Revekka Blumberg

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Tallinn
Estonia
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
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I met Revekka, or Rita, which is her more commonly used name, Blumberg in the Estonian Jewish community 1. Rita is involved in social work in the community. She is a visiting nurse. I had known Rita before conducting this interview, but it never occurred to me to ask her for an interview since I was sure she was born in the postwar years. She is a bright lady, dressed up to fashion, looking young with her hair cut short and vivid eyes. Only when it came to discussing the deportation 2, I heard that Rita had to live through all horrors of forced relocation to Siberia in June 1941. Rita willingly agreed to tell me the story of her life, however hard these recollections were for her. Rita is a very emotional person, and her story is not only interesting as a description of the facts, but also, her comments thereon. Rita told a very interesting story about her husband's father Rachmiel Blumberg, who went back to Siberia many times after returning from the camps in Siberia to take with him as many children of "enemies of the people" 3 deported from Estonia as possible. Rachmiel is still well remembered and honored by many Estonians. The interview took place at Rita's home. She lives in the center of Tallinn. There is a lot of light in Rita's apartment: light colored walls, furniture and lots of pot plants. Rita's dwelling is very much like herself: fashionable and showy, but all within good taste.

Family background

I spent my childhood and some of my young age in a distant area in Siberia where we were deported in 1941, instead of spending it in my hometown of Kaunas, Lithuania [2nd biggest town in Lithuania, 90 km from Vilnius]. All I know about my grandmothers and grandfathers is what my mother told me. Unfortunately they had passed away before we returned home. However little I know about my parents' families is based on my mama's reminiscences. These memories were so hard for her that I could not ask her to tell me the story of my family too frequently.

At that time I did not think about knowing too little about my roots, any details of my family's life before I was born or about what my grandmothers and grandfathers were like. Life was about surviving at that time, and the past was almost a forbidden subject for me. It was far later that I started thinking about this trying to restore whatever little could be found and reconstructed.

I will start from my mother's family. They lived in Lithuania, Klaipeda [about 300 km from Vilnius], which was called Memel during the tsarist time. My mother's parents' surname was Fisher. My grandfather died young leaving six children behind. Besides my mama, Hana-Leya, born in 1913, I only knew her brother David and sister Paula. Mama had another brother and two sisters. Unfortunately, I cannot remember their names. When my mama was telling me about them, I didn't think it so important.

After my grandfather died the family moved to Kaunas. My grandmother was a housewife, when my grandfather was alive, which was common in Jewish families. The children were still young, all of them being of school age, and my grandmother did have a hard time in her effort to provide for them. Even when Grandfather was alive, the family was far from wealthy, and after he died they were actually left in poverty. It's hard to say how my grandmother managed, but all of the children received good education. They finished a German gymnasium in Kaunas.

After finishing the gymnasium Mama studied in a Jewish religious school in Germany. She told me this school accepted the girls with good academic records and fluent German. The Jewish community paid their trip to Germany. Mama spent two years at this school. All children were raised to become decent, kind and hardworking people. It wasn't only my mother saying this. I heard this from those people who had known my mother's family as well.

After Mama returned from Germany she went to work. She spoke fluent German and went to work as personal assistant to the owner of a large shoe factory. This company had some contractual relationships with Germany, and Mama was responsible for correspondence administration.

My father's family, the Levins, lived in Kaunas. There were many children, of whom I only knew my father's sister and brother, who stayed in Lithuania. The older children moved to various countries before the 1920s. I have no information about them. My father was the youngest of three children who stayed in Lithuania. The oldest was his sister Shulamit, Shulia, and the middle brother's name was Haim. My father, Yacob-Berl Levin, was born in 1902.

I don't know what my grandfather was doing for a living. Mama did not like to talk about my father's family. All I know is that they were rather wealthy. The family was religious like all Jewish families in Lithuania at the time.

My father took to commerce and life was gradually improving. My father had his own business before getting married. He dealt with fabric wholesale. He purchased fabric abroad and sold it to garment enterprises in Kaunas, Lithuania. It is my understanding that he was a medium level businessman, but this business supported him all right.

I don't know how my parents met, though I know for sure that this was not a prearranged marriage considering that my father's family was not really happy about it. They thought it to be a misalliance. My mother came from a poor family while my father's family was a wealthier one. My father's parents were probably going to have their son marry a girl with plentiful dowry, but my

father went against their will. From whatever little my mother told me, I knew that her relationships with my father's family were no good, and therefore, she avoided talking about them.

During the war

My parents got married in 1936. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. My father insisted that my mother left her job after getting married. My father had a nice apartment in Kaunas where the newly weds settled down. My mother's family accepted my father. They had warm and kindly relationships. My father even employed my mother's sister and brother. I was born in 1937, one year after my parents' wedding. I was given the name of Revekka.

The language we spoke at home was Yiddish. Lithuania was the center of Jewish culture before the war, and now, after almost 50 years of Soviet rule, the Jewish culture has very deep roots. I remember the Kaunas of my childhood. This was a beautiful and green town. Vyshgorod, a neighborhood in Kaunas, was located on a hill, and there was a funicular connection with it. We lived on the main street, which was Laisvės Alėja at the time. There were many Jews in Kaunas. And, of course, there were synagogues, cheders and everything else that was necessary to support the life of a large Jewish community.

Thinking about my aunt Shulia, I believe my father was a religious man, considering that they grew up in one family and received similar education. I don't think my parents were canonically religious people, though they observed all Jewish traditions. Even after the war my aunts had kitchenware for meat and dairy products, followed the kashrut, and I believe that this was the way of living in our family before the war. My father's family strictly observed all Jewish rules, and my father was no exception in this regard. As for my mother, she was always religious, having received religious education in a German school.

I don't remember how my parents felt about the annexation of Lithuania to the Soviet Union 4. My father's business was nationalized, and our life became notably more difficult. I remember the day of deportation on 16th June 1941 very well. On this day many Lithuanian families were deported from their country, and their only fault was that they reached certain well-being through hard work and managed to provide for a decent life of their families. The deportation lasted for three days: from 14 to 16 June. [Editor's note: The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. See 2]

I remember very well how this was with my family despite my being just a child. Two NKVD officers 5 came to our home and gave us half an hour to get ready. Nobody knew what was happening. Much depended on each NKVD employee. Some of them merely followed their orders. They were told that the ones to be deported were enemies of the people and deserved no mercy. These NKVD guys didn't even give a thought to where the fault of those who were called 'enemies of people' was. They did their job with the same ardor as someone digging a pit or planting potatoes. Others were more merciful warning owners of the houses that they were to be deported, telling them what they should take with them and even helping them to pack.

Some of these guys took pleasure in bullying people to be the deported. This was the kind of people that we were to deal with. They were watching what Mama was packing throwing away what they thought was in excess of what we needed to take. They allowed only the minimum of things, just one set of underwear and everything else and later in exile this had its impact. Those,

who had more belongings with them, could bargain them for food products or milk for their children, while we didn't even have enough of what was necessary, to say nothing of excesses.

Then we were taken to the railway station where families were separated. Men were taken to one train, and women and children to another. At that time we were not aware that this was separation for a lifetime. We were hoping that we would be together, when we arrived at the destination. The carriage was packed with Lithuanians, Russians and Jews. They were all, whom the NKVD office believed to be wealthy, which meant they were criminals and alien elements.

The trip was horrific. Children and adults were crying. This was really a nightmare. There was no food or drinking water available. When the train stopped, those women, who had extra clothes, could bargain them for food. There was no toilet in the train, and its passengers were using buckets that were stinking. There were little windows below the roof, but they were not allowed to be opened. It was so stuffy in the carriage that people were fainting. A few babies died on the way. The trip was hard.

