

# Feiga Tregerene

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Kaunas

Lithuania

Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya

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Feiga Tregerene lives in a 1970s building in a residential area of Kaunas. She has a nice two-room apartment furnished in the fashion of the same period. Feiga, a short and slim lady, makes an impression of a very ill person. She can hardly move around her apartment, and when walking, she needs to hold on to the walls. She has a low and indistinct voice. Nevertheless, Feiga agrees to this interview. She emphasizes that it is her wish to tell the story of her life and family and leave this kind of memory about them. Feiga speaks very quietly, her answers to my questions are concise, but in the middle of her story she acquires some confidence. Feiga absolutely refuses to be photographed, and she has no recent pictures of herself to share with us.

My ancestors and I come from Birzai, a small town in the east of Lithuania. This was a typical Lithuanian town. There were corner shops and stores in the center of the town, most of them owned by Jews. They were rather small shops, and townsfolk had to go to Kaunas or Zarasai for major shopping. The town stores were selling groceries, meat, haberdasheries and household goods. There were cobblers', tailors', glass shops, etc. in the town. Twice a week there was a market in the central square where farmers sold their products: vegetables, potatoes, and dairy and meat products. The central part of the town was mostly populated by Jews, while the Latvian and Lithuanian population traditionally resided in the outskirts of the town. All communities lived in peace following their own and respecting everybody else's traditions. There was a Catholic cathedral and a Protestant church in the town, but there was no Orthodox church. However, the most beautiful building of this kind was a two-storied wooden synagogue. With its wood carvings, it looked like the utmost piece of construction art to me. There were a few synagogues in Birzai, but I remember this central choral synagogue. Sloss, a large park, was a popular place in our town. It was laid out on two levels. The townsfolk dressed up to walk in the shade of the trees and among the flowers on weekends and holidays.

Unfortunately, of all my ancestors, I only knew my grandmother, my father's mother, though I can't remember her name. She was born in the 1860s, and in the 1930s, when I was a child, she lived in Birzai in the family of my father's brother Chaim Berl. My grandfather Fayvel Glezer died around 1914, which was long before I was born, and since then all first-born boys in our family were given the name of Fayvel after him. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. He may have been a craftsman. Anyway, he didn't really make a fortune, and his children were not wealthy, or I would rather say, they were poor.

The family of my grandfather was a traditional Jewish family. My grandfather and grandmother observed Jewish traditions and went to the synagogue. They celebrated Jewish holidays and raised their children to respect traditions. I know this from the memories I have of my grandmother. She was an old thin lady, or at least, I believed she was old, when I knew her. She always wore dark

clothes and a kerchief on her head. She lived a quiet life and died quietly in 1936. I don't remember her funeral. According to [local] traditions, Jewish children are not supposed to attend funerals. However, I know for sure that she was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Birzai in accordance with Jewish traditions, and all mourning requirements were observed.

My father's eldest sister, whose name I don't know, moved to America, when she was young. I have no information about her. My parents and she had no contacts. My father's elder brother, Chaim Berl Glezer, born in the 1880s, also lived in Birzai. I don't remember his wife's name, but I remember her always wearing an apron. She spent all her time doing the housework and cooking for the numerous members of her household. Chaim Berl had many children and had to make every effort to provide for them. He was some kind of a craftsman and also often assisted my father.

One of Chaim Berl's sons was a convinced Zionist, who moved to Palestine in the late 1930s. He was one of the pioneers of the kibbutz movement. He became the director of a large kibbutz. Chaim Berl's other sons, Perez and Chaim, joined the Komsomol [1](#) like many other poorer Lithuanian Jews. They perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War [2](#). All the other of Chaim Berl's children survived. He had four or five daughters, and I remember their names: Chaya Sora, Feiga, Paya, Zipa, though I can't remember, who was born after whom. Leibl, the youngest son in the family, had turned six before the Great Patriotic War.

Fortunately, Chaim Berl and his children managed to leave the town on the first day of the war. They returned to Lithuania after the war and settled in Kaunas. From there they gradually moved to Israel. Paya was the first one to do this. She married a Polish Jew after the war, moved to Poland, and from there they moved to Israel. Her brother, who was the director of a kibbutz, supported his sister at the initial stage. Leibl followed his sister to Israel. Feiga, Chaya Sora and Zipa, who were married by then, also moved to Israel with their children. They are still there with their children and grandchildren, enjoying a prosperous life in Israel. Chaim Berl lived as long as 70 years. He died in Kaunas in the middle of the 1950s. His wife didn't live much longer. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Kaunas.

My father's brother Meishe Glezer, born in the 1900s, had two children: daughter Chaya and son Fayvel. They were members of the Komsomol. When the war began, they left Birzai with a group of Komsomol activists. They worked in a kolkhoz [3](#) in Udmurtia [a region in the north of Russia, 1500 km from Moscow]. They survived, but Meishe and his wife as well as other Jews, were killed in Birzai in 1941. After the war Fayvel and Chaya moved to Israel. As far as I know, they still live there.

