

# Samuel Eirus

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Russia

Interviewer: Anna Shubaeva

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*At first glance Samuel Maxovich Eirus looks much younger than he is. And he is already about eighty.*

*Samuel is short, slender and rather vigorous (possibly because of his athletic background), but we can see that at present some extra steps turn to be a heavy duty for him.*

*He is sitting next to his wife at their kitchen table: he is deeply touched recollecting episodes of his life and his wife is laughing softly at him.*

*Many young couples will be envious of the warm-heartedness of their relations after so many years of their married life, after birth of their son and grandsons.*

*And at that moment looking at Samuel and his wife, you understand what makes them look so young: their bright shining eyes.*

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## • My family background

My name is Samuel Maxovich Eirus; I was born in 1929 in Tartu. [Tartu is a small town in Estonia, it is situated 185 km south-eastward from Tallin.]. My mother and father lived there. My paternal grandmother and grandfather also lived in Estonia, but I do not know in what town they were born.

My grandfather's name was Samuel Eirus. My grandmother's name was Sara Meirovna Eirus and her sister's name was Rive Meirovna Brand. Brand was her 2nd husband's surname and I know nothing about her 1st husband, except his surname: Kalyu. Rive arrived in Leningrad together with her 2nd husband and my grandmother.

Unfortunately I know nothing about my great-grandparents. In fact I was not interested in it. You see, when I was little (we left Estonia when I was 4 years old) I was interested only in my toys and childish emotions. At that time I was not old enough to concern myself with my ancestors.

Only later I started to be interested in my ancestors, but... unfortunately I had no system: I asked Rive questions from time to time. She outlived my grandmother by many years; she went through

the war together with us and died in 1950s. Sometimes in the evening we had long talks, and I used to ask her different questions.

It was Rive who told me that my grandfather and grandmother were professional revolutionaries. And Rive was a revolutionary too.

I do not know what they were engaged in besides that. I have no idea about their financial situation... But if they were revolutionaries and managed to provide an education to their children, I guess they were not poor. My father knew two foreign languages (German and French), and I think that at that time most Jews knew only their shtetl dialect and Russian. To my mind they were too much oppressed to become educated and study foreign languages. It was possible for Jews to receive formal education only if their parents already had got money and were persons of high position. All the rest were underprivileged.

Probably my grandparents were members of a political party (I do not know exactly what party). Their activity resulted in the attempt of making revolution, but it failed. My grandparents were arrested, tried and sentenced to death. They were kept in the death ward. Grandfather was executed by shooting, but Estonian authorities had no time to do it with my grandmother and her sister: our government exchanged them for some Estonian political figures arrested in Russia. Probably my grandmother and her sister were granted a political asylum in Russia and made Petrograd their home in the beginning of the XX century.

My grandmother and her sister (like all revolutionaries in the USSR) enjoyed certain privileges. Grandmother was a merit pensioner of Russian Federation. [Merit pension of Russian Federation was established for persons of priceless services to the country in the field of revolutionary, state, public and economic activities or for outstanding merits in the field of culture, science and engineering.] At that time they were very few. They used special shops and special medical service. Authorities appreciated old revolutionaries.

I do not remember the date of their arrival, but in 1933 they invited my father (son of Sara Meirovna), my mother, me and probably someone from our family to come to Leningrad from Estonia.

My Mom told me about her childhood very little. Her family lived in the town of OPOCHKA. [OPOCHKA is situated 130 km far from Pskov.] Her mother had got 3 children: 2 girls and a boy.

Her father (my maternal grandfather) was a true Jewish small trader: he had got a horse and carried junk from village to village, changing it for money or for different things. Mom said that he traveled much and worked as a real commercial traveler. So the family was rather poor. But my grandfather's wife did not work and he had a horse, therefore he was wealthier than the others. On the other hand, they lived in out-of-the-way village: life was cheaper there than in cities.

They observed no Jewish traditions. The same was with my paternal grandparents: it goes without saying, because they were revolutionaries!

I know nothing about the way my mother and her relatives got to Estonia. I was born in Tartu where my father and mother lived at that time. I think that they lived there for a rather long period of time: my mother's husband and her brother Mulya, for example, played together in the orchestra - I guess it means that the family settled down for good in Tartu.

My father was born in Estonian city Vyrú in 1905. I already told you that my paternal grandfather was a professional revolutionary, and he managed to educate all his sons. My father spoke Russian, Estonian (I do not take these 2 languages into consideration), German and French. By the way I do not know if he knew Yiddish or Hebrew. Besides, he finished a musical school and played in the Estonian National Orchestra. I keep a photo showing him together with the orchestra musicians. Pay attention that musical education was not free at that time.

