Irina Golbreich

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Latvia
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
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This interview with Irina Golbreich was conducted in the social center of the Jewish community of Riga 1. The community has become a second home for many people. This is what Irina said, speaking from her heart. Irina is not too tall. She has curly, chestnut-brown hair. Her face wears the expression of shyness and kindness. Perhaps, for this reason many people call her affectionately Irochka. Irina worked as a school teacher and I'm sure her students were lucky to have her as their teacher. Irina is a soloist of the Jewish choir at the community. She's been with the choir since 1994, when it was established. I've been at a concert of the choir and I was very much impressed. The choir sang Jewish songs, and they sang through their heart. The choir is like a family, and each of them feels like a member of the family. This family helped Irina to go through the dramatic loss in her life, when her husband died a year earlier.

My childhood and family

My father's family lived in Daugavpils [150 km from Riga], Latvia. My grandfather Naum Mikhelson was born in Daugavpils. I don't know his date of birth. I don't know my grandmother's name or where she came from. My grandfather was a grain dealer, and my grandmother was a housewife. The family was big. My grandmother had twelve children, and ten of them survived. I knew five of them besides my father. My father Boris [common name] 2, Jewish name Ber, Mikhelson, was the youngest child. He was born in 1904. I don't know the dates of birth of his brothers or sisters. I only remember their names. My father's brothers were called Leib and Isaac Henrich, and his sisters Yevgenia, Alexandra and Emma. They lived in Riga, and I happened to know them. They must have had Jewish names as well, but I don't know those. My father may have told me about the others, but I don't remember anything about them.

I traveled to Daugavpils only once, and I can't describe the town. My father told me there was a large Jewish community in the town. There were a few synagogues, a cheder and a Jewish

cemetery.

My father's family was very religious. My grandfather had a beautiful voice. He was a chazzan at a synagogue in Daugavpils. The family observed all Jewish traditions. The family celebrated Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. My grandfather and his sons went to the synagogue on Saturday, and on holidays the whole family went to the synagogue. The sons studied at the cheder, which was mandatory for Jewish boys. At 13 the sons had their bar mitzvah, the coming-of-age ceremony. My father's family spoke Yiddish.

All children received secular education. I know no details, but they must have studied at the gymnasium [grammar school]. At least, my father did. After finishing it he entered the Agricultural Faculty of Riga University. He moved to Riga and rented a room. Anti-Semitism in Latvia was strong at the time. One lecturer told my father that he might study at university and graduate from it, but there was little chance he would find a job. Perhaps, his words affected my father so that he never finished his studies. He quit university and took a course for amateur radio engineers. After finishing the course he went to work as a radio engineer. Besides repairing radios, he also modified them.

My father's brothers also moved to Riga. It was easier to find a job in a bigger town. Leib and Henrich were shop assistants and clerks. They were single. One of my father's sisters finished a course for medical nurses. She specialized in obstetrics. She worked as an obstetrician nurse at the Jewish hospital 3 in Riga. She was well valued at her work. Alexandra was single. Emma and Yevgenia were housewives after getting married. They had Jewish husbands. I remember Emma's marital name. She was Rozhevskaya. My father's other brothers and sisters moved to other towns and countries. My father told me that one of his brothers, a dental technician or a dentist, lived in London. This is all I know about them. My father's parents died in the late 1920s or early 1930s. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Daugavpils.

Yakov Rozenblit, my maternal grandfather, came from Odessa 4, southern Ukraine. He had graduated from Odessa University before getting married. He was a chemical engineer. He must have been very intelligent, if he managed to get a higher education in Russia, being Jewish. There was a quota for maximum five percent Jewish admission 5. My grandfather must have had many merits to have overcome this barrier.

My grandmother Henrietta came from Riga. I don't know how they met, but they did and got married. I know that after getting married they lived in Odessa for some time. Their three children were born in Odessa: Mama's older brother Solomon, sister Esphir and my mama Rachil, born in 1905. Mama told me her family moved to Riga after World War I, probably before the Soviet Russia officially recognized the independence of Latvia 6. In Riga they lived with my great-grandfather. I don't know whose father he was. Mama told me that my grandfather and great-grandfather wore black clothes and had beards.

My great-grandfather was deeply religious. My grandfather and grandmother were not so fanatically religious, but they observed Jewish traditions. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home. On holidays they went to the synagogue. The children received primary Jewish education. At least, they knew Jewish traditions and religion. However, the family focused on secular education. My grandfather believed that only an educated person could become successful. He arranged for it that his son and daughters had higher education. They were all very cultured. My

grandfather had a big library, and the children studied music and foreign languages. They often went to theaters and concerts. They spoke Yiddish, German, as many people did in Riga, and a bit of Russian.

Solomon, the oldest son, graduated from the Law Faculty of Riga University. Esphir and Mama studied at the Conservatoire. Esphir was a violinist, and Mama was a pianist.

In 1920 Latvia gained independence. There wasn't as much anti-Semitism there as in tsarist Russia, and the Jewish quota was cancelled.

I don't know what caused my grandmother Henrietta to move to Lithuania, where she had some relatives, in the 1920s, while Grandfather Yakov and Uncle Solomon moved to the Soviet Union. Anyway, my grandmother and grandfather separated. My grandfather Yakov and Uncle Solomon moved to Moscow. Solomon went to work as a lawyer. He married a Jewish girl from Moscow. In 1926 their daughter Yudith was born. My uncle and his family lived in Leningrad for some time, but then they moved back to Moscow.

My parents corresponded with them. They wrote each other with long intervals until finally this correspondence came to a complete end. Later I found out that the Soviet regime didn't appreciate its citizens having relatives abroad or corresponding with them 7. Apart from everything else, Latvia was a bourgeois country, and this correspondence might have had sad consequences for my uncle. Fortunately, he managed to avoid repression [Great Terror] 8 in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in the postwar years.

My aunt Esphir also left Latvia. I knew about her from what Mama told me and also, from her letters and pictures that she had sent before the war. She moved to Paris, France, where she got married and had a son. His name was Michel. She divorced her husband, and her son stayed with her.

After finishing the Conservatoire, Mama worked as a teacher at a music school.

My mother's cousins, my grandmother's sister's children, also lived in Riga. Mama and her cousin sister were very close and often visited each other. My father and mama's cousin brother [Boris] were also friends. My father often visited his friend, and so my parents met at the home of Mama's cousins. Their surname was Genkin. My parents got married in 1930. I don't know if they had a traditional Jewish wedding. My father's parents had passed away, and Mama's parents had moved away. My parents were not too religious. However, I have no information in this regard whatsoever.

My parents rented an apartment. This house is still there. It wasn't destroyed during the war. This was where I grew up and from where we evacuated. My father was a foreman at the Kolibri knitwear factory in Riga. Mama was a music teacher. I was born in 1934, and I was the only child in the family. I don't know why my parents gave me the name of Irina. Mama never told me, and I never asked. There is no one left to tell me now.

Our family spoke Russian in my childhood. Russian is my mother tongue. When my parents didn't want me to understand the subject of their discussion, they switched to Yiddish. They didn't teach me Yiddish. When I was born, Mama took maternity leave for some time to breastfeed me. Later she went back to work. I had no nanny. Perhaps, my parents couldn't afford it. My father's sisters Emma and Yevgenia were more than willing to take care of me having no children of their own.

Mama took me to one of them before going to work in the morning and picked me up after work. My aunts took me to the town park, read me fairy-tales and played with me. Later my parents hired me a Latvian nanny. She was a very kind woman. I was attached to her. She spoke German, and I picked up German pretty soon. She stayed with us till my parents sent me to a private kindergarten. Our tutors spoke Russian and German with us. I didn't attend the kindergarten all the time. At times I stayed with my father's sisters.

My parents were not religious. They didn't celebrate Jewish holidays. My father didn't go to the synagogue. My father's older sisters observed Jewish traditions, and we visited them on Jewish holidays. However, I guess, for my parents this was more of a tribute to family traditions, rather than attachment to Jewish traditions. We also celebrated our birthdays in the family. I remember this.

My parents took a great interest in life in the Soviet Union. My father often listened to radio programs about the Soviet Union and read all relevant newspaper articles. He told Mama and me that the Soviet Union was the country of equality and fraternity, where all ethnic groups, however small they were, had equal rights, and there was no oppression, and that the very idea of the country was in internationalism. These were attractive ideas, and my parents believed in them. I was just a child, and the Soviet Union was like a fairy-tale country where all dreams came true.

My parents also talked about Germany. Mama, in particular, hated the Fascist regime. She said that Germans, formerly a very civilized nation, turned into beasts killing and torturing people that were different from them. Mama often talked about Germany after it attacked Poland 9. I didn't care about Germany at the time. It was far away, and I was sure it had nothing to do with our country.

In 1939 military bases [Annexation of Latvia to the USSR] 10 were established in Latvia. I have dim memories of this period of time. All I remember is that Mama organized a music club for the children of the Soviet Consulate employees. Mama was eager to visit her father and brother in Moscow. She requested the Consulate's approval of her trip, but they refused her. Mama had no idea why.

In 1940 Latvia was annexed to the USSR. I remember how the Soviet forces came to Riga. There were tanks and trucks with the military wearing Soviet uniforms, moving along the streets. People standing on sidewalks greeted them, waving their hands and throwing flowers. My parents and I also went there. I was shouting greetings with the others and waved my hands at the passing tanks and trucks. I remember the feeling of admiration generated by the powerful capacity of the Soviet Army 11.

My parents were for the annexation of Latvia to the Soviet Union. They never joined the Party, but they believed that life would be better in Soviet Latvia, that discrimination would be eliminated, and people would be equal and free. They were not alone in their faith. However, I don't think our life was different during the Soviet regime. We lived in the same apartment, and my father worked at the same factory, which already belonged to the Soviet people. I went to the same kindergarten. There were no improvements, but things were not getting worse either.

Some time later some disastrous and bizarre events started happening. However, they didn't affect our family, though some of our relatives suffered from them. The first one was Mama's cousin Boris Genkin. After Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union, he went to Moscow to visit his relatives. He

spoke poor Russian and had an accent. He was arrested on the charge of espionage. The investigation was prompt, and the trial lasted no longer than some minutes. Boris wasn't even given the floor in court. He was convicted for espionage and sent to the Gulag 12.

His elderly parents, Grandmother's sister, and her husband, had no idea where their son was for a long time. Then it was their turn. They were wealthy and owned a two-storied house. Actually, this was all the property they had. They were forced to leave their home, and on 14th June 1941, when deportation 13 of enemies of the people 14 from Latvia began, they were sent into exile to Siberia.

Their daughter was married. Her family name was Dembo, and she lived with her husband. She and her family were not affected by these actions. We couldn't understand how two old people could be enemies of the Soviet regime? How could they pose a threat to it? People couldn't understand things about the deportation, and this made it even more frightening, but at least, people knew about it, while Mama only got to know about Boris after the war, when we returned to Riga.

During the war

On 22nd June 1941, the war 15 began. The radio announced that Hitler's army violated the Non-Aggression Treaty 16 and crossed the border of the USSR. My father listened to the radio and then told Mama what he had heard. Mama was busy doing routine things at home. My father told her that the Soviet Union was a big and strong country, and that the Red Army would beat the Germans in no time. I remember these words. My father had an indisputable authority with me, and I was sure that Mama had no grounds for worry.

German Air Forces started bombing Riga. It was particularly bad at night. I remember the banshee howl. We dressed in haste, running to the air raid shelter in the basement of the house across the street from our house. For the most part, there were old people, women and children in the shelter. Men stayed outside to put out fires from the bombs. Then there was all-clear banshee, and we could go home. At times we had to run to the air raid shelter two or three times per night. Somehow I remember night air raids. This was an enigmatic show with some kind of gleaming balloons in the sky.

Mama insisted that we evacuated. She knew that the Germans were killing Jews and was very scared. My father, on the contrary, was quite optimistic. He comforted Mama, telling her that if the Red Army had been successful fighting against German forces in Poland, they would have no problem defeating them in their own land. Mama didn't give up. On 20th July Mama's former student called us, telling us that there was some vacant space in her car, and we could join her to leave. My mother failed to reach my father at work. She also called my father's sisters and brothers trying to convince them to join us, but they refused. They believed that the Germans were not as bad as the Soviets and were resolute about staying. None of them survived. They perished in Riga during the German occupation. I don't know if they were killed in the Riga ghetto 17 or in the Rumbula forest 18.

Mama packed in haste, took Alexandr Dembo, her cousin's son, and we left not knowing where we were heading. On our way we picked up some other people, and had to throw out some suitcases to vacate some space. All we had with us was what fit in the patchwork fabric bag. She knew that she could only take what she could carry herself. We reached Valka [on the Latvian-Estonian

border] where I saw a German plane with a swastika on its wing for the first time in my life. It was flying low. I was told it was a bomber. It dropped bombs near the railway station. Fortunately, it didn't destroy the railroad track, and we managed to catch a train. There were only three carriages, but all we cared about was getting out of there.

Mama was worried about my father, who stayed in Riga, fearing that we wouldn't find him. Later we found out that my father evacuated shortly after we did. He left for Cheboksary a few days before the Germans occupied Riga. My father was 36, when the war began. In Cheboksary my father decided to volunteer to the front instead of waiting till he was regimented. The military office sent him to the Latvian division 19.

The three of us reached Rostov of Yaroslavskaya region [about 1200 km from Riga]. In early winter the Germans advanced significantly, and we had to move on. The children's home of Rostov was also to evacuate to the rear of Russia. Mama knew she wouldn't be able to support two children, and she sent Alexandr to the children's home. He had a chance to survive there.

In Rostov we rented a room from an elderly couple. Our landlord often reminded us that we had to move on, because the Germans were advancing. Once Mama asked him why they intended to stay, and he replied that they were Russian, and the Germans would do them no harm, while we had to leave, being Jews. Of course, these discussions had their effect, and also, many families were leaving Rostov. We headed to the Ural. We arrived in the village of Ailino of Cheliabinsk region [about 3000 km from Riga]. The Germans never reached Rostov, and we could have stayed, but who could have known that then...

Life in Ailino was very hard. It was a small village with few streets, and old shabby huts. Many people evacuated there, and it was hard to find any accommodation. It took us some time before Mama managed to find accommodation. It was a house with two rooms. The landlords were in one, and another room was divided into two parts with a big Russian stove 20. There were two families living in them. One was a woman with two daughters, and the other woman had a son and a daughter. All children were older than me. These women's husbands were at the front. The hut was packed, and looking back, I don't really know how we managed there. The winter was cold, and none of us had blankets. All of us, eight people, slept on the stove bench. It was large, but not wide enough for eight people. The children stayed there during the daytime. We had no warm clothes till Mama somehow managed to get two cotton wool coats.

There wasn't enough food. Mama couldn't find a job. She had 200 g bread coupons 21 issued to the unemployed. It was just one slice of bread. It was bread with sawdust in it, underbaked and heavy. This was all the food we had. There were potatoes, cereals and milk sold at the market, but we had no money or clothes to trade for products. We were starving. It was hard till a Russian boarding school evacuated to Ailino. Its director sympathized with Mama and hired her as a tutor or an attendant. She was provided with some food there. Anyway, Mama tried to leave whatever food we had to me, and all she had was boiled drinking water. She developed dystrophy and was swelling.

Some time later Mama was allowed to take me to the boarding school. We were allowed to accommodate there. It solved two problems that we had: food and accommodation. The food we were provided with was rather miserable. We were given some skilly and cooked cereal. The children were weak, and the school suffered from epidemics. Many children were dying. I fell ill with measles. I stayed in hospital for a long time. After I was released from hospital I caught

pneumonia. There were no antibiotics or any medications whatsoever available. Mama was told there was little chance that I would survive. Mama spent all her free time with me. I survived, and Mama decided we should move to a town where she could have more opportunities to find a job. We moved to the town of Satka in Cheliabinsk region.

My father found us when we were still in Ailino. He met a woman from Riga in Cheboksary, and she had corresponded with another family staying in Ailino, who wrote her that Mama and I were in the village. My father started writing to us from the front. We received these triangle letters with a field mail censorship stamp on them. There were no envelopes or stamps, the letter itself was folded into a triangle, and the address was written on the blank side. It was strange that the mail worked, and we received letters regularly. We knew that my father was in the Latvian division, but we didn't know the location. Mama and I listened to the radio and knew that there were casualties in the Latvian division. We were so happy to receive another letter from my father. It meant that he was there and safe.

Life in Satka was far better than in Ailino. This was a small industrial town. There was Magnezit, a huge plant, manufacturing fire-proof bricks and fire-proof materials for blast furnaces. It owned a few kindergartens for the children of employees of the plant. Mama went to work as a music teacher in a kindergarten. She taught children music, singing, conducted a choir and prepared concerts in the kindergarten. Mama liked this job. I went to the same kindergarten. I was eight and had to go to school, but Mama told me she would teach me herself, and there were three meals provided in the kindergarten. This was a sufficient argument for me after the hunger in Ailino, though I was looking forward to going to school. We shared a room in the kindergarten with Mama's colleague, who also had a daughter. The girl and I were the same age.

In 1943 my father joined us. He was wounded in his leg at the front. His bone was fractured, and the sinews were torn. He was provided with first aid in the field hospital and then sent to a rear hospital. My father stayed in a few hospitals and had several surgeries. He developed gangrene, and the doctors were thinking of amputating his leg. My father was at death's door, but fortunately, the doctors helped him. His leg was shorter and curved, but he didn't lose it. My father was strong and healthy, and he managed it well. However, he was demobilized from the army. A medical commission acknowledged that he wasn't fit for further military service. He joined us and life became better.

My father went to work at the Magnezit plant. I don't remember what kind of job he had. Veterans of the war were well-respected at work. My father was promoted. Mama and I were the family of a veteran. We received coupons for clothes and also, received a shared three-room apartment 22. There was a family in each room. Besides our family, there was a single woman in one room and a Jewish family from Poland. Their surname was Schtasberg. The father was raising three sons, whose mother had died. The neighbors got along well. Local residents were also good to us, and we felt quite at home.

In September 1943 I went to the first grade of the local Russian school. There were four to five pupils, evacuated from their home town, in each grade. There were five in my class, and two of them were Jewish like me. This was the first time I felt I was different from others. Our teachers treated us all right, but some of my co-students demonstrated that I was Jewish and different from the others. Local children had straight hair. I had curly hair and I was continuously teased. I

wouldn’t say there was anything hostile about it. We played together a lot, but every now and then someone blabbed something indicating that I didn’t belong there. Besides, this only happened at school. My neighbor children and I got along well. I don’t know whether my parents faced any anti-Semitism. At least, they never mentioned it in my presence.

Another thing I remember about our life in Satka is that my father went to a village and brought a lot of cabbage. My parents cut it with long knives, and I was to add salt to it. We made a big barrel of sauerkraut and placed it on the balcony. It turned out very delicious. We also treated our neighbors and acquaintances to it.

I heard about the end of the war incidentally on 8th May 1945. I was passing through a yard where the children were playing and shouting, ‘The war is over! The war is over!’ I rushed home to tell my mother and our co-tenant lady. They just thought it was another children’s talk, but the next day the end of the war was announced on the radio. We had a black radio dish in the kitchen. It was never turned off. Everybody was happy that the war was over and we could go back home.

After the war

My father was the first to go to Riga to arrange some accommodation for us. Mama and I waited till my father notified us that it was time for us to come home. We went via Moscow and stayed there a few days to visit Mama’s brother Solomon and my grandfather. Uncle Solomon and Grandfather had not seen Mama for a long time, and they had never met me before. The reunion was very emotional. My uncle met us at the railway station, and we went to his home where we met his wife and daughter. The adults couldn’t stop talking after having not seen each other for so long. My uncle’s wife and her daughter, who was a few years older than me, spent much time with me. They showed me around Moscow. There was much destruction, but the city was beautiful, anyway. A few days later we left for Riga.

My father received a nice four-room apartment in the center of the town. Some time after we arrived, he was told that four rooms for one family were way too much, and that the authorities were planning to accommodate another family with us. At that time Mama’s cousin Dembo’s family returned from evacuation in Siberia. Mama had given them information about their son, and his mother found him at the children’s home and took him with her. He was in evacuation with his parents. They were staying with us looking for an apartment, but when Mama heard that there was another family to be accommodated with us, she decided that it was better to have her cousin living with us rather than some strangers whom we didn’t know. The Dembo family needed an apartment anyway, and Mama had them registered as tenants at this address 23.

This was how they stayed with us. Each family had two rooms, and we shared the kitchen, bathroom and the fore room. We got along well. Alexandr studied at an art school and became a good artist in due time. My parents went to work. Mama worked as a piano teacher at the music high school. She worked there till she retired. My father worked as a foreman at the factory.

When we returned to Riga, my parents heard about the terrible destiny of my father’s family, who perished in the ghetto. I don’t think mass media disclosed this information about the Riga ghetto, mass shootings of Jews in the Rumbula forest or the Kaiserwald concentration camp 24 during the war. At least, my parents had not heard about it until after we returned to Riga. They were so

distressed and shocked. My grandmother Henrietta, who was living in Lithuania after my grandfather had moved to Moscow, also perished. She was one of many Jewish people, whom the Fascists exterminated shortly after they invaded Lithuania.

Mama's sister Esphir survived. She stayed in Paris after the German army occupied France. Her son Michel was in the French army. My aunt's French neighbors gave her shelter during the German occupation. They saved her life. Perhaps, a number of people knew she was hiding there, but they never gave her away to the Fascists. After the war my aunt stayed in Paris. Her son Michel returned from the front. Unfortunately, a few years after the war he died tragically in a car accident.

This is all the information I have about my aunt. We didn't correspond with her. Latvia was a Soviet republic, and residents of the USSR faced severe risks corresponding with their relatives living abroad. There were persecutions after the war as well, and it was dangerous to correspond with people from capitalist countries. The very fact might have been sufficient evidence for a conviction for espionage.

Now people often say that in 1940 the Soviet Union occupied Latvia and that this was a military crime. However, I do think that for many Latvian Jews this happened to be their rescue, since if Latvia hadn't belonged to the Soviet Union when the war began, Jewish families wouldn't have evacuated to Russia, which was a chance to survive. We would have stayed in Latvia as well and would have shared the destiny of those Jews, who didn't want to evacuate and perished.

Also, after we returned to Riga, we learned that extermination of Jews was not merely the fault of the Germans. Latvian residents also had their share in what was happening. I studied in a Russian school. There were Russian, Jewish and Latvian students at school, but I faced no expressions of anti-Semitism at school.

My parents didn't observe any Jewish traditions after we returned to Riga. They were not religious before, and when Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union, the Soviet authorities struggled against religion 25 and national traditions. We celebrated Soviet holidays at home: 1st May, 7th November 26, Victory Day [on 9th of May] 27, 8th March, International Women's Day. We also celebrated New Year and the birthdays of members of our family.

The attitude of my parents towards the Soviet regime changed. Feeling rather optimistic in 1940 and believing that our life would improve, after deportation in 1941 they probably started wondering whether what they believed in was true. The majority of those who were deported were women, old people and children. How could they possibly be enemies of the Soviet rule? Were the Genkin, two old people, who died from life hardships and severe climate in exile in Siberia, enemies of the people? I believe this was when my parents' attitude started changing. After the war they were no longer adamant supporters of the Soviet rule. Postwar events only strengthened this attitude of theirs. However, we had no choice and there was no alternative to adjustment to the Soviet rule.

In 1948 the period of trials against cosmopolitans 28 started in the USSR. Of course, it wasn't so massive in Latvia, but there were occurrences of this kind. My father's friend Boris Peker lived in the same house where we lived. They often met and talked. One day my father heard that Boris was arrested by the NKVD 29. My father was very concerned. He had many books about the history of the Jewish people. The Soviet regime also intended to exterminate the national self-

consciousness, besides struggling against religion. So this kind of literature was banned. I remember my father burning these books. He told me to discuss this with no one. He also explained that the Soviet authorities didn't only forbid reading these books, but also, it wasn't allowed to keep them at home. It was dangerous to discuss politics, dangerous to tell jokes. Everything was dangerous.

Boris Peker was released after Stalin died [1953]. He visited us, and I remember my parents asking him what the charges against him were. He replied that at interrogations he was asked whether he was acquainted with a rabbi. I don't remember the name of the rabbi. His interrogators also asked Boris whether he was involved in the activities of an anti-Soviet society, and whether this society had relationships with any foreign organizations. Boris said that these questions made him laugh, and this reaction must have clearly indicated that he wasn't involved in any such activities. However, he was kept in jail for quite a while. This had an impact on his health condition. He used to be a strong man before he was arrested, but after he was released he suffered from severe hypertension for the rest of his life.

The period of the Doctors' Plot 30 was also rather disturbing. It didn't affect our family, but there was the feeling of growing anti-Semitism. Mama's cousin was a children's otolaryngologist. Once she told me that some parents refused to show their children to her, and when she asked them about the reason, they explained that Jewish doctors were writing out wrong prescriptions on purpose. This was stupid, but my aunt was very much upset. My parents had nothing to do with medicine, but they were very unhappy about what was going on.

I studied in a Soviet school where I became a pioneer 31 and joined the Komsomol 32. For me Stalin was an idol like for many other Soviet children. I took seriously everything the newspapers wrote about Stalin: 'Friend, teacher and chief…' I believed this was true. Stalin was an integral part of our life. There were his portraits everywhere, posters with Stalin's quotations. He was everywhere, and had a total presence in our lives.

After finishing school I passed entrance exams to the Faculty of Natural Science and Chemistry of the Riga Teachers' Training College. I was worried about my results since Jews were not quite welcome at higher educational institutions at the time, but I passed my exams successfully and was admitted to college. A few of my co-students were also Jewish. Our lecturers didn't make any distinctions between their students. Their attitude toward us was objective. There were a few students, who didn't conceal their bad attitude towards the Jewish people. This was undoubtedly the influence of their families and family education. They were Latvian students and some were newcomers from the USSR. However, the common attitude toward us wasn't bad.

In March 1953 Stalin died. This happened when I was already a student. We were told to gather in the conference hall for the mourning meeting. I was sobbing and so were other students and lecturers. It was a tragedy for me. I sincerely didn't know how we were going to live on without our wise chief. At this time uncle Solomon from Moscow was visiting us, and I kept saying, 'What's going to happen? How are we going to live on without Stalin? Who will rule the country? My uncle tried to comfort me, but it was a waste of effort. The world seemed to have collapsed and be lying in ruins.

After the Twentieth Communist Party Congress 33, where Khrushchev 34 spoke about Stalin's crimes, the world collapsed for the second time. I believed Khrushchev, since everything he talked

about had happened before our eyes. It was just like a veil had been cast on our eyes and we couldn't shake it off. We didn't dare to compare the facts and think about this. However, this was the biggest disappointment I had in my life, the disappointment in the idol.

Upon my graduation I received a job assignment 35 to the general education school of the Marta collective farm near Riga. This area belongs to Riga now. I lived at home and took a bus to work. I worked as a teacher of natural science and chemistry for a year before I was offered a job in Riga. I worked in this school till I retired. I wouldn't say that everybody treated me well. People are different. However, I faced no anti-Semitism at work.

I got married in 1957. I met my future husband Aron Golbreich through his aunt, who was Mama's friend. Mama had met her before the war. Aron was born in the town of Beshenkovichi, Vitebsk region, Belarus, in 1921. It was a Jewish town, one of many in Belarus. Aron's father's name was Solomon, and his mother's name was Hena. The family had four children, and Aron was the youngest. I didn't know the others. Aron had finished school before the war. He was going to continue his studies at college. Aron and his brothers were recruited to the army. Aron was the only survivor. His parents perished, when Fascists occupied Beshenkovichi.

Aron's only relative, his aunt, lived in Riga with her family. She was a dentist. She convinced Aron to move to Riga. He graduated from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the Riga Teachers' Training College and worked as a teacher of physics and mathematics at school. His aunt suggested to my mother that they introduce him to me. She told Mama he was a nice guy. Mama asked my consent, and I said I didn't mind. Why not? I liked Aron, and I think Aron liked me as well. We started seeing each other and some time later he proposed to me.

We had a common wedding. Jewish weddings were not popular at the time. It's different nowadays. When Latvia became independent 36, Jewish traditions were restored, and nowadays there are many Jewish weddings arranged. It was different at our time. Besides, Aron was a party member. He joined the Party in the army at the front, and he couldn't have had a Jewish wedding even if he had wanted to.

In 1958 our only son Alexandr was born. My husband wanted to give him the name of Solomon after his deceased father, and call him Sasha affectionately. I was against it. Giving him the name of Solomon in those years meant destining him to continuous teasing by Russian and Latvian children. So, I said that if we were going to call him Sasha then why didn't we give him the name of Alexandr? So we did.

Our family was no different from many other families. My husband and I went to work. Our son went to school. The job of a school teacher takes much time and effort, and we spent less time with our son than we wanted to. Our son took a liking to reading. Perhaps, it helped him to compensate for the lack of his parents' attention. When my parents retired, they could spend more time with Alexandr, and he liked visiting them. We spent summer vacations at the Riga seaside. We also liked traveling across the USSR. Sometimes we visited my relatives in Moscow. My grandfather died in the late 1950s. My uncle Solomon and his family always gave us a warm welcome.

Alexandr was good at mathematics and exact sciences. He had the highest grades in these subjects at school. Our son studied well. He took part in various Olympiads in mathematics and physics, and was awarded prizes. Before finishing school, Alexandr knew where he wanted to

continue his education. He entered the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of Riga University. This happened during the period of Brezhnev's rule 37, a hard period for Jewish people, when anti-Semitism was demonstrated at the state level and the authorities took no efforts to conceal it even for decency purposes. Perhaps, my son's numerous diplomas he had been awarded at the Olympiads helped him to avoid entrance problems, at any rate he successfully passed his exams and was admitted to Riga University. As a student, our son was also involved in scientific activities.

Upon graduation from university our son was issued a job assignment to the Institute of Organic Synthesis in Riga. He was a scientific worker [research fellow]. Later he wrote and defended a candidate's thesis 38. In Soviet times scientific work was funded by the state, and this funding was sufficient. My son had good perspectives at work. He had authority and was involved in a number of scientific developments.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union [in 1991] Latvia became independent, and it no longer focused on scientific developments. Scientists were underpaid, and often their salaries were delayed. The funding of new developments was terminated, there were no budget allocations for the necessary equipment. Many scientists, including Alexandr, started looking for jobs abroad. Alexandr worked in Germany for six months, and six months in France before he moved to America in 2000. He promptly adjusted to life in America and found a job that he likes. He lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He calls me two to three times a week. We have long conversations. My son tells me what happens in his life and asks me how I am. Alexandr is a very caring and loving son. Unfortunately, he has no family of his own.

In the 1970s large numbers of Jews were moving to Israel. This was actually the only possibility for the Soviet Union to move to another country. Many of our friends and acquaintances left at that time. We knew they were leaving to have their children grow up free people, having their rights respected, to never know the feeling of being treated as people of the second or third rate. These people were moving to their historic Motherland. This was a brave move on their part. We knew it, but we did not dare to make this move. We supported those who were leaving. Things were not easy for them. Authorities took every step and effort to make their life complicated.

We corresponded with our friends in Israel and were happy for their successes. None of them regretted taking this decision. We were probably very inert. It was difficult to take this decision and to make this decisive step in life. Besides, my parents were old and suffered from hot weather. I couldn't leave them, or take them with us where they would suffer from the hot climate, and I would be to blame for their suffering and would be able to do nothing about it. So we stayed.

However, we never lost interest in watching news from Israel. During the Six-Day-War 39 and the Judgment Day War 40, we watched the course of military actions and were worried about Israel. We were on the side of Israel, and felt happy about its military successes. The official Soviet mass media deployed a wide-range anti-Israeli campaign calling Israel an aggressor and invader. The bigger Israel's victories were, the stronger the hysteria was.

There were other sources of information besides Soviet radio programs. We listened to the Voice of America 41 and other Western radio stations. This was not appreciated, but there was hardly one Jewish family that didn't listen to these radio broadcasts. To eliminate interferences, my father adjusted the circuit in the radio and the broadcasting quality improved

I wish I had visited Israel and seen this beautiful country. However, this dream was not to come true. It was impossible to travel before perestroika 42, and later, when it became possible, we didn't have enough money. Besides, I wasn't that healthy.

I was enthusiastic about perestroika at first. I had a hope that these promises of a better life would not remain mere promises and that life would change. There was finally some freedom of speech, and people were no longer afraid of the all-powerful KGB 43. There was freedom of the press, and people didn't have to listen to foreign radio stations any longer. Our newspapers published everything one would want to read about.

Also, people were allowed to travel and no longer needed the approval of district party committees, correspond with their friends and relatives living in other countries and invite them to visit us. People resumed their freedom of religion. There was no longer a ban on religion, and people had the freedom of choice. For those, who were born in Latvia and remembered life in Latvia before it was annexed to the USSR, this was a return to normal life, though for those who were born in the USSR and never knew a different life this was something new and different.

These changes brought optimism and faith in the future. It's a pity the outcome was different from what we expected. Our standards of living were impetuously dropping, prices of necessary food products and goods were growing dramatically and the shelves in stores were empty. Many people were complaining about life. This finally resulted in the breakup of the Soviet Union. Perhaps, this was historically justified and inevitable, but I wish this country still existed. It was a powerful state that could resist any aggression while now our countries are small and isolated and are unable to defend themselves.

Life in the free Latvian republic

It goes without saying that I didn't like everything about the Soviet Union. Our rights and freedoms only existed on paper. They were stated in the Constitution, but we could never enjoy them in real life. However, the ideas were good. If the Soviet Union had followed the Constitution, the basic law in any country, rather than the guidelines of the Communist Party, our life would have been very different. I think, they should have preserved that great and powerful state and changed whatever impeded our life. It would have been good.

During perestroika the Jewish life in Latvia began to revive. In 1988 the Jewish cultural society was officially registered. In recent years it has significantly grown and strengthened. Jews finally felt themselves to be Jewish. My husband Aron returned to Jewish life. He read many books about the history of the Jewish people and their religion. Aron knew Hebrew in his childhood. He restored his knowledge to read the Torah and prayers. Aron went to the synagogue on Sabbath, and on Jewish holidays he and I went to the synagogue together.

We observed Jewish traditions at home. On Friday evening I lit candles and prayed over them. On Saturday my husband went to the synagogue. I stayed at home, but I did no work at home. I left whatever chores I had for Sunday. On Saturday my husband and I read aloud and visited our friends or went for a walk. We celebrated Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Chanukkah and Sukkot, the biggest Jewish holidays, at home. We just couldn't follow all traditions strictly, but we did our best.

Mama died in 1987. We buried her at the Jewish cemetery in Riga. However, we didn't arrange a Jewish funeral. In 1993 we buried my father beside Mama's grave. My husband died in 2004. His funeral was a traditional Jewish one. This was my husband's wish, and I followed it.

In 1991 Latvia became independent. I think there are positive and negative factors in it. Let me start with the negative ones. During the Soviet rule, pensions were sufficient to cover all the necessary expenses. We could pay our bills and buy sufficient food. Even small pensions were sufficient to live on them and save some money for summer vacations, clothes and medications, while current pensions are hardly enough to cover utility costs. It's impossible to live on the remaining amount.

Jews are fortunate to have the Jewish community covering some of their expenses. It delivers food packages. Poor people are provided meals in the community on Saturday. The community provides necessary medications, covers some utility expenses, particularly heating costs during the cold season. I can't imagine how I would manage, if it were not for the community. It's not only about all the provisions. We have the community, the place where we can come and feel at home. This is very important for all people, but it has a particular significance for older and lonely people. I met many friends in the community, and it helps me to bear my loneliness after my husband died.

We celebrate Jewish holidays and birthdays in the community. Knowing that someone is thinking about you is very important. Newspapers and magazines are too expensive for many of us, and the community provides these. Our community does much to keep the memory of all Jews, who perished in Latvia during the Holocaust. There were gravestones installed at the locations of mass shootings of victims of Fascism, and also, there is an on-going search of such locations.

Anti-Semitism still exists, even with independence in Latvia. I face it every now and then. However, the most important thing is that there is no governmental anti-Semitism. Routinely anti-Semitism can be managed. Our community takes an active part in it. The facts of expressions of anti-Semitism become known and talked about, and this means that the community protects us.

There are two choirs in our Jewish community. One is Shofar, and the second one is Rahamim. The Shofar members are younger, and Rahamim is attended by older people like me. I joined the choir in 1994. Since then the choir has become a part of my life. We sing Jewish songs in Yiddish and Hebrew. Only few singers know the languages, and the others, like me, just learn the words off by heart. All members of the choir are fond of Jewish music and Jewish songs, and this common activity has made us friends. Our choir is one big family. We need each other and we care about one another.

The Rahamim social center, with Hana Finkelstein at its head, provides significant assistance to our choir. We have a room for rehearsals, and the center also took care of costumes for our concerts. We sing in the community, and our choir is also welcomed at the Jewish communities in other Latvian towns. We tour the country, and always many people come to listen to our songs. We sing for them, and we know that they need our songs. When I sing, I see the enlightened expressions in the audience. I know that what we do is very important. This gives me additional strength.

Glossary:

1 Latvian Society of Jewish Culture (LSJC)
formed in autumn 1988 under the leadership of Esphik Rapin, an activist of culture of Latvia, who was director of the Latvian Philharmonic at the time. Currently LSJC is a non-religious Jewish community of Latvia. The Society's objectives are as follows: restoration of the Jewish national self-consciousness, culture and traditions. Similar societies have been formed in other Latvian towns. Originally, the objective of the LSJC was the establishment of a Jewish school, which was opened in 1989. Now there is a Kinnor, the children's choral ensemble, a theatrical studio, a children's art studio and Hebrew courses at the society. There is a library with a large collection of books. The youth organization Itush Zion, sports organization Maccabi, charity association Rahamim, the Memorial Group, installing monuments in locations of the Jewish Holocaust tragedy, and the association of war veterans and former ghetto prisoners work under the auspice of the Society. There is a museum and document center 'Jews in Latvia' in the LSJC. The VEK (Herald of Jewish Culture) magazine (the only Jewish magazine in the former Soviet Union), about 50,000 issues, is published in the LSJC.

2 Common name
Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

3 Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim
established by the community with the same name. It existed in Riga since the late 19th century. In 1924 Ulrich Millman and the Joint funded construction of a hospital where they provided assistance to all needy besides Jews. The hospital consisted of 3 departments: therapeutic, surgery and neurology. Director of the hospital was Isaac Joffe, director of Riga's health department in the early 1920s. Doctor Vladimir Minz, one of the most outstanding surgeons, was head of surgery. He was the first surgeon in Latvia to operate on the heart and brain, and do psychosurgery. Fascists destroyed the hospital, its patients and personnel in summer 1941. Doctor Joffe perished in the Riga ghetto in 1941, Professor Minz perished in Buchenwald camp in February 1945.

4 Odessa
The Jewish community of Odessa was the second biggest Jewish community in Russia. According to the census of 1897 there were 138,935 Jews in Odessa, which was 34,41 percent of the local population. There were seven big synagogues and 49 prayer houses in Odessa. There were cheders in 19 prayer houses.

5 Five percent quota

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed five percent of the total number of students.

6 Latvian independence

The end of the 19th century was marked by a rise of the national consciousness and the start of national movement in Latvia, that was a part of the Russian Empire. It was particularly strong during the first Russian revolution in 1905-07. After the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917 the Latvian representatives conveyed their demand to grant Latvia the status of autonomy to the Russian Duma. During World War I, in late 1918 the major part of Latvia, including Riga, was taken by the German army. However, Germany, having lost the war, could not leave these lands in its ownership, while the winning countries were not willing to let these countries be annexed to the Soviet Russia. The current international situation gave Latvia a chance to gain its own statehood. From 1917 Latvian nationalists secretly plot against the Germans. When Germany surrenders on November 11th, they seize their chance and declare Latvia's independence at the National Theatre on 18th November 1918. Under the Treaty of Riga, Russia promises to respect Latvia's independence for all time. Latvia's independence is recognized by the international community on 26th January 1921, and nine months later Latvia is admitted into the League of Nations. The independence of Latvia was recognized de jure. The Latvian Republic remained independent until the Soviet occupation in 1940.

7 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 a concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

8 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were Communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public ‘show trials’. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

9 Invasion of Poland

The German attack on Poland on 1st September 1939 is widely considered in the West to be the date of 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.

10 Annexation of Latvia to the USSR

upon execution of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 2nd October 1939 the USSR demanded that Latvia transferred military harbors, air fields and other military infrastructure to the needs of the Red Army within 3 days. Also, the Soviet leadership assured Latvia that it was no interference with the country's internal affairs but that they were just taking preventive measures to ensure that this territory was not used against the USSR. On 5th October the Treaty on Mutual Assistance was signed between Latvia and the USSR. The military contingent exceeding by size and power the Latvian National army entered Latvia. On 16th June 1940 the USSR declared another ultimatum to Latvia. The main requirement was retirement of the 'government hostile to the Soviet Union' and formation of the new government under supervision of representatives of the USSR. President K. Ulmanis accepted all items of the ultimatum and addressed the nation to stay calm. On 17 June 1940 new divisions of the Soviet military entered Latvia with no resistance. On 21st June 1940 the new government, friendly to the USSR, was formed mostly from the Communists released from prisons. On 14-15th July elections took place in Latvia. Its results were largely manipulated by the new country's leadership and Communists won. On 5th August 1940 the newly elected Supreme Soviet addressed the Supreme Soviet of the USSR requesting to annex Latvia to the USSR, which was done.

11 Soviet Army

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary basis. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committy of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- two years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- three years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and Cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went

through military training in their educational institutions. On the 22nd June 1941 Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became compulsory for all. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over eleven million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was three years and in navy- four years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to two years in ground troops and in the navy to three years. That system of army recruitment remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

12 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 somewhat improved.

13 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 52,541 people from Latvia, 118,599 from Lithuania and 32,450 from Estonia were deported under the pretext of ‘grossly dodged from labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life’. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Latvian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable of rejecting 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 the camps.

14 Enemy of the people
official Soviet term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

15 Great Patriotic War
On 22nd June 1941 at five 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.

17 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

18 Riga ghetto
established on 23rd August 1941. Located in the suburb of Riga populated by poor Jews. About 13 000 people resided here before the occupation, and about 30 000 inmates were kept in the ghetto. On 31st November and 8th December 1941 most inmates were killed in the Rumbula forest. On 31st October 15 000 inmates were shot, on 8th December 10 000 inmates were killed. Only younger men were kept alive to do hard work. After the bigger part of the ghetto population was exterminated, a smaller ghetto was established in December 1941. The majority of inmates of this 'smaller ghetto' were Jews, brought from the Reich and Western Europe. On 2nd November 1943 the ghetto was closed. The survivors were taken to nearby concentration camps. In 1944 the remaining Jews were taken to Germany, where few of them survived till the end of the war.

18 Rumbula forest

the location where Latvian Jews, inmates of the Riga ghetto and Soviet prisoners-of-war were shot is in the woods near the Rumbula railway station. At the time this was the 12th kilometer of the highway from Riga to Daugavpils. The drawings of common graves were developed. There was a ramp made by each grave for prisoners to step into the grave. Soviet prisoners-of-war were forced to dig the graves to be also killed after performing their task. The total number of those killed in Rumbula is unknown. The most accurate might be the numbers given in the report of the police commander of Latvia, who personally commanded the actions in Rumbula. He indicated 27 800 victims in Rumbula, including 942 from the first transport of foreign Jews from Berlin, executed in

Rumbula on the dawn of 30th November 1941, before execution of the Riga ghetto inmates. To hide the traces of their crimes, special units of SS Sonderkommando 1005 opened the graves and burned the remains of victims in spring and summer 1944. They also crushed burnt bones with bone crushing machines. This work was done by Soviet prisoners-of-war and Jews, who were also to be executed. In the 1960s local activists, despite counteraction of authorities, made arrangements in place of the Rumbula burial. They installed a memorial gravestone with the words 'To the victims of Fascism' engraved in Latvian, Russian and Yiddish.

19 Latvian division: Latvian rifle division 201 was formed in August/September 1941. The formation started in the Gorohovetski camps in the vicinity of Gorky (present Nizhniy Novgorod), where most of evacuated Latvians were located. On 12th September 1941 the division soldiers took an oath. By early December 1941 the division consisted of 10,348 people, about 30 percent of them were Jews. 90 percent of the division commanders and officers were Latvian citizens. In early December 1941 units of the Latvian division were taken to the front. From 20th December 1941 till 14th January 1942, during the Soviet counterattack near Moscow the division took part in severe battles near Naro-Fominsk and Borovsk. The casualties constituted 55 percent of the staff, including 58 percent privates, 30 percent junior commanding officers. Total casualties constituted about 5700 people, including about 1060 Jews.

20 Russian stove

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

21 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.

22 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns, communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

23 Residence permit

The Soviet authorities restricted freedom of travel within the USSR through the system of residence permits 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 eight square meters to themselves.

24 The Kaiserwald concentration camp

Kaiserwald was an old German name of the Mezapark area of Riga. In summer 1943 Himmler ordered to eliminate all camps in the east, exterminate all inmates who were unable to work, and take the rest to another concentration camp. In summer 1943 prisoners from Polish concentration camps started building the camps. The 'Riga-Kaiserwald' had 29 'Ausenlagers'; the sorting out took place in the central camp. The male inmates who were able to work were sent to clear fields from mines. In August and September 1944, when the Soviet armies advanced to the Baltic countries, some inmates were sent to the Studhoff camp near Gdansk, and about 400 inmates were sent to Auschwitz. The rest were executed on 2nd October 1944 during elimination of the camp. From Studhoff the inmates were taken to various camps. The ally armies rescued them from extermination. At the most 1 000 Latvian Jews taken to Germany lived till liberation. The total of 18,000 Jews were exterminated in Kaiserwald during the Great Patriotic War.

25 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 Protestant and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

26 October Revolution Day

25th October (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on 7th November.

27 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

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

28 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitan' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the

Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

29 NKVD

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

30 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.

31 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.

32 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, it could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

33 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.

34 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.

35 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR

Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory two-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.

36 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic

On 4th May 1990 the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Republic accepted the declaration, in which it was informed of the desire to restore independence of Latvia, and the transition period to restoration of full independence as then declared. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Latvia and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held on 3rd March1991, over 90 percent of the participants voted for independence. On 21st August 1991 the parliament took a decision on complete restoration of the prewar statehood of Latvia. The western world finally recognized Latvian independence and so did the USSR on 24th August 1991. In September 1991 Latvia joined the United Nations. Through the years of independence Latvia has implemented deep economic reforms, introduced its own currency (Lat) in 1993, completed privatization and restituted the property to its former owners. Economic growth constitutes five-seven percent per year. Also, it’s taken the course of escaping the influence of Russia and integration into European structures. In February 1993 Latvia introduced the visa procedure with Russia, and in 1995 the last units of the Russian army left the country. Since 2004 Latvia has been a member of NATO and the European Union.

37 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 a 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.

38 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about three years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a

'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

39 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

40 Yom Kippur War

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

41 Voice of America

International broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Voice of America has been broadcasting since 1942, initially to Europe in various European languages from the US on short wave. During the Cold War it grew increasingly popular in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe as an information source.

42 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.

43 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.