My father's sister Riva, who was much younger than him, was an underground movement activist. She was a Komsomol member and later she joined the Communist Party. In the early 1930s, during the rule of Smetona [4](#), she was arrested and put in jail for eight years before the Soviet rule was established in Lithuania [5](#). Riva was released and married Kodulu Stupas, her Lithuanian friend. He was also a member of the Communist Party. On the first day of the war Riva, who was seven months pregnant, left Birzai, and I was to accompany her. I was 14 then. I will describe our mishaps and our long trip into evacuation later. I accompanied Riva and her daughter Nadia, born in August 1941, through all the years of the war. After the war Riva was reunited with her husband, who had been kept in some Fascist concentration camps on the occupied territory. Riva gave birth to

another girl, but it wasn't her destiny's will to let her raise her children. Her imprisonment in jail, and then lack of food and hard work in evacuation affected my aunt's health. She had a poor heart. Riva died in the late 1950s. Her children live in Israel.

My father Isroel Glezer was born in Birzai in 1891. The only education he got was at cheder. He had to start work and became a painter's apprentice, when he was still very young. Very soon my father surpassed his master and became the best expert in painting. He was highly skilled and did fine work, which required artistic skills. The climate in Lithuania is humid, the winters are cold and damp, and people tend to have all renovations done during the summer. To have work to do in winter, my father learned how to engrave on granite gravestones in the Jewish cemetery. When World War I began, my father was drafted into the army. In less than a year's time he was wounded and shell-shocked. He was taken to a hospital in Kiev [today Ukraine]. When he recovered, he was dismissed from the army. When he returned home, his father Fayvel had already passed away, and my father took to work. He also helped my grandmother about the house. In 1919 my father married my mother. She also came from Birzai. My father knew her since they were young.

I didn't know my maternal relatives. My mother was orphaned, when she was a young girl. Her parents died before she turned 18. The only thing I know is my grandfather's name. His name was Khona Rapeik. This beautiful and rare name was my mother's maiden name. Unfortunately, I can't remember my grandmother's first name, though my mother must have told me her name, when I was a child, I would think. My mother's only sister [Feiga Rapeik] died in her childhood. However, my mother had a cousin. His name was Shimon. He was a vendor and a rather wealthy man, though he didn't provide any support for my mother and was just a relative in name. Unfortunately, this is all I know about my mother's family.

My mother, Chaya Rapeik, was born in Birzai in 1896. When my mother became an orphan, she moved to a Latvian town, I don't quite remember, which town it was, but there was a distant relative of hers living there. In this town my mother became a dressmaker's apprentice. She went to work for a dressmaker where she was provided with boarding and meals. It didn't take long before my mother acquired the necessary trimming skills. Her mistress was good to the orphaned Jewish girl. My mother remembered the kindness of this lady, who was so helpful at the very start of my mother's adult life.

Having learned a new craft, my mother returned to her hometown. She settled in her parents' house. Chaya earned her living by sewing. My parents had a modest wedding party, but it was a traditional Jewish wedding. They stepped under the chuppah in the largest synagogue in town. After the wedding my father moved into the house where my mother was living. My sister, brothers and I were born in this house, and this was where I spent the happiest years of my life. In 1920 a girl was born, and my parents gave her the name of Hanna. I think my mother gave her this name after her father Khona. In 1921 a boy, who was given the name of Fayvel after my father's father, was born. Two years later another boy was born. He was given the name of Falk. I was born on 17th February 1927, a few years after my brother. I was given the name of Feiga after my mother's sister, who died in infancy. My mother had no more children after me, though she was still young.

We were not wealthy. My father was the only working member of the family. It was common for married women to take care of their homes. My mother took care of the household and the children, and had no time to earn additionally by sewing. An efficient housewife can contribute so

much more than whatever mythical earnings she might have, if she weren't tied to housekeeping and children.

We lived on the outskirts of town in a basically Lithuanian neighborhood. Our house was not far from the cemetery, which made it convenient for my father to get to work. There were three rooms and a kitchen in our small wooden house. The furniture was plain, but solid and lasting. The largest room served as a dining and living room. There was a sofa in this room, and this was where my sister and I slept. My brothers had a little bedroom of their own. The third room was our parents' bedroom. The kitchen was in the central part of the house. There was a big stove where my mother cooked, and the stove also heated the house. The toilet was in the yard, which was quite common at the time. We also kept chickens and turkeys in the yard. We didn't have a cow. My mother bought dairy products at the market. Some Jewish families kept pigs, but my mother believed this was quite out of the question for us.