Finally we reached Biysk [the Altai Mountains, Russia, about 3500 km from Moscow], from where we were taken to a settlement on a peat field. We were accommodated in wooden barracks with two- and three-tier plank beds. Most of us spoke Lithuanian and German and hardly any Russian. Women were sent to work in the peat fields almost immediately. One of them stayed in the barrack to look after the children.

For over a year the women had no information about where their husbands were. It was cold inside the barrack and there was no food. The children were falling ill, and I also was near death a few times. Once I fell ill with whooping cough. I developed croup and could not breathe. There was an agronomist in the settlement. She had a horse and took me to the hospital. She saved my life. Many children died from diseases, cold and lack of food in the course of the first year. However, humans get used to many things, and our mothers also got used to these new inhuman living conditions.

Gradually all exiled were accommodated in local houses. There were only women, children and old people left in the settlement. Men were at the front. The family of our hosts consisted of Natasha, the hostess, her son of nearly my age and an old woman. Natasha was kind to us. At first the locals had a hostile attitude toward us. They called us bourgeois and some other insulting names that I didn't remember knowing little of Russian. Later they started talking to us and asked questions, to get to know us better. Most of these common Russian people treated us well. They sympathized with us knowing that we were no enemies, but the same people as they were. Natasha, our hostess, treated me no different from her son. She read fairy tales to us in the evening and we shared whatever little food was available. Sometimes we received some balanda [soup], which was also rarely available.

I went to the local school for three years. When I first came to my class and told them my name, Revekka, or Riva, the pupils started laughing. This was a new name for them. I had a mop of thick chestnut hair, and the children teased me 'Riva – a mane of hair'. Later they suggested they would call me one of the following Russian names: Rita or Rimma, since it was hard for them to pronounce my name. This was how I became Rita, and I got so well used to this name that it became my name. My true name is written in my documents, but I am commonly addressed by the name of Rita.

Dina Israelit, a Jewish girl, was my closest friend in the class. She also belonged to an exiled family. We are still friends, though Dina moved to Israel a long time ago. We were close to one another, and another thing that made us closer was that we shared the same things in life.

During the Soviet times school had a strong political background. Soviet education was a very important aspect. We were convinced that the Soviet Union was the country of happy childhood, and that we owed this to Stalin, the father of all people, who was taking continuous care of us. We were taught to be patriots, and Dina and I had a strong belief in everything that was instilled in our minds. We were set to very strong patriotic feelings.

In general, there were common children's joys in my exiled childhood. We spent time together and went to bathe in the Biya River. I was an active girl. I attended a dance club at school. However, reciting a poem in front of the public was never an easy performance for me. I spoke almost fluent Russian, but I burred, and felt embarrassed about it. Therefore, I avoided this kind of performances, preferring dancing. However, this burring was no hindrance to my progress with the Russian literature and language classes. I was good at writing dictations and compositions, and my teachers praised me high. I am good at languages basically and find them easy to learn. Dina was always good at performing in front of the public. Anyways, later a teacher helped me to overcome my shyness. She just forced me to recite a poem on the stage, and afterward I was never again afraid of performing to the public. My childhood, even the way it was with me, was the best time of my life.

I've faced no anti-Semitism, and this is true. I've always been sociable and friendly toward my surrounding, and people have treated me nicely. I liked going to pioneer camps 6, when a child. I made many friends and was the focus of whatever events in those camps. I can remember a compliment I was told. They said I was one of them and one would never guess I was a Jew. It was said in such a manner as if this was a much appreciated thing. However, I never left it without response. Moreover, when hearing something of this kind, I always replied that yes, I was a Jew, and that Jews were no different from other people. I had nothing in my appearance that might indicate my Jewish origin, when I was young, but it did show with my growing older. I had fair eyes and auburn hair.

My mother and I were very poor. Mama, actually, was very lonely and very unpractical. Some women have a strong will and can find a way out of any difficult situation, but not my mother. She was a weak person and needed support and care of a strong man. When in Siberia, she lived with constant fear in this different environment. She could not understand why we were deported and feared that she might say or do something that might lead to another persecution. She wanted to forget whatever had to do with our past life and never talked to people about it.

About over a year later we heard that my father and other men from the Baltic republics were kept in a Gulag 7 camp. My father developed severe dystrophy in the camp, and when it became clear that his condition was threatening to his life they released him from the camp. This happened in 1943. One week before he died, my father was brought to us on a horse-drawn cart. He could not stand by himself. Actually, they brought him there so that he died elsewhere, but in the camp, where his death might add to their statistics. I have vague memories of this, but I can remember my feeling of horror. Jews and all other people, who were in exile, came to his funeral. I remember this day well.

Some time later Mama heard that her family, her mother and two sisters and their families died in the ghetto in Kaunas 8. My father's mother also died there. They failed to evacuate and were taken to the ghetto during the first days of the German occupation. I cannot remember how exactly this information became available to my mother, but it broke her down completely. Mama could not manage what had fallen unto her: her husband died before her eyes and her family died. There was none of her kin left in this world. My friend Dina's family supported us during this heart-break disaster.

Dina was luckier than me. Her family lived in Klaipeda before they were deported. Dina's father was a wealthy man. He owned a textile factory. He was sent to a Gulag camp, too, but he survived. He was released from the camp and joined his family in exile. The father, the mother and the daughter were together. It was a miracle in itself, but then another miracle happened.

Dina was the youngest of three children. Her middle brother was 11-12 years older, and another sister was even older. During the First Estonian Republic 9 they left Estonia. Dina's sister lived in England, and her brother lived in Africa. The family managed to locate Dina's older sister. It was incredible in itself, but they did manage. Dina's sister worked for the Joint 10, and through the Red Cross she managed to send parcels with food preserves to her parents. It was quite an event in our life.

I remember how Dina invited me to her home once telling me to say not a word about it to anyone. When I came there they treated me to some cream or mousse, I can't remember what it was, but it was something so delicious and fluffy, something so very much out of this world that I felt like taking leave of my senses. Dina's family was a great support to my mother, when she became a widow. They also cared about me and warmed me like a frozen sparrow. Dina's father was particularly kind to me.

Our escape from exile

People started leaving the exile. When they were caught, they were forced to come back, but there were rumors that those who bought false documents managed well. Mama also decided to escape from exile. I can understand what was behind her decision. If we were caught we would just come back and continue living in exile. The risk was high, but it was justified. Mama had no documents whatsoever. When people who were deported arrived at their destination, their passports were taken away and replaced with a certificate indicating the only place of residence they were allowed. Each month they were supposed to make their appearance at the commandant's office for the record.

Mama knew a family that had escaped one year before. Mama must have corresponded with them, considering that she also decided to take the risk. I matured in exile. I was only ten years old, but my mother talked to me and was seeking my advice and relied upon it as if she would upon her friend or sister's advice. Mama explained to me that any spoken word might spoil the whole plan and then we would come back to Siberia again. We took a train having no documents. There were frequent raids on the way, when they were looking for the runaways, who had no right to leave the exile, to take them off the train. We were lucky enough to avoid being identified.

Mama and I plotted our new biography, according to which we came from Riga, from where we evacuated, and my father had died at the front line. Our documents were burned, when our train was bombed. I learned all details by heart. I learned what a white lie was for at an early age, however hard and even humiliating this felt. I knew I had to lie from then on, though I could not understand why life was all about lying like that. Lying was against my principle. When I was younger, Mama often told me that we were poor, but we had our honesty, and we had to do so that our good name was not spoiled. It was true that honesty was all we had. At times I have a tendency to think that his period in life was even more difficult than the exile. We faced a lot of humiliation and constant fear having to hide away all the time.

