

# Etta Ferdmann

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Etta Ferdmann is a petite lady. She has nicely done auburn hair and natural make-up. Etta is dressed to the fashion and with taste. She looks younger than her age. Etta is very amiable and kind. When we had just met, she was a little bit tense. She probably did not know what she was supposed to tell as if her inward censorship worked. Then she probably started to trust me and changed instantly beginning to tell her story in detail. Etta's wording was very precise. It must be a professional feature - Etta has worked as a teacher all her life. She is a very kind and caring woman. Etta's place is very cozy. Her apartment is well furnished and comfortable. She has a lot of books, pictures of her relatives and students. Etta is interesting to talk with. She is a book-worm and a globe-trotter. Having spent a couple of hours with her I understood why she is so loved by her students.



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## My family

The families of my parents lived in the small town of Narva [about 200 km east of Tallinn] bordering on Russia. I only vaguely remember Narva of my childhood days, but I often asked my mother questions about it. It was a small, neat town, where people of different nationalities were living – Estonians, Russians, Jews. None of them felt different. Mother always used to emphasize there was no difference between the people of different nationalities during the Estonian

independence 1. All of them knew each other and were very friendly.

My paternal grandfather's name was Chaim Mendle Ferdmann. I do not know when and where he was born. Grandmother Yachna Ferdmann was born in Narva in 1877. The family was large. They had five children. The eldest, Benchi, was born in 1896. In 1901 their daughter Zelda was born and in 1902 their son Samuel followed. In 1904 their son Meishe was born. He was always called Mikhail. The youngest was my father Gessel. He was born in 1907.

I did not know Grandfather Chaim Mendle. He died in 1909, when my father was only two years old. Grandmother became a widow with five children. Probably she never got married again because of the children. Who would like to marry a widow with such a caboodle of children? Grandmother managed to raise the children by herself. She was a common, uneducated woman. While Grandmother was alive, she was a housewife. After her husband's death, my grandmother found a job, started rolling cigarettes. Of course, she could not make a lot of money with such work, but still she managed to raise her children.

I do not think any of them finished secondary school. At that time education was expensive. All of them just went to a Jewish school. My father finished seven grades of a Jewish school, maybe even less. He read a lot, was interested in many things. He looked like a mundane, educated man. The family was very poor. When father was 17, he had an ulcer from malnutrition. He had a perforated ulcer and underwent a complex operation.

Everybody in Narva knew my grandmother and deeply respected her. She was a very religious woman. In spite of living from hand to mouth, she also found a way to help the poor. She said, no matter how bad your life was, there would always be somebody whose life was even worse. She found people like that and helped them the way she could. Of course, she observed all Jewish traditions and taught her children that. Sabbath was always marked at home as well as other Jewish holidays. Grandmother went to the synagogue and took the children with her. I cannot say that we were as pious as grandmother, but we were religious and followed traditions.

Only Yiddish was spoken at home. All the children knew Russian and Estonian. Grandmother spoke Yiddish, and she knew some phrases in Estonian to have a small talk with her neighbors. Grandmother was a very strict and autocratic woman, a true head of the family. Even when the kids grew up, they respected her a lot. Her word was the law. There was only one case when somebody disobeyed Grandmother. I will tell you about it later.

Grandmother's four sons achieved everything themselves. They learned the tannery craft. The elder children started working and helped Grandmother with money. Then, they taught the younger ones their craft. All of them were shoemakers, not cobblers, but shoe-designers. This job required certain skills and was well paid.

Mother's family also lived in Narva. The name of my maternal grandfather was Abram Donets. He was born in Narva. The date is not known to me. I do not know what he did for a living. Grandmother Etta Donets was born in 1889. Grandmother was a seamstress. She was a gorgeous, cheerful lady. Mother said she had a wonderful taste and she had rich customers.

My grandparents had two daughters. Mother was the elder one, born in 1912. Her Jewish name was Zelda, but she was always called Zinaida. Mother's sister Maria was born in 1913. She was called

Musya in the family. Mother's family was rather well-off. Mother and Musya graduated from the Russian lyceum in Narva. At that time it was considered to be a good education. Mother was very beautiful. She had a very beautiful, feminine shape with a small waist. In 1933 she was even elected the beauty queen of Narva.

Of course, my mother's family was traditionally Jewish, rather religious. All of them probably went to the synagogue and marked holidays, and believed in God, but they were not such zealots as my paternal grandmother Yachna.

Grandmother Etta died young in 1932. She was only 43. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Narva. Grandfather Abram was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. In 1940 he left for Tallinn on business and was run over by a car. Grandpa was not taken to Narva and was buried in Tallinn. I remember my mother and her sister Musya went to Grandfather's funeral in Tallinn. They did not take me with them.

I do not know how my parents met. Narva was a small town and Jews always met in the synagogue at charity events. There are a lot of places where two young people can meet each other. All I know is that it was not a prearranged marriage. In spite of the fact that Grandmother Yachna was an ardent follower of traditions, prearranged marriages were not common in our family. All her children had a love wedlock. My parents got married in 1933. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a rabbi and chuppah.

My grandmother Yachna lived in a large, six-room apartment with her numerous children. The family was clustered together – all my grandmother's children were living there with their spouses and children. My parents also settled in that apartment after their wedding. Each family had a separate room. The only single person was my father's brother Mikhail. And only Father's brother Benchi lived separately with his family.

This is the story of Benchi Ferdmann I mentioned above – the case of disobey. Benchi fell in love with a Russian girl, who was living in Narva. It goes without saying that Grandmother was against that marriage. They had heavy disputes, and Grandmother demanded that Benchi stopped loving that lady. Benchi did not lose hope to talk his mother into agreeing to his marriage, but she was adamant. He loved the girl so much, that he married her without Grandmother's consent and blessing. At that time it was the event that astounded the whole town. Both Jews and Russians kept talking about it. Probably Grandmother was the only person who did not want to talk about that marriage. She rejected her son. It was a terrible story. She spent mourning days over him the way it is done with the deceased, and never mentioned his name after that.

Father's sister Zelda married a Jew from Narva called Sinder. Their daughter Gita was born in 1932. Father's brother Samuel married a Jewish girl from Riga. Her name was Mira. In 1937 their son Chaim Mendle was born. He was named after Grandfather. His secular name was Charvie. He was a wonderful boy. I was born in 1934 and named Etta after Grandmother.

Of course, Grandmother's sons became independent and she stopped working. She was sitting in the armchair and reading in her prayer book and Torah. Her daughters-in-law and her daughter Zelta did the house chores. They cooked together. The whole family had meals together at a huge table. We were very friendly. Our family spoke to me in Yiddish or Estonian. My parents spoke either Russian or Yiddish. During family reunions with Grandmother, only Yiddish was spoken.