I don't think my parents were very religious. They didn't pray at home and they didn't always cover their heads. My mother had her kerchief, and my father had his kippah on, when going to the synagogue. However, they strictly observed the traditions of a Jewish household that they had been taught in their childhood. In our household we strictly followed the kashrut. We had separate kitchenware, utensils, tableware, cups and plates for dairy and meat products. Mama bought meat in kosher stores: she usually bought inexpensive mutton and veal for holidays. We took our chickens and turkeys to a shochet at the synagogue. Usually this was the responsibility of the older children, and it became mine, when I grew up. However tight our situation was, we didn't starve. Mama was an efficient housewife. In the morning we usually had cheese pancakes or porridge. At lunch we had soup: cereals, boiled in meat broth or potato soup and a piece of meat. For supper we had a slice of bread and milk. Our food was plain but filling.

On holidays Mama always made something delicious. She used to start preparations for Saturday in advance. On Thursday she already had challah loaves in stock. She used to buy challah in a Jewish bakery store, or at times she baked bread in our stove. The house was filled with the smell of fresh bread starting on Thursday. Besides challah, my mother made very delicious little meat pies. This filling was both cost-effective and delicious. She bought cow lungs, washed them thoroughly, fried them with flour and onions, ground them in the grinder and filled little pies with this stuffing. When we got up on Friday morning, there was a dish full of little pies on the kitchen table waiting for us.

Mama usually boiled a chicken for Sabbath. She served it with little pies or kneidlakh and homemade noodles. In the summer, the season of berries and fruit, she made little pies with apple and cherry filling. It goes without saying, that chulent was there on Saturday. No Jewish household can do without chulent. Mama left a large pot with stewed meat, onions with spices, potatoes and beans in the stove overnight. On Friday evening, when my father came home from the synagogue, we sat together at the festively laid table. My mother said a prayer and lit the candles, and my father blessed the food and wine, broke off a piece of challah and dipped it in salt, signaling the start of our meal.

On Saturday morning my father also went to the synagogue, and when he was back, we had a meal that my mother had made in advance. On this day you are not supposed to heat the food, turn on the light or feed the animals. I used to feed our chickens and turkeys. It was not considered a sin, if I did it. After lunch everybody could take some rest. Mama used to read on Saturday. She

liked Jewish writers, and her favorite was Sholem Aleichem [6](#). My father sang very well. I think he might have made a good opera singer, had he grown up in different conditions. On Saturday he liked singing Jewish songs, and neighbors and friends enjoyed listening to him. In the summer, when the weather was nice, we went for walks in the park. Jewish families used to walk there, bowing 'hello' to one another.

I have already mentioned that we lived in a Lithuanian surrounding, and my first friends were Lithuanian girls. We played together without giving a thought to what nationality one or another girl was. Our parents also had good relationships. I remember that the girls treated me to Easter bread on Easter. I accepted the treats, but never ate them. Mama didn't allow me to eat them, explaining that they might have been cooked with pork fat.

As for our Jewish holidays, I liked them so much! Christians were not supposed to be invited to our celebrations. Our Jewish world was rather secluded. My friends knew about Jewish holidays and sent me greetings, but they never attended our celebrations. My favorite holiday was Pesach, of course. We started preparations almost immediately after Purim. In my childhood I didn't quite recognize Purim, except that I liked the delicious 'Haman's ears' [hamantashen], triangular pies stuffed with poppy seed. When I went to the Jewish school, this was when I discovered the fun of the Purim carnival and merry performances.

However, Pesach was a true home holiday. The house was thoroughly cleaned: the floors were cleaned, the furniture polished, the table was covered with a fancy tablecloth, the windows were cleaned and lighter summertime curtains were hung up. There was the feeling of forthcoming festivities everywhere. My father prepared presents for the children in advance: new boots, dresses for the girls and suits for the boys. There were four of us, and he had to take care of each one, which was quite a challenge, considering his modest means.

Sometimes we had a chance to earn a little at my mother's cousin's house. They made matzah at home, and my older sister, my brothers and I assisted with kneading the dough and making holes with a special wheel. Our uncle paid us a few litas for this work, and this additional earning came in very handy.

A few days before the holiday, a big basket with matzah was delivered to our home from the synagogue. Mama had special kitchen and table ware for Pesach. Before Pesach my father conducted a special ritual of chametz removal. He searched and got rid of any traces of chametz in the house, sweeping them onto a special shovel and burning them in the yard. There was not a crumb of bread in the house throughout the holiday. Then the first seder took place. We had it at home usually. My father was sitting at the head of the table, conducting the ceremony. One of us found the afikoman and my brothers asked questions about the holiday, and all rules were followed on this day. My cousin Chaya often visited us on this day. She liked listening to my father singing. She asked him to sing.

Mama cooked most delicious Jewish food for the holiday, and gefilte fish was the central dish on the table. This was the most festive food. Pesach was the holiday, when we could afford it. Even on Sabbath we could not afford to have it. Stewed chicken, kneidlakh from matzah, matzah puddings, broth, imberlach and teyglakh, cakes made from matzah flour, chicken and turkey liver pate made our festive meal on this day. My father made wine from honey and raisins for this holiday. We called it the 'honey drink.' The door was kept open overnight. I truly believed that the Prophet

Elijah visited every Jewish home on this holiday and had a little wine.