We arrived at Kaunas. My father's older sister Shulia gave me shelter. Her marital name was Abelski, Shulamith Abelski. Her family survived the Holocaust. Aunt Shulia and her daughter evacuated. They returned to their former apartment from the evacuation. Aunt Shulia had a five-room apartment on Kestuchio Street in the center of Kaunas, but her family was also big. Her husband and daughters Pesia and Rina, her son Moisey and his wife Riva and my aunt lived there. My aunt's older daughter went to study in London back in the 1930s, and did not want to come back, when the Soviet rule was established in Lithuania.

My aunt's son and his wife had no children, and Riva was all heartbroken about this. Moisey and Riva were in the ghetto in Kaunas. The Germans selected younger and stronger inmates to go to work in Germany. Moisey and Riva were also taken to this train. Moisey and Riva were sportsmen, and when on the train, a few young people, also sportsmen, decided to jump off the train. So did Moisey and Riva, and everything went all right. They returned to Kaunas. The Germans also sterilized young women in the ghetto with injections. Riva was one of them, and she could never have children. This was a tragedy for her. She loved her husband dearly and it was her dream to have his baby. Moisey was her first and only love. Being unable to have a baby Riva thought she was defective and inadequate.

When I joined them, Riva came to liking me dearly and treated me like one of her kin. She asked my mother whether she would give her consent to my adoption, but my mother refused to give her consent, which only deepened the conflict between Mama and my father's family, which had started with their marriage.

There was another thing about my mother's relationship with my father's family, which did not contribute to its positive development. My father's brother Haim became a widower, when he was still a young man. He did not remarry due to his tight-lipped and unsociable manner. He liked my mother and was willing to marry her after my father died. It's a common thing among Jews that a brother marries his brother's widow or, at least, takes care of her. Haim proposed marriage to my mother, but she refused bluntly. This evidently added to my father's family negative attitude.

It was due to this lack of good relationship between these two families that my mother never told me about my father's family. It was my aunt Shulia, whom I stayed with for two years after we escaped from exile, who gave me some information. I learned a lot about Jews, Jewish traditions and the Jewish way of life from my aunt. My aunt helped me to restore my Yiddish, the language of my childhood. They spoke Yiddish in their household, though each of them had a good conduct of Lithuanian, German and Russian. I also had to speak Yiddish, and I'm grateful to my aunt for making me learn to speak it. I wish I had learned the ABC to be able to read and write in Yiddish,

but I was too lazy to do that. I was just a child and wasn't quite willing to take extra efforts to do things.

Two years ago I had a good chance to verify my appropriate knowledge of Yiddish at the congress of Lithuanian Jews from all over the world that was held in Vilnius. I enjoyed taking part in it. Different people got together like members of one family and one and the same culture.

There was one more thing that caused mutual dislike between my mother and aunt Shulia. My aunt Shulia and her family rejoiced at the official recognition of Israel by all countries in 1948 11. My aunt was eager to move to Israel and she got her chance. During a short period in between 1949 and the 1950s Lithuanian Jews were given an opportunity to reunite with their closest kin in Israel before the Iron Curtain 12 was drawn back. One of my father and aunt Shilua's brothers moved to Israel back in the 1910s. He sent an invitation letter for the entire family, and my aunt wanted me to go with them. My aunt wanted me to have a future in Israel. She wanted me to leave the USSR, and believed that my deceased father would have liked it. My aunt asked my mother to let me go to Israel with them, but my mother was against it. She wanted me to stay with her, and I could understand this. Her refusal caused another conflict between my mother and my aunt, and this conflicted lasted as long as they lived.

I happened to meet with my cousin sisters in Israel during perestroika 13, when we were allowed to travel abroad. Regretfully, my aunt Shulia had passed away before then. When I was a child, I could not give full credit to my aunt, and it was only when I visited Israel that I realized how wise her decision to move the family to Israel was. My aunt had a strong will, and she was the core of the family. She guided and strengthened the family ties.

I can compare my life and the life of my cousin sisters in Israel. My reunion with them was a great shock for me. My older cousin can speak fluent Russian, and we could talk as much as we wanted with her. We met before I visited her in Israel. Pesia came to work for the Sochnut 14 in Novosibirsk where she taught Hebrew. She wrote me, and we started to communicate after a long interval.

Rena, the younger one, came to Israel at the age of seven or eight years, and she speaks poor Russian or Yiddish. Pesia graduated from the Department of Mathematics of Tel Aviv University. She has two children. Rena, the younger cousin, finished the Physical Culture College. She played in the volleyball team of Israel and took part in the World Cup. After finishing the college Rena went to the army where she served until she retired at the age of 45. Rena is full of energy, and she took to business. She is a tall and beautiful woman.

My cousins and I were as different as day and night. They have confidence and strong will. They are proud of their own life and their country. They are beautiful, and this is amazing since their soul reflects in their eyes. They are not shy Jewish girls like I was. They are real Israelites. Their self-sufficient attitude and their confidence in righteousness made a crucial impression on me.

The whole family adores Aunt Shulia, who insisted that they all moved to Israel back in the 1940s. They were still young and accepted her decision, but in reality Aunt Shulia just gave them a new decent life. Looking at my cousins and their children I was thinking that if all people living in Israel are like this, the country has a future. Their children are free people of the world, and how different they are from those browbeaten Jews having fear of everything around. They feel at home and masters of their own life in Israel. However hard the situation may be they know that these are

objective difficulties and they take every effort to establish peace and joy in their country. The people of Israel are the Jews that we can be proud of.

Those years, 1940 to 1950, in Kaunas were very tense. There were continuous raids in the town. Militia guys could come to any family to check documents. Sometimes these passport control checkups occurred at night. They were looking for the people who had no passports. Mama lived at a different location for the sake of safety. I remember that when somebody rang the doorbell, I had to hide behind some bags so that they could not find me. My mother also had to hide away and she told me about it. I went to the fourth grade in Kaunas.

In Kaunas Mama found out the details of how her family had died. When it became clear that the Soviet army was approaching Lithuania, the German troops started elimination of the traces of their crimes. They were in a great hurry and took little notice of the ghetto inmates. Some Lithuanian support personnel gave inmates a chance to escape from the ghetto. They were already aware of preparations to exterminate the inmates. Actually, many inmates were burned alive during this action.

My mother's brother and sister were offered a chance to escape. They came to a secret council with my grandmother. My grandmother was telling them that they should go and take this chance to escape, but they decided to stay with her, which they did. My mother's sister's daughter Frieda, who was 15 or 16 years old, was also there in the ghetto. She escaped along with a few other teenagers. The Lithuanian staff helped her to escape. They were hiding in a cellar at a Lithuanian household, before someone helped them to get to Kaunas. There were some Lithuanians killing Jews, but the others were rescuing Jewish people even at the risk of their lives. I met Frieda in Israel about eight years ago. She told me the story. She was the only survivor in my mother's family.

It took Mama almost a year before she managed to buy a passport. All those who managed to escape from exile already knew there was a man in Vilnius, who could help with a passport. Most of them were poor, and the locals collected money for them to buy necessary documents, clothes, etc. The Jewish community in Kaunas also collected the amount of money my mother needed to buy a passport. My mother went to Vilnius and when she returned she already had a passport. She had her maiden name of Fisher indicated in her new passport. My mother was Fisher, and I was Levina. My mother retained her name, and I changed mine to Blumberg after I got married.

However, despite our having new documents it turned out that it was still not safe for us to stay in Kaunas. It was a small town where people knew each other. Even some Jewish people might report to the NKVD that the Levin family had returned from exile illegally. If it happened this way, my mother would have had to go to prison for the violation of passport regime, and then we would have been made to return to exile. Also, they might have found out that my mother's passport was a false one. Once someone warned my mother that she and I had been noticed in the town and that we had to be watchful. We had to go somewhere where people did not know us and we had to hide away again.