Sabbath was marked at home. On Friday festive food was cooked, challot were baked. Grandmother watched the process for things to be done properly. She ruled the big family. Friday night we were supposed to get together in the drawing room. Grandmother lit candles and read prayers, then everybody sat down at the table. We took a piece of challah, dipped it in salt and ate it. After that we started eating other meals.

We marked all Jewish holidays; there was a synagogue in Narva and on holidays all of us went there with Grandmother. I do not remember if all the children went there on every holiday. For some reason I remember Rosh Hashanah. On that day my parents took me to the synagogue. I liked it a lot, and I was looking forward to this holiday. I do not remember other holidays.

Dad worked a lot and my parents saved money. In 1939 they opened up their own store. It was a small one, but still it was their property that they took pride in. Unfortunately, their joy was not lasting. In 1940 Russian troops entered Estonia and we became one of the Soviet republics [cf. Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [2](#).

I would like to say that at first people even felt euphoric about the annexation of Estonia to the Soviet Union. Nobody knew practically anything about the Soviet Union apart from the slogan 'freedom, equality, brotherhood,' and that was all about Soviet propaganda. The country where all people were equal, where there is no oppression, segregation, almost like a paradise. Many people believed in that, but soon they learned the sober truth.

My parents and other people went to welcome Soviet soldiers. Then they came back saying that they looked like paupers. It was obvious that the poor army demonstrated the poverty of the country. The army is the face of the country. Since that moment my parents' attitude to the Soviets changed. Life showed that they were right. Nationalization started right away. They took all they could: houses, companies, stores. They also took my parents' store. Of course, my parents got no compensation for that. Fortunately, nobody was housed in our apartment as we were too many people already. Then repressions started. Many people were arrested, including the Jews.

On 14th June 1941 mass deportation took place in Estonia [3](#). It was not enough for the Soviets to take people's property. Within one day 10,000 people were deported from Estonia, while the entire population of the country was about a million. The deported were rich people, who were called 'enemies of the people' [4](#). Luckily, we were not deported. Stalin must have planned several stages of deportation as he was expecting Hitler's attack on the USSR. More than one echelon might have been deported, but on 22nd June 1941 troops of fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union and the war was unleashed [5](#).

When in 1939 Hitler attacked Poland [6](#), some Polish Jews managed to escape, and some of them came to Narva. Grandmother always helped the poor and started assisting them, giving them clothes and food. Of course, she listened to their stories about the atrocity of fascism. So, thanks to that she understood what we should expect. Our family obeyed Grandmother unconditionally. When Polish fugitives told her about ruthless murders of Jews, my grandmother ordered all of us to go into evacuation. I have no doubt: if grandmother had not told us to leave for evacuation, we would have stayed in Narva.

## **In evacuation during the war**

We left on 18th July 1941. The Soviet government provided the trains for everybody who was willing to leave. Unfortunately, very many Jews decided to stay. They did not fear the Germans as much as the Bolsheviks [7](#). There were very few survivors from among those who stayed. When we were leaving, Narva was bombed from all the sides. It was bombed at the beginning of the war and during the liberation of Estonia.

My father left with us. He was the only one out of the four brothers, who was drafted into the Soviet army. The other brothers were too feeble as a result from their impoverished and famished childhood. Father was mobilized, and I left with Mother. There was also my mother's sister Musya with us. She was single at that time. Benchi and his wife were evacuated separately from us. We found out about it after the war.

Father was drafted before our departure. We met with him almost right away. When things like that happen, one starts believing in God's hand. We took the train to Ural. We stopped at some station in Kirov oblast. Suddenly, there was a rumor in our train that the echelon with mobilized soldiers was approaching the station. Then we found out that there was an announcement in the military train that there was a train with Estonian evacuees.

Father did not know that we were on that train, but he rushed to look for us. He was putting his boots on, when there was an announcement about our train. He even did not have time to put the second boot on, and ran there holding the second boot in his hand. It was very touching. Hardly had we spoken several words, when our train left. We were heading to Ural and the train with the mobilized took the same direction. There were camps nearby the town Kamyshlov of Sverdlovsk oblast, where the Estonian corps [8](#) was being formed.

We reached the town of Irbit, Sverdlovsk oblast [about 1600 km east of Moscow]. We were sent to Kirillovo, which was 14 kilometers away from Irbit. We were housed with peasants. All of us were very tired and hungry, willing to get to bed and to take a rest. We were taken to the hut. Samuel went into the room, which was provided by the hosts. He came out and said that the room was large enough for all of us. There were icons on the walls. [Christian families traditionally had icons in their homes, unless some of their members were convinced communists. Most older people in villages remained religious.] Grandmother did not enter the room and did not let anybody in until the hosts had taken off the icons. Then, she allowed them to enter the room.

All of us but Grandmother started working. There was a kolkhoz [9](#) in Kirillovo. Women started working in the field. The kolkhoz paid for work with trudodni [10](#). There were trudodni for each working day and after harvesting a certain amount of flour, groat and vegetables were given for them. It was the only food we could get. Sometimes we exchanged products for some things.

Now I understand how difficult it was for the adults to work so hard physically to feed three little kids. It was the hardest for Grandmother and Zelda as they ate only kosher food. Fortunately, Grandmother's sons were not such bigots. It is hard to imagine how the kashrut could be observed under those circumstances. I do not know how they survived, but they did not break the rules. They even marked Jewish holidays in evacuation. I remember on Pesach my grandmother baked matzah from flour, which was given for trudodni. They made Lenten scones and baked them in the oven.

When we were living in Kirillovo, my mother tried to find out where the Estonian corps was formed. Finally she got to know it and it turned out that it was not very far from us. Mother and I went to

visit Father. I do not remember how we got there. All I can tell you is that somebody showed us the path in the forest and we managed to find Dad. They lived in dug-outs in the forest. There were a lot of our acquaintances. The commanders of the corps gave a separate dug-out to three people and we lived there with Father for three days. Then we found out that there would be medical commission soon and Father would most likely be demobilized. He required a very strict diet and in the camp he had an ulcer. We left for Kirillovo. In early 1942 my father was demobilized and he came to us.

Late 1941, early 1942 was the hardest time for our family. On 28th December 1941 my uncle Samuel's little son, Chaim Mendle, died. That day was my birthday. The kid was only four. He was the youngest and evacuation was the hardest on him. Of course, his death was a blow to the entire family. The second loss was in early 1942. The husband of my father's sister Zelda decided to leave for Palestine. During the war such a decision was absurd, but he probably could not understand how preposterous his plans were. He also urged two other men – his distant relatives – to go with him. They risked finding their way to Palestine. My uncle left his wife and small daughter Gita to seek his fortune. He got lost. After the war, we started looking for him. Though, we do know what has happened to him. He must have been shot on his way.