Pesach was the principal holiday. We also celebrated other holidays. On Shavuot Mama made things from cottage cheese: cheese cakes and pancakes. Rosh Hashanah, symbolizing the start of the year and repentance, started with the kapores ritual. Girls came to the synagogue with a hen and boys carried a rooster each. The shochet circled a chicken over his head, saying a prayer. Our parents went to the synagogue in the evening, and there was a delicious dinner waiting for us at home. Gefilte fish was the main dish that we had on this day, and our father, being the head of the family, was to eat the head of the fish. There were sweets, symbolizing a sweet year to come: apples with honey and imberlach. Besides, Mama also made meat, apple and cheese cakes. On Yom Kippur our parents observed the fast. Before and after the fasting we had a plentiful meal.

On Sukkot my father made a sukkah in the yard, using pine tree branches. Inside the tent he placed a portable table to have meals there on these days. On Simchat Torah we ran to the synagogue to watch the festival. When we grew older, we could also participate. I remember numerous lights on Chanukkah, the winter holiday, when Jewish residents lit chanukkiyah candles that could be seen through the windows. Mama lit another candle every day. When I was a little girl, my father used to make me a spinning top, and I played with it with other Jewish children. All eight days of Chanukkah we ate potato pancakes [latkes], cakes and pies made from the dough on vegetable oil. We also had little pies filled with jam. I learned the history of Jewish holidays and rituals, when I went to the Jewish school. Before school I didn't quite realize what they were about.

There was one four-year Jewish school in Birzai. All subjects were taught in Yiddish. When I started this school at the age of seven, my brother Falk had just finished it. We had wonderful teachers. They were truly committed to the idea of Jewish public education. I made a number of new friends at school. They were Jewish boys and girls. Basia was one of them, and there was Perez, whose parents owned a large store in the center of Birzai. He was probably the best provided for child at our school. My mother was an active member of the parents' committee. This committee was established to provide assistance to teachers. My mother attended its weekly meetings. Parents collected contributions to organize celebrations on holidays, buy costumes and supplies and support the needy schoolchildren. Besides general subjects that were taught in Yiddish, we were told about the Jewish history and religion, and this was when I came to know the origin of my people's holidays and traditions.

I liked preparations for Jewish holidays most of all. We staged amateur performances, which were sketches from the Jewish life, for each holiday. Purimspiel was the merriest performance on Purim. Once I even played the role of Queen Ester, the savior of the Jewish people. Our mothers and older sisters made costumes for holidays in our favorite teacher's apartment, which almost became a sewing shop. Our teacher enjoyed preparations to holidays as well. We also gave performances on Simchat Torah and Chanukkah. I enjoyed going to school, and my school years were happy and flew by quickly.

There was no place to continue my Jewish education in Birzai. My older sister Hanna became a dressmaker after finishing school. My brother Fayvel went to work in a craftsman's shop in Birzai. My father wanted me to continue my education. There was a Jewish gymnasium in Zarasai, where Jewish children could continue their Jewish education, but my mother was reluctant to have me leave our home. Therefore, after finishing my school, I entered a public Lithuanian gymnasium in



Birzai. My brother Falk, who was good at technical things, also studied in this gymnasium. After finishing it he moved to Kaunas where he entered a Jewish secondary school.

I was the only Jewish student in my class in this Lithuanian gymnasium. My school mates and teachers were kind to me, but I didn't like it there anyway. It seemed a different surrounding to me. We had to leave the classroom, when the others had their religion classes. A rabbi conducted a common religion class for Jewish students.

In those years young Jewish people took an active part in political activities. Some young people were fond of Zionist [7](#) ideas related to the restoration of a Jewish state. However, the poorest strata of the Jewish community, suffering from the ruling regime, strongly believed in Soviet Russia. My sister and brothers joined the underground Komsomol. My sister and brothers' friends had frequent gatherings in our home. They also gathered in a nearby forest where they played the accordion and danced, and they also read Marxist books and propagated their ideas. My parents were aware of their older children's hobbies. They couldn't help being concerned about them. By that time my father's sister Riva had spent a few years in jail for her underground Communist activities, and my father was afraid his children might suffer the same punishment. One day before the holiday of the 1st of May young people put red flags everywhere in the town. The following day arrests started, and my parents decided that Hanna had to leave town to escape arrest. She went to Kaunas where Falk lived. Hanna went to work at a students' diner.

When the Soviet Army [8](#) came to Lithuania in June 1940 [9](#) and the Soviet rule was established, my brothers and sister were just happy. Poor people were happy. Shortly after the Soviet rule was established many food products disappeared from stores. Nationalization began: property was taken away from those, who had worked hard to make their living. The wealthiest individuals were relocated to Siberia [10](#). My school friend Perez's family was sent to Siberia. After the war people told me that Perez survived, returned to Lithuania after the war and moved to Israel later. I never saw him again. In autumn I went to the new Soviet school organized on the basis of our former Jewish school. The term of education was extended by two years. I was happy to go back to school and see my school friends again. My sister Hanna became an active Komsomol member. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War began she joined the Communist Party. She worked in the passport office in Kaunas. My brothers Fayvel and Falk also became active Komsomol members. Fayvel was seeing a Jewish girl from Birzai and was thinking of marrying her.