We knew that my friend Dina's family also escaped from exile and lived in Riga. Dina's parents, particularly her father, wrote my mother offering her their support and assistance. So, we decided to go to Riga. I was very happy about it. Dina is still my best friend and we are very close. She is my sister, even though she was not born to our family. Dina's family had a great influence on me.

They helped me a lot. Dina's father was particularly kind to me. He was a very educated and interesting person. He gave his daughter very appropriate education. At that time people cared little about studying foreign languages while he gave his daughter an opportunity to study French and English, and this helped her a lot in life. I often attended Dina's classes learning what she did.

School years

I had a Cinderella complex. I loved my friend dearly and did not envy her, but I felt bad about not being able to have as good a life as she did. My mother and I were very poor. At that time skating was very popular, but I could only dream about it. There was no way we could afford buying skates. I had friends in my class, but I hardly ever attended any events at school or my friends' birthdays having no fancy clothes. I had one dress, which I wore to school, and I was embarrassed among my friends wearing fancy clothes. There were many things bothering me. I felt bitter about my mother being unable to provide the kind of life other children were having to me.

Mama did not always behave adequately, and those were hard times for me, when I witnessed that. It was additional emotional stress for me. It was not that I was ashamed that she was my mother, but it was painful to watch her condition. It took me some time to realize that Mama was ill. This was the result of deportation and life in exile.

Mama did not die in exile, she survived physically, but she was broken down spiritually, and her life was wasted. Of course, this situation was not common for all those, who were in exile. Perhaps, other people were stronger. Some had relatives, brothers or sisters to rely upon and get some support and assistance, while she had nobody. She spoke good literary Lithuanian, fluent Yiddish and had a good conduct of German, but she failed to learn appropriate Russian. She could explain herself in exile, but this was all she could. Perhaps, her mind rejected the Russian language subconsciously. Mama was not resentful, but inside she could not accept the Soviet regime, the system that broke her life.

I take after my father. Mama was a very beautiful and kind woman, but these features of hers turned out to be unclaimed. Moreover, she became timid and shy. She could have married someone and have her life ordered, but she didn't accept this. She didn't want anything. Mama was raised to be religious and she became devout, though she concealed this from all. Even I learned this only, when I was about 50 years old. Once we had a confiding discussion with her, and Mama told me that she had been praying through all these years. She read the prayers to me.

Mama spoke, read and wrote in excellent German. She even did some translations, but she never mentioned this to anyone. She was afraid of speaking it out. At first she feared to be arrested as a German spy, and things like this did happen during Stalin's rule. However, her fear did not vanish after he died, though she already could make her living knowing the language. She could teach or do translations.

When we fled from exile, Mama made her past life and biography null and void. She lived her life in fear, and this fear that was inside her developed into sickness, phobia. My friend Dina's mother also had problems. She could not work and she had problems with contacting people. However, she did not have to face this alone: her husband was there, she was well provided for and she knew she was well loved and cared for. Her situation was very different. However, Mama did not realize she was severely ill. Living in the USSR, we somehow ignored any indisposition until the pain became

unbearable, and as for mental problems, people were not used to paying any attention, whatsoever. Only after Mama moved to Israel in 1970, since this was the dream of her life, she had medical examinations and treatment.

I was a pioneer at school. All children became pioneers. They didn't ask their consent. It was something that goes without saying. However, I did not join the Komsomol 15. It was necessary to tell one's biography at the general meeting, which to me meant presenting a lie, which was not proper. It was wrong to start the life of a Komsomol member with lying. This was unacceptable to me, and I just decided to refuse from the Komsomol membership. I knew this was going to make my future life complicated and hinder my going to college, but I still did not want to tell lies.

When I turned 15, I had to quit my studies at the 8th grade at school and go to work to earn my living. Mama was very ill then and could not provide for both of us. It was hard to get any employment for me. I was 15, and labor code allowed going to work at the age of 16. The garment factory was the only place I could be employed. Young workers were in demand there. It took two to three months to learn working at the production line and it was easy. I remember they made men's shirts.

After I learned this I went to the 8th grade in the evening school. I was the youngest in my class. I did well at school. After finishing the 10th grade I went to the Riga extramural textile affiliate of Moscow College. What I actually wanted was to go to the Philological Department at university to study English or psychology, but all of my adult acquaintances were telling me these were professions with uncertain perspectives that were not going to provide for a living. They were looking at things from practical perspectives. They were telling me that I had to get a practical profession, which could support and provide food in the future, and that this was the only right approach to choosing a profession. Therefore, I went to the textile college. I had academic leaves to take exams and worked the rest of the time.

However strange it may seem, even in the 1950s the Jewish life in Riga was in full swing. I met some Jewish guys and girls and went to the synagogue with them. It wasn't that I was particularly looking for only Jewish friends, but I liked being among Jews. We could discuss Jewish topics and what concerned us freely. Whenever there was a non-Jew among us, we avoided these subjects. We didn't want to impose our problems on other people. There were also young people from mixed families among us.

I remember Stalin's death in 1953 very well. I was 16 at the time, no longer a child. Life had made me mature at young age. Some of my acquaintances were dissidents. Besides exile and resettlement, they were talking about political exile and arrests of cosmopolitans 16, 'enemies of the people.' I also heard at work that one or another Jew was arrested for cosmopolitism. I also remember the Doctors' Plot 17 process well. Before March 1953 I knew much about the misdeeds of the Soviet regime, and therefore, I felt no sadness about Stalin's death.

I remember hearing this news. I was visiting my acquaintances in Estonia then. We did not listen to the radio. A young girl, who was an Estonian school teacher, ran into the house. She was greatly excited and pronounced before stepping across the threshold: 'Imagine what, the radio announced Stalin has dropped dead.' She did say 'dropped dead". I was astounded at how she was not afraid of saying it openly. She was carrying a little dog, and she took a slice of sausage from a plate and gave it to her dog: 'May you feast, too.' I remember this. I was quite shocked by her conduct. I

thought how could one be happy about someone passing away, but as for me, I felt no grieving. I felt no joy either. I just accepted the news.

Married life

In my college I met a guy from Tallinn. His name was Moris Blumberg. He was visiting his aunt in Riga. I liked him. He was mature for his age. Moris studied at the Polytechnic Institute in Tallinn. He was 22 years old, but he already had a clear goal in life. However, what united us most of all was that we had much in common about the life we had had. His family was also deported from Kiev, and we had much in common. Both of us were children of enemies of the people. It somehow turned out that we could openly speak about what he had never told anyone. This brought us closer to one another.

We corresponded a whole year. Moris often visited Riga. I remember how happy we were, when Khrushchev 18 spoke at the 20th Party Congress 19 saying that our resettlement was illegal and wrong. Khrushchev's speech was like a ray of light for us, and we were hoping that the hard times had passed.

In 1960, when I was a 3rd-year student, we got married and I moved to Tallinn. My husband's parents arranged a wedding for us. At that time it wasn't possible to have a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. This was just dangerous. My husband's parents lived in Tallinn, but they came from Viljandi where they had relatives and friends. This was where our wedding took place. Moris' parents were well known and respected in Viljandi, and there were about 80 guests at our wedding. It was a beautiful wedding. Our wedding was registered at the registry office of Viljandi. The wedding ceremony was conducted in the Estonian language. At that time I knew not a word in Estonian, and I had to be told when to say 'yes.'

After the wedding we moved in with my husband's parents. My mother stayed in Riga. Moris' parents accepted me like I was one of them. My mother-in-law used to say she always wanted a daughter, but she only had two sons, and that I was like a daughter to her. My husband's father also said I had become his daughter, and he would not allow anyone to hurt me. I found a family for the first time in my life. I had been deprived of a real family environment, when a child. It wasn't before I got married that I felt I had parents.