Mikhail was the only one of my father's brothers who was single before the war. He met his future wife in Kirillovo. Sifa was also an evacuee. Her family were Belarusian fugitives. They turned out to be in Irbit. Sifa was a Jew and Grandmother allowed Mikhail to marry her. He was the only one of the family who did not have a traditional Jewish wedding. Where would they have found a rabbi in that hick Ural village. Their marriage was registered in the village council and in the evening Grandmother made a festive dinner for both families.

In 1942 my father was demobilized from the army because of his health and he came to Kirillovo. We were living together in that hut for about a year, and then our family left for Irbit. The rest of the family stayed in Kirillovo. Father started being in charge of a workshop, where Mother was also working. I went to school rather late. Mother was hoping that the war would be over soon and I would be able to go to school in Estonia. Mother did not trust the village school. I turned nine and Mother would keep saying, 'Let's wait for our return to Estonia.' Finally my father insisted that it was high time for me to study and I went to the first grade in Irbit. That was the reason why our family could not come back together.

Soviet troops, including the Estonian corps, liberated Estonia on 24th November 1944. Grandmother moved there with the whole family. Narva was almost completely destroyed by bombing and they settled in Tallinn. The war was not over yet, but it was not hard to return to Estonia. Only a passport was needed. We could not leave at once, as I was supposed to finish the first grade at least. Thus, we returned in summer 1945, when the school year was over. At that time an invitation letter was required to return to Estonia. Somebody from our family sent us the invitation letter and we went to Tallinn.

## **Back in Estonia**

We started living together again in a small log house on the outskirts of Tallinn. There was one big room there, where all of us lived. We slept on the floor. Father was suffering that he could not provide normal living conditions for us. He was a very sociable person with a sense of humor. He



had a lot of friends. Father walked around Tallinn, looking at houses. If he liked something, he would sigh and say, 'I wish we lived here.' One of Father's friends helped. He got two rooms in a communal apartment [11](#) on one of Tallinn's central streets, Tartu Mente.

The apartment was in an old, but very beautiful house with high ceilings and carved doors. It was posh for postwar times. Estonians were our neighbors. We were very friendly, having no conflicts. We lived there for 26 years. Only after Father's death we decided to exchange it for a separate apartment. In 1971 my mother and I moved to a separate two-room apartment. I still live there, and I like my apartment. All my father's relatives got apartments with time. All of them lived not far from each other and still were very close. Grandmother kept bossing around over our large family.

Uncle Samuel was the first to die. He and my father were very close. They saw each other almost every day. Maybe Samuel was my father's favorite brother because of that. Samuel started feeling unwell in evacuation. He took the death of his four-year-old son really hard. He was afflicted with stenocardia after that and could not be cured. Upon his return to Tallinn Samuel hardly worked. He stayed in bed most of the time. He died of a heart attack in 1947 and he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. His wife Mira lived alone for many years, then she got married again. She died in 1974.

Mother's sister Musya got married after the war. She was an educated woman, but she married a simple worker. Her husband's last name was Burmistrovich. He was from Pärnu. After the wedding she moved there. She worked in some office. She did not have children.

Mikhail and his wife Sifa got one room in a communal apartment. Mikhail worked as an accountant. They had no children. They lived together childless. Mikhail died in 1972. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

During the years in evacuation Kirillovo we did not know anything about the fate of Grandmother's son Benchi, we even had no idea if he was still alive. We did not know if his family managed to get evacuated from Narva. We met only in 1945 in Tallinn. Benchi and his Russian wife were in evacuation in Siberia. In 1942 their daughter Anna was born there. Benchi suffered very much that his mother rejected him. All her sons were close to her. Several years after the war a meeting between Benchi and his mother was arranged. Grandmother thought better, and accepted her son once again. Of course, she recognized neither his wife nor daughter. She was cruel. Benchi was taking it very hard as Grandmother did not even want to look at her granddaughter.

He died rather young because of all that suffering. Benchi was only 57, when he had an infarction and died. I cannot say that my grandmother was mourning over him. She cried, but it was not obvious that his death was a big tribulation for her. Benchi was buried in the Jewish cemetery and his wife did not mind. Grandmother did not even attend her son's funeral. She only asked where and when the burial would be. She probably could not forgive him. She thought he had betrayed his people. Now Grandmother and Benchi are buried next to each other. The earth reconciled them finally.

I went to the second grade of compulsory school upon our return from evacuation. There were a lot of overage pupils in our class due to the war. I did pretty well at school. I was particularly good at arts. I joined the pioneers [12](#) when I was in the third grade, but I didn't join the Komsomol [13](#) at school. I always found some reasons for refusal, and finished ten grades without entering the

Komsomol.

We came back to a totally different Estonia. It was not the country that we had known. After the war we started having a lot of newcomers from the Soviet Union and Estonia had a strong Russian influence. I cannot say that they were feeling aloof towards Estonian denizens. There were a lot of good people among the Russians and we made friends with some of them. But most of our friends were Estonians and Jews.

### **Attitude to judaism**

My parents were religious and I consider myself to be religious. After the war, the Soviet regime started a struggle against religion [14](#), but here it was lackadaisical, not the way in was in the rest of postwar Russia. There was no synagogue in Tallinn [15](#) after the war. The wonderful Tallinn synagogue burned down during the bombing. After the war the municipal authorities provided Jews with small premises to be used for praying. The premises were at the school where I was studying. It could not be called a synagogue, not only for being so small, but also because there was no rabbi in postwar Tallinn. The rabbi of Tallinn, Aba Gomer [16](#), was murdered by Germans, and since then there was a gabbai in Tallinn, who knew Ivrit, prayers and Jewish traditions and rites. A true rabbi appeared here in 2003, at the invitation of the Jewish Community of Estonia [17](#). Even during the Soviet time, Jewish life did not cease to exist in Estonia.

All Jewish traditions were very strictly observed while Grandmother was alive. She even managed to celebrate Sabbath and lit candles on that day, although Saturday was a working day in Soviet times. Grandmother did not work. She marked Sabbath in accordance with the tradition. On Saturday she went to the prayer house. When she came back she spent her day reading a prayer book. Grandmother lived with her daughter Zelda and granddaughter Gita. The kashrut was very strictly observed. Even in evacuation they preferred hunger to committing a breach of the kashrut, so after their return it went without saying: there was only kosher food at home, while Grandmother was alive.

I remember when I was a student, my father got into a huge debt and purchased a Moskvitch car [18](#). I learned driving and every week for grandmother I went to the market to get live hens and took them to the shochet. His name was Kats. Probably nobody remembers him anymore, but I will always remember my trips to him with hens. So, I took hens to him, he cut them and I brought them to grandmother. Her daughter and she ate only those hens.

Zelda had always been a very pious person. She was very charitable, helped the poor, gave them money for food. When some Jews died, she went to sew takhriks – Jewish traditional attire for the deceased. It was supposed to be a good deed for God. She always looked after some sick person. She helped everybody. People did not have to ask her for help, as she offered it anyways. She was honest in everything. There was one case: one old man whom she looked after, left her money. My aunt refused, saying that she had not right to take it. She found some of his distant relatives in Leningrad and sent the money to them. She had an easy death without suffering. Zelda died in her sleep in 1978.

We also marked Jewish holidays after the war. Grandmother made sure that everything would be observed that was sacred to her. If she observed it, her children did the same. On Rosh Hashanah



and Yom Kippur my grandmother even forbade my cousin Gita and me to go to school. Thus, we obeyed her and went to the synagogue with our parents. When Grandmother was alive, the whole family got together to mark the holidays. Grandmother and Zelda made the feast. I remember that on Pesach my father always read from the Haggadah and put one drop of red Pascal wine on the saucer. Father also read a prayer, as far as I remember. It is hard for me to recall things in detail, as things are forgotten over the years. The Soviet regime did its best for us to be away from Jewry.

On Yom Kippur my parents fasted for 24 hours in accordance with tradition. When I grew up, I also started fasting. We bought the products on the eve of the fast so that we could have them after fasting. We did not have family reunions after Grandmother's death, but we marked holidays in our family. Our family always marked holidays. After Grandmother's death our family went to the synagogue on major holidays, but we did not mark Sabbath at home.

### **Life under the communist regime**

When we had just returned to Tallinn from evacuation, we did not feel the Soviet regime as acutely. Then the oppression of the Soviets was getting harder and starting from 1947 we started feeling how strong it was. It all started with Estonian partisan squads, which could not abide by the Soviet occupation of Estonia. Those squads mostly consisted of peasants. They attacked soldiers. It was horrible! Those peasants were caught and ruthlessly exterminated like wolves. Many Estonian families had to mourn over their relatives that perished at the hand of the NKVD [19](#). Then they started imprisoning people. One suspicion that the person was helping the partisans was enough to put him in jail. People were imprisoned for disapproving remarks with regards to the Soviet regime and whole innocent families were imprisoned.

Then in 1948-1949 deportation of Estonian population resumed. This time the Soviet regime fought well-off peasants. Agricultural export was the main source of export from Estonia. Of course, the peasants were rich, having large farm. They did not have any kolkhozes – families worked hard from dawn till night. Those hard-working people were called kulaks [20](#), and exiled to Siberia with their families. That deportation did not refer to the Jews only because the latter were barely involved in agriculture. Estonians were exiled – the most hard-working and skilled. The rest were compelled to join kolkhozes.

At that time we lived at Tartu Mante, not far from the building of the automobile inspection. I still remember the closed trucks arriving there closer to the evening. Then at night they went out to arrest people. In 1949, 20,000 were deported within several nights. It was a terrible campaign. It is hard to put in words what was going on here. People were moaning, crying, trying to find out information about their relatives, to give them food and clothes. The Soviets felt like hosts here, doing whatever they wished. Almost every Estonian family felt what the Soviet regime was like and hated it.

I remember one case vividly, though in 1946 I was still a child. My uncle Mikhail and his wife Sifa lived in the center of Tallinn at Pik Street. We often called on them. Once my parents and I were at their place, when their pals, the Perovich family, came. Tallinn indigenes probably know that family very well. They were a rich Jewish family that was deported in 1941. Both of them were elderly. They had spent five years in Siberian exile and survived. In 1946 they were exempt from exile and they decided to come back to Tallinn. So, they came to see Mikhail. They were sitting at the table

and having a meal, when suddenly somebody rang at the door. Two NKVD officers came in and asked, 'Are you the Peroviches?' And informed them that they were arrested and had to go into exile again. Horrible!

I still remember the silence at the table. Everybody was so shocked that they could not say a word. I was twelve years old at that time and I still remember that feeling of being horrified. It was such a guile to let these people go – they were innocent – and make them feel free only to arrest them again. They followed them because they did not come to arrest them in their place, but to us. Then I understood that the NKVD was constantly following people. Damned regime! But still we managed to live with it, as we had no choice. We suffered, but we could not go anywhere. USSR citizens had no right to immigrate.

After the war my father was in charge of a shoe workshop. He did not have a very professional accountant and in a while he had a discrepancy between the cash and the reports. There was a surplus in the till of 1,200 rubles. In 1950 there was an audit at the workshop and the surplus was seized. [Editor's note: at that time it was not a very large amount, it equaled an average two-month salary, but it was hard to get by with that amount of money]. I went to the sixth grade at that time. It was January 1950. I remember how they came to our place for a search. It was dreadful for me. Of course, they did not find anything, but they arrested Mother. I stayed by myself. I was watched and assisted by my kind neighbors. Father was sentenced to eight years in prison, then they thought it was not enough and they added another two years, that is, ten years in total. Mother was in Tallinn jail. I went to see both Mother and Father, brought them some food. It was such a bad time!

Mother was in prison for a relatively short term: eight months. They did not find her guilty and let her go. She had to work as Father was in prison. First, she was employed at a textile store as a saleswoman. Then she went to work for a dairy store. Father stayed in Tallinn. Here we had a camp at Magazin Street. Usually they did not imprison people in the city where they were from. For example, a prisoner from Tallinn was sent to Kostroma and one from Kostroma in Tallinn. It was done so that it would be hard for the relatives to go and see prisoners, for them to feel left out from ordinary life, for the hardship of prison to be felt dramatically. Father had many friends and they managed that he could stay in Tallinn. Mother and I went to see Dad, and at times we left things for him.

At that time the prisoners were not robbers and gangsters like now, but the intelligentsia. Once Mother and I were waiting in the line to give a package to Dad and noticed a 13-year-old girl with black plaits. We understood instantly that she was a Jew and not a local once to boot. The car of the camp director was passing by and she stopped it. Mother and I understood what she was talking about by the expression of her face. We went up to her and asked where she was from. Her name was Mara Dolgopolskaya. She was from Leningrad. Her father, a famous Leningrad lawyer, was arrested and charged with spivving. At that time they did not think of the plausibility of the indictment and sent him to the Tallinn camp.

I do not remember where Mara's mother was at that time. At any rate, the girl remained by herself. Thus, she, a 13-year-old child came to Tallinn from Leningrad to see her father. It is hard to imagine what she must have been feeling! How can someone love the Soviet regime, if any human being was like dust to them that could be wiped out? Mother had Mara stay with us before her

departure for Leningrad. She stayed in our place every time she came to see her father. I made friends with Mara and we are still close. Mara studied, became an engineer, got married. We are very different, but we are bonded. We write letters, call each other.

My father's pardon was an unbelievable concurrence of circumstances. Some official happened to live in the house, where we were living after the war. In the apartment one floor below us lived the Estonian writer August Jakobson, who was a Soviet writer. After the war, my father decided to make clothes to have an additional income. He did well and soon he became a good tailor. Jakobson ordered suits from my father and came to our place. Our neighbors loved our Dad and when my parents were arrested, Jakobson and his family did not leave me in the lurch. They took care of me. I made friends with two of his daughters. I will never forget all their help and support while my parents were in prison.

Then Jakobson was elected the chairman of The Presidium of the Supreme Council of Estonia [21](#). At that time his family moved to the place where the members of the government resided. That August Jakobson exempted my father. Mother and I never asked for anything as he had a connate pride. Mother worked, I went to school and we tried to get by with what we had. Our relatives helped. They were father's kin, so we could accept their help.

In winter 1953 there was a sudden telephone call. I picked up the phone and the lady said that she was calling from the Supreme Council to find out where the prisoner Ferdmann was held. I advised her accordingly. In the evening I told my mother about that phone call. We could not get what was going on because we had not made any appeals as we knew it would be of no use. It turned out that Jakobson sent a request to the camp asking for the characteristics of the prisoner Ferdmann. He had excellent characteristics and the Presidium of Supreme Council pleaded for my father's pardon. It was unbelievable and I will never forget it.

There were people who understood how unfair the Soviet regime was. There were good people. In 1963 Jakobson died while my father was still alive. My dad went to his funeral with a big wreath. I still remember those years and think thank God those years are in the past! Almost every family suffered during the Soviet regime! It made Jews and Estonians more bonded. Both of them suffered from the Soviet regime as the indigenes of Estonia were also hit by that.

I do not deny the fact that there was scum here during the war: Estonians, who were killing Jews, giving away Jews, bringing Germans into Jewish houses, taking them to the camps in other countries. Those things happened back in that time. Maybe there were many Estonians who were guilty of the afore-mentioned. It was genocide of the Jewish nation, Holocaust. But we should also remember that before the war, in the period of 1940-1941, the Soviet regime murdered, incarcerated and deported innocent people. Who knows, if there had not been that terrible year, Estonians maybe would not have regarded the Germans as liberators from the Bolsheviks. Maybe, they would not have helped the Germans.

Of course, almost all Jews stayed in the country during the war and were slaughtered not only by Germans, but also by Estonians. It was true. But there were righteous people [22](#) among Estonians. When I was in Israel, I went to Yad Vashem. [23](#). There was a monument to Estonians, who saved ten Jews. I took a picture of the monument, where the surnames of the rescued Jews were written. The war segregated people in two camps. After the war, I can say expressly, that Estonians were always on the side of the Jews. Anti-Semitism in Estonia emerged only from the Soviet regime, from

the Soviet people, who flooded Estonia after the war.

I was at school during the Doctors' Plot [24](#) and I was reproached for being a Jew only by Soviet children. None of the Estonian kids ever did anything of the kind. They helped, supported and were kind to me. I felt it from my own experience. During the Doctors' Plot, Estonians were compassionate not only to the Kremlin doctors, who were charged with the attempt to poison Stalin, but to the Jews in general.

I have worked in Estonian teams all my life, and I have never felt that I, a Jew, was different from Estonians. I felt different when communicating with Russians. I am currently living in a house where there are only Estonians, no Russians, and I perfectly get along with my neighbors. By the way, after the war, there were a lot of Jews in Soviet punitive bodies, like the NKVD. I cannot forgive such Jews. My father's investigator was a Jew, he tortured and beat people during interrogations. Of course, such people were hated and I understand why.

Father was pardoned, and he had no right to live in Tallinn until his sentence expired. No matter that he was pardoned, his rights were restricted. The fact that he was bereft of his voting right, was of no importance to my father, but it was very hard for him to be separated from his family. Father was registered [25](#) in the Tallinn suburb Keila. He was formally there, but in actuality he was living with us. Of course, it was very dangerous. If someone had informed against Father, he would have been sent back to the camp for violation of the passport regime.

I remember the day of Stalin's death. It was the 5th of March, 1953. There was a mourning announcement on the radio early in the day due to Stalin's death. I dashed into my parents' bedroom to break the news to my father, who said, 'God, what a fortune, that Stalin kicked the bucket and they announced it!' There was a meeting of teachers and students at school. Our school principal was crying when she was addressing us. The teacher and students burst into tears. I was also crying, and my tears were sincere. Probably I was just touched by the atmosphere.

The Twentieth Party Congress [26](#), where Khrushchev [27](#) divulged Stalin's crimes, was not a big astonishment for us. Of course, we were rejoicing in the official recognition, as in Estonia everybody understood that Stalin was a criminal and a tyrant. People here were not as much stressed as those from Moscow or Leningrad. We took it with relief. Of course, Estonians were happy to find out about it. Rehabilitation began [28](#), the deported, repressed were coming back home. Those Estonian citizens who were deported in 1941, had been in exile over 15 years, and those who were deported in 1949 for seven to eight years.

I finished school in 1955. I was not willing to leave Tallinn to go study anywhere, not even at the famous Tartu University. Moreover, I was an only child in the family. After school I entered the history and philology department of Tallinn Teachers' Training Institute. I easily passed the entrance exams and was admitted. My nationality was not an obstacle as there was no state anti-Semitism in Estonia, of course it was the politics of the Soviet Union since key posts were taken by Estonians, but still they did not share the politics.

I was not a member of the Komsomol at school. I found all kinds of pretext not to join this organization. I hated the Soviet regime and all kind of party activity, even when I was a child. I was the only one in the university, who was not a Komsomol member. A Jew called Vcherashnyaya was the curator of our group. Once she called me and said that I should join the Komsomol as I was the

only one in my group who had not done so. She was sincere with me. She said I should not be singled out in the group, especially being a Jew. Judging by my age I did not have to stay in the Komsomol for long. Thus, I thought I could bear it. So, I joined the Komsomol. Then, when I was working, I was talked into entering the party, but I flatly refused it. I was very happy for not giving up, without having to prevaricate.

There were a lot of Jews in my group. In general, there were a lot of Jews in Estonian institution of higher education. There were not only Jews from Estonia, but from all parts of the Soviet Union. It was very hard for the Jews to enter an institute in other republics, so they came to us. Here there was one selection criterion: knowledge demonstrated during entrance exams.

My cousin Gita was studying at the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute and there were a lot of students, who came to study from all over the Soviet union as there was terrible anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Gita married her fellow student Iosif Fefer, who came here from Nikolayev.

Not only students came here, but also the teachers. Many talented people, scientists, who were unwanted in other parts of the Soviet Union, came here. They became the pride of Estonia. For example, there was a wonderful philologist named Yury Lotman [29](#), a professor of Tartu University.

I studied for five years and never felt that I was a Jew, worse than anybody else. There was no social or state anti-Semitism among indigenes of Estonia. Those who came from the USSR brought it in 1940.

When I was in the fifth year in 1960 there was an announcement for the students of the fifth course to teach Russian language and literature on the islands of Estonia. There was a high demand for teachers there. Those, who agreed to go there, were to defend their diplomas separately and have open diplomas, that is, without mandatory job assignment [30](#). The terms were attractive. Besides, I wanted to try my choice of profession. I chose the island Hiiumaa in the north of Estonia and headed there. I remember how my parents were seeing me off in winter time. I had to take a small plane, where only ten people could fit. I was given a very warm welcome at school. I had work there until the summer holidays and then I came back to Tallinn. I defended my diploma and graduated.

My father helped me get a job of a teacher of Russian language and literature at the Construction College. I worked there for 14 years teaching Russian to Estonian and Russian students. Then I changed my work place for the music school at the conservatoire. I taught Russian language and literature there. I worked for 28 years full time and retired. I had several hours of Russian with Estonian lawyers. It was not a very well-paid job, but I enjoyed it. This year, I was asked to come back to the music school. They really wanted me to be back. So, I am working there and I am very happy as I find no pleasure in sitting at home.

In 1961 my grandmother Yachna died. She had a hard death. She was practically bound to bed most of the time. Her children revered her, I cannot say that they worshipped her, but she was deeply respected by them. When she was sick, both of her sons, my father and his brother Mikhail, looked after her in turns. Grandmother died at the venerable age of 84. She was buried in Tallinn cemetery in accordance with the Jewish rite.

It is a miracle that neither the Germans nor the Soviet did harm to our Jewish cemetery. People are still buried there. She was buried in the casket with seven perforations for the body to be turned to ashes as soon as possible. It is interesting that the Estonians who were working in the undertakers' bureau were aware of that Jewish tradition and did things properly. Grandmother was clad in takhrikhim and put in the casket. After grandmother's death Sabbath was no longer marked in our family, but Jewish holidays were still marked in keeping with tradition.

For 20 years my mother was working as a saleswoman in a kiosk Tallinn. She was the best saleswoman in Tallinn and very many people knew her. Though she changed over the years, put on weight, young men came up to her and asked, 'Are you Lady Donets?' She was probably still recognizable. Mother was pleased with that. She was even awarded a Zhiguli car for outstanding work. She could not drive the car at that time as she was walking with crutches. I drove that car for 15 years. Mother was very hard-working. She retired at the age of 70, though the pension age for women was 55 in the Soviet Union. Mother was deeply respected, both of my parents enjoyed respect from everybody who knew them.

My private life was not very happy. My father was as strict as my grandmother. He also thought that there was no way I could marry a non-Jew. For some reason I was mostly admired by Russians. Of course, none of them was allowed to enter our house. It was out of the question. At times my father would not speak with me for weeks if he found out that I had a Russian admirer. Thus, I remained single.

After my father's death I started seeing one man. Mother was more loyal than Dad as she thought that I should not remain by myself. My relationship did not last long, we broke up soon, remaining strangers to each other. So, I have neither husband nor children. Now the only close person to me in Tallinn is my cousin Anna, the daughter of my poor father's brother Benchi and his Russian wife. Anna is a doctor. She is also single. We are good friends.

Father died in 1967 when he turned 60. He died suddenly. The cause was an infarction. All of us were at home. Father was reading a newspaper, I and Mother were talking. Suddenly we saw Father falling... He died in two days and a half. I am not a fatalist, but there is an interesting coincidence with his death. Father and his brother Samuel, who died in 1947, were very close. They loved each other very much and often met. Samuel died on 5th December 1947 and exactly 20 years later, on 5th December 1967 my dad died.

Father was buried in accordance with the Jewish rite. Before her death, my grandmother bequeathed that all her sons should be buried in tallit. Father had a tallit before the war and he was buried in that. He was buried by a gabbai. People were praying in the synagogue and reciting the Kaddish over him.

Mother survived Father by 20 years, she died in 1987. She had a heart attack. When I came home after work, she was in the kitchen. Suddenly I heard a moaning: m-m-m-m-m.... Mother, like Father, lived for another two and half days and died. Of course, she was buried in accordance with the Jewish rites. In this respect, my soul is clean as my parents and relatives were buried properly. I also arranged the funeral of my aunt Musya, my mother's sister. She died in Pärnu in 1984.

## **Attitude to Israel**



When in 1948 the state of Israel was officially recognized, it was a holiday for all my kin. I will never forget how happy my parents were on that day. None of our relatives left, when there was a mass departure of Jews for Israel in the 1970s. They left in 1990. The only relatives who stayed for a while were my cousin Gita and her family. I also had some distant relatives, some second cousins or so, but I did not know them very well.

Gita and her family left in March 1990. I visited them in summer 1990. Gita sent me the invitation and I went to Moscow to process the permit. The Soviet regime was still in power, though perestroika had started already [31](#). It was so complicated! I had to go to Moscow, to the Israeli embassy. There were problems with the tickets; I had to stand in line all night long to exchange money. It was terrible.

My other two visits were after the breakup of the Soviet Union [in 1991]. It was so simple then. I did not even need a visa. I bought the tickets and left. During my first trip to Israel, I thought of my father when the plane was approaching the airport. It was my dad's dream to see this country. His dream could not be realized during the Soviet time. He wanted to go there at least once.

Israel is a beautiful country, where every stone and every tree is breathing with history. It is a wonderful country, but I did not want to stay there. There are a lot of things there that are strange and unclear to me. Jews are very fussy. There is such a din.... They call it historic motherland. I do not understand this, frankly speaking. I still think that even if my parents were still alive, we would stay here anyway. Our roots are here. It is nice to go there for a visit, but not to live permanently in Israel, or Canada, where our relatives live. The generations of my parents lived in Narva, Estonia, and this country is my motherland. I am comfortable here.

Then, there is another factor my ancestors' graves are here. Almost all my kin is buried in Tallinn Jewish cemetery Paxumer. I am taking care of their graves and I find it sacred. There is also a burial place for me, with my name written on it. It keeps me here. Relatives should not be forgotten, but remembered and respected. Of course, I always trace the events in Israel, watch the news, often call my relatives there. I am worried for my country, for my relatives. They are happy there and I am glad.

My Israeli relatives became religious. For example, it is not common for me, when the public transport is closed in Israel at 2pm on a Friday. Everybody marks Sabbath: lights candles, puts challot and bread on the table, prays etc. I was pleased with that and I was even surged with recollections of my childhood. As if I travelled back to those times. I was in Israel on Yom Kippur. Unfortunately, I could not fast because of my diabetes. I had to eat, but my relatives said that God did not want sick people to fast to their harm, and it was no fault of mine. I went to a true Jewish wedding.

Before my trip to Israel I went to some former socialist countries. It was hard to get the trip vouchers, but I was given them as a bonus at work. During the work for the Construction College, I was given a voucher for Bulgaria. There were so many discussions whether I was worthy to represent the Soviet Union in Socialist Bulgaria! It was allowed to go there only in groups. The sightseeing was only with the group. Everybody knew that in every group there was always a stooge working for the KGB [32](#), who would report about your behavior, contacts etc. We also had a KGB informer at work. We knew that all of us depended on his reports, starting from salary increase and up to getting an apartment and trip vouchers. The whole Soviet system was built on

squealing. Thank God all those horrors are gone.

## Recent years

When Mikhail Gorbachev [33](#) came to power in the Soviet Union, I personally did not hope for any changes for the better, but it turned out that our lives became better. Gorbachev's perestroika gave us some liberties that we did not have. We could freely speak about everything without fearing the KGB. Materials were published in newspapers and magazines, for which authors would have been sent to the Gulag [34](#) before.

I cannot say that during Gorbachev there was no Iron Curtain [35](#), separating the Soviet Union from the rest of the world. But changes were emerging. It was the time when tourist vouchers could be purchased without hurdles. The trade union provided them. I recall that in early 1988 vouchers to Hungary and Romania were on offer. There were so many people willing to go that the lines were huge. I was standing in line all night long to get a voucher.

Gorbachev was respected in Estonia. When he came to Tallinn he was given a very warm welcome. I think he deserves respect as he was the first from the leaders to take a step towards a normal life. When I was working in the music school, my Estonian students said that finally the Soviet Union had a normal president. Compared with Khrushchev and Brezhnev [36](#), Gorbachev looked civilized, had good manners and orator skills. I think it was he who prepared the breakup of the Soviet Union even if he was not aware of it. Those who were behind the putsch [37](#), also facilitated in that. Those people who were looking up to Gorbachev, to a new course, would not be able to abide by the stagnation bog of the Soviet life.

Fortunately, the events connected with the putsch, did not have such a resonance in Estonia. Though, the tanks of Pskov division were commissioned in Tallinn. They reached the television tower, our People front [38](#) met them there. Our president and famous Estonian politicians were there. They managed to reach a peaceful agreement without resorting to a fight. I remember when I was listening to the radio. I was focused on the news from Moscow. It was calm here.

On 20th August 1991 our government made the announcement that Estonia would be no longer a Soviet Socialist Republic [39](#). On 21st August I left for Finland. I remember we were joking on our way: we would come home, and there would be Soviet power again. Thank God things were smooth, no victims. Estonia became independent again. When I found out about the breakup of the USSR, I felt happy. The only thing I pitied is that my dad did not live to see that. He was so looking forward to that event as he hated the Soviet regime. Thank God it happened in my life time. That Soviet regime was so wicked! When I was going back to those times trying to recall good things, there was only one – free education and scholarship. Officially health care was free, but if one wanted to be well taken care of he still had to pay, but in the form of presents.

There are people in Estonia who are still nostalgic about the Soviet regime. These are Russians, who have not obtained Estonian citizenship. They demand that it should be provided automatically, and they take no efforts. It's not that hard: just learn Estonian and pass the exam. I always argue with Russians who are saying that it is impossible to study Estonian. Why demand that a second state language – Russian – should be introduced, that Russian schools should be open for their children and subjects taught in Russian at the universities? It is necessary to study the language if

you are willing to work, to be a fully-fledged citizen of a country. My cousin Gita left for Israel, when she was 59 and she learned Ivrit.

There are some Russians in Estonia, who have been living here for over 50 years, some were even born here, but still they do not know the language. How can it be like that? It would be impossible in any other part of the world, but here it is possible, because Russians were not wanted here, but became the hosts of the country and they did not care about the Estonian language and culture. They did not get that they had to respect the language and the customs of the country, where they were living. Only occupants are acting like that. Estonian was taught at Soviet schools. There were two classes per week, but the attitude was indifference. They gave you good marks no matter whether you knew the language or not. Now Estonian is not one of the major subjects in Estonian schools, which was different in Soviet times.

There is no anti-Semitism in Estonia. I am rather elderly. I worked with Estonians all the time and nobody ever hurt me. My relationship with Estonian students is great. Every year on teachers' day my graduates come to congratulate me. Actually, they come to see me even on ordinary days asking for my help if it is needed. They do not come in groups, just one or two people. I know they are sincere. I am currently teaching the Russian language in the ninth grade of the music school.

Recently there was a poll and students were asked to share their opinion of the teachers, including their personal qualities. I think this would have been impossible in Soviet times. And now we are mature enough to be given characteristics by our students. I was lucky enough to read some of those opinions expressed by students. Of course, I was not entitled to do that as the poll was intended for the Ministry of Education, not for the teachers. But I was so curious that I decided to browse through the material. I was so shocked how good those students were at knowing people. They did not care about my nationality. All they are interested in is what kind of person I am. I was not aware of many things brought up by the students. When I finished reading and thought about it, I understood they were right.

I always got along with my students. The last graduates of the Construction College from the year 1972 come to see me every year on teachers' day. They found out from somebody that I was going to fix my apartment. I made arrangements with specialists, but my former students asked me to cancel everything saying that they would fix my apartment. They did a great job and I was very happy that they made such a present for me. What can you say about anti-Semitism here?

I think I live rather comfortably now. I earn my bread and butter and get a pretty good pension. Last summer everybody who was in evacuation got the status of a repressed person. It means that for every year in exile an additional three years of pension record was added. Thus, I got 12 more years of the pension record. Now my track record is 47 years. Besides, I am provided with benefits. The only thing that I regret is restitution. I could not get any compensation for the seized store that my parents used to own. It was taken from my parents by the Soviet regime. It was hard on them. In general, I am doing well. I can afford traveling. I would like to go to my niece's wedding in Canada. I will go there for sure, if I get a visa.

In 1985, when Gorbachev was at power, the Jewish Community of Estonia was officially founded in Tallinn. I became a member right away. I am not a very active member as I am working and do not have a lot of free time, but still I go to the community rather often. The very fact of its existence is important to me. The community provides monetary assistance. Now I am getting compensation

for being repressed, so I do not use the assistance provided by the community. I go there rather often to attend meetings with interesting people, lectures, community meetings. Of course, I also go to Jewish community on religious holidays. It is important for me to comprehend that I am not alone. I never feel lonely in the community.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Estonian Independence**

Estonia was under Russian rule since 1721, when Peter the Great defeated the Swedes and made the area officially a part of Russia. During World War I, after the collapse of the tsarist regime, Estonia was partly conquered by the German army. After the German capitulation (11th November 1918) the Estonians succeeded in founding their own state, and on 2nd February 1920 the Treaty of Tartu was concluded between independent Estonia and Russia. Estonia remained independent until 1940.

### **2 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.

### **3 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.

#### **4 Enemy of the people**

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

#### **5 Great Patriotic War**

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

#### **6 German Invasion of Poland**

The German attack of Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered the date in the West for the start of World War II. After having gained both Austria and the Bohemian and Moravian parts of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was confident that he could acquire Poland without having to fight Britain and France. (To eliminate the possibility of the Soviet Union fighting if Poland were attacked, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.) On the morning of 1st September 1939, German troops entered Poland. The German air attack hit so quickly that most of Poland's air force was destroyed while still on the ground. To hinder Polish mobilization, the Germans bombed bridges and roads. Groups of marching soldiers were machine-gunned from the air, and they also aimed at civilians. On 1st September, the beginning of the attack, Great Britain and France sent Hitler an ultimatum - withdraw German forces from Poland or Great Britain and France would go to war against Germany. On 3rd September, with Germany's forces penetrating deeper into Poland, Great Britain and France both declared war on Germany.

#### **7 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **8 Estonian Rifle Corps**

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

## **9 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

## **10 Trudodni**

A measure of work used in Soviet collective farms until 1966. Working one day it was possible to earn from 0.5 up to 4 trudodni. In fall when the harvest was gathered the collective farm administration calculated the cost of 1 trudoden in money or food equivalent (based upon the profit).

## **11 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.

## **12 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.

## **13 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.

#### **14 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.

#### **15 Tallinn Synagogue**

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

#### **16 Aba Gomer (?-1941)**

Born in Belostok, Poland, and graduated from the Department of Philosophy of Bonn University. He lived in Tallinn from 1927 and was the chief rabbi of Estonia. In 1941, he was determined not to go into Soviet back areas and remained on the German-occupied territory. He was killed by Nazis in the fall of 1941.

#### **17 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.

#### **18 Moskvitch**

Meaning 'a man from Moscow', Moskvitch was a Soviet-made car, popular in the entire post-war communist world. As reparation the Soviet Union received the complete manufacturing line of Opel Kadett after WWII and it was taken to Moscow from Russelheim (American Zone) in 1946. The new Soviet plant MZMA (Moskovsky Zavod Malolitrazhnykh Avtomobiley), meaning 'Midge Car Works of Moscow' started producing Moskvitch 400 based on Opel Kadett in 1947. Further models were developed by Soviet engineers later on. In 1969 the plant changed its name to AZLK (Avtomobilny Zavod imeni Leninskogo Komsomola), meaning 'The Lenin Komsomol Auto Works'. Moskvitch cars were always somewhat sturdy but reliable on substandard roads; they were offered at an affordable price. A modernized line of Moskvitch models started in 1988. But the markets failed

during the 1990s, and in 2002, AZLK went into bankruptcy. Plans to restart the factory have so far not succeeded. (Sources: [http://www.opelclub.com/html/back\\_from\\_oblivion.html](http://www.opelclub.com/html/back_from_oblivion.html) and [http://www.opelclub.com/html/back\\_from\\_oblivion.html%20and](http://www.opelclub.com/html/back_from_oblivion.html%20and) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moskvitch>)

## **19 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.

## **20 Kulaks**

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

## **21 The Supreme Soviet**

'Verhovniy Soviet', comprised the highest legislative body in the Soviet Union and the only one with the power to pass constitutional amendments. It elected the Presidium, formed the Supreme Court, and appointed the Procurator General of the USSR. It was made up of two chambers, each with equal legislative powers, with members elected for five-year terms: the Soviet of the Union, elected on the basis of population with one deputy for every 300,000 people in the Soviet federation, the Soviet of Nationalities, supposed to represent the ethnic populations, with members elected on the basis of 25 deputies from each of the 15 republic of the union, 11 from each autonomous republic, five from each autonomous region, and one from each autonomous area. [22](#) Righteous Among the Nations: A medal and honorary title awarded to people who during the Holocaust selflessly and for humanitarian reasons helped Jews. It was instituted in 1953. Awarded by a special commission headed by a justice of the Israeli Supreme Court, which works in the Yad Vashem National Remembrance Institute in Jerusalem. During the ceremony the persons recognized receive a diploma and a medal with the inscription "Whoever saves one life, saves the entire world" and plant a tree in the Avenue of the Righteous on the Remembrance Hill in Jerusalem, which is marked with plaques bearing their names. Since 1985 the Righteous receive honorary citizenship of Israel. So far over 20,000 people have been distinguished with the title, including almost 6,000 Poles.

[23](#) Yad Vashem: This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

## **24 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.

## **25 Residence permit**

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

## **26 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.

## **27 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.

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

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

## **29 Lotman, Yuri (1922-1993)**

One of the greatest semioticians and literary scholars. In 1950 he received his degree from the Philology Department of Leningrad University but was unable to continue with his post-graduate

studies as a result of the campaign against 'cosmopolitans' and the wave of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Lotman managed to find a job in Tartu, Estonia. Starting in 1950, he taught Russian literature at Tartu University, and from 1960-77 he was the head of the Department of Russian Literature. He did active research work and is the author of over 800 books and academic articles on the history of Russian literature and public thought, on literary theory, on the history of Russian culture, and on semiotics. He was an elected member of the British Royal Society, Norwegian Royal Academy, and many other academic societies.

### **30 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.

### **31 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)**

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

### **32 KGB**

The KGB or Committee for State Security was the main Soviet external security and intelligence agency, as well as the main secret police agency from 1954 to 1991.

### **33 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.)

### **34 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.

### **35 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.

### **36 Brezhnev, Leonid, Ilyich (1906-82)**

Soviet leader. He joined the Communist Party in 1931 and rose steadily in its hierarchy, becoming a secretary of the party's central committee in 1952. In 1957, as protégé of Khrushchev, he became a member of the presidium (later politburo) of the central committee. He was chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet, or titular head of state. Following Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, which Brezhnev helped to engineer, he was named first secretary of the Communist Party. Although sharing power with Kosygin, Brezhnev emerged as the chief figure in Soviet politics. In 1968, in support of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he enunciated the 'Brezhnev doctrine,' asserting that the USSR could intervene in the domestic affairs of any Soviet bloc nation if communist rule was threatened. While maintaining a tight rein in Eastern Europe, he favored closer relations with the Western powers, and he helped bring about a détente with the United States. In 1977 he assumed the presidency of the USSR. Under Gorbachev, Brezhnev's regime was criticized for its corruption and failed economic policies.

### **37 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.

### **38 National Front**

A social organization founded in Estonia in April 1988. The activities of the National Front contributed to the restoration of Estonian independence. Similar fronts existed in Latvia and

Lithuania.

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