### • Growing up

My father was a real professional: he was able to perform serious musical compositions. I remember my Mom mentioned that he wrote notes himself. Some musical scores he arranged for his balalaika [a national Russian musical instrument]. I remember him frequently writing notes at home...

I was not much interested about the way my father earned the living: in fact he was arrested when I was little. It was Rive who told me some facts about him when I asked her (for example) what I had to write down about my father in different questionnaires.

I know that after my father's arrival in Leningrad he managed to find a job at LENEXPORTLES (at that time there were a lot of foreign firms), because he knew German language well. [LENEXPORTLES was founded in 1926 and was engaged in timber export.] He worked there as a quality control inspector. Possibly later this fact helped authorities to fabricate a charge against my father: he worked in a foreign firm and was in touch with foreigners.

Mikhail Kushnarev, a cousin of Rive and a coeval of my father graduated from the Leningrad Timber College. Probably it was him who helped my father to get that job. I guess that my father was educated in the sphere of timber industry, but I know nothing about the College he graduated from.

Later (after NEP [1](#) was abandoned) all foreign firms were closed, and my father found a job of a goods manager at the Krasnaya Zarya factory (I got to know about it much later). [Krasnaya Zarya factory was founded in 1897 and produced telephone sets.]

And here in Russia my father did not forget his musical knowledge. We arrived in Leningrad in 1933. We lived near Fontanka River and there was a Club named after Kalinin [2](#) next door. Like in other houses of culture they arranged different meetings including cinema shows. Different orchestras used to give small concerts before the beginning of cinema shows. And I remember very well that my father organized an ensemble (some sort of orchestra) to perform before cinema shows. He played balalaika.

I remember it very well because father used to take me with him, so that I could watch cinema show. I was absolutely not interested in performances of his ensemble. But to tell the truth, at present I remember only his performances and nothing about those feature films.

My father used to wear ordinary suits (secular).

I know nothing about the way my father got acquainted with my Mom: I was not interested and Mom didn't tell me about my father much.

My mother was born in OPOCHKA (a town near Pskov) in 1901. Her parents were poor. She finished only 4 classes, therefore it was possible to call her illiterate. But she was very beautiful!

Mom worked as a hairdresser. In the beginning she was a master; later she was appointed a manager of her hairdressing saloon because of her diligence and good service.

My Mom's circle of acquaintance was rather wide because of her work: several theaters were situated near her hairdressing saloon. One of them was the Bolshoy Drama Theater named after Tovstonogov [it was founded in 1919 and is one of the most popular theaters of the city]. Another one was the Drama Theater named after Pushkin [one of the oldest professional theaters of Russia was founded in 1756]. There was also the Comedy Theater [founded in 1935] situated in Nevsky prospect. Therefore a lot of her customers were actors. Mom knew many actors personally. It was very interesting.

So we lived in that house near Fontanka River since 1933. The house was 4-storied, but later the 5th floor was built for the College of Film Engineers. It was a true mansion with marble stairs and tile floors. In the hall near the front door there was a small door leading to a special room which had been occupied by a door-keeper in the former times. Near the same front door there was a fireplace. I remember copper bars fixing the carpet on the staircase. Later the carpet disappeared, but the bars remained on the footsteps during a long period of time. So it was a real manor-house! To my mind it looked like a museum. Sometimes now I wish to go there and make a glance at it again. You see, I got married and left for another apartment. Later my brother also got married and they changed that apartment for a 3-room flat. At present my relatives do not live there any more.

The house was richly decorated, but we lived in 2 communicating rooms of a communal apartment [3](#). The apartment was very large, and our rooms were very large, too: about 50 and 25 square meters. And the fretted ceiling was 5 meters high.

We lived there 9 together: father, mother, grandmother, aunt Rive, her husband, 3 brothers of my father, and I. Of course my grandmother placed my aunt and her husband in the smaller communicating room. All the rest slept in the larger room on the floor or in folding-beds.

At that time my parents decided to cabin off (probably they already got to know about the future birth of my brother). But it was not easy to make 3 rooms of 2 communicating ones. We considered it to be absolutely inconvenient to disturb each other passing through the rooms. You see, in our rooms there were 3 windows and in the apartment there was a long corridor. So we used a part of our rooms to lengthen the corridor. We cut 2 doors in the wall and got 3 separate rooms.

My aunt's husband Grigory Brand was an artist and a restorer. He could paint ceilings using oil paint. We had fretted ceiling. I guess earlier it was pictured, because once when the room was under repair I found there a painting which had been covered with plaster. My aunt's husband managed to clear that painting and we saw angels and Amours there. All visitors used to hold their heads high and take a good look at it. And it arrested their attention for a long time.