When joining the Blumberg family, I felt like they were my original family, my home and everything my heart had always strived for, however subconsciously. I had missed the feeling of a Jewish home, and when saying 'Jewish,' that's what I mean. I had this all in my new family. I can say only little about my own father, but I would like to say more about my second father, my father-in-law, Rachmiel Blumberg, a very nice person. I called him my 'father,' because this was what he was to me. He replaced my own father, who was taken away from me, when I was a child.

Viljandi was a small and very beautiful town. Before the war there were many Jewish families living in Viljandi. They were workmen, craftsmen, tailors, tinsmiths and entrepreneurs. Rachmiel Blumberg was born in 1897. He came from a large and very poor Jewish family. He became a tailor's apprentice at a very young age. This was a difficult school of life. Besides his apprentice's assignments he had to do whatever housework errands.

I remember a story from Rachmiel's childhood that he told me. Once his master sent Rachmiel to deliver an order to a wealthy family. The housewife was making cutlets in the kitchen. She left Rachmiel waiting in the kitchen while she went to get the money. Rachmiel was as hungry as ever, and the cutlets' smell was so tempting. He grabbed a cutlet and put it in his bosom. It was burning hot, and the scar on his skin remained there as the memory that stolen things were always a burning memory.

Rachmiel became a tailor. They said in Viljandi that he knew his business however young he was. He was doing well and managed to open a garment store before long. In 1934 Rachmiel married Hana, a young and talented girl. She was 17 years younger than he. In 1938 their son Moris was born, and one year later his brother Rafail came into this world. The family business prospered and everything was going well.

When the Soviet rule was established in Estonia, many of Rachmiel's friends left the country. They were also telling Rachmiel that he should leave, but Rachmiel believed he had no one and nothing to fear: he had lived a decent life and made his fortune through hard work and persistence. By that time he already owned a large store in the center of Viljandi.

It goes without saying that shortly after the Soviet rule was established in Estonia, the store was nationalized. Rachmiel's employees wrote a letter to the NKVD requesting to let Rachmiel stay as director of the store. Rachmiel came from a poor family and lived a hard life, and he knew whatever concerns were worrying common people and treated them with sympathy. His employees thought much of him. However, their letter didn't help, and Rachmiel lost his store and the job. Rachmiel took to tailoring again and had his clients.

Then 14th June 1941 came. Someone knocked on the door and Hana opened it. Those were NKVD officers. They told the family to pack promptly and leave. Rachmiel was sentenced to five years in a strict security camp in Sverdlovsk region. Hana and their two children were sent to the village of Sbornoye, in Tomsk region. Estonian and Jewish families resided in barracks. Moris was three and Rafail was one year and a half. Hana had to go to work. The term of their exile was indefinite. Rachmiel survived the camp. His craft helped him. He made clothes for prisoners and employees. Rachmiel was lucky that his expertise was in demand.

He was released in 1946 and granted permission to go back to Estonia. However, his wife and sons were sentenced to permanent residence in exile and were not allowed to relocate. Rachmiel had an entrepreneur's mind and plotted a fantastic plan. At first he planned to take his children out of Siberia, and then he thought that he might as well consider other children. It was just his luck that in 1946 there was a secret direction issued to the NKVD, according to which underage orphans were allowed to go back to Estonia.

Rachmiel took care of his sons first. He told me funny episodes occurring during his trips. On his trip with his sons he bought them hats. The hats were too big. Moris could manage in his hat, but his younger brother's hat was a nuisance continuously falling down onto his nose. Rachmiel made two holes in the hat for the eyes. Everybody was laughing at the way it looked, but the hat was spoiled. Rachmiel also bought his sons two pairs of shoes, and the sales assistant tied shoe-strings together. As it happened, he did two left and two right shoes separately. Rachmiel put the shoes into a bag, in which some thieves made a hole and stole two left shoes. Rachmiel, when he found this out, went asking the passengers on the train if one of them got two left shoes to bargain one

for the right shoe, but no one responded.

When Rachmiel arrived in Estonia, he started asking, who had underage relatives in exile. Many people wanted to have their relatives back in Estonia, but this involved money to pay for the tickets, food on the way and even bribes. Very few could afford such expenses, and Rachmiel took to making leather coats. This job paid well, and Rachmiel managed to save some money. When he had the necessary amount, he traveled to Siberia to take a few children back home. He made five or six such trips. Rachmiel wanted to take back as many Estonian and Jewish children, as he could manage. This was a risky trick, but he managed all right.

There were numerous risks on the way as well: document checks, thefts and infections. Each time Rachmiel had a few children with him. He was asked why he had so many children with him, and he decided to say that he had been married a few times, and that he wanted his children to be with him. Of course, this was just an excuse, but one had to know Rachmiel to understand why people believed him. He could always find a common language with any person. People could feel his friendliness and appreciated his humor. Rachmiel knew how to convince other people.

Once Rachmiel and the group of children he had with him had to stay in Tomsk for a week. Rachmiel had to buy tickets and pack food for a week. He was very busy and had older children looking after the younger ones. To reward their effort he took the children to the cinema. Some of the children Rachmiel brought back to Estonia had to change their names since many people sympathized with those children and wanted to help them, while the others might report to authorities that those children were no orphans and that their parents were still in exile.

This was what happened to Andres, a well known cameraman and film producer in Estonia nowadays. His mother had stayed in exile, and Andres had to take another name. Andres returned to Estonia in 1947. Rachmiel was arrested, being reported to authorities. He had to spend some time in jail. The children he had with him had to go back to Siberia. However, this mission did not stop, and Rachmiel was its leader. This is what our father was like. I called him my father. He did replace my own father, of whom I only had vague memories.

Rachmiel was a modest person. He never boasted or told us about this period of his life. I knew nothing of this experience of his. Once we started discussing education and that one had to study. Rachmiel told me then that he might have been considered a person having higher legal education thinking of what he had been through, when only his natural talents and life-long experience helped him to survive. He had to think of each and every detail to have his stories trustworthy and hard to verify at the same time.

Nobody has counted how many children he managed to bring back home, but according to what he told us there must have been 35 to 50 of them. Once I asked Rachmiel why he was doing this considering that the risk was great and that this might have had impacted himself and his sons. He replied that he knew that if those children had stayed in exile they were destined to not only hard life and famine, but also, to the assimilation, lack of their own cultural and language environment.

In Estonia many of them realized their personal and professional potential. Those children grew up and had their own life, but my father always believed them to be his own children. When hearing about their successes he smiled and said: ’Look, this is my boy!’ Many of them kept visiting him. Peter Kaup, one of them, who was a well known cameraman in Estonia, moved to Finland. When

visiting Estonia, he came to see my father, and I remember their meetings. I can't remember all of them, but my father did.

For some time I was the only member of the family, who was aware of these children being rescued, the only member, in whom my father confided. Even my husband and his younger brother knew nothing of this. Rachmiel, for some reason, wasn't sure that they would understand his motives, considering that he put his family at risk and also, spent a lot on this effort.

We stayed with my husband's family for about five years. Our son was born in 1961. We gave him the name of Nevil. My mother-in-law chose this name for him. Before the war she had a close friend living in Viljandi. Her name was Rita. She gave birth to a son, and his name was Nevil. When the Soviet rule was established in Estonia, Rita and her family moved to Australia. She had relatives there. Rita was trying to convince my mother-in-law and the family to join them, but Rachmiel refused bluntly. He was a patriot of Estonia and was sure that nothing bad could happen to him in his own country. My mother-in-law asked me to name my son Nevil. I liked the name.

The Soviet regime did not only fight religion 20, but also, the national identity, and all national rituals, including the Estonian and Jewish ones, were forbidden. However, my father-in-law could not imagine that his grandson was not going to have the brit milah ritual. At his request a mohalim from Leningrad arrived at our house to conduct the circumcision. My husband had a job and was a member of the party by then. He was not very happy about our decision to have our son circumcised. What he was saying was that we shouldn't expose our baby to pain. Nevil was three months old then. To prevent my husband from feeling that he was violating the party rules, we let him be away from home at the time. Of course, Hana and I also worried that this would cause the baby some pain, but Rachmiel insisted that the tradition was observed to the full.

I had very close, kind and warm relationships with my husband's parents as long as they lived. My husband's mother and I were so close that even my friends felt jealous about us. They were saying that such a relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law could not be true. However, this is what it was like between us. I didn't know how to make Jewish food and had a rather vague idea about Jewish traditions. She taught and educated me. We observed Jewish traditions in the family. We celebrated Jewish holidays.

My husband's younger brother Rafail got a job assignment 21 and moved to Norilsk where he lived many yeas with his family before moving to Kostroma. This is where he lives now. My husband's parents, my husband and I lived in Tallinn together before my husband received a room in a shared apartment 22. There were two other Jewish tenants in this apartment. A few years later my husband received an apartment.

On Jewish holidays we visited my husband's parents. When my mother-in-law grew too old to cook, they joined us on holidays. I remember how happy I was to hear from my mother-in-law that there was nothing else she could teach me to do, and that I had become a better cook than she was. I was very pleased to hear this from her. This was praise for me, considering that Hana was a great housewife and was a model to follow.

My first years in Estonia were very hard. I had to learn the Estonian language. When living in Riga, I had a good conduct of everyday Latvian, and all official documentation was issued in Russian, while living in Estonia required knowing the language. At my work there was no one, who could

speak Russian to me. I had to learn the language, and my husband's family was very supporting.

I had to quit my college since there was no affiliate of the textile college in Estonia. Therefore, I entered the Tallinn College of light industry. I had classes in the evening. My specialty was clothing technology and clothing design. At that time I was pretty much short of time. I had to go to work, study and take care of the child. When thinking about our life in Siberia, I had a feeling that I was living somebody else's life, that it was a rough copy or a rehearsal before real life. Resettlement took everything away from me. A baby is born to the family where each member of the family loves and cares for it, where it has a perspective of a happy life in the future, when all of a sudden this all collapses to be followed by the life with constant fear and the feeling that you are to blame for something, but you don't know what exactly you are to blame for.

I had to be continuously hiding and concealing my past, my thoughts and feelings. I knew that even the fact that I had survived was a mere fortuity. I understood that each person had his own life and mine was not that bad, though I missed many things in my life. I wish I had known more about our ancestors, traditions and history to tell our son and now to my grandson. There is little I can tell him about our family, my grandparents and parents. We had a nice family, nothing to be ashamed of. Things could have been different for us.

I've been in contact with my friend Dina all my life. When I left Riga for Tallinn, Dina's family took good care of me. I have faced no anti-Semitism while Dina had to face some. Besides having the unequivocal name of an Israelit, Dina also had a brightly expressed Jewish appearance. She did very well at school. In Dina's school certificate there were all 'excellent' grades, apart from only two 'good' grades. After finishing school Dina was going to enter the Medical College. I believe medicine was Dina's vocation, but she failed to enter the college. They intentionally reduced her grades at the entrance exams, even if it was a half point, but she finally lacked just a little to have the necessary number of points. Dina's father grudged no money to pay for Dina's private classes.

For three years in a row Dina tried to pass entrance exams to the Medical College before she gave up and entered the extramural Department of Economics at the Textile College where I was a student, only of a different department. Dina was a talented girl and did well with studying economics, though she had a longing for medicine. Medicine has always been her unaccomplished dream.

Another reason why I've faced no anti-Semitism might have been my choice of the place to study and work where there was little competition. I know of only one case at work, when my Jewish origin hindered my career. I had a chance of being employed by a department at the Estonian Ministry of light industry. There was a vacancy of curator for a few factories. My documents were transferred to the HR department, but they were returned.

It was a long time afterward that I got to know why I failed to get this position. Someone told me that there was no way for a Jewish woman, who was not a party member and whose mother resided in Israel to be appointed to this position. Who knew what to expect from me? What if I decided to move to Israel, too? However, I've never faced any anti-Semitism on an everyday level. I did know, though, that it existed both in everyday life, and on the governmental level, but it did not concern me.

It was Mama's dream to move to Israel. She got a chance to make her dream come true during the mass departure of Jews to Israel in the 1970s. She received a letter of invitation from a distant relative. Mama wanted me to divorce my husband and join her, but it was not for me. Mama left in 1970, and our contacts stopped for a long time. At that time one couldn't even imagine there would be time, when people got an opportunity to travel to Israel or invite their folks to visit them. My friend Dina's family also moved to Israel at about the same time, and they supported my mother as much as they could there. I got a chance to visit my mother during perestroika after 18 years of separation. Since then I kept visiting her once a year or even more frequently. Mama died in Israel in 2000.

I was also eager to move to Israel, but my husband had problems in this regard. Moris worked at a defense enterprise and had a strict security access permit form. Having access to defense affairs he was not going to be allowed a permit for relocation. He had to resign and find a job, which was not associated with any access permits, in which case he might be allowed to relocate in ten years' time. Anyway, this wasn't Moris' intention. He was fanatically dedicated to what he was doing and believed in the Soviet system. In short, he was an 'appropriate' person. Considering the job he had, he was not entitled to travel abroad for whatever purpose.

The only time he traveled abroad was in 1992, when we went to Israel together. When we returned home, I sensed that he had changed a lot. We tried to avoid discussing this subject. I knew that this was a sensitive subject for him. Perhaps, he realized that he was responsible for not giving me or our son a chance to live a different life. Well, nobody could tell what kind of life we might have had in Israel and what it might have been like.

Another thing was important: in the USSR we were living in a closed surrounding. We had no opportunity to compare and evaluate our way of life and the way other people lived in a different system and on a different land. In other countries people could rely on themselves, their own choices and persistence, while we depended on the system, and what we could change was very little. We, Jews, had to keep in mind that the land we lived on was not our own land and that we were second-rate people and had to play supporting roles and stay within permissible limits. The endless and permanent fear inside becomes some sort of a norm. You always pull yourself up: don't thrust yourself forward, this is not yours, you won't manage here, they won't give you this job…

After our visit to Israel Moris understood that there are countries where people have equal initial positions, and each person is responsible for realizing them, while in the USSR we all appeared to be hostages and victims of the system. It's true, though, that this did not only concern Jews. Moris was a very honest man. I would even say, this was a hypertrophied sense of justice. For him, doing something good to his surrounding was more important than doing some good to himself and his family. This was the way his father was, and he was the same.

Moris was a very tight-lipped person. He hardly ever shared his thoughts and feeling even with me, but I know that after our trip to Israel he started revising his value system. His career, his job, which cost him a lot of effort and life, in the long run, would surely have been much more successful in another country, and he wouldn't have had to take such tremendous effort, and this thought was bothering him. The thing is, our system was squeezing whatever was possible from a person before dumping him or her. Nobody cared about people or took any interest in those, who

could work no longer. Actually, Moris burnt himself at work, and then he passed away at the age of 61.

My husband was a very complex person. He was a born leader. He knew how to build up a team, and he was good at this. He had a strong charisma of a leader. His family and his child did not come first. I wouldn't say he didn't love us. No, he loved us as much as he could, but his work came first. It goes without saying that this approach had a negative impact on our marital life. Even my husband's mood or his involvement in family activities depended on situations at work. However, Moris had broad outlook: he was interested in pictures and books. He started collecting books, when he was a student. My husband was fond of philately. Every now and then I asked him whether he was happy with his life working from morning till night and whether he wanted to do something different. Moris replied that he got at work whatever interesting the world could offer to the full.

It was true, considering that his surrounding was represented by bright individuals, very complete personalities. Their team was recognized on very high levels. For example, the team headed by Moris received the invention award of the Estonian government twice. I knew no details about the kind of work Moris was doing. All I knew was that it was related to the defense complex of the USSR.

I wouldn't say that our life was secluded. We used to go to exhibitions and concerts, but Moris easily refused from going out, when this was for the sake of his work. Sometimes he came home from work half an hour after the concert we were planning to go to had started. Our life was highly dependent on his job, and his work was a determining factor. At some instants I thought, 'that's it, I can't go on like this'. We had different attitudes in life and life values.

However, each time the thought of hurting his mother and father stopped me. The role my husband's family, representing a real Jewish family, played in my life was so important to me that I put my decision aside. I was telling myself that I would not leave my husband like that, and that I had to fight and try to somehow change his attitudes. It was easy to say, but hard to do.

Now, looking back at the past years I understand that my husband gave much to me. I had to start work, when I was very young, and I missed the kind of life students were having with its joys and cultural things. I was rather delayed in my intellectual development. My husband and his family helped me to fill up this gap.

At home we celebrated Jewish and Soviet holidays. During the Soviet times the requirement to go to parades on Soviet holidays was mandatory. I went to parades, too. There were lists of those, who did not attend such events, made, and if I failed to attend an event, this would have had a negative impact on my career. However, I wasn't quite fond of celebrating these holidays.

And there were other things involved. We lived in a rather spacious apartment in the center of the town. And there was a tradition that my husband's team gathered in our apartment to celebrate holidays. They felt like staying together to celebrate. I liked those people, and had nothing against their visits. Well, of course, I had to cook a lot, but I didn't mind doing this for my husband. Actually, this was the only reason why I got involved in the celebration of these holidays.

We spoke Yiddish to my husband's parents, but in our family the language we communicated in was Russian. Our son Nevil studied in the Russian school. He was doing well at school. When he went to the 3rd grade at school, we sent him to a music school. He took violin classes. Nevil finished the Russian school and the music school and entered a music college. When he was still a student, he was offered to join a band as a solo-guitarist. It didn't take him long to learn the instrument. He was 17 years old at the time. The band turned out to be really good, and they went on a few tours abroad.

Nevil entered the Tallinn Conservatory, but quit his studies after the second year. There was no department where he wished to study, and he didn't quite like the department where he was actually admitted.

Nevil got married, when he turned 20, but this marriage was a failure. At the age of 25 my son was recruited to the army, and when he returned, his family fell apart. In the army Nevil started composing music, and after he returned to Tallinn he took to music with all seriousness. Nevil gathered an ensemble and they were tape recording their music. For a number of years my son was a rather successful musician. There are annual contests of guitarists in Tallinn, and twice in a row Nevil was a winner of this contest of guitarists. Music was his long-term business, but it brought no high profits to him.

While he was living with us, Nevil could afford to do what he liked without giving much thought to how much he was earning, but when Nevil remarried and they had a baby, he had to earn money to support the family. Nevil went to work at a record company, but some time later he opened an advertising firm of his own. At first he only dealt with advertising music before he expanded his business to advertising other things. He had to learn a lot and he liked this. He fit well in this advertising business, and his company has a good reputation. Unfortunately, his business leaves him little time for music.

Nevil married an Estonian girl. Of course, my husband and I wanted his wife to be Jewish, but there was nothing we could do about it. We are not the kind of parents, who can put pressure on their children. So our son married the girl of his choice, though his decision was a hard thing for my husband and me. I am not dead against mixed marriages. I know some mixed marriages that have resulted in very good families, but to have this, both spouses have to be cultured and educated people and have respect of the culture and religion of each other. If a marriage has this, it's going to be good and strong. Respect of the partner has to make the foundation of such a marriage.

I have normal everyday relationships with my daughter-in-law, but I have no spiritual contact with her. I am not trying to impose my company or my ideas on her. I just know it makes no sense to do so. It's impossible to change anything about it. Maybe, there is no need to change anything. She is still very young. She is eight years younger than my son, and perhaps, she will want to be closer to me and change something in our relationships, but it's going to be her decision. When the soil is not ready yet, you can drop as many seeds as you want, but they won't grow. This is what was happening in our family: for 10 years we were wasting the grains. Now our son lives his own life: he has a family and his job, and the rest of it comes after these.

Sometimes, growing older, people shift their priorities. What seemed of no significance becomes a top priority. Now I'm beginning to feel that his Jewish identity is gaining importance with my son, and his having a non-Jewish life makes this part of life rather difficult. I am his mother, and I know

that he and I have this in our genes, though it has little expression in his actual doings as yet. This knowledge has not matured yet, but Nevil is very close to recognizing it. Their son Mark, my grandson, was born in 1995. He is a nice boy. He goes to an Estonian school. I believe I have a closer contact with him than with his mother.

My mother-in-law, Hana Blumberg, died in 1980. Rachmiel outlived her and died in 1985. They were both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn and had Jewish funerals. They live on in my memory, these two close people.

I've never limited the criteria of my choice of friends to their national identity. I still have Estonian and Russian friends. My friends are the people I feel closeness to. It's not the national origin, but the personality that matters. However, I gather only my Jewish friends at my home on Jewish holidays. I make traditional Jewish food: gefilte fish, gehakte herring and tsimes. When we get together on Jewish holidays, I feel like remembering everything inmost related to our history and our life. It is important for me to be in the Jewish surrounding on such days.

I can't say I was a great supporter of the Soviet regime, but I wasn't a ferocious anti-Soviet opponent either. I actually knew that there was much injustice in the Soviet system. Many people could feel that, but life was going on, and each day demanded new efforts, and I had little time to think about such things. I was no different from other people, and the Soviet system was something given that was not possible to change.

The changes came with perestroika, when books, which had not been allowed before, became available: Solzhenitsyn's books 23, 'Doctor Zhivago' by Boris Pasternak 24, etc. We shared those books reading and discussing them. This was an active period of time, when many people, who had never given a thought to such things as camps and persecution 25 started to reevaluate their views on life. My husband's and my families knew the truth by no hearsay, but the majority was only beginning to find out the depth and tragic nature of what had happened.

I worked in the clothing industry for 17 years. I worked in the experimental department where we designed clothes to be introduced in production. I liked this job a lot, but in due time lots of standards were established and the element of creativity vanished. Everything was so plain and dull that I no longer enjoyed this work. I decided to do something different.

I was lucky to get a job at the publishing office at the Ministry of Communications. The publishing office reported to the Central Committee propaganda department. I was the only employee, who was not a party member, but they accepted me, anyways. I was responsible for the distribution of newspapers, magazines and books in Estonia. I liked this work and did it successfully and for a long time. It also involved communicating with other people. It was the process of mutual enrichment with good outcomes. I had this job for over 15 years.

The Estonian Jewish community was established during perestroika in 1988. This was the first officially recognized Jewish community in the USSR. I was very happy about it. I only wish my husband's parents had lived longer to witness this. For many years Tsilia Laud, the head of the community, and I were friends. My husband's parents and Tsilia's family were friends. Tsilia worked at my husband's plant for some time, and this also tied us together. Then Tsilia quit working at the plant and headed the WIZO 26 women's organization.

I often attended meetings at the community and tried to contribute in its development. At first I was a WIZO volunteer before Tsilia offered me permanent employment with the WIZO, and I was more than happy to accept this offer. I had a lot of work to do. There were sponsors making contributions to charity funds. It was necessary to develop a database to determine the needs of the people under the WIZO care. I was involved in the social center establishment in our community 27. I had to gather a team of people I could fully rely upon. They were to be honest and capable of caring for elderly people, sympathetic and compassionate. I managed this task well, and now we are like a family.

There is a ‘warm home’ program in our social center. It’s my favorite program. It’s no secret that many older people suffer from loneliness more than they do from illnesses or lack of money. This program gives them an opportunity to communicate with other people. Some people agree to have a few people getting together in their apartment. We find people living in the same neighborhood and having common interests.

There is a house where those who had been subject to persecution get together. There is another house: a merely Jewish home where older people get together to speak Yiddish. We discuss whatever subjects in Yiddish. This gives us a chance to remember Yiddish and just speak the language of our childhood. Another nice ‘warm home’ in Tallinn is where former teachers and doctors get together. They are representatives of the same generation and culture having many interests in life. Some of them compose nice poems and the others recite poems by famous poets. They sing and play music, discuss the books they’ve read and plays they’ve seen. They make a joyful company, and having visited them one forgets how old one is.

It is my job to put together the people, who are sure to like each other and enjoy each other’s company. I believe this is a very good program. People find new friends and start to take care of each other. They visit those who are ill and know how their friends are doing. They celebrate Jewish holidays in the community and in their ‘warm homes.’ They feel the need to get together and this helps them to stay optimistic.

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed. Was it good or bad? I think this was the right thing to happen that our countries gained independence, though this is a double-edged weapon. I think, there are many more factors bringing our Baltic republics together with Russia than, say, Scandinavian or other European countries. There are two or three generations of people here, who felt very comfortable in the Soviet system. They feel nostalgic about the USSR, though they may feel reluctant about saying this aloud. Besides, I think that from the point of view of economy it would be better, if our Baltic countries were friends or, at least, retained good relationships with Russia. However, this has not been the case in recent years.

There was a lot of good in our Soviet way of life. Anyway, I believe it’s a good thing that we’ve rid ourselves of the USSR. We need to learn by ourselves and feel what it is like to live in a different system. Few people can remember their life in pre-Soviet Estonia. Their children and grandchildren lived during the Soviet period, and now they need to learn another reality. Anyway, whatever is to be will be the outcome of our conscious choice.

I remember how during the putsch 28 residents of the Baltic Republics made a living chain. People were standing holding hands, and they were not only the native residents of our countries, but also, Russians, Ukrainians and Moldavians. And people of all nationalities standing in this chain

were thinking emotionally about one thing: we want the Soviet dictate no longer, we don't want the 'big brother' to decide everything for us and impose its own choice on us. Now we can manage our own life, and they are not going to take this right from us.

People, particularly younger people, have obtained tremendous opportunities. They can get good education in whatever country they wish and they can get good jobs. Unfortunately, many of them move to developed European countries where they want to stay. Unfortunately, most of the residents in the Baltic Republics have the nature of individualists. They lack the 'typical Russian' feature: the sense of camaraderie, overall collective responsibility and the wish to do more for their country, rather than for themselves. This often becomes a hindrance with us.

My husband died in 2000. We buried him in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. Since then I've lived alone and my work prevents me from feeling lonely. People need me and I can help them, and this gives me strength to go on. There is still a lot to do, particularly about the nursing service, which is my responsibility. Many people truly need our care and assistance. It would be great, if we could establish a home for such people where they would receive continuous nursing services, medial care and whatever comforts they require.

Social aid is vital for many old people, but on the other hand, they worked hard and have the right to a decent life in their old age. Estonia has very high living standards and miserable pensions. I don't know what would happen to us, if it were not for the assistance the community provides. I feel sorry that few generations of people, who grew up during the Soviet rule, developed no charity related traditions. It doesn't occur to those, who have made fortunes, that there might come the day, when they need some help, too. Why do people from abroad provide assistance to us while wealthy people here have no intention to help the others?!

Nowadays, after my husband died, I often look straight into my heart trying to understand my life and my purpose in life. What happened in my childhood was terrifying. It's frightful that the dreadful mark of 'enemies of people' turned many innocent people into outcasts and renegades. What was the fault of these people, particularly the wives of 'enemies of people' and their children? Later it turned out that none of them was guilty, but hundreds and thousands of lives had been destroyed, reshaped in the roughest and most barbaric way? This barbarism and this crying injustice should not be forgotten or forgiven.

We make a small group of former convicts. They are the people, who had had their heavy lot in life. They are rather withdrawn, and they don't like to talk about themselves or about their past. What happened to us is associated with pain and dreadful loses. Memories and talking about what we have lived through mean feeling this pain again. We lived a larger part of life in fear and lies, though we know not what our fault is.

There is a series of programs based on the memories of those who had been resettled on the radio in Estonia. I would like this program to be given the name of 'Guilty without any guilt.' We, being the children guilty without any guilt, had to carry this dreadful injustice, which mutilated our lives. This was what the life of my generation was like. There are people from all over Estonia in our group. We meet on 14th June, the Day of Resettlement, each year. This is our memorial day. We are like a family. We are very close. What we had gone through brings us closer to one another.

Glossary

1 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.

2 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.

3 Enemy of the people

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

4 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.

5 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.

6 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.

7 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.

8 Kaunas ghetto

On 24th June 1941 the Germans captured Kaunas. Two ghettoes were established in the city, a small and a big one, and 48,000 Jews were taken there. Within two and a half months the small ghetto was eliminated and during the 'Grossaktion' of 28th-29th October, thousands of the survivors were murdered, including children. The remaining 17,412 people in the big ghetto were mobilized to work. On 27th-28th March 1944 another 18,000 were killed and 4,000 were taken to different camps in July before the Soviet Army captured the city. The total number of people who perished in the Kaunas ghetto was 35,000.

9 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.

10 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

11 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.

12 Iron Curtain

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

the late 1980s and early 1990s.

13 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.

14 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)
International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.

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 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.'

17 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.

18 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

19 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

20 Struggle against religion

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

21 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

22 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.

23 Solzhenitsyn, Alexander (1918-2000)

Russian novelist and publicist. He spent eight years in prisons and labor camps, and three more years in enforced exile. After the publication of a collection of his short stories in 1963, he was

denied further official publication of his work, and so he circulated them clandestinely, in samizdat publications, and published them abroad. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970 and was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 after publishing his famous book, The Gulag Archipelago, in which he describes Soviet labor camps.

24 Pasternak, Boris Leonidovich (1890-1960)

Russian poet and novelist, who stood up for independence in creation. In the times of the Great Terror (1934-38), Pasternak defended the repressed on a number of occasions. He translated modern and classic foreign poetry. His major work was the novel 'Doctor Zhivago', depicting the fate of the Russian intelligentsia with tragic collisions of the Revolution and the Civil War. The novel was banned in the Soviet Union, but appeared in an Italian translation in 1957 and later in other languages. In the Soviet Union it was published only in 1988. In 1958 Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, but the furor stirred up in the Soviet Union forced him to reject the award. It was posthumously given to his son in 1989.

25 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.

26 WIZO

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

27 Hesed

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center

facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.

28 1991 Moscow coup d'etat

Starting spontaneously on the streets of Moscow, its leaders went public on 19th August. TASS (Soviet Telegraphical Agency) made an announcement that Gorbachev had been relieved of his duties for health reasons. His powers were assumed by Vice President Gennady Yanayev. A State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) was established, led by eight officials, including KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, and Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov. Seizing on President Mikhail Gorbachev's summer absence from the capital, eight of the Soviet leader's most trusted ministers attempted to take control of the government. Within three days, the poorly planned coup collapsed and Gorbachev returned to the Kremlin. But an era had abruptly ended. The Soviet Union, which the coup plotters had desperately tried to save, was dead.