punishment for me and my sister was when our father told us to stand in the corner. Our parents treated us with strictness. I remember that I liked dangling my legs, when sitting at the table. When my father noticed this, he made me go to stand in the corner. When everybody else had finished eating, I was allowed to sit at the table to eat.

It would have never occurred to my sister or me to disobey our parents, snarl at them or demonstrate disrespect. Things like that never happened. When we went out, Mama always told us at what time we had to be back at home. If we were ever two or three minutes late, we were not allowed to go out next time. My mother and father wanted to know our friends and where we went. However, we were never restricted in our choice of friends. I was never told to only make Jewish friends. I had Jewish, Estonian and Russian friends. What mattered for our parents was that my friends came from decent families and behaved properly.

There were wonderful winters in Tallinn before the war. There was a lot of snow in winter. The snow was white and clean. There were few cars, and the air was clean. My friends and I liked sleighing from the hill in the Old Town on the side of the Liberty Square. We liked walking in the park and along the narrow streets of the Old Town. Our family spent the summer months in Piarnu, a resort town. My father played in the orchestra in Piarnu, and my mother, my sister and I enjoyed our vacation there. I have beautiful memories of our stay there.

Jews had a very good life at the time of the First Estonian Republic. There was no anti-Semitism. Jews suffered from no restrictions in Estonia. The only restriction, as far as I can remember, was that Jews could not hold senior officer's positions in the army. However, I don't think this was so very bad, since they were free to engage themselves in any other sphere of activity. They were free to receive higher education and become teachers, lawyers and doctors. Lots of Jews were engaged in businesses. They enjoyed the same employment rights as Estonians. What was important was how skilled one was and how well one could perform, but one's origin was of no significance, really.

In 1926 Jews were granted the cultural autonomy 8 unlocking even more opportunities. There was no everyday anti-Semitism either. Routinely anti- Semitism can only evolve, when the government shows connivance. It can only develop, when it is not terminated, and there was no such ground in Estonia.

Going to school

My sister studied in a Jewish gymnasium in Tallinn. There were two gymnasiums sharing one building on Karu Street, though they both had the same staff and director, Samuel Gurin. In one gymnasium subjects were taught in Hebrew, and in the other one in Yiddish, while Hebrew was just another subject. My sister studied in the Yiddish gymnasium. When my time came to go to the gymnasium, I went to the Yiddish one. It was quite a distance from our house and my mother took me there in the morning and met me after classes.

We had very good teachers, indeed. Gurevich taught us music and religion. He was a wonderful teacher and a chazzan at the choral synagogue in Tallinn. Gurevich told us interesting tales from the Bible, the Torah. He brought a concertina to our classes to accompany us, when we sang.

Unfortunately, I only studied one year at the gymnasium. I fell ill with diphtheria and missed a number of days. I was to go to the second grade the following year. I went to the Estonian general education school near our house. Boys and girls studied together at the Jewish gymnasium, but this school was for girls. There were wealthier and poorer pupils at school. I also had friends from wealthy or poor families. This was of no significance for my parents. We retained our friendship. Unfortunately, many of my friends have passed away. And I keep in touch with those, who are here, we call each other and see each other occasionally.

My father insisted that my sister studied music. We both attended piano classes, but it was impossible to practice at home, when our father was there. God forbid, you play a false note. Father made a real blow-up yelling that no good musicians will come out of us. This was the worst oath he could think of. Therefore, Mama was always watchful that we did not sit at the piano, when Father was at home.

My father's younger brother Michail Shumiacher was also a violin player. He had no family. Regretfully, this was my grandmother's fault. Michail lived together with Ilze, an Estonian woman of German origin, for 13 years. Ilze was a very beautiful and intelligent woman. She knew 15 languages and worked as an interpreter in an embassy. She had a son from her first marriage. His name was Otty.

Michail and Ilze loved each other and wanted to get married, but my grandmother was strictly against this marriage. She had no complaints against Ilze, but one: Ilze wasn't of the Jewish origin. My grandmother believed that Michail had to marry a Jewish woman. My father and his brother respected their mother so much that it never occurred to Michail to disobey his mother and do what he believed was right. My grandmother kept introducing him to Jewish girls, but Michail only wanted Ilze. Otty hated Michail. When a child I thought Otty felt so because he was a fascist, but when I grew up, I understood that Otty believed Michail to be the source of his mother's suffering. I don't know what this was about.

In 1939, when Estonian residents of German origin started moving to Germany at Hitler's call-up, Ilze and Otto left, too. I remember how Michail came to see us then. He was very upset and told my mother that all he needed to say was, 'Ilze, stay,' and Otty would have left for Germany alone. However, he couldn't have said this, because my grandmother would not have recognized Ilze. He never saw her again, and Michail never got married. He dated women, but never stayed long with one.

We recalled Ilze and her son again in 1944, when we returned to Tallinn from the evacuation. The owner of the apartment where my uncle had lived before the evacuation told him that when the Germans occupied Tallinn, a German officer wearing an SS uniform visited her looking for my uncle. This was Otty. If my uncle had stayed in Tallinn, he would have killed him for sure.

In the mid 1930s my grandmother's condition grew weaker. The podagra disfigured her hands, and her joints were aching. She could work no loner, so she sold her restaurant. She spent all her time reading the Torah and praying. We often visited her.

During the War

I cannot remember what my parents thought about the Soviet military bases in 1939 9. The adults must have discussed this issue, but there was a solid rule in our family: the children were not to be present, when adults were having their discussions. They did not touch upon policy in our presence. Even when we had guests, we had to leave their company at 9 in the evening. Without any reminder we had to stand up, say 'good bye' to everyone politely and depart into our room. This was the rule. Therefore, we never knew what they were discussing.

In summer 1939 we were on vacation in the country, the town of Algvida. There was a railroad nearby, and a train with Soviet navy men arrived there. They were entertaining, sociable and even arranged impromptu concerts for the locals. My mother found them enchanting, and when she discovered Jews among them, she was delighted. My mother spoke fluent Russian and she could easily talk to the Soviet officers. She met a few of them and was very much interested in what they were telling her about life in the Soviet Union. I remember my mother saying to a Soviet officer, 'How come you've never traveled here before?' At that time we did not know yet what the Soviet regime was bringing to Estonia. In 1940 the Soviet rule was established in Estonia 10. Soviet Armed Forces came to the country. A few months later my mother was saying with horror, 'Why are they here?'

Estonian residents knew about the Soviet Union what they could read in newspapers or hear on the radio. This information stated that the USSR was the country where people were equal, all roads were open to all, healthcare and education were free and all nations lived as one fraternal family. Actually, these were the slogans that we were going to hear every day. In general, Estonians had a friendly attitude towards the Soviet newcomers. I don't know whether they were sincere or just realized that there was nothing they could do about having them in their own country. Anyway, the accession of Estonia to the USSR was undisturbed. The Soviet newcomers were even greeted with flowers.

Oppressions followed soon. They kept arresting politicians and the ones that failed to demonstrate their loyalty to the Soviet regime. The next step was the nationalization. They took away houses, stores and businesses, which became the property of the government. We were happy that Grandmother no longer owned the restaurant. Actually, our family had no other property. My father's 'production tools' were his hands and the violin. Therefore, our family suffered no implications then. Since we had no property we did not belong to the wealthy class of exploiters, according to the understanding of the Soviet authorities. The only change for me personally was that my classmate and I became pioneers 11. However, this was a mere formality for me and the girls. We hardly knew anything about pioneers.

The population of Tallinn grew all of a sudden. The military were the first to come, and then their families followed. They were initially accommodated in local apartments. This was when we experienced living in shared apartments 12. Nobody was accommodated in our apartment, though. Perhaps, they would have been, had there been more time. I don't think my parents were concerned about those on-going arrests. They probably believed there was nothing we should have been afraid of: we were decent people, we did not lie and our father was not involved in any politics. At that time my father was playing in the symphony orchestra at the drama theater.

On 22nd June 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union 13 without declaring a war. We had to decide whether we were going to stay or leave. We did not feel like leaving our home. My mother

and grandmother were positive that we should stay, but my father said we should leave as far as possible from the place and there should be no doubt about that. His theater was to evacuate and we could go with it.

My mother packed a suitcase for each of us, just in case we happened to travel in different train carriages. Mother packed our best clothes and shoes. She also added our valuables and silverware into or Father's suitcase: a sugar bowl, a coffee pot and the tableware. My mother was hoping that we would be able to trade our silverware for food products, if necessary. However, this was the suitcase that was stolen at the railway station even before we got on the train.

My grandmother, my father's brother Michail and my grandmother's sister Martha went with us. Martha's son Hermann was mobilized to the Soviet army. The theater was to evacuate to Kuibyshev, they were told, but on the way the route changed. The Soviet government was evacuated to Kuibyshev and, of course, we were not allowed to go there as well. We arrived at the Kanash station, Chuvashia [about 700 km north-east of Moscow]. At the evacuation office we were told that our destination point was the village of Shemursha. The musicians of the orchestra and their families were distributed to various locations. In Shemursha we were the only family of an orchestra player, though there were many other people evacuated from their homes. They came mostly from Belarus. There was one family from Estonia and we became friends almost immediately.

We were accommodated in a small house located in the yard of the owner's house. We were the only tenants. There was a big room and kitchen with a Russian stove 14 in it. The stove heated the kitchen and the room. We cleaned the house. I washed the floors using a brush and some alkali solution. We made frilled gauze curtains for the windows. There was no other house with curtains in the village. The locals, when visiting us, admired how clean and cozy our house was.

There were actually many things we didn't know about living in the village. We didn't know how to cut wood, and my mother didn't know how to stoke the Russian stove. It took us some time to get used to doing things of this kind. My mother was trading whatever belongings we had with us for potatoes and flour. We baked potatoes in the Russian stove, and my mother baked our own bread. My sister and I picked brushwood, bringing it home in bundles. Someone delivered a few logs to us, and we cut them for wood for the stove. My mother or my sister never learned to cut wood. My father and I did this job. We had to learn it all. Misfortunes can teach anything.

There was a sauna in the backyard. This was new to us. We had never seen a sauna before. There are no such saunas in Estonia. You undress in the fore room with some straw on the clay floor. Coming out of the sauna, you get dressed standing bare footed on this cold straw. What is surprising is that nobody fell ill once there. I was very ill, when a child. I had probably all children's diseases in Estonia: scarlet fever, diphtheria, chicken pox, etc. And catching a cold was a common thing me, but I never had even a running nose in Russia, even though we came out of the sauna, when it was minus 40 degrees Celsius outside. When we returned to Tallinn, I started catching a cold often again. The climate in Chuvashia was very healthy with bright and hot summers, when it only rained occasionally, and frosty and dry winters.

The locals treated us kindly. We did not starve even during the first year of the evacuation. We have to thank our mother for managing to provide food for us. My mother started making sheepskin hats for the locals from the sheepskin they supplied. They paid with food products:

potatoes, cereals, sauerkraut and pickles. At the start of the second year we received a land plot where we planted potatoes, carrots, cabbage, onions and garlic. Tatiana, our landlady, had a cow. She brought us a mug of milk every evening. My mother had cuts of fabric with her, and she traded them for butter, poultry and even honey. So, we had everything we needed in the evacuation, and our situation was very different from what others had to go through.

My mother and sister knew the Russian language, while my father and I could speak only a few words at the most. It was hard at the beginning. Mama taught me the Russian alphabet. I tried to read signs in the village. I made a few friends. They were local girls and the ones like me. They spoke Russian to me and before long I picked up some Russian. For a long time I spoke with a terrible accent and put all the wrong accents on words, but in due time I learned to speak.

Back in Estonia I had finished four grades at school, and in the village I went to the local school. It was hard at first, but I improved eventually. Schoolchildren used to write letters to the front. My friend helped me with writing letters. I drafted a letter, she checked and corrected the mistakes and I put together the final version. So, I learned to write without mistakes, eventually. I finished seven grades of a general education school in Chuvashia. I didn't join the Komsomol 15 at my school. They didn't pay much attention to such things there.

My grandmother's sister's son Hermann was regimented to the army before we left Tallinn. He was enlisted to the Estonian Corps 16, which was formed in early 1942. It was deployed in the Yelansk camps near Kamyshov in the Ural, which was not that far from our location. Hermann managed to visit us in our village. He fell ill with diphtheria, and when he was released from hospital, he was allowed a leave. Hermann stayed with us for a short time before he went back to his unit. This was the last time we saw him.

He died a tragic death at the very end of the war. This happened on Saaremaa Island. Herman was captured by Germans. He did not look like a Jew having fair hair and a straight nose. He was tall and spoke native German. Besides, his surname was Fridlander. The Germans thought he was an Estonian German. They did not kill him. When the Estonian Corps advanced to Saaremaa, he managed to escape. When Hermann joined with his unit, they met him with suspicion. They did not believe he was not working for the Germans. They couldn't believe the Germans had not killed the Jewish man. Nobody listened to what he had to say, and he was regimented to a penal unit where he perished. He must have been destined to die, and there is no escaping fate. After the war Hermann's fellow soldier told Aunt Martha about what had happened to her son after the war.

In 1943 my father was summoned to Yarsoslavl where an Estonian state orchestra was formed. My father's brother Michail was also summoned there. My father and Michail went to Yaroslavl. Before leaving they made stocks of wood for the stove. Even when we were leaving there was still a lot of it left. Some time later my father picked us from Shemursha and we headed to Yaroslavl [about 250 km north of Moscow].

My father worked a lot in Yaroslavl. He attended rehearsals, and the orchestra also went on tours to the front line. There was also a ballet and a drama troop. There was even a jazz band in which Uncle Michail was playing. They all gave concerts at the front.

My mother did not go to work in Yaroslavl, but my sister did, though I can't remember where. I finished a course of medical nurses at the medical school in Yaroslavl. I went to work as a medical

nurse at the ophthalmologic department at the hospital in Yaroslavl. In November 1944 the Estonian Corps liberated Tallinn. We started preparations to go home. My father was offered a job in the symphony orchestra in Yaroslavl, a nice apartment and salary, but my sister and I insisted on going back to our homeland. We wanted to go back whatever there was in store for us! We could not imagine living anywhere else, but Estonia. So, our family headed to Tallinn.

After the War

We looked forward to getting to our apartment. We already knew that it was not damaged or ruined. Uncle Solomon's son got to Tallinn some time before we did. He served in the Estonian Corps that liberated Tallinn. Michail came by our house and wrote my mother that our apartment was all right. However, when we got there, it turned out there were other tenants living in there. Our Estonian janitor had moved in there. When we opened the door using our own key, he met us with the words: 'Jews, what are you looking for here? Why did you come back in the first place and how come they didn't kill you in Russia? My father asked him what he was doing in our apartment, but he only cursed us in response. To cut a long story short, he didn't let us in our own home. We had to back off.

My mother's friend, whose husband hadn't returned from the front yet, gave us shelter. My father addressed the court to have our apartment back. However, it turned out that there was no way we could force the janitor to move out. He presented the form stating that his son was in the Red Army to the court. As it turned out afterward this form was falsified, but we only found this out many years later. Well, at that point of time we were homeless. After numerous visits to the executive committee 17 and the Central Committee of the Party Mama obtained an authorization for us to move into two rooms in a shared apartment. We lived there a few years. Our co-tenants in this apartment were three other families. We had never resided in a shared apartment before and had to get used to the new way of living.

After the war my mother's sister Fanny found us. She lived in the USA with her family. She was so happy to learn that we survived! We had hardly any luggage, when we arrived in Tallinn. Mama only retained one decent outfit for each of us, so that we had a pair of shoes and a dress each to dress properly to go out. She didn't want people to say that we were a bunch of ragamuffins having come back from Russia. The rest of our clothing was sold or traded for food products. Actually, this was all we had at all. Our apartment and whatever belongings we had left therein were gone. Aunt Fanny started sending us parcels. She sent us sufficient clothes to dress for any occasion. We corresponded until my father was told that this was not safe 18 and our communication faded.

Uncle Solomon's wife returned from the evacuation. Ida and Solomon were evacuated to Uzbekistan. Solomon had poor sight and was not subject to army service. Solomon was a rather credulous man, and this played a wicked trick on him. One day in the evacuation a Polish Jew, an acquaintance of Solomon dropped by asking Solomon whether he might leave a bag full of clothes at his place. It goes without saying that Solomon did not mind. Later it turned out that this bag contained stolen things. The thief had been captured and confessed that Solomon had the bag. My uncle's place was searched. They found the bag and arrested my uncle. Solomon died in prison. Ida worked at a weaving mill in Uzbekistan. She was even noted for her performance. Their son Michail was at the front and survived. They lived in Tartu after the war.

After returning to Tallinn our family observed Jewish traditions. There was no possible way to follow the kashrut, though. Well, we did not buy any pork or pork sausages, but there was no place selling kosher meat. We bought beef, veal and poultry, then. Actually, we did that, when meat became available in stores some time after the war, of course. We celebrated Jewish holidays at home. My mother made matzah for Pesach. We did what was possible. The synagogue in Tallinn burned down in 1944. My grandmother and mother went to a small prayer house on major Jewish holidays. My sister or I didn't go there.

In Tallinn I went to work as a medical nurse in the navy hospital. My sister Mena was a manicurist at a hairdresser's. Our father played the violin in a popular café in Tallinn. Before 1940 it bore the name of Fleishner after its owner, and after the war it was renamed to the Tallinn café. Many people visited the café to listen to my father playing the violin. He played with a small orchestra. People applauded, when he stepped onto the stage.

My father liked Russian romances and musical comedies. He put his whole heart into playing the violin. He had four infarctions because of working so hard. When he died, so many people came to his funeral, as if he had been some celebrity. And my father was a celebrity in Tallinn, indeed. When renowned violin players from the USSR or other countries visited Tallinn, they always came to see my father. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

My grandmother returned to Tallinn all right, but her health condition grew worse. She had an infarction and died in 1948. In 1952 my father's younger brother Michail died. He had leukemia and died at the age of 52.

In 1948 Israel was officially acknowledged 19. My father was no Zionist 20, but he was as happy as a child would be. We also felt happy and proud acquiring our own country. The fact that the Soviet Union supported Israel was some reconciliation for making Estonia one of the Soviet Republics. The relationships between the Soviet Union and Israel were quite friendly at the start. Golda Meir 21, the Prime Minister of Israel visited Moscow, and this event was widely covered in the mass media.

We followed what was happening in Israel. We are Jews, aren't we? And every nation sympathizes with its own people. We were proud of the successes of Israel. Who wouldn't be proud? Then the attitude of the USSR toward Israel changed dramatically. The Soviet press kept calling Israel an aggressor. We listened to news from Israel on the Finnish and other Western radios. We were worried about the Six-Day War 22, the Judgment Day War 23. And we were proud, when the little country of Israel won the victory over its offenders.

However, my mother had no intention of moving to Israel. My mother used to say, 'East or West, home is best. Why go to another country? Our home is here and so are our dear ones and friends. Why give up all and go to where we don't know? It might be the case, if we were oppressed to persecuted, and otherwise there's no reason to leave your home.' When in the 1970s large numbers of Jewish people were moving to Israel, I particularly didn't feel like going there.

Poor people of Israel! I don't think they knew they were going to have their hands full with all of them, who were used to commanding and demanding what they believed was due to them. For some reason Soviet Jews thought that Israel owed to them and they kept demanding the benefits, which were granted to the native residents of the country that they had built in the middle of the stony desert. It never occurred to them that they had to contribute something before they were

entitled to receive things. They aren't even willing to study the language. They want people to talk Russian in Israel.

Nowadays Israelites, perhaps, understand that they should have constrained their generosity, but can they change anything? Immigrants from the Soviet Union may cause a social upheaval soon... So, for this very reason I was reluctant to move to Israel. I sympathize with Israel a lot. Poor country. They are surrounded with the Muslims thinking of how to destroy them, and on the other hand, there are immigrants from Russia, unwilling to accept the rules of the country and trying to introduce their own rules.

I got married in 1950. I met my first husband, Victor Vatis, at a dancing party at the Palace of Officers. We started seeing each other and got married shortly afterward. Victor came from Odessa 24. His family moved to Tallinn after the war. His mother, Zinaida Vatis, was born into a family of district doctors in Kherson. Zinaida became a medical nurse. She got a very good education. She knew few foreign languages. She spoke fluent French and often spoke French to my father's brother Michail. Her husband, Yuri Vatis, was an accountant. They had two children. Victor, the older one, was born in 1927. His sister Tamara was one year younger.

Victor graduated from a College of Finance and Economics and studied at the Department of Journalism of Tartu University, the extramural department. Though Victor was a Jewish man, my mother did not quite like the fact that he wasn't a local man. However, my parents had no objections to our marriage. We had no traditional Jewish wedding. This was hard to arrange after the war, and besides, Victor was an atheist. We registered our marriage in a registry office and had a wedding dinner with our friends and relatives. Victor had a room in a shared apartment where I moved after the wedding.

Victor was a jealous husband, and insisted that I quit working at the hospital, because many of the patients were young men. I went to work as a medical nurse in the railroad children's recreation center. I got pregnant, and my pregnancy took a complicated course. The labor didn't go normal and the baby was stillborn. After that we started keeping aloof. We were no longer a family. We were just two people sharing a room for some vague reason. We divorced in 1953. However, I retained friendly relationships with his mother and sister. Tamara died young. She had the flu, and it affected her heart. She died in 1980.

I worked in the recreation center for three years. The Doctors' Plot 25 had no implications for me. This period was quite unnoticed in our part of the country. I remember the day, when Stalin died in March 1953. Many employees of the recreation center were not just crying: they were grieving and sobbing, as if they had lost their own father. They were lamenting and sobbing. I did not cry and had no feeling of grief. I could not understand why they were grieving. I was telling them that we are all mortal and one day we will go, too. I though to myself: are they so dumb? Don't they know that Stalin was an evildoer? As it happened, they didn't.

Stalin was mean in his treatment of doctors. It was a good thing he died and they were rehabilitated 26. However, even now many people believe that Stalin was a great person and chief. Well, let everybody believe what one wants to believe. For some people Stalin was an evildoer, for others he was an idol, and this won't change.

In the children's recreation center I contracted dysentery bacillus from children. I could not go to work with the children before I fully recovered, and I quit working at the center. I went to work as a typist at the railroad office. I issued train and load tickets. I thought it was going to be my temporary job, but when I fully recovered, I did not feel like going back to the center. My work there involved night shifts and continuous nervous tension... So I stayed at my new job.

There I met Ilmar Lepiku, my second husband. He was Estonian. He was a loader. We got married in 1962. My mother was no longer with us. She died in 1956. We buried Mama in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. In 1962 we buried my father next to her.

My second husband, Ilmar Lepiku, was born in the village of Aniya, Kharoyusk district, in 1932. His father and mother Ilmara were farmers. Ilmar had a younger brother. His name was Rein. Ilmar finished seven grades at the general education school in the village. He was not fond of farming and went to study at the vocational school at the shoe factory in Tallinn. After finishing it he worked as a shoemaker at the factory and lived in a dormitory, which saved him from the resettlement [see Deportations from the Baltics] 27.

His mother Maria Lepiku and his father were exiled. When the officers came to arrest Maria, her younger son was in bed. Maria had sufficient self- control to cover him with heaps of clothes, and the NKVD 28 officers did not notice the boy. Maria and her husband were arrested, and their son stayed at home alone. His neighbors found him and he stayed with them. They were kind people. Maria was exiled to the Krasnoyaskiy Krai and her husband was taken to the Gulag 29 where he died. Maria returned from exile in 1956. She came back an invalid. Estonians are very hard-working people. Maria worked at an elevator sparing no effort. She had her spine injured. It hurt her to walk. However, she lived to turn 91.

Ilmar worked at the factory until the late 1940s, when he went to work as a loader at the railroad. He earned a lot more as a loader. Ilmar was a sportsman and a very strong man, and hard work did not bother him much. He was very honest. He told me other loaders were stealing, when unloading trains. It was common for Soviet people to steal at work. I saw that, when I was in the railroad staff. I thought then: 'It's none of my business. Let them do what they want.' Ilmar did not even think about stealing things. When he quit his job, his supervisor said he was so sorry that he was leaving. There are few people like Ilmar.

When we got married, I quit my job and went to work as a controller at the Salva toy factory manufacturing dolls with Estonian folk costumes. The factory was located in the yard of our house, which was very convenient. Shortly before I was to retire I went to work at a toy shop. They paid a higher salary to the staff of shops, which was better from the point of view of my future pension. When my retirement time came, I was assigned the highest pension rate in the country, which was 120 rubles.

My husband and I got along very well. They say mixed families face the risk of confrontations due to their national differences, but I believe this all depends on the spouses themselves. Behave decently, respect your spouse's national identity, respect his/her people's traditions, and there are going to be no problems. This is how we believed it was proper. I never heard a mean word spoken by my husband against Jews.

However, Estonian people had no anti-Semitic convictions. There was no anti- Semitism in pre-Soviet Estonia in the past. It was imported to Estonia by immigrants from Soviet Russia. I wouldn't say that all Soviet people are bad. No. Like Germans, for example, besides fascists, there were also German people rescuing Jews during the war. I believe there is no evil nation, there are evil people. This is also true about Jews. Somehow, evil people draw more attention than decent ones.

My dear ones left this world early. My sister died of cancer in 1982, when she was 59. Mena was single and lived alone. My husband Ilmar died in 1992. He turned 74. 14 years ago my dearest person died. I don't know when it is my turn...

In 1985 the Jewish community of Estonia 30 was established. It provides great assistance to all of us. The community supports me. I keep to a strict diet and cannot eat the food they deliver. Therefore, they deliver food rations, and I can cook myself. I try to do everything about the house. The social community staff tell me off for cleaning the windows myself, when I can order this service. What I think is that as long as I can do things myself, why bother people?

I used to visit the community frequently in the past. I attended their events and celebration of holidays. Now walking is difficult for me, and I stay at home most of the time. The community covers some medication costs for me, though I have to spend a lot on medications.

In summer 2005 the government increased pensions of the people, who had been in the evacuation. We were equaled with those, who had been subject to repression, and provided some similar benefits. However, our utility bills are very high. After paying all bills I have 800 crones [about USD70,-] left, and this is far from sufficient. I don't know how I would manage, were it not for the community support.

It's hard to give a simple answer to the question about the breakup of the Soviet Union. In general the life of Jews in independent Estonia 31 has improved. There is no anti-Semitism now, or there's hardly any, I'd say. Nowadays they have job-related age and qualifications restrictions, but no nationality-based limitations. There are hooligans, but they exist in every country. However, they are just a few individuals, but it is not the policy of the country. Our President shows respect to Jews and highly values our community. He visited the community at the Chanukkah celebration recently. This kind of visit was out of the questions in the past.

I would say this happened to be beneficial to some people and failure for the others. The breakup of the Soviet Union is good for young people, undoubtedly. They have free choices. They can study in any country and they can travel all over the world. They have got more opportunities in Estonia, too. There was no entrepreneurship in the Soviet Union. People could only get jobs at the state-owned enterprises. Nowadays any individual can start his/her own business. This is good for the country.

However, pensioners have surely lost a lot. There were low prices and free healthcare in the Soviet Union. This is very important for the people of my age. Now we have to pay for healthcare services and medications. The members of the parliament responsible for lawmaking studied in free Soviet universities. And now they establish prices for higher education. Is this fair?

I know that I have already lived my life, and I'm not the one to have my word in what is going to become of Estonia. This is up to younger people. They are to live in their country and raise their

children. What I know for sure is that to have a good life, one has to think about one's country and helping the needy besides taking care of oneself and his/her own family.

Glossary:

1 Pogroms in Ukraine
In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

2 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.

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

4 Tartu Synagogue
built in 1903 by architect R. Pohlmann. The synagogue was destroyed by a fire in 1944. The ritual artifacts of the Tartu Synagogue and the books belonging to Jewish societies were saved during World War II by two prominent Estonian intellectuals - Uki Masing and Paul Ariste. A part of the synagogue furnishing has been preserved in the Estonian Museum of Ethnography.

5 First Estonian Republic
Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918, they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918.

6 Estonian War of Liberation (1918-1920)
The Estonian Republic fought on its own territory against Soviet Russia whose troops were advancing from the east. On Latvian territory the Estonian People's Army fought against the Baltic Landswer's army formed of German volunteers. The War of Liberation ended by the signing of the

Tartu Peace Treaty on 2nd February 1920, when Soviet Russia recognized Estonia as an independent state.

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

8 Jewish Cultural Autonomy
Cultural autonomy, which was proclaimed in Estonia in 1926, allowing the Jewish community to promote national values (education, culture, religion).

9 Estonia in 1939-1940
On 24th September 1939, Moscow demanded that Estonia make available military bases for the Red Army units. On 16th June, Moscow issued an ultimatum insisting on the change of government and the right of occupation of Estonia. On 17th June, Estonia accepted the provisions and ceased to exist de facto, becoming Estonian Soviet Republic within the USSR.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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.

13 Great Patriotic War

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

14 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.

15 Komsomol

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

16 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.

17 Ispolkom

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

18 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.

19 Creation of the State of Israel

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

20 Revisionist Zionism

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

21 Meir, Golda (1898-1978)

Born in Kiev, she moved to Palestine and became a well-known and respected politician who fought for the rights of the Israeli people. In 1948, Meir was appointed Israel's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. From 1969 to 1974 she was Prime Minister of Israel. Despite the Labor Party's victory at the elections in 1974, she resigned in favor of Yitzhak Rabin. She was buried on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem in 1978.

22 Six-Day-War

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

23 Yom Kippur War (1973 Arab-Israeli War)

(Hebrew: Milchemet Yom HaKipurim), also known as the October War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and the Ramadan War, was fought from 6th October (the day of Yom Kippur) to 24th October 1973, between Israel and a coalition of Egypt and Syria. The war began when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise joint attack in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, both of which had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day-War six years earlier. The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day-War, felt psychologically vindicated by its string of victories early in the conflict. This vindication, in many ways, cleared the way for the peace process which followed the war. The Camp David Accords, which came soon after, led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel - the first time any Arab country had recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence almost entirely.

24 Odessa

A town in Ukraine on the Black Sea coast. One of the largest industrial, cultural, scholarly and resort centers in Ukraine. Founded in the 15th century in the place of the Tatar village Khadjibey. In 1764 the Turks built the fortress Eni-Dunia near that village. After the Russian- Turkish war in 1787-91 Odessa was taken by Russia and the town was officially renamed Odessa. Under the rule of Herzog Richelieu (1805-1814) Odessa became the chief town in Novorossiya province. On 17th January 1918 Soviet rule was established in the town. During World War II, from August - October 1941, the town defended itself heroically from the German attacks.

25 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

26 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.

27 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.

28 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.

29 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.

30 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.

31 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.