In the middle of June 1941 our family got together in Birzai: my sister and brothers came home on vacation. I had finished the fifth grade of school. On the morning of 22nd June I saw airplanes in the sky. This was the first time I saw such a sight and so, I kept watching them. We had no radio, and our neighbors hurried in to tell us that the Great Patriotic War had begun. On this very day a few Komsomol activists left the town. My brothers Fayvel and Falk and my sister Hanna went with them. Aunt Riva's husband had to stay in the town for some time. He and other party leaders had to ensure that all party documents were destroyed. The family council decided to send away Riva and me to support her on the way. Riva's husband found a horse- drawn cart and we left our hometown. We didn't even get a chance to properly say 'good bye' to our dear ones.

We headed for Latvia. It took us a whole night before we reached a border side town. A few women from Birzai were with us. We stopped in a forest quite near the railway station. Riva and a friend of hers went to look for some transport to move on. At that time a bombing raid began, causing the

explosion of railroad fuel tanks. It didn't take long before the whole town was burning. We had to move on and I realized I had lost Aunt Riva. We walked a few kilometers before I saw a truck. The truck stopped and from there my aunt called my name. We decided to never lose sight of one another for a single minute. We reached a railway station. There was a train on the tracks with all those who had left their homes. My aunt showed her documents and her party membership card, and we took this train. Our trip lasted at least ten days. On the way my aunt traded our belongings for food. I was hungry all the time. My aunt was pregnant and needed more food than I did, and I gave my share to her. We finally reached Kirov [about 1300 km north-east of Moscow], and from there we took a truck to the town of Slobodskoy, Kirov region.

We were accommodated in a local house. The mistress of the house was Russian, one of those wealthy people, who were relocated to this town after the revolution [11](#). She still hated the Soviet rule and for some reason she associated us with this regime. We could physically feel the hatred that she radiated. Soon my aunt had to go to hospital. Her baby was due soon. I was alone with our landlady. At some point of time I felt so starved that it caused giddiness. At this time our landlady was having tea that she made in a samovar. She never offered me a cup of tea. I spoke not a word of Russian, and this made my situation even worse. I went outside feeling unsteady. A local approached me in the street. She asked me a few questions, but I didn't understand a word. The girl left me and a few minutes later she brought me a glass of milk and a piece of bread. I shall always remember this girl. She probably saved my life. Later I went back into the house and went to sleep. In the morning, when I woke up, somebody knocked on the door. My parents were standing in the doorway.

We were laughing and crying, hugging and telling each other of our misfortunes. They happened to leave Birzai a few hours after us and kept looking for us. A Lithuanian acquaintance of theirs directed them to where we were. By that time Riva gave birth to a girl and named her Nadia. We still had no information about my brothers or Hanna. Riva didn't know anything about her husband.

Some time later my parents and Riva decided we should go to Gorky region where Lithuanian Komsomol members were, according to what people were saying. We took a train to Gorky, but in the middle of the way it headed in a different direction and we arrived in Udmurtia. We were taken to a kolkhoz and accommodated in a pise-walled hut. There was one room in the hut. The owner of the house had to move to his acquaintances. Mama started the search for her children again. She traveled to nearby kolkhoz villages asking people, when she finally succeeded. My sister Hanna happened to be in one of them. She joined us soon. She told us she had lost our brothers at the border between Latvia and Russia, and she knew nothing about what had happened to them.

We all went to work. Hanna and I worked at the flax harvesting in a kolkhoz. My father also worked in the kolkhoz, and so did Riva. My mother stayed at home with little Nadia. We were in bad need of food. The kolkhoz provided some gray bread and cereal. Mama started selling our clothes. With a sunken heart she traded a cut of English gabardine that she had bought for my brother to the director of the kolkhoz for a few bags of potatoes. My dresses and even nightgowns adorned with lace were selling well. Local girls wore my nightgowns as they would fancy dresses. Hanna couldn't agree to part with the Swiss watch that our father had given her. One day she came home in tears: her watch had been stolen. Somebody had taken it off her wrist.



My mother and sister couldn't help thinking about my brothers. Hanna decided to join the 16th Lithuanian division [12](#), hoping to find our brothers there or at least, get some information about them. Mama went to the Lithuanian representative office in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, to arrange for my sister to join the army. In fall 1942 Hanna went to Balakhna where the rear units of the 16th Lithuanian division were formed.

When Hanna left, Riva decided to move to the town of Glazov, where she was offered a job. Nadia was to go with her. I also went with them. Riva had to go to work, and I was to look after the baby. Some time later our parents joined us in Glazov. We shared our room with a young Lithuanian woman, who had two children. Her name was Neele. She was older than me, but we became friends. Neele loved a man, who was an officer in the Soviet Army. Neele looked forward to his letters and kept hoping that he would be safe. We got along well and lived like one family. I also looked after Neele's children while she was at work.

However, some time passed and we decided I had to go to work. Riva had a bread card [13](#), but this bread was insufficient for all of us. My father went to work at a military plant evacuated from Kalinin. He was a worker. By that time I picked up some Russian and could even write in Russian a bit. Having these skills I managed to get a job at the secretariat of the plant. As an employee I was provided with 800 grams of bread. I made friends at the plant. The girls were older than me, but we had common interests. We were fond of reading. There was a library at the plant, and I read almost all the books available there. I discovered the wonderful world of Russian classical literature. I joined the Komsomol at the plant. My mother was babysitting. She also worked at nighttime. Her acquaintance from Siauliai worked at a bakery. My mother worked night shifts with her, receiving a loaf of bread for her work.

Hanna wrote to us regularly. Fortunately, she wasn't sent to the front line. She returned to Balakhna after having acute malaria. She was sent to the hospital and after recovering she was assigned to a rear unit. My sister already knew the truth about our brothers, but she kept it a secret from us. My mother kept writing letters to Buguruslan and Kazan. Once we received a response with the return address of Fayvel Glezer. We were so happy and wrote back, but this Fayvel happened to be an older man. He just happened to have the same name as my brother.

Finally, Hanna decided to tell us the truth to save us from the pain of uncertainty. She found out that Fayvel, Falk and a large group of Komsomol members were detained at the former Soviet border in a small Latvian town. It turned out that the Soviet authorities didn't let everybody across the border. We were lucky that Riva had a party membership card. Younger and stronger men and women were left to create a living shield on the way of the enemy. My brothers had a chance to cross the border, but they decided to wait for Hanna. They didn't know that Hanna had already left without them. Then Fascist landing troops killed all the Komsomol members: my brothers and many of our acquaintances and friends. Learning this terrible news was very hard for us. Mama was grieving and never found peace till the end of her days.

In early 1944 Hanna was sent to a training course at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow. She finished her training in July 1944. Immediately after Vilnius was liberated my sister went to our home country. She was offered the position of manager of the passport office in Zarasai. In 1944, that same year, my sister married Andrushis, a Lithuanian man, whom she met at the training course.

We celebrated the Victory Day in Glazov in May 1945 [14](#). It was full of joy and tears. This was a day off. People marched the streets. My sister was already making arrangements for us to go back home. Riva left in early 1945. In August I said 'good bye' to my friends, and my parents and I headed to our homeland. We arrived in Zarasai where my sister and her husband met us. She already had a boy. He was given the Lithuanian name of Rimas. My sister was very happy that we arrived. She put us up in a room in her two-room apartment.

Her husband was rather prejudiced against us. He wasn't an easy-going person. He worked in the accounting office of an NKVD body [15](#). Though he wasn't involved in arrests [16](#) or interrogations, the atmosphere itself must have affected his personality, which was not easy, anyway. I wouldn't say he was a manifest anti-Semite. I never heard a word of abuse from him, but he was treating my parents and me with resentment. In early 1946 there was a fire in our street, and this fire caused severe damage to our house. We were given separate apartments, though in one building. We finally had our own lodging.

My sister was very kind to me. She helped me to get a job. Though I had lower secondary education, I had a good command of Russian. There were few people who knew Russian at the time. I went to work as a secretary at a district consumers' association. Hanna decided to take care of my personal life as well. She had two Jewish friends, veterans of the Lithuanian division. They were brothers. They reminded her of our brothers. One of them was even called Fayvel. One day David and Fayvel visited us. David liked me and I liked him as well. We decided there was no point in waiting. A few weeks later we registered our marriage in a registry office.

My husband, David Treger, was born in Zarasai in 1920. His father Simon was a craftsman. His mother Chaya was a popular dressmaker. She even had clients from Kaunas. Chaya had her own dressmaking school, and her trainees worked in many Lithuanian towns. David had a good education. He finished a Jewish gymnasium where he got fond of Zionist ideas. The establishment of the Soviet rule prevented him from moving to Palestine. When the Great Patriotic War began, Chaya, Simon, my husband's sister Pesia and his younger brother Leibl stayed on the occupied territory and were killed like all the other Jews of Zarasai on 26th August 1941. This happened in the vicinity of the town. David and his older brother Fayvel left the town with other Komsomol members. They joined the 16th Lithuanian division. They were wounded several times and received a number of awards. Fayvel lost his leg, and David had three fingers of his right hand missing.