My aunt's husband told me a lot about his military service in the tsarist army. He said that Jews were not oppressed there. He was an infantryman and they devoted a lot of time to drilling and physical exercises. Many soldiers were not able to pull themselves up, and officers caned them on their backside until they pulled up. But it could not help. The officer used to order my aunt's

husband 'Well, show them how it has to be done!' And Grigory answered 'Yes, Sir!' He usually demonstrated excellent pull-ups and he was always pointed at by officers as an example. Unfortunately I can tell you nothing about the time of his service. I am not sure if he participated in the WWI, because I do not know how old he was at that time. I guess that he was younger than my grandmother; he seemed to be a coeval of Rive. He outlived my grandmother by many years. He outlived his wife too, but by a short period of time because after her death he took to drinking. After Rive's death he managed to marry a Russian woman, and I think that after his death she made much money changing his large room for a smaller one.

Our room was 12 square meters large, and grandmother had a larger room. They lived there 3 together: my grandmother, her younger son Emil and one of her elder sons Grigory (he was younger than my father). To tell the truth, Grigory did not live with us: he had been arrested and exiled (we hoped that he would come back one day). Practically I do not remember him, but I remember that he was the shortest in the family.

There was stove heating, electricity and water supply. We had got a large copper gas-bath. We washed in turn: there were 12 rooms in our communal apartment.

The kitchen was very large: about 50 square meters. There was a large tiled gas-stove, but I remember that it was not in use: at that time people preferred kerosene stoves.

Every family had got a little table in the kitchen. And later when they supplied gas and central heating, there appeared 4 gas-stoves: one stove for 3 families.

I remember that we all lived in peace and friendship. Families were large (by the way, at present 2 persons often are not able to get along together). We were less fastidious...

In the day time all adults worked, children were in kindergartens or in day nurseries. And in the evening all members of the families gathered in the kitchen to have supper, because their rooms were rather small for it. They moved tables to the middle of the kitchen making one large table. All people sat at that table eating their own meals and talking about everything.

And children (including me: at that time I was 5 or 6 years old) ran around the table, collecting clips and gathering some tasty things. Adults usually sent us to the corridor. The corridor was very long (it consisted of 3 long parts). We used to ride bicycles in competition with each other...

I do not remember many Jews among father's or mother's friends. Most visitors were father's colleagues or musicians. I remember that talking to them, father often played his balalaika and they argued about something. We (children) were usually sent to the corridor not to distract adults.

Neither my father nor anyone from our family was religious. I mean they never showed it anyhow... I also remember no icons, nothing of that kind. Our family members were indifferent to prayers and kippot. I am sure in it because they were communists, especially my grandmother and her sister Rive (they were true revolutionaries, faithful to principles of communists). But! Recently I found a photo of my father where he wore some sort of a badge in the form of Magen David (it was fixed to his coat's lapel).

My grandmother knew Yiddish: she spoke Yiddish with her sister and my Mom.

And I cannot speak Yiddish at all. Unfortunately I did not listen to my grandmother speaking Yiddish to her sister or my Mom. I was not interested.

They did not speak German language. I am sure in it, because nobody of my relatives could help me when I started studying German at school. If they knew, I would have no problems.

All of us were hundred-per-cent Jews. I know that Grigory, the 2nd husband of Rive was Jewish, too. When I was going to receive my passport, authorities asked my certificate of birth from Estonia, where I was born. According to the inquiry Estonians sent us my certificate in Estonian language. It was written there that my parents were Jewish.

My paternal grandmother had got 4 sons: my father Max, his elder brother Jacob, his younger brother Grigory (all of them were adult when they arrived in Petrograd) and the youngest one Emil (he was a schoolboy at that time). Though I was born in Tartu, I remember almost nothing about our life there. We left in 1933.

I already told you that Grigory, my father's younger brother was arrested before the beginning of the war for some reason and exiled to Kamchatka. Sometimes he sent us letters. Therefore now it seems to me that he was arrested not for political reason. You see, it happened even before the beginning of mass repressions. Besides he was allowed to correspond with his relatives. We often sent him parcels. Many times I watched my grandmother making up a parcel for Grigory. We sent him warm clothes. Unfortunately during the war our correspondence was not maintained (I do not remember the reason).

In 1937 authorities started mass repressions [4](#). My grandmother's sons were arrested first. They took all her sons except Emil, the youngest, who was a schoolboy at that time.

Special NKVD [5](#) Troika (no public trial) sentenced my father and his elder brother Jacob to 10 years of camps without right of correspondence. As we got to know much later (after Stalin's death) it meant execution (at bottom of fact).

I do not know when Jacob was born. In Leningrad he married a Russian girl Antonina. They had got a daughter. When he was arrested in 1937, his wife changed her surname for her maiden name. I think she also changed their daughter's surname ... At that time a lot of people did it: they were afraid to be relatives of enemies of the people [6](#). Authorities used to inform former coworkers of every new enemy of the people. I know nothing about Antonina's profession, but they often visited us and I remember that they were a family of real intellectuals. You see, that was the time of liquidation of Russian intelligentsia. They were engineers, very good specialists. Unfortunately I know very little about them. Asking my Mom, I tried to learn something only about my father. Of course I had to ask more...

Jacob was the 2nd to be arrested in our family. Grigory was the 1st one among my grandmother's sons. In 1937 it became clear for us that my father was in danger, too.

At that particular time (I remember it quite well) Misha Kushnarev, a cousin of Rive came to visit us and had a talk with my father. He said 'Max, things look black; you are near to be arrested.' Misha worked as an engineer in the sphere of timber industry (somewhere in Leningrad region). He said 'You should leave. You should come with me, you should disappear!' My father was very stubborn, he answered 'I am not guilty, there must be some misunderstanding.' And so on and so forth. So he



did not take the advice and you know the result...

Mom told me that my father was very sociable, very cheerful and liked to talk. I guess he had said too much in a company, and somebody informed NKVD against him (somebody who was evil-eyed). But when my father was taken away, we were not informed about any charges against him.

It happened in summer when we were at dacha [7](#). Father was alone at home. Our neighbors told us later that he was taken at night (we knew that it always happened at night time). They arrived in a black car (people called in Cherny Voron). They used to come together with a street cleaner, and father had to open the door. They made a search. Everything was turned upside down: all linen was thrown out of the wardrobe, all books were on the floor... Our neighbors informed us, and we immediately rushed home...

Mother addressed municipal officials and got to know that father was in the Kresty prison [a well-known prison on the territory of Leningrad]. At first Mom brought father food packages. And then one day they refused to take her package and informed that father was sentenced to 10 years of camps without right of correspondence. We never got to know where he was taken from Leningrad. I told you already that only much later we found out what it meant. My father was hopeful of justice, but alas: at that time there was no justice.

In 1958 my Mom received a certificate of father's death. It was written there that he was rehabilitated posthumously [8](#).

In 1992 I officially asked for additional information about my father's destiny (a victim of political repressions). I received another certificate (archival) in reply to my inquiry. It read that my father had been accused of espionage activity for the benefit of Estonia. In 1938 he was sentenced to execution, and executed by shooting. In 1938 victims of mass repressions used to be buried near Levashevo of Leningrad region. I got no more information about the burial place. Every year I visit Levashevo.

You already know that my grandmother was a merit pensioner of the Russian Federation, an old revolutionary. During mass repressions she was not arrested. I remember her gathering friends at home in the evenings. Probably there were lawyers among them, and they wrote letters to Voroshilov [9](#) and Zhdanov. [Zhdanov Andrey (1896-1948) was a Soviet communist party figure, a close companion-in-arms of Stalin.] They considered them to be important persons, worth to pay their attention to the facts. The answer was usually formal: do not worry, all circumstances would be investigated, innocent people would be released, guilty persons would be punished.

In 1940 my grandmother died from rupture of the heart. She was a hypertensive patient and suffered much...

After father's arrest in 1937 Mom had to work hard at her hairdressing saloon. She came home very late: it was necessary to earn money to feed children.

I remember that we never were rich. Possibly if we remained in Estonia we could have lived better... But we moved to Leningrad.

Authorities could have banished us from the city: a lot of family members of enemies of people had been banished to Siberia or to Kazakhstan. One day they said 'We are leaving.' And that was all.

Nobody knew where they moved... Fortunately we remained in Leningrad (I think due to my grandmother's merits).

On a lower floor there lived a family of Charles Shreder, a German engineer. I studied in the same school with his children (they were 3 or 4). I remember that the youngest boy had 6 fingers on his hand and used to show it everybody (he was little: 3 or 4 years old). One day I came to them and saw them very much upset: they had to leave. They were not arrested, they only had to leave somewhere: to Kazakhstan or to the Far East (to uncrowded regions). It was awful: people usually were taken directly to woods and given spades to dig earth-houses for living... It happened before the beginning of the war, in 1938 or 1940. Later I heard nothing about them.

A lot of foreigners lived in our house. Our neighbor in the flat overhead was an engineer from America. He had got a family and lived in a large room. I knew that engineer's son, we called him American. He was very orderly, self-restrained, and quiet. Besides he wore boots, long socks and shorts. Here nobody wore those things. We were dressed like tramps, we ran and shouted! He was absolutely different. I do not understand how we managed to become friends. He invited me to visit their apartment. There I saw different electric toys (for example, a toy railway which we could only dream about!). I remember that when I was going to visit them, Mom used to say 'Don't forget to say Good evening!'

His father, an engineer used to smoke a pipe. I remember their large room: one half of it was occupied by the engineer (his secretaire, his desk): he used to work there smoking his pipe. And we played in the opposite corner. In the middle of the room there was a large table separating 2 parts of the room.

In our communal apartment there lived two Germans. The woman's name was Elza (I do not remember her surname). She helped me in mathematics. Later they left Leningrad. They were not arrested. Probably they were German citizens and worked in Russia according to contract.

In fact there were many foreigners working in Russia at that time. There were Englishmen, too. I read the book by Evgenia Ginzburg (she was an active communist party figure). She wrote there that many Germans (foreign communists) had been taken to Stalin's camps. She did not explain the reason.

At present I got to know a lot from different books. I read there that mass repressions started in 1935. In 1935 authorities arrested communists who participated in Trotsky [10](#) and Bukharin coalition. [Bukharin Nikolay (1888-1938) was a well-known Soviet state and party figure.] And at school teachers told us that they were parricides. In fact the charges were trumped-up: Stalin wanted to destroy the old guards, who created the USSR. Stalin destroyed people without distinction [11](#), and engineers, too.

At present I read much. I always liked to read books, but now a lot of things move me to tears (I am old!). Authors of the books I read speak about many people lost during Stalin's repressions. People know about them almost nothing, only the fact that they were banished.

Time was getting on. The war burst out.

Most probably my father's elder brothers were executed by shooting. Grigory stopped sending letters to us (I guess he was also killed in the camp). Nobody of them was found alive.



Only Emil, my grandmother's younger son remained with us. Shortly before the war he finished his school (he was 18 years old). It was a good boy: he could draw very well, he studied very well. He was drafted. He went to the local military registration and enlistment office and what a surprise! They called him to serve in the navy. Why? He had got a congenital heart disease. Nevertheless... He showed us his new identity card with an anchor and a star.

Emil was appointed a political officer [12](#). During the war we corresponded. In 1943 he fought somewhere near Leningrad. Emil loved my younger brother very much. He used to send us his ration certificate. I keep one of those certificates till now.

In 1943 we received a notification that Emil was wounded, died and was buried in the town of Pitkyaranta [in Karelia]. My younger brother (before his departure to Israel) and I visited Pitkyaranta twice. There is a common grave, but we did not manage to find Emil's name. We went to the local Ispolkom [13](#), showed them a letter (a notification about Emil's death in Pitkyaranta). They promised to inscribe Emil's name on the stele (all victims had to be named there). We promised to check the result later, but did not manage: my brother left for Israel, and it is too much for me alone.

War began in 1941 when I was 12 years old. Mom said that at that time I was a typical idler (capricious and unmanageable child). I think I was simply spoilt: I had got too many tutors... Before the war burst out I finished 4 classes. Our form-master Ekaterina Nikolaevna, a very good teacher used to say that I was very lazy, but very capable. Nobody could set me on the right track. In the 4th form our math teacher considered me to be a dunce and tried to beat me on my head with a ruler.

In 1941 we hoped to start our school studies. But one clever local official decided to evacuate children of different ages to the Leningrad suburbs (later I read about it in a newspaper). Children were placed in pioneer camps [14](#). It happened in August, possibly authorities were afraid of bombardments. I guess they believed that the war would be finished quickly (like the Soviet-Finnish War [15](#)) and children would return home soon. But in fact everything turned out tragically. I remember that in the pioneer camp we spent about 2 months. And then one day Germans appeared very close to our camp... I am not sure that they understood who we were, but they started bombing and firing upon us as if we were a military unit. Our teachers jumped out of their cottages and shouted 'Children! Run into the wood! Germans are here!' And we ran in various directions into the wood. We never returned to the camp because we were very frightened, ran very far away and lost our way.

I found myself in a group of 7 or 8 children. Among us there was an elder girl. We weaved our way through the forest. At last we came up to the railroad and argued about the way to choose. Younger children got tired and started to cry 'We want to eat! We want to sleep!' Hobbling, we reached a railway station. There we saw a troop train ready to move to Leningrad. We asked soldiers to take us with them and described our situation. What could they do? The train commander agreed. Soldiers gave us food and the train moved. It moved very slowly because Germans controlled most roads. We arrived in Leningrad in the morning. Moscow railway station was situated not far from my home and half an hour later I already was at home.

My younger brother also was in a pioneer camp in the suburb of the city. After my return home Mom rushed there and managed to bring him home safely. So for us that was the beginning of the

war, blockade [16](#) and starvation.

From the very beginning of the war we got to know about fascist atrocities. We read newspapers. As for me I was subscribed to Leninskiye Iskry [a Soviet newspaper for pioneers], then to Komsomolskaya Pravda [a Soviet daily newspaper for youth audience] and later to Leningradskaya Pravda. We also listened to the radio. By the way, we used to know about bomb raids and bombardments from the radio (we also heard factories, steam locomotives, and automobiles honking in the beginning of bomb raids). On the radio they informed us about atrocities of fascists: probably informers were people who managed to escape from encirclements, came from partisan detachments, or gave information from occupied regions.

### • During the war

So the war burst out and we all remained in the besieged Leningrad: my younger brother Mark, Mom, my aunt Rive, her husband and I. We managed to survive during terrible starvation.

After the beginning of the war, people were ordered to liquidate all wooden constructions which could be burnt by fire-bombs. And in our yard there was a laundry (a wooden house). Yard keepers were mainly women (men were at the front), therefore boys of my age and older helped to demolish that building. We worked under direction of the yard keepers: leaned our weight upon the walls. We also had to paint wooden joist ceiling with special compound and prepare containers with water and sand in case of fire-bombing. Earlier we played, but during the war we had to work.

Later we got another job: to check blackout of windows. At that time in Leningrad electricity supply was still in order and we had to go around our house and check the blackout. If we noticed light, we ran to that apartment and informed our housemates. People listened to our requirements, because our lives depended on it. We were on duty almost every evening and it was interesting for us, because at that time we had nothing else to do and it was our responsibility. We were engaged in it till the beginning of winter when authorities cut off electricity supply.

At first they cut off water supply, and we had to bring water from Fontanka River (the gradual descent to the river was near our house). Adults made there a hole in ice. I used to take a long serving spoon and a three-liter bottle. Water was rather deep there in the hole, therefore I had to kneel on ice and draw the water. I remember that people stood in line to take water.

When the electricity supply was cut off, people thought out the so-called Leningrad wick lamps: a small bottle with kerosene (kerosene was on sale all the time) and a wick. I perfected the construction by using a toy metal wheel with a hole for fixing wick. People also had no firewood. We burnt chairs, tables, etc. Later we started burning books. We had a lot of them. I especially remember one book Maugli (it was large and colorful, its paper was of high-quality, its cover was red with beautiful gold stamping). The book was of great value for me; but one day I had to permit Mom to burn it, because she wanted to make tea...

At that time my brother attended a kindergarten: I took him there early in the morning and took him back home at 6 o'clock in the evening. Parents gave kindergarten employees their children's ration cards and they arranged 3 meals a day for children. But it was necessary to give Mark something to eat in the evening when he came home (Mom managed to give him something, I do not remember what exactly). My brother kept himself to himself and was sleepy all the time: he

could sleep both in the sitting and standing positions. At that time we all were sleepy and hungry, but I managed to keep control upon myself due to my important duties: I had to go shopping, bring water and firewood (in bombed-out houses we used to collect everything that could burn, including wall-paper).

Once in winter (in February) people could not get their ration of bread during 3 days. The reason was unknown: shop assistants explained that fascists had destroyed waterpipe by bombing. I guess it was not the reason, because people took water from Neva, from Fontanka and I think the employees of bread-baking plant did the same. People were informed about nothing, in spite of the fact that radio worked 24 hours a day. People stood in line near bakeries hoping to get bread. They stood 3 days and 3 nights: at night they did not leave for home because they were afraid to lose their place in line. People suffered much, because most of them were already exhausted and it was very frosty at night.

I remember myself standing in line near bakery keeping our ration cards in my right mitten. I was very sleepy and rested my back against the counter. I felt nothing, but when I woke up, I found out that my right mitten disappeared. I cried 'Oh! Where are my cards?' I searched the bakery for the mitten, but uselessly. I became very anxious, because the month was only in its first decade. I could not imagine myself telling Mom that I had lost the cards. Probably if Fontanka River was not covered with ice, I would have committed a suicide... I went along the street and cried. When I came home, Mom was at home. I said 'Mom, kill me: I lost our ration cards!' Mom embraced me, we cried together, and then she said 'Well, we have to survive...'

At that time people had no stocks. But Mom knew that in Leningrad there was a black market where it was possible to buy bread for jewelry. In the beginning of the war many people voluntarily gave their jewelry to authorities to help the army. Mom kept small golden wrist-watch in memory of Daddy: he had given it to her as a wedding present. Mom went to the black market and swapped it for 3 kilograms of bread. It saved our lives.

When fascists were going to storm Leningrad once again, authorities decided to evacuate mothers with 2 or more children. Therefore in spring of 1942 we were evacuated.

We received an order to be ready for leaving. A car brought us to the railway station. And we left, though we did not want to. We already heard about the Road of Life, knew that it was regularly bombed... Earlier it was on a voluntary basis, but at that moment we were ordered to leave and had to obey. Of course it was up to Mom (we were ready both to stay with her in Leningrad and to follow her everywhere).

In evacuation we were in Bashkiria, in a local village called Malomeleus (it was situated near the city of Belebey). [Belebey is situated 180 km far from Ufa.] In that village people burnt wood for heating. My brother and I had to chop firewood, and Mom worked. Local people showed us (boys) how to saw and cut wood. Mom worked as a hairdresser, but there was no hairdressing saloon, she had to go from one house of the village to another and offer her services. Not many people agreed... They used to give her food or clothes for her services.

Later I worked in the field: harrowed. We worked together with local guys, elder boys of 16 or 17 years old were our leaders. All the boys were good friends.

Evacuated people were given American humanitarian help: we received a lot of clothes. It was just in time, because we had already worn out our clothes. I got yellow trousers. Local boys ran after me crying 'American!' (they wore linsey-woolsey clothes). In reply I threw stones towards them, because they bothered me very much. Certainly I did not want to hurt anybody.

Later we moved to Bishbulyak town, because Mom was a hairdresser and nobody needed a hairdresser in the village. In the town she worked in the club where they showed movies every evening. There we lived a little bit better, because they gave a vegetable garden at our disposal. And we cut wood ourselves as we did before.

In evacuation I studied at school 2 years. I studied in winter, and worked in summer. We left for evacuation in 1942. There I repeated the 4th form (they checked my knowledge and found out that my level was rather low) and finished the 5th and the 6th ones. When we returned to Leningrad, it seemed to be too late for me to go on studying.

In evacuation Rose (wife of Mulya, my mother's brother) and her little daughter Raya lived with us for some period of time. Raya was about 4 years old at that time. At first they were evacuated to Kara-Kalpakia [autonomy of Uzbekistan]. Rose's surname was Vareyatova (the surname of my mother's brother and my mother's maiden name). Rose's husband perished at the front line. Raya was ill. They corresponded with us and Mom invited them to us (to Bashkiria).

They lived with us about a year. But Rose did not like it, because she could not find a job. You see, she was a fashionable dressmaker. But who was interested in fashionable underwear at that time? Besides there was no fabric at all (only sackcloth).

### • After the war and recent years

After the end of the war we got to know that my mother's mother who remained in Estonia (she refused to leave for evacuation because of her age) had been betrayed by her neighbors. When Germans occupied those territories, they started to destroy communists and Jews. Grandmother did not look like a Jewess (she was very old and gray-haired), but someone informed fascists that she was Jewish. They came and took her away. This information came to us from Rose, who returned to Estonia after the end of the war. I do not know who told her about grandmother. In Estonia they did not and do not like Jews in contrast to other western countries.

Raya graduated from the Pedagogical College and became a teacher. Later she worked in the district communist party committee. She was a Komsomol [17](#) member and later a Communist Party member.

I was already adult and more or less independent when I spent my first summer holiday with them. I do not remember how old was Rose at that time, but we were in touch with her, we corresponded. She often visited us together with Raya. In fact it was not a problem to go to Estonia from Leningrad: we used to go there by bus (no visa was required, because Estonia [18](#) was of one of Soviet Republics). Much later when Rose died, we attended her funeral...

We were in touch with Raya for a long time. She married a Russian guy, they had got 2 children. The boy's name was Igor and I do not remember the girl's name. Raya's surname was Zhanzharova. When everything was balled up [Perestroika [19](#) in Estonia, Estonians started

oppressing communists and Russians and people wanted to run away from Estonia. A lot of them arrived in Russia. But Raya had got friends abroad and decided to leave for Canada together with her children. Unfortunately she suddenly died from heart attack. We attended her funeral together with my brother, who is in Israel now. But Raya's children did left for Canada. We lost touch with them... Much later my brother's daughter found them through the Internet, they corresponded and already visited Raya's children in Canada!

My mother's sister Alexandra was married to Eugeny Shuster. They had got 2 children: Roman and Simon. Simon, the younger brother died during the war. Before the war he studied at the musical school (he played the violin). When the war burst out, he started working as a milling-machine operator at a plant. When the blockade began, all plants were evacuated, and his factory moved to Chelyabinsk. There he could not survive under unbearable conditions (he was only a boy, mamma's darling) and decided to run away from Chelyabinsk to Leningrad. They caught him on his way and sent to penal battalion [penal battalions consisted of military men who committed crimes during wartime], where he was killed. You see, the boy was considered to be a deserter!

Roman was a student of the 3rd course when he was drafted in 1939. He finished a school of younger commanders and fought at the German front line and later in Japan [20](#). When we finished war against Germany, our armies were moved to Japan [the interviewee is mistaken: they moved to the Far East, Soviet armies never were in Japan]. Roman returned home with a lot of military awards. I remember that he was an orderly of a high commander. After the end of the war he started working at the Leningrad cartographical factory. He considered himself to be too old for studying. All his life long he worked. Recently he became a pensioner, but unfortunately while crossing the street he was run over and died. Roman was married to a Russian woman, but they divorced long time ago (he did not marry for the 2nd time). He had got a son Anatoly Shuster. Anatoly lives in St. Petersburg. He is married to a Jewess.

I do not remember when aunt Alexandra arrived in Leningrad. I remember her and her husband well because we often visited each other. She stayed in Leningrad during the blockade. Aunt Alexandra received an award for defense of Leningrad: she was in fighting battalion [21](#) (they put out fire bombs on city roofs).

Alexandra died in 1980s and her husband died in 1975.

When we arrived in Leningrad after evacuation, we placed ourselves at aunt Alexandra's room, because our room appeared to be occupied. At that time Roman was still in the army. They lived in a 2-room communal apartment (occupied 1 room). And next door there lived Valya, a girl whom Roman married later. She was very nice and I often gave her the look. I was 16 years old, and she was older (maybe 20). She was very sociable and we frequently talked about nothing.

Rive, my grandmother's sister survived the war: she evacuated from Leningrad in February 1942 (through the Road of the Life [22](#)), but I do not know where they went. Rive together with her husband returned to Leningrad in autumn of 1945.

We were in evacuation till 1945 and then returned to Leningrad. At that time it was possible to be hired for disassembling blockages in Leningrad. Recruiters made contracts and gave people advance payment. So we signed a contract. You know that only Mom was able to work there, but we all were hired. I do not know how she managed to arrange it (possibly she bribed the recruiter

or did something else). That was the way we returned to Leningrad [23](#).

When we returned to Leningrad, it was difficult time for us, because our room had been occupied. We lodged at mother's sister and they had only one room. We slept in the kitchen, in the corridor, everywhere. You see, our room (warm and cozy) was occupied by a woman (our former neighbor). We were at law with her during all summer long. We still had our residence permit [24](#) and had the right to get our room back. We successfully got it back and moved from Rive's place to our empty room.

Mom told me 'You should continue your studies.' But I was already 16 years old. I answered 'Mom, I'll enter an industrial school.' [Industrial schools gave young people who finished 7 classes a worker's profession.] I went there myself, while at that time a lot of young people received an order from authorities to become a student of an industrial school.

I realized that it was necessary to help Mom earning money for living. She worked as a hairdresser and her salary was not adequate to support our family. Mom cried when I told her about my decision. She asked me to enter a technical school and promised to do her best to make both ends meet. [Technical School in the USSR and a number of other countries was a special educational institution preparing specialists of middle level for various industrial and agricultural institutions, transport, communication, etc.] But I refused: technical schools offered a small stipend and industrial schools gave students packed meal. So I made my decision (it happened in 1945).

I remember that when I came to the local communist party committee to get a permit, they were very surprised: a Jew was going to study at industrial school on voluntary basis! I explained them everything regarding financial situation in our family. I said that I wanted to help my Mom.

I had some plans. Before I made that decision I got advice from some elderly men. They said that wood or metal turner was a very good profession: I would have large salary and there would be no need to get higher education. I understood it, but planned to work and become a part-time student.

Well, indeed I was the only Jew at our industrial school. I know that Jewish families were skeptical regarding working class.

At my industrial school and later in the army I came across no manifestations of anti-Semitism. Soldiers in the army sometimes laughed at me, but friendly. But later (I am sure in it!) my nationality [25](#) played a trick on me. I was sent to penal battalion and found myself among young guys who had been not lucky to be on the occupied territory. They told me that during the war they were forced by Germans to serve in police under the threat of execution. Most of them were 16-19 years old at that time. Later they gave themselves up on voluntary basis, but were taken to the penal battalion. They laughed 'We know the reason why we are here, and what about you?' At that time it did not come to my mind that it could be connected with my item 5. It was necessary to fight there (in the penal battalion) and for me it made no difference.

Now I realize that my item 5 influenced my life greatly... Perhaps it was additional minus to my status of a member of family of the enemy of people. I never told anybody about my father. I hoped that most people would not rake over the dust and ashes of my past. If I was asked about my father, I answered that he had been killed in fights with fascists. Probably, real facts were



recorded somewhere in my documents and interested people were able to find them, but the rest were not concerned. For instance, at our industrial school people did not care. To tell the truth, it surprised me a little: our school was situated at a military factory. That factory was a former shipyard, adjoining the Admