

# Ester Khanson

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I met Ester Khanson in the Jewish community of Estonia [1](#). She came there to tackle some of her issues. She seemed a bit decrepit. It was hard for Ester to walk. She leaned on a stick. When she was introduced to me and we started a conversation, Ester changed drastically. She began telling me about a recently attended concert with shining eyes, which made her look beautiful and younger. When I got to know Ester better, I was not surprised by that 'magic transformation' that struck me the first time. Then I understood that in her soul Ester has remained young and lively. She takes a keen interest in the things surrounding her and people much younger than she enjoy communicating with her. Ester invited me to her place to conduct the interview. She lives in a two-room apartment not far from downtown Tallinn. The apartment is furnished with solid, antique furniture. There is an air of solidity and respectability at her home. There are a lot of books and pictures of relatives on the wall. Although it is difficult for Ester to walk, she attends concerts and ballet performances. Her nephews called her while I was there. Though the conversation was in German, which I do not know, judging by Ester's intonation I felt that she was not only loved by them, but that they also have close bonds. It is impossible not to love and admire her.



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## Family and childhood

My father's parents were indigenous inhabitants of Estonia. Our correct name is Kljass. When Estonia was separated from the Russian empire and gained independence [2](#), Estonian passports

were issued. Every official put our name the way he heard it. Most members of our family had the surname Kljass in their documents. Several agnate generations lived in Tartu. The German name of Tartu is Dorpat and when Estonia was part of the Russian empire, Tartu was called Yuryev.

I never met my grandfather Kljass. When I was born, Grandmother Fanny had been a widow for a couple of years. I do not know anything about my grandfather – who he was and what he did for a living. However, I remember my grandmother very well. She was very authoritarian and I was afraid of her. Grandmother seemed very old to me then, but now I am much older than she was at the time.

There were seven children in the family: six sons and a daughter. I do not remember when they were born. All I know is that my father was born in 1878. His name was Yakov. Father's only sister was Berta. Father's brothers were German, Oscar, Bernhard, Eduard and Harli. German was the eldest child in the family. All of them were called Kljass, but German had a double name for some reason: Kljass-Glass. His children also had that name. Father's youngest brother Harli lived in Philadelphia, USA. I remember he was very witty. He corresponded with us before the war [3](#). He sent us old post cards with Yuryev and Tartu landscapes. His wife's name was Fanny. She was a Jew from Riga. Both of them died a long time ago. Their only daughter is not willing to know anything about us. This is all I can say about my father's younger brother.

I think my father's family was religious. At any rate, my father and his brothers stuck to Jewish traditions, when they were adults. They were not bigots, but they observed Jewish laws. It must have been imbibed in their childhood. German was spoken in the family.

My mother's family lived in Poland. Grandfather's name was Mikhail Shreiber and Grandmother's name was Regina Shreiber. They had three children. The eldest was my mother's brother Illia. Then, in the 1890s my mother Polina and younger brother Voldemar were born. He was called Volush in the family. Then my mother's family moved to Riga, Latvia. Mother and her brothers went to the Russian lyceum in Riga. The children grew up and my grandparents returned to Poland.

Both of my mother's brothers were very handsome, but their characters were polar different. Mother's elder brother Illia was a very funny man, and good company. He loved singing and dancing. I remember when he came over, he sang some folklore songs and did some step dancing, which was very popular at that time.

My parents got married in 1915. They lived in Tartu, back then called Yuryev. They did not have their own place to live, they rented an apartment. The apartments were always very beautiful. Father dealt with timbering. He had a wholesale warehouse of timber materials: boards, roof timbers etc. In a word, all kinds of timbering materials used in construction could be purchased at my father's warehouse. After getting married, my Mother became a housewife. In 1917 my elder brother David was born, and I was born in 1919. I was called Ester. Only German was spoken at home, and my brother and I learned how to speak German. It was our first language.

I had a very happy childhood. The house in which my parents rented an apartment during my childhood was located in a wonderful, large garden. Father loved roses and cultivated them himself. We had a horse and two dogs – the bigger one, the watch dog lived in the yard, and the small one in the apartment.

I remember my brother's and my portraits were hung on the wall in the drawing-room. When David turned four, my mother had an artist make his portrait. David was a very handsome boy. The artist depicted him sitting on the sofa against a blue background. The portrait was made in pale shades. My portrait was made by the artist Rudolf Kreli, a Baltic German. He painted my portrait in the garden. I was holding a blooming branch of an apple tree in my hand and was smiling. Mother always made me a bow from bands that looked like a butterfly. I wore a pretty white dress with flounces with pink trimming. Those pink trimmings were not depicted on the portrait. I was very disappointed as I liked those flounces so much!

I remember that my maternal grandparents, the Shreibers, came to see us from Poland. They always brought our favorite German sweets by Georg Stude for my brother and me. It was famous German chocolate. I also remember small chocolate bars, which we called 'Plättchen.' They were very thin and melted in the mouth. [The birth of the Estonian confectionery industry dates back to 1806 when a pastry cook, Lorenz Caviezel, opened a confectionery business in Tallinn. In 1864, the business came into the possession of Georg Johann Stude. Out of Stude's production, marzipan figures and hand-made chocolate candies were in especially high demand. Stude's sweets were also known outside Estonia. Thus, for example, the court of the Russian tsar was a regular customer at the turn of the 20th century. Source:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalev\\_%28confectioner%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalev_%28confectioner%29)

One day a terrible tragedy happened. My grandfather Shreiber died tragically. I was a little girl, even did not go to school yet. I do not remember the details. It was in Poland. He and Grandmother Regina were traveling by train and my grandfather went to the toilet. He told her that he would be back soon. Grandmother was waiting and waiting. All of a sudden the train stopped, even before it had reached a station. It turned out that Grandfather opened the wrong door and fell off the train. It resulted in his death. Then they started talking about suicide, but Grandmother did not believe that.

Mother went to Grandfather's funeral in Poland, and came back together with Grandmother Regina. She lived in one room with me. I was bonded with her. Grandmother had asthma and she smoked Abyssinian cigarettes. I liked their aroma. I even wanted my grandmother to smoke. I loved her very much. One old lady often came to visit my grandmother and play cards. She was a Polish lady called Malchinskaya. I remember that my grandmother's clothes were gorgeous. One of them was made from beige lace. Grandmother put a brooch on the collar. I still keep it. She wore fashionable hats with veils.

Grandmother's sister Fanny lived Finland, Helsinki. Fanny and two of her daughters visited us. Mother was friends with them. When my grandmother was living with us, Fanny came to see her.

We had a wonderful nanny, whom I will never forget. Her name was Minna, and my brother and I called her Minenka. She loved us like her own children. She was a dear person to us. She warmed me with love and care in my childhood.

We stuck to Jewish traditions at home, but did not observe them strictly. We marked Jewish holidays at home. Father went to the synagogue on holidays. I remember on Pesach my father carried out the seder and afterward we sang Pascal songs. I also remember New Year [Rosh Hashanah]. We always marked it ceremoniously. We did not observe the kashrut. We did not cook dishes from pork, but my father liked ham a lot and it was bought for him.

I had turned eight and finished the first grade at school in Tartu, when my mother wanted to spend the summer in Germany. Of course, our nanny and grandmother Regina came with us. Father stayed in Tartu as he could not leave his work for a long time. We went to Berlin. My brother and I were raised in Tartu and we were astounded when we arrived in such a big city. I looked at the high, many-storied buildings and could not imagine how people got to the top floors. They were so high! My brother and I were surprised about many things! Mother told me that we looked very calm, asked no questions and seemed to understand everything. But in fact, many things seemed so amazing to us that I still remember what I felt at that time.

We liked Berlin a lot and my mother decided that we would not return to Estonia. Father joined us. He found a job easily. We rented a decent, furnished apartment in a good district at Brandenburger Strasse, not far from Kurfürstendamm. It was not in the heart of Berlin, but a little bit farther from the city center. Nanny or Grandmother Regina took us for a walk in the park. We made new friends. Most of them were German children. Grandmother or Nanny sat on the bench and did needlework, while we were playing nearby. I remember our favorite game: my brother and his friend were bellicose Indians. They would catch me and tie me to a tree and throw imaginary knives at me. They had fun and I felt like a hero.

There were a lot of amusements for children in Berlin: theaters, concerts, matinees. I remember that almost every day we went somewhere, either to the theater or to a concert. The school year was approaching and we went to school. We had spoken German since our childhood, so there was no problem with that. My brother and I entered Volksschule – public elementary school. Those schools were co-ed: boys and girls studied together. Then, in the lyceum they studied separately. I went to the first grade and David to the third. I was surprised that there were teachers in the school that beat students. We had a needlework class. It seemed to the teacher that one girl did not have a very tidy needlework bag and she slapped her so hard that the girl fell. I was perplexed with that. I was never beaten by teachers, but still I was afraid of them.

When David finished Volksschule he entered a very good lyceum for boys, and I entered the lyceum for girls. As compared to the Volksschule, the atmosphere in the lyceum was absolutely different. I remember my English language teacher with special affection. The knowledge imparted to me by her was the basis for my further studies of the language.

All those good things lasted for several years. Our life was calm and joyful. I had my first suitors, my brother's pals from the lyceum. Then, in the early 1930s, fascists started seeking power in Germany. I was far from politics, but I remember that my parents first took it calmly, but once we were walking in the street not far from our house, and there were two demonstrations: Nazis on the one side of the street and communists on the other. They were in columns. Each of them was walking on one side of the street and they met. What a horror! Mother and I witnessed this mêlée. I do not remember how we got home. Both of us were crying from horror.

Then such street frays became common. Gradually the atmosphere became tenser and it was very calm in the city. I was afraid to go out, talked my parents into returning to Estonia. Mother was ready to go back, but she did not want to live in Tartu. We decided to settle in Tallinn. Father was the first to leave Berlin to find lodging in Tallinn. As soon as he found a place to live, we came back to Estonia.

First we stopped at our friends' place. They had a large house. We lived in one wing, and they took the other. We occupied several rooms. Then Father found an apartment for us. It was in a very beautiful house at Tatarskaya Street. Father's elder brother German also lived in that house. He was a dentist. German lived with his wife Stanislava, their son, and my grandmother Fanny Kljass.

Father's second brother Oscar also lived in Tallinn with his family. Oscar's wife was Zara and their daughter's name was Anna. Uncle Bernhard, his wife Rebekka and their two sons stayed in Tartu. Eduard also lived in Tallinn. He was married to Anna Gourevich, the daughter of a famous Tallinn cantor. It was the only Kljass family where German was not spoken, but Yiddish and Estonian instead, probably because of Gourevich. Their son Eri Kljass became an outstanding Estonian conductor. Father's sister Berta Israelovich was a true beauty. Berta, her husband and children – son Mikhail and daughter Irene – lived in Tartu.

Both my mother's brothers emigrated from Estonia. Her younger brother Voldemar lived in Paris. Voldemar and his wife Jenny had one son, Boris. When we left for Berlin, the elder brother Illia also went to Berlin from Tartu. He married Nadya in Berlin and she also became a member of the Shreiber family. Nadya was a German Jew, very comely and cute. Nadya came from a rich family, but uncle Illia was poor. When the Nazis came to power in Germany, Illia understood that it was dangerous to stay there. With the help of his younger brother he and his wife moved to France, not to Paris, but to Leon. The younger brother helped them out and they lived comfortably in Leon. Of course, the fact that they left Germany on time saved their lives.

My brother and I had to go on with our studies. There were several Russian lyceums in Tallinn but we did not know the Russian language well enough to be admitted. There was a Jewish lyceum [4](#), where all subjects were taught in Ivrit. Children started learning Ivrit before school, in kindergarten. I did not know the Estonian language either. Thus, we had a limited choice: I could study only in a German school. There were several German lyceums and schools. There was a very good German girls' lyceum, Elisenschule, where girls from high society studied. Mother wanted me to study there as well. I was not admitted to that lyceum because I was a Jew. There was another German lyceum for girls not far from our house. It was very democratic. My German was great after having spent so many years in Germany. I was enrolled in the lyceum. The teacher said it would be excellent if all girls would speak such good German as I did.

I was the only Jew in my class, but there were Jewish girls in other classes, in each grade. We felt no anti-Semitism. Jews were treated very friendly in the Estonian republic [5](#). There was no oppression. Unfortunately, I did not know the Estonian language and in my first year I was free not to study the Estonian language at the lyceum. I took private lessons. During the summer holidays, when the whole family went on vacation, my mother hired an Estonian language teacher for me. All children played, swam, while I studied Estonian. I made pretty good progress. At the beginning of the year the teacher checked my knowledge of the Estonian language and was happy with my results. The Estonian language was taught by a German from a very good family. Her brother was a professor. An Estonian philologist came to our class and controlled the teaching process.

I did well in other subjects from the very outset. I ranked among the top students in the English language classes. Other students were of approximately the same level. All teachers were very good, cultured people. I studied and finally I was approaching the graduation year. In the summer our family went to a resort not far from Narva. It was a wonderful place on the shore, near a forest.

There was a very popular spa and well-off people often spent vacation there. We stayed there the whole summer.

I fell in love there. A Jewish family called Rozental from Finland – mother, daughter and son – was also in that spa. My mother became friends with that lady. Both of them were in WIZO [6](#). First it made them closer, then they had other interests. The daughter of that lady was a very beautiful girl. She fell in love with my brother and he fell in love with her. I fell in love with that lady's son and our love was mutual. Leo was about five or six years older than me. When our vacation was about to end and we had to go home, Leo proposed to me. I had to study in the lyceum for another year. I decided to quit my studies and marry Leo, but he did not allow me to do that saying that I should be educated, finish the lyceum at least. We parted and Leo promised to visit me on New Year's.

The separation from Leo was hard on me. The classes at the lyceum had not begun yet and I had a lot of time for my anxiety. My parents were worried about me. They did not want me to drop my studies because of a big love or do some other silly things. They decided to send me to Paris to my mother's younger brother Voldemar. They contacted Voldemar and Aunt Jenny, saw me off to the train and I went to Paris.

My uncles Voldemar, Illia and Aunt Jenny met me at the station. My aunt Jenny was a very clever woman and she understood that I had to immerse myself in new impressions to forget my worries. She said that I would not live in their place, as they would not be at home almost all day long, and I would get bored by myself. She rented me a room in a boarding school for students. They were all young people who knew Paris and would be able to show me the city. I would not feel lonely there. I knew the French language, because when we lived in Tartu, Berlin and Tallinn, my mother took care of my education and I was taught by a French language teacher.

So my aunt took me to the boarding school. I liked it there very much. There were only boys and I was the only female student. Everybody lived in a separate room. There was a group of students from Egypt, Egyptian Jews. As it was common in France, everyone had his own table in the canteen. There was a long big table only for the Egyptian group. They were very cute. We became friends. I enjoyed staying in that boarding school. In the morning a very comely maid brought me a cup of hot chocolate and a croissant. Then everybody went down to the canteen to have breakfast.

There was one guy among the Egyptian Jews who was always wearing glasses. I was intrigued by that as I wanted to see what he looked like without glasses. After lunch all of us got together in the hall. I sat at the grand piano and started playing. The hostess was singing. Then those concerts after lunch became regular. Once after a concert that boy came up to me and we got acquainted. His name was Arman de Resi. He started courting me and soon he became my boyfriend.

Do I need to say that Leo was forgotten? Arman and his group were to leave before school started. We said good-bye to each other. He took my Tallinn address and said that he would come to meet my family. He left and I stayed in the boarding school. We wrote to each other rather often. A very pleasant young man, Mak Intayer, was also living in the boarding school. He was from America. We became friends. We took walks in Paris, enjoyed the views, went dancing, drank champagne.

I started attending French language courses. I bought fashionable clothes in Paris. Mother did not allow me to wear clothes like that. Pleated skirts were in fashion at that time and low-heeled shoes.



Mother did not allow me to wear them since she thought it to be unfeminine and making me plumper. I loved wearing them. There were very many good impressions ...

### **During the war**

Then suddenly on 1st September 1939 the war began, German troops invaded Poland [7](#). I was in Paris. My uncle said that I had to go home at once. I could not go through Germany, so we picked the itinerary via Belgium and Sweden. I was issued a Belgian visa at once, as for Sweden it took longer. They were afraid that I would stay in Stockholm. Swedes were afraid of Germans, and they did not want to have another Jew. Only when my aunt Jenny knelt down in front of the consul, he took pity on me and gave me the entry permit. I wrote Leo that I would go through Sweden. When my uncle was seeing me off, he told me that when I meet Leo, I would understand that he does not mean anything to me anymore.

We had fun during the voyage to Belgium from France. Everybody danced. Nobody thought of war and imminent danger. I visited my cousin in Belgium. She was the daughter of my father's brother Bernhard. She lived in Belgium with her husband and two wonderful children. Then, when the Germans occupied Belgium she wrote to her father in Tartu: 'You can live with Germans. Do not leave.' I spent a couple of days there and went to Sweden. I had to wait there for two or three days for the ship to Estonia.

Leo met me on the quay in Stockholm. I understood that my uncle was right, he was not the Leo, I used to know and love. He arranged a hotel for me. Every night we went to the restaurant for dinner. Leo criticized me for staying in Paris so long as I could have been taken to a camp. I waited for the ship bound for Estonia. It was the last ship from Sweden to Estonia. The weather was great and I spent a lot of time on the deck. There were very many people. We were caught in a storm, but I was not sea-sick at all. I was in high spirits on my way. I ate a lot on the ship. Food was served all day long. There were very many different tasty dishes and people could eat as much as they could. It was scrumptious! I spent all day on deck-chair. I came back tanned and fat.

My mother and father's employee met me. He saw me on the deck and said to my mother, 'Here is your girl!', and Mother objected, 'No, that's not her!' She did not recognize me. And when she finally understood she just cried out, 'Oh my God!' On the way home my mother tried to convince me to go in for gymnastics to slim down. I told her just one thing: you do not know what is going on in the world. The war has been unleashed and soon the Germans will be after us. At that time my words were taken skeptically. Father said that after my visit to Paris I considered myself the smartest. Nobody thought that I was right. Nobody was listening.

Arman stopped writing me. I got a letter from my American friend Mak Intayer. He wrote that I should not be afraid of anything. He was a pilot. If anything happened, he could come and get me. I was moved, though I laughed at his fantasy.

My closest friends were the girls from the Ivrit lyceum. When I came back from Paris, I abhorred everything German. Though since childhood I had been speaking German, I even was not willing to speak that language. It was unpleasant for me. I remember on the first day at school the German teacher said with pride, 'I heard the Führer's speech!' She said it with such pathos that I even started hating her.

Our mathematics teacher was a countess, from a noble kin. We knew that she also supported national-socialism, but she never showed it. She treated me fairly. Mathematics was hard for me and she advised me to take private lessons with a German teacher of mathematics, Baron von Rekkenkaf. He was paralyzed. His hands could move and that was it. His young wife looked after him. He was a great teacher. He explained mathematics so well to me that I started understanding it and even loved it. He also helped me with physics. After having classes with him I got only good and excellent marks in those subjects.

Baron von Rekkenkaf said that I was a Jew, but he treated me in a very friendly manner. I cannot say that all Germans were bad, but often I had to force myself to communicate with them. Some students from my lyceum started to make fascist hails. They raised their hands and exclaimed, 'Heil Hitler!' They were not perturbed with my presence. They did not even consider that I was a Jew, and if the Germans came to Estonia, I could be killed. I understood that they were not hostile toward me. They merely did not understand what type of impression I would get from that.

I had to write a composition in German at my final exam. There was a blank sheet of paper in front of me, but I could not make myself to write a word. The teacher came up to me and said that if I would agree to a satisfactory mark in my certificate, she would help me. Previously I had only excellent marks in German, but I replied that I did not care which mark I would be given. She helped me focus. I understood that I had to write a composition and I wrote it somehow. Thus, I finished lyceum with a bad mark in German, but it did not upset me.

We had a meeting before the certificates were handed out. Each student was asked what she would do upon graduation from the lyceum. All my friends from the Jewish lyceum were going to leave for Israel. I was also thinking of that. When the board asked me that question I said, 'I will be leaving for Israel.' The chairman of the commission said that my decision was right. As a matter of fact, I wanted to leave, but my parents were against it. Father forbade me even to think of Israel. He said he would not give me money and what would I do then? I had to give up my plans. Then I thought soundly that Father was probably right. I was not as independent as my friends. I probably would not be able to survive in Israel. I calmed down.

When we moved to Tallinn, I started going in for music. I studied in the lyceum and conservatoire. Then, during the Soviet regime the music school was opened in which compulsory and music education could be obtained simultaneously. It was not at the time when I went to school. I learned how to play the grand piano. The teachers praised me. When I finished the lyceum, I entered the conservatoire, the grand piano faculty. My aunt Anna Kljass was a wonderful pianist. She was my first teacher and I loved her classes. When she started teaching at the conservatoire, I was transferred to her class. I loved music and spent a couple of hours every day practicing. I enjoyed my classes. I also attended accounting courses. When I was in Paris, my uncle Volodya told me that music classes would not let me earn my bread and butter, I should study something practical. I cannot say that the work of an accountant attracted me, but I was enrolled for the course.

My brother was drafted into the army. He was tall and handsome, so he was assigned to sentry duty at the governmental building. There were two sentinels and the most handsome and stately soldiers were selected for that. Once my brother was on duty and saw a beautiful girl. He decided to get acquainted with her and left his post. It was considered to be a crime and my brother could have even been imprisoned for that. Mother went to the military minister. He was a wonderful man.



Mother asked him to be indulgent with David. He calmed down my mother and tried to arrange it that my brother would not be punished rigidly.

Father was getting sick when I came back from Paris. He had stenocardia in a severe form. He had heart trouble very often and there were times when he was bound to bed. Of course, they could not treat such diseases at that time. Father had a terrible death. He could not move, then his hand was paralyzed, his speech became inarticulate and retarded. When he was on the brink of death, he could not speak at all. I remember Father saying good-bye to me. It was hard for him to say his last words. He died in 1940 at the age of 62. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. All his employees from the timbering warehouse attended the funeral. They loved Father very much and took his death hard. They were crying at the funeral. There were very many people and everybody was trying to support us, say some good words.

After my father's death we could not pay for a big apartment, besides my mother was worried that someone would be accommodated with us. Then she bought a house in Nõmme – a suburb of Tallinn. It was a small house, just in line with the Soviet norms for a family of three people. We settled in there. It was very beautiful. We lived there for about half a year and then we were evacuated.

We kept my father's death a secret from Grandmother Fanny. She did not go outside. She could walk only with a stick in the apartment, just the way I do now. My brother and I called on Grandmother as Mother could not visit her after Father's death. She was afraid that she would burst into tears and Grandmother would understand that there was a sorrow in the family. Once all of a sudden Grandmother asked me why Mother would not come. So one day Mother pulled herself together and went to see her. As soon as Grandmother saw her she asked at once, 'Is Yakov dead?' She must have felt something. Mother had to tell her the truth. Grandmother was bedridden since that day. She died within three months after my father's death. She was buried next to him. Soon my second grandmother Regina died as well. She was also buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Hardly had we got over our loss, when another tribulation came. In 1940 Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union [8](#). Though, what was happening seemed so strange and savage to us that we could not even believe that it was real. An authorized person, a so-called commissar [9](#), was appointed to my father's warehouse by the Soviet authorities. He was supposed to understand the situation. Mother was supposed to go there every day and help him. All the employees spoke only Estonian, but he knew only Russian, and Mother interpreted for him.

In a while my father's enterprise was nationalized by the Soviet authorities. The families of most of our friends – Jews and Estonians – had experienced that. They said in the open that they envied Father for dying peacefully, for his family and his life was not taken by them. Father's workers sympathized with us and even offered help. We lived in fear without knowing what would happen to us. Everything had been taken away from us. Only music saved me from that horror. I was playing all day long.

Thus time went by and a very scary day in Estonian history came, 14th June 1941 [10](#). On that day 10,000 thousand people out of a total Estonian population of one million were deported and sent to the Gulag [11](#) and into exile. Again we were happy that Father did not live to see that. He died at home being surrounded by loved and close people. If he had still been alive, he would have suffered in a camp before his death. And he would not even have a grave.

Our family and our kin were not affected by deportation. Maybe my father's death saved us from exile. Only the daughter of Father's sister Berta was exiled. She married a very wealthy man. It was a marriage of convenience. Irene was exiled and her husband was sent to a camp. At that time we thought it to be the most dreadful thing, but in a week the war was unleashed. Germany attacked the Soviet Union on 22th June 1941 without preliminary announcement.

Mother went to work after Father died. She taught German to the commanders. I do not remember where those lessons took place. They sent a car to take my mother to the classes. Once one of the officers' wives sent a parcel with pork. Of course, Mother accepted the gift. But she was so scared. For the first time we had pork in the house and Mother did not know what to do. She called Reni Firk, who was married to a very pleasant Estonian man. Reni calmed her down and said that it was hard to get products and it was great that we had meat. She taught my mother how to cook roasted meat. We cooked it and it was very tasty.

In late June I had an exam in the conservatoire. I had been playing all the time. My brother said that cities were being bombed and it was not the time to sit at a grand piano. I got ready for the exam and did not think of danger. I did not have to take an exam. Mother and I were given a permit to go into evacuation to Ulyanovsk. Mother was happy saying it was located on the Volga and that it was a beautiful city. We went there together. My brother did not go with us. Men were not allowed to go into evacuation. They had to defend Tallinn.

At every station where we stopped, we left a letter for David for him to know where we were heading. We were on the road for a long time. We had lunch at the stations. Local people treated us very well. They brought us food. I remember the train stopped all of a sudden. There were old ladies with kerchiefs on their heads. I said jokingly, 'Here we are!' Everybody was perturbed, but it turned out that I was right. We got off the train. It was Nizhnyaya Uvelka, Chelyabinsk oblast [about 1800 km from Moscow]. The old ladies came up to us and told us that they had been waiting for us and got the bath ready for us. I could not even imagine that.

We went out to look for lodging. Local people accommodated us. The hostess was very pleasant and treated us well. She was sure that the Soviet regime set us free and gave us Estonian, a better life. She asked me how we lived before our liberation. At that time I did not understand that it was better to keep silent and said that we were not liberated, but vice versa! We were free, lived in our own county and you took everything away from us. Probably, it was unexpected for the owner to hear that and she was very frightened! 'What are you talking about?' I said I told the truth. When the landlady and her cook went to the market it was hard to tell who was who. At this, the lady was intrigued and she started to ask me about our life. Mother was very worried and told me to keep silent as the woman could inform against us, but she turned out to be a decent lady and did not tell anyone about our conversations.

We did not stay in Uvelka for long as Mother found out that there was a vacancy of a German teacher in a school in the nearby settlement Klyast. We moved to Klyast. There were gold mines. Gold, platinum and something else were extracted there. Evacuees were not allowed to go there, but we were admitted for some reason. Mother was provided one room in a one-storied house by school. It was a corner room. It was very cold and there was no stove. We were given an oven. Mother and I went to the forest and were shown a plot. We were told that all the trees there were ours. Mother asked one man to make firewood for us. She paid him back with logs.

It was hard for us in the first year as we had only food cards [12](#). We had things with us and we swapped dresses for food. During the second year my mother and I planted potatoes and it was much easier for us to get food. We had never dealt with farming. The neighbors explained everything to us and we tried to do it the best way we could. We had huge potatoes. We had enough to eat. Potatoes were our main food. Of course, there was bread, some groats, some more vegetables that we got by cards. The most important thing for us were potatoes, we had them three times a day: for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Before that we did not eat a lot of potatoes. I came to liking them at that time and I still like them very much.

Mother worked in school and I found a job in the culture club. I played there in the evenings. There were singers and a ballet circle. Then I went to work as an assistant to the chief accountant in the canteen. In 1943 I suddenly came across an Estonian paper in the post-office. Our Estonian government was evacuated [13](#) to Chelyabinsk. They issued a paper in Estonian. There was an announcement in it that they offered the Estonian youth to study for the government to have trained experts who could start work when the war was over. A college that trained specialists for post-war Estonia was opened in Yegoryevsk, not far from Moscow. I decided to go there to study. I wrote to the address indicated in the paper and soon I got a governmental invitation to come to Yegoryevsk.

We had already heard the news about my brother. He was fond of skiing and he was a good sportsman. When David was mobilized, he was assigned to skiing troops. During military actions the land troopers were carried on tanks and then they jumped off the tank and joined the battle. We found out that my brother was severally wounded. He had a cranium injury and he was taken to Moscow to the Neurosurgery Institute. My brother said that the doctors had a discussion in his presence whether to perform a trepanation of the skull. David interfered and said that he refused. So, they started curing him without trepanation. When my brother was discharged from hospital, he was demobilized from the army for being disabled.

My brother was eager to be in the lines, but nobody wanted to have a cripple on the front. David wanted to enter a pilot school, but he was told that he would not be able to fly with such an injury, but they would teach him aircraft maintenance. David was assigned to Chkalov aerodrome. He was supposed to inspect the aircraft before take-off. When he was discharged from the hospital, the doctors told him that he could live without worries, marry a lady, who has a cow, and drink milk. David was already in Chkalov, when Mother found out the news. She went to him to help out. I went to Moscow, to the HR department, where I was issued an assignment to study in Yegoryevsk. I went there. It was a small, pretty town near Moscow. I decided to work in the food ministry.

I was welcomed by the principal of the college. She was a very pleasant and educated person. I was accommodated in a hostel. I shared a room with young girls. The studies had not started yet, so we ran errands: usually sorting potatoes or other works connected with harvesting. My life was interesting. Yegoryevsk was not far from Moscow, where the theaters were open, operas and concerts were held. The members of our government were moved to Moscow. They were given tickets to theaters, but they were not willing to go, and gave them to us. A whole group of people went to Moscow, to the theater or to the Opera. It was just wonderful.

It was the first time when I happened to attend a performance by Arkadiy Raikin [(1911-1987): prominent Soviet stand-up comedian, born into a Jewish family in Riga, founder of the Satyricon

theater in Moscow]. I was in raptures! I could not believe that such an actor could be in Soviet Union. He was so elegant and so handsome! I applauded so much that I was about to fall from my seat! Raikin was gorgeous! After the war I met him on the beach in Pärnu.

Days went by, the life in Yegoryevsk went well, but the classes did not start. Some singer came to Yegoryevsk. She was supposed to give a concert, but her accompanist did not come. She asked me to accompany her and we started rehearsals. She was pleased. She gave several concerts in our college and then suggested that I should go on tour with her. I went to our principal and asked for her advice. She said she did not advise me to go as I would be out of touch with the college and it would not be known how I would get back to Estonia after that. She turned out to be right and I refused.

School had not started yet, but I was urgently called to Moscow, to the HR department of the Council of Ministers. There was another HR director, not the one who gave me the assignment to Yegoryevsk. He was a very pleasant Estonian, a war invalid. He said that in my form it was written that I knew Russian, Estonian, German and English. The latter was not in need at that time. He offered me a job as a translator for the head of the department supplying oil to Estonia. I agreed to an interview. A small, fat and very lively man came over. He looked at me and said, 'Daughter, you will be working for me. Write to your mother and say you are now working for Kopyrkin, and everything will be OK with you.' I liked him at once: he was so kind and cordial. Thus, I became Kopyrkin's secretary.

We worked in part of a room partitioned from the Council of Ministers. There was a reception with the secretary at each of the ministries. In one of the nooks I was given a desk and a typing machine. I did not know how to type on a Russian typing machine, but Kopyrkin soothed me and said that I was working for him and everything would be OK. He always told me that. He said that he had a young wife and a baby. They would be happy if I visited them.

I was his secretary, but I did not have any work to do. Everybody spoke Russian and there was hardly any need to translate anything. Sometimes as per instruction of Kopyrkin I typed job offers. He took on a supplier, an Armenian guy, then an accountant, a Jew called Abramovich, and a chief accountant, an Estonian Jew named Zaks. They also came to work like me and waited for something to do. They were paid money while they were waiting. Once Kopyrkin said that I should write to my mother that I was promoted. I would be the head of the HR department and I would get a pay rise. I became a director, but still I did not have any work to do.

Once Kopyrkin said that today we would not work and we would go to watch German captives escorted on Moscovskoye Koltso. I did not want to look at that, but Kopyrkin said that I should go look, remember and then tell my children about that. Thus I saw that.

Then a group was formed that went to Leningrad, closer to Estonia. There were air raids, but our train was not bombed. The train stopped and we were told to get off and hide in the forest. Fortunately, the train was not damaged and we were safe as well. We arrived in Leningrad. We were told to settle in Hotel Oktyabirskaya. While in Moscow I was told to come to work, in Leningrad I was told to sit and wait, and if needed, they would find me. I met a lot of friends in Leningrad. There was Anna Kljass, my aunt and teacher, the mother of my favorite nephew Eri, my friends from the conservatoire. My friend who before the war played in the orchestra of the theater 'Estonia' also came. We went out every night. We could buy sweets and tea without cards there.

We had fun remembering the old times.

### **After liberation**

Tallinn was liberated and our group came to Tallinn via Tartu. I went with Kopyrkin and the supplier, the Armenian guy. I was surprised that Tartu was an empty city. All houses were open and you could walk in anywhere and take anything. People must have fled the city without taking anything. We spent a night there and then went to Tallinn. Suddenly I felt so bad as I had nowhere to go. I could not understand whether it was my home or not. We were taken to the castle of the government and said that we would spend a night there. I spent many nights in the armchair in the governmental building.

Then my mother and brother came and we went to Nõmme, to our prewar house. There were strange people in our house and none of our things. Mother managed to make it possible for our house to be returned to us. We were not willing to live there. Mother found an announcement in the paper regarding the exchange of an apartment in Tallinn to a house in the suburb. We made it work: we got the apartment and other people moved into our house. When we moved to Tallinn, I bumped into my nanny. She was very lonely. She was in such a state that we took her to live with us. She was a kind person, like an angel.

My grand piano remained in our house in Nõmme, when we were leaving for evacuation. It was not there when we came back. I suffered from not playing it. Fate had mercy on me. There was a time when state bonds were given at work. We also had such types of bonds and Mother was given a loan for a large amount. I hesitated whether I should buy a piano or a grand piano. Mother did not talk to me and went to the commission shop and bought an astrakhan fur coat for me. The fur coat was very beautiful, but I hated it and I felt so miserable! There was some money left and we could buy an old used piano. I hated that coat all life long, but had to wear it as I could not afford another one. A couple of years ago it was eaten by moths and I was so happy about it! I gladly threw it into the garbage.

I came to Tallinn a day after the Germans had left. Estonians were staring at me! They knew that I was a Jew and they looked at me in a strange way. I got sick and tired of this kind of attitude. Once I entered the pharmacy; the pharmacist there was known to my family. He held a bowl, but when I came in he dropped it! I walked out right away. In evacuation I had dreamed of coming back to Tallinn, to sit in a café in a beautiful dress. I entered a café, where I used to go before war, and the waitress whom I knew, stared serving me. She looked at me as if I was an alive corpse! When I went to Nõmme to look at our house, before my kin got there, one Estonian whom I did not know rushed to me and said, 'How great that you came back!' Then we got acquainted and she told me that she was an actress from the Tallinn drama theater.

Only few of our kin were lucky to survive. Beside us, only Uncle Oscar with his wife Zara and daughter Anna managed to leave for evacuation. After the war they lived in Tallinn in our street. Now his grandson Mikhail Belinson is the principal of the Jewish lyceum in Tallinn. I should never have thought that he would become a teacher, a principal. He was such a brisk child, so fidgety! Anna, Eduard's wife and their son Eri got evacuated, but Eduard stayed in Tallinn.

Irene, the daughter of my father's sister Berta Israelovich, was deported with her husband. Irene survived in exile and her husband survived the Gulag. Unfortunately, as soon as they were released, they got divorced. Irene's husband had a new family. Irene fell in love with a handsome man, whom she met in exile. He had a beautiful voice. They got married. They had two sons, Alexander and Mikhail. Irene's second husband was called Fallstein. She took his name. Now both of her sons live in Germany with their Russian wives. Irene was a very good pianist, but she never worked. She left for Germany with her sons, lived in a very good nursing home. She is dead by now.

As for the other members of our family: Aunt Berta, her husband and son were murdered by fascists in Tartu. They were not willing to get evacuated, neither did my father's brother Bernhard, who also lived in Tartu with his family. He perished with his wife Rebekka and their two sons.

My uncle German, who lived in Tallinn was a dentist. He was not going to get evacuated. He was a very good dentist and all local Germans were treated by him. German could not imagine that the Nazis would come and exterminate all the Jews. He said, 'Germans have always been my friends.' He did not want to leave. German's married daughters Babi Firk and Reni – I do not remember their husbands – were evacuated with their families and came back to Tallinn after the war. Uncle German's wife, Stanislava was worried. She cried, but her husband's word was the law. Germans took them to a concentration camp. German Kljass had a loyal maid – an Estonian. Her name was Yulya. She bribed the guard in the concentration camp and brought food to my uncle. Once she came there and the camp was empty. Nobody knew what happened. Either they were transferred to another place or exterminated.

The Germans put my uncle Eduard in Tallinn prison. They started incarcerating Jewish men on the first day. What an amazing coincidence: when Yulya went home from the empty camp, she walked by the prison during the time when the arrested were taken out. There were many of them and she recognized Eduard. He threw away his wedding ring through the bars and she gave it to Anna when we came back from the evacuation. It was spoiled and crooked, but still something was left from him. Eduard was a very good person.

Thus, almost all our family died. It happened because people tried to escape from Germans much less than from Bolsheviks [14](#). They thought nothing would happen. After a year of the Soviet regime all Estonian citizens were afraid of Bolsheviks rather than Germans, who were living nearby. Besides, they were used to Germans much more.

Both my mother's brothers survived the German occupation in France. Uncle Illia and his wife moved to a part of France that was not occupied by Germans. They lived there calmly until the end of the war. Many French people helped Jews and sheltered them. Uncle Voldemar and his son joined the French resistance. Voldemar's wife Jenny stayed in Paris. When the Germans occupied Paris, she was called to the commandant's office. At that time many Jews were called there. Aunt Jenny went and made a scandal there: 'How dare you calling us here?' They let her go. After that she moved to Uncle Illia. They were not touched. After the war Aunt Jenny met her husband and son. Some of their acquaintances, Jews, perished. I never saw Uncle Illia after that. Once, in 1961 Uncle Voldemar and his wife came to Riga from Paris and my mother and I also went there to see them. Boris, their son, once came to Tallinn for a visit. My mother was still alive at the time.



When my mother came to Tallinn, she found a job as a translator. Then she started teaching Russian and English in Estonian lyceum, and her former boss hired me instead of her. I also worked as a translator. Once, German captives were brought into town. I was called and told that the officer of the group needed a person, who was fluent in German, Russian and Estonian. I agreed, but felt very uncomfortable. I could not imagine communicating with Germans after what they had done.

I had to go to the train station to meet my acquaintances. I was standing on the platform and there was a handsome young man standing on the platform looking at me. The next day I had to work with the Germans. I went there and then after me a German officer came in. I was supposed to translate what he said. He turned out to be that handsome man I had met on the platform the day before. He was well dressed, I could not even say that he was a captive. He probably recognized me too. He sat next to me and said he was sorry for what his people had done to mine. He was well respected by the commanders. He was even allowed to walk without a convoy. Only in the evenings, when our work was finished, an NKVD [15](#) sergeant came to take him to the camp.

Well, what do you think happened? We fell in love with each other. Every day we spent together was a joy for us. When we started working he asked for a Russian-German textbook. I had such a textbook from the German lyceum. He studied the Russian language and made good progress. The head of the camp asked him to come over. He was an intelligent guy.

Then I found out that the Russian Navy theater needed a concert master. It was a very good theater. I was eager to get back to music. I went to the theater for an audition and I was offered the job. There were such wonderful people! They were cultured composers. I was very happy. I worked with a band of singers and dancers in the sailors' club. I went on tours. German officers came to our theater every day watching performances in the Russian military theater.

The German I had fallen in love with saw me home, when the performance was over. We had a long relationship before he left for Germany. We did not make any plans for the future as none of us could predict what might happen. After his departure, he wrote to me, but very few letters reached me. Of course, I did not write to him as it was very dangerous for me. It was tacitly banned by the authorities for USSR citizens to correspond with people from other countries [16](#), and letters were censored by the KGB [17](#). That was the way we lost each other. It is a pity that we were separated, as our relationship was so good. I do not even know whether he is still alive. But he was much younger than me.

My brother lived in Tallinn after the war. He did not have any civil profession. He became a ski instructor. My brother did very well and his trainees got the first prizes, went to international contests. David was married to an Estonian, but it did not last long. They did not have children. Then he married a German. She was not an Estonian Jew, but a native German. My brother as assigned to train a female skiing team in Germany. He came back with a wife. David often went to the restaurant, owned by her parents. She worked there as a waitress and helped out her parents. They fell in love with each other. David divorced his wife and got married in Germany. They came to Tallinn with their little son Mikhail, Mikki.

When in 1987 my brother died from cancer, his wife went back to Germany, and their son stayed in Estonia. He even does not think of going to Germany. He purchased our former house in Nõmme. He still lives there with his family. He graduated from Tallinn Polytechnic Institute and got married.

He has two sons, who are 13 and 11 years old. He is working in Tallinn Polytechnic University and writing his doctorate thesis. My nephew is a very good person. He is taking care of me. I treat him as my own son and we are really bonded. Amazingly, my brother's wife was born in the same city as that German officer I was in love with. My nephew is trying to find him via the Internet, but there are no results so far. Maybe he will be able to find him. I would like to find out what is going on with him, and how his life was after our separation.

In 1946 the Navy Theater, where I was working, returned to Leningrad. Of course, I was invited to go with them, but I could not, though they tried to talk me into that. I could not imagine my life outside Tallinn, outside Estonia. That theater existed in Leningrad for a while, then it was closed down. I worked in an amateur group as a concertmaster when the marines left. I mostly worked with common Estonian people and we got along very well. I still keep in touch with some of them.

### **Work as a pianist**

Then fate gave me another gift. The state ballet school was opened in Tallinn. There was a wonderful ballet dancer in Tallinn – the famous Anna Exton, nee Epstein, a Jew. When she quit her career as a ballet dancer before the war, she became the chief ballet master of the theater 'Estonia.' Then she organized a ballet group at the theater having selected gifted boys and girls. She had classes with them and some ballet dancers helped her out. In 1946 the choreography school was founded on the basis of that group. I was a concertmaster of the Estonian ballet in the theater 'Estonia.' When a ballet school was to open, Anna Exton suggested that I should be transferred there. I gladly accepted the offer.

I was the only pianist at the school. Then some more joined. I worked there from 1946 to 2000. I wanted to leave work when I turned 75, but the principal did not let me go saying, 'What are you going to do at home?' He talked me into staying. Only when I turned 80 I told the principal, 'Now I go. And that's flat.' By the way, the headmaster was our former student. I worked there when he was a boy. He did not become a ballet dancer upon graduation. He went to Moscow to study to become a ballet master. Then he became the chief ballet master of the theater 'Estonia,' and with time he became the principal of our ballet school.

I am grateful to the Soviet regime for this school. There were only private ballet studios in pre-Soviet Estonia. It was unlikely for someone to found a state ballet school. At times I worked for the theater 'Estonia.' I was supply concertmaster if someone was ill or could not come to work for some other reason. My main job was at the school. I traveled a lot thanks to my work. Dancers from our school took part in all kinds of contests and I was there with them. I was in Moscow, Leningrad, Riga, Kiev and Yerevan. Those were very beautiful cities and I loved being there.

Mother and I often went to Riga. She grew up in that city and loved spending vacations there. Mother lived with me all her life. She did not marry again, though she remained beautiful even at an elderly age. When I asked her why she was not willing to get married, Mother responded that she had never had another chance to meet such a great person as my father.

Grandmother's sister Fanny, who lived in Helsinki, came to see us several times. She came before the war and during the Soviet regime. For some reason the Soviet authorities did not give an entry permit to her daughters. My mother and I thought that she would like to go to the grave of her

sister, Grandmother Regina, but she kept silent. When Mother asked her, she said she did not want to go there. We found it strange. She was a sweetheart. At that time our elderly ladies wore black or grey, but Fanny wore a light blue dress with short sleeves. I do not know why I remember this.

## Marriage

I had known my husband for a long time before we got married. Anatoliy-Eduard Khanson was a ballet dancer, a soloist of the theater 'Estonia.' I played there sometimes. I liked him a lot. He was a very handsome man. I was looking at my future husband and envied his wife. Their marriage did not last long. Their daughter was born, Anatoliy-Eduard's wife fell in love with another man, also a ballet dancer, and they divorced. Then my husband-to-be came to me right away. It happened in 1957. We were together till his death.

Anatoliy-Eduard Khanson was born in Tartu in 1924. His father was Estonian and his mother Russian. That is why he has a double name: Russian and Estonian. My husband said that his father was very handsome. Judging by the pictures, my husband took after his father. He barely remembered his father as he died when Anatoliy-Eduard was a child. He had TB and he died before the age of 30. My husband was raised by his mother.

We lived together for many happy years. My husband was nice, smart and kind. Apart from ballet he loved music and literature. He knew history very well and was keen on it.

I lived with my mother and my husband with his mother. My mother-in-law was old and sick, so my husband could not leave her. He constantly needed help. It was hard for my mother to live by herself and take care of things. First we thought that our mothers could live together and we could help them, but it turned out to be impossible: each of them was used to her own orders. Thus my husband and I used to run from one apartment to another. When his mother died, he moved in with us. My mother loved him a lot and they became good friends. My husband was a very kind man. At times he was even too kind!

We had already lived together for eleven years, and only in 1972 we decided to get our marriage registered. We did it when Mother was still alive. Shortly afterward, in 1972 my mother died. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery, where my father and both my grandmothers were buried. To my shame I do not know how old Mother was, when she died, 70 or 80. The only thing I know for sure is that she was much younger than Father.

During the Soviet regime anti-Semitism became conspicuous. Maybe I had never felt it at work since I worked in the theater, other than that I could hear some careless words, probably said without spite: 'Bloody Jews!' Once my husband and I were at the resort Haapsalu, an old resort in Estonia, and we could hear it almost every day, mostly from drunk Russians. My husband got angry at it more than I did. He judged people by their personal qualities.

We did not have children. My husband and I were living with music and dance. It was the sense of our life. I was never interested in politics. It is not my cup of tea. In 1986 my husband had a brain infarction. First, I could not even understand what happen. I could not understand what he was saying. Then the doctor told me the diagnosis. I stayed with my husband all the time, hoping that he would get better, but he died in a couple of months. He was a great person. We lived a happy life together. And though I have lost my husband too early, I am grateful to destiny for the years I

lived with him.

Anatoliy-Eduard was buried in the town cemetery. There is a big section for actors. Even after death, people are classified into categories. My grave is next to my husband's. I am a member of the drama society. I reserved a place next to my husband in the cemetery. I hope it will be the way I wish. My brother is also buried in that cemetery as he was a famous sportsman, the pride of Estonia. At that time I was asked if I would give my consent for my brother to be buried there. I agreed. All of us will be there.

## Recent years

I think it was good for the Soviet Union to break up, and our Estonia to gain independence [18](#). Each country should live its life and decide what kind of life it is going to be, and what kind of peoples it is going to have. The war in Chechnya has been going on for quite long [19](#). Chechen people simply want to live their life without dictatorship. Why should they not have that opportunity? So much blood has been shed, and will be shed...

Now we are free, but so many people long for the USSR, saying that life was better at that time. Of course, our independence has been newly gained, and we have to learn how to be independent. Anything can happen in such conditions and dishonest people might take advantage of that. We have quite many rich people who came into money dishonestly. Now we find out about that, and it is very unpleasant. Though, contrary to the Soviet times, you can read about everything in the newspapers. Now, I am not very much interested in politics. I understand that they are fighting for power and, frankly speaking, I do not care about that.

Of course, anti-Semitism is there even now. It has been cultivated in peoples' minds for quite long and it is hard to eradicate it. Unfortunately, it is coming from Russian speaking people in our country. My friend, an Estonian, lives not far from the cemetery. Once, she told me in horror that it was written on a grave in Russian: 'Death to Jews.' Those words were deleted, but then the same words were scratched on a bench. Of course, it is terrible. I am sorry for those people. They have poor souls!

I am happy with the Estonian youth of today. They are free people. They feel themselves European and behave accordingly. They are very attentive to me. They help me on the street as they see that I am leaning on a stick, help me to get onto public transport. Recently I had to go to a big store and there was no railing on the staircase. One young man saw me, came down and helped me go up. Young people are very attentive, there is even no need for me to ask. They are always helping. Russian youth is not raised in such a way, though they help sometimes as well.

Music is the main thing in my life. It makes me strong and keeps me going. I would have died without it. Even now there are very few joys in my life. My colleagues do not forget about me. Recently the principal of the choreography school invited me. He turned 65. The principal sent the car over. He knew it was hard for me to walk. I was taken there and I was given a warm welcome as right now I am the eldest employee of the school. There was a feast, without alcohol of course. The principal teaches at school as well. He is an excellent teacher. There were his former students at the jubilee. It was so great.

When I walked out, I even was not willing to go home. I sat on the bench by the school. The sun was shining. I took a nap. Then I went downtown to the concert of Georgian composer Giya Kancheli. The symphonic orchestra played. The first part of the concert was devoted to Gidon Kremer. There was an intermission and then the piece that the author devoted to violist Yuri Bashmet. The music was gorgeous. I liked that there were many folklore motives in the music. It was so interesting! The audience was crying in delight and stamped with their feet. I felt so happy!

A couple of days before Kancheli's concert I saw [Arvo] Pärt's concert. It was broadcast from the concert hall 'Estonia.' I enjoyed Kancheli and Pärt. I often attend concerts. Thank God, I can afford it: there are special rows for pensioners, the tickets are cheaper. I can also listen to music at home. There is a classics radio program on Estonian radio. The music is always very beautiful. There is a TV program, showing wonderful concerts and shows from the concert hall 'Estonia.'

Of course, I am often lonely during the day. My young relatives are working. I listen to music; at times I start playing the piano myself. I have friends. They are very good and wonderful people. I can only say good things about them. In spite of all adversity I can say that I am a happy person.

## **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 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.

### **3 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.

#### **4 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium**

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

#### **5 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.

#### **6 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).

#### **7 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.

#### **8 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.

## **9 Political officer**

These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

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

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

**11** 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.

## **12 Card system**

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

## **13 Estonian Government in Evacuation**

Both, the Government of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party were created in 1940 and were evacuated to Moscow as the war started. Their task was to provide for Estonian residents who had been evacuated or drafted into the labor army. They succeeded in restoring life and work conditions of many evacuees. Former leaders of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic took active part in the formation of the Estonian Rifle Corps assisting the transfer of former Estonian citizens from the labor army into the Corps. At the beginning of 1944, top authority institutions of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic were moved to Leningrad, and the permanent Estonian representation office remained in Moscow. In September 1944, Estonia was re-established as part of the USSR and the Estonian government moved to Tallinn.

## **14 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 Bolshevikize 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.

## **15 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.

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

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

## **17 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.

## **18 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.

## **19 Chechen War**

After the communist Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia declared their independence. The autonomous territories immediately north of these new nations remained part of the new Russian State, though their populations largely were not Russian. Several of these ethnic groups began agitating for more autonomy from Moscow or for outright independence. The conflict in Russia's South Caucasus region (Chechnya, Dagestan, Ossetia, Ingushetia) began quickly. After the first Chechen War (1994-96) Chechens claimed victory and independence, and the Russian government claimed victory and the retention of Chechnya as a part of Russia. Clashes along the border continued as several Chechen rebel leaders and groups continued to harass the Russians in nearby areas. One such area is Dagestan, another, largely Muslim, region of southern Russia. During the Dagestan Campaign, Russia suffered several terrorist attacks in cities

throughout the nation. Using this as an excuse to continue the Dagestan Campaign into Chechnya proved quite popular with Russian voters. After Yeltsin's retirement, Acting President Vladimir Putin won the March 2000 election largely on the strength of his continuing war against the Chechens and Islamic 'terrorists.'