David had a good position: he was deputy director of the district consumers' association. However difficult this period of time was, David was doing well. He managed to get the wedding rings for us. His cousin made a crepe de Chine gown for me. We arranged a wedding party at my home. My husband and I shared the room with my parents. The Treger family house wasn't damaged during the war, but there was a Lithuanian woman living in it. Fayvel was a rough man. He went to the house and threw this woman's belongings out of the window. We moved into my husband's family house. Some time later Fayvel went to visit his relatives in Tashkent. He came back with his fiancée Irina. She was a Jewish girl from Ukraine. They got married and moved in with us. In 1947 my son was born. We named him Simon after my husband's father.

My father didn't work after he returned from evacuation. He was helping my sister to raise her son. When Simon was born, he moved in with us. When I went to work, he was babysitting. My sister didn't get along with her husband. She decided to get a divorce. In 1948 Hanna and her son moved

to Birzai. Formerly we had made up our mind to never go back to our hometown, where even stones seemed to have been soaked in the blood of our dear ones and acquaintances, but then my mother decided to join my sister. She wanted to be of help to her. As for my father, he decided to stay with me. My mother never recovered from her sons' death. She walked along the streets recalling who lived there and what happened to him or her. One day she had a stroke right there in the street. My mother died. This happened in 1949. After her death my father moved in with Hanna.

There were few Jews left in Birzai, but they stayed together, remembering their deceased friends. They collected money to install a monument in their memory at the burial place. My father didn't work. He received a pension for his sons. In the middle of the 1950s Hanna's husband arrived in Birzai. He made an attempt to make up with her. As it turned out later, he wanted this for the sake of the apartment. My sister believed her husband. She, her son and her husband moved to Kaunas where they received a nice apartment. My father moved to Zarasai to live with me some time later. He was of great help to me. He was my best friend and companion. He lived many years before he died in 1976 at the age of 85. We buried my daddy at the Jewish cemetery.

Hanna didn't get along with her husband. She divorced him, but stayed to live in Kaunas. Hanna was a member of the Communist Party. She was the director of the passport office and retired from this position in due time. She married Yashgur, a Polish Jew. My sister must have been born unfortunate. Her second husband wasn't an easy-going man either. She lived with him for over 20 years. He died a few years ago. Hanna lives alone in Kaunas now. Her son Rimantas identifies himself as a Lithuanian. He doesn't recognize any Jewish traditions. He married a Lithuanian girl and raises his children according to Lithuanian traditions.

After my son was born I continued working in the consumers' association for some time. During this period my husband's people convinced him to join the Communist Party. This wasn't what he wanted, but his position required him to be a member of the Party: my husband was the director of the consumers' association. In the early 1950s he was invited to visit the district party committee where they explained they wanted to employ me. The party authorities were in need of Russian speaking employees. I was employed as a typist. Some time afterward I was promoted to the typists' office manager. I worked the last years of my career as an accountant. I came to work at the district committee in January 1953. This was quite amazing, considering that in those years most Jews were fired and accused of all mortal sins [17](#). I wasn't involved in any party activities. I belonged to the support staff, but the Communist ideology did influence my personality.

In March 1953, when Stalin died, I was shocked at how my fellow employees were grieving. They thought life wasn't possible without him. I worked at the district committee for 30 years before I retired. It goes without saying that I couldn't avoid the party membership working at the district party committee. Therefore, I joined the Communist Party some time after I started my career there. However, I was just a nominal member of the Party. I wasn't involved in any party activities or events. Basically, I've never been interested in any politics or public activities. I believe this to be a waste of effort and time. It's better to dedicate more time to one's family, children, friends and books, if you ask me. My life is my children, my house. As for whatever public things, I couldn't care less. Perhaps, this attitude makes me feel lonely and exhausted nowadays, but this is the way I am, and one can hardly do anything about it.

We had a very good life. My husband was paid well, and we had all we needed. In 1956 my daughter was born. We gave her the name of Chaya after my mother. However, when the girl went to school, we started calling her Raya [18](#). We were raising our children in the Jewish way. Since their early childhood they were aware of their uncles' death. We told them about the memorable, sad and tragic events of Jewish history. Every year on 27th August we took our children to the place where my husband's parents died. Jews from all over Lithuania used to arrive there: from Kaunas, Vilnius and other towns. My husband and his brother established an initiative group to collect funds to immortalize the memory of the deceased ones. The monument was installed thanks to Jewish contributions.

Our children had friends of various nationalities. They studied in a Russian school. I recall no cases of oppression my children faced due to their Jewish origin and identity. We had a friendly atmosphere at home as well. Simon and Chaya's friends visited our home. They knew they would always receive a warm welcome here. My husband's salary enabled us to have a decent life. Each year we spent vacations in Palanga. These vacations were paid for by trade unions. There were no theaters in Zarasai, but we took every opportunity to attend tour performances. We took trips to Kaunas, Vilnius, Moscow and Leningrad [today St. Petersburg, Russia]. We led an active cultural life. Many people were surprised that my husband had no car or dacha [19](#), considering his positions that allowed many to accumulate a fortune. However, my David was a crystal-honest person. He was a decent man in everything he did. We didn't even have money to buy a cooperative apartment. We lived in his parents' home for a long time. In the late 1960s the Lithuanian consumers' association provided an apartment for us.

We had many friends. Most of them were from the intelligentsia of Zarasai. Despite our membership in the Party we never neglected Jewish traditions. It goes without saying that Sabbath or the kosher way of life were out of the question, but we always bought matzah for Pesach. Initially we bought it in the apartment where it was made secretly, and later we had it delivered from Vilnius. There was no synagogue in Zarasai or Birzai after the war. However, we got together with our friends to celebrate holidays. As for fasting on Yom Kippur, I still follow this tradition.

My husband always dreamed of Israel. During the period, when emigration to Israel was no different from a funeral, my husband or I couldn't even dare to think about Israel. Neither of us would have been allowed to move there. We had special permits to access secret documents. When perestroika [20](#) began and Lithuania regained independence [21](#), relocation to Israel was made possible, but my husband was severely ill by then. He had stomach cancer, but even in his poor condition he was dreaming of stepping onto the land of Israel, kneeling and kissing it. David's dream was not to come true. My husband died in 1992.

Our children had their own families by that time. Both of them got university education. Simon graduated from the Siauliai Teachers' Training College. Working as a teacher at the school for children with special needs, he received additional education and was promoted to headmaster of this school. Simon married a Jewish girl. A mixed marriage was out of the question in our family. His wife Rachil was a sanitary doctor in Kaunas. Simon and Rachil have two daughters: Taube, the older one, and Liana, the younger one. In the mid-1990s my daughter-in-law had problems at work. She lost her job, eventually. She insisted on emigration, and a few years ago my son and his family moved to Germany. The girls entered a college there. They are completing their education. Taube married a Russian man. They have a son. His name is Georgiy. He is my great-grandson. Liana

married Igor, a former USSR citizen. They have no children yet.

My daughter Chaya graduated from the Faculty of Cybernetics of Kaunas Polytechnic College. She married Motl Rozenburg, a talented engineer. This was a pre-arranged marriage, but my daughter and her husband are happy. She has two children: son Elan, born in 1977, and daughter Elena, born in 1983. Elena has finished a medical college this year. She wants to continue her education to acquire her Master of Medicine degree. Chaya works in a private company and is making good money. Motl works at the design institute where he started his career. Elan, my grandson, finished a medical college. He married Lisa, a Jewish girl. In 1994 he realized his grandfather's dream and moved to Israel. He's become a true Israelite, a religious Jewish man observing his ancestors' covenants. Elan and Lisa have a lovely daughter. Her name is Michalia. She is my great-granddaughter.

David's death was a hard blow for me. In 1994 my children sold my apartment to take me to Kaunas. I am very ill. I haven't been out for almost two years. I feel like a very old, tired and lonely person, though I am not that old. I am a member of the Jewish community, but I am not in a condition to attend Jewish events. I speak with my sister Hanna and my daughter-in-law Rachil on the phone. They are my closest friends. On this Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah I wish joy, prosperity and happiness to the Jewish world!

Glossary:

### **1 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.

### **2 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.

### **3 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.

#### **4 Smetona, Antanas (1874-1944)**

Lithuanian politician, President of Lithuania. A lawyer by profession he was the leader of the autonomist movement when Lithuania was a part of the Russian Empire. He was provisional President of Lithuania (1919-1920) and elected president after 1926. In 1929 he forced the Prime Minister, Augustin Voldemaras, resign and established full dictatorship. After Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union (1940) Smetona fled to Germany and then (1941) to the United States.

#### **5 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.

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

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

#### **7 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.

#### **8 Soviet Army**



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

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## **10 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, 52,541 people from Latvia, 118,599 from Lithuania and 32,450 people from Estonia were deported in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodging from labor activity in the agricultural field and leading anti- social and parasitic mode of life'. 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.

## **11 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.

## **12 16th Lithuanian division**

It was formed according to a Soviet resolution on 18th December 1941 and consisted of residents of the annexed former Lithuanian Republic. The Lithuanian division consisted of 10.000 people (34,2 percent of whom were Jewish), it was well equipped and was completed by 7th July 1942. In 1943 it took part in the Kursk battle, fought in Belarus and was a part of the Kalinin front. All together it liberated over 600 towns and villages and took 12.000 German soldiers as captives. In summer 1944 it took part in the liberation of Vilnius joining the 3rd Belarusian Front, fought in the Kurland and exterminated the besieged German troops in Memel (Klaipeda). After the victory its headquarters were relocated in Vilnius, in 1945-46 most veterans were demobilized but some officers stayed in the Soviet Army.

## **13 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.

## **14 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

## **15 NKVD**

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

## **16 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.

## **17 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'**

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

## **18 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; Yuri 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.

## **19 Dacha**

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

## **20 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.

## **21 Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic**

On 11th March 1990 the Lithuanian State Assembly declared Lithuania an independent republic. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held in February 1991, over 90 percent of the participants (turn out was 84 percent) voted for independence. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 6th September 1991. On 17th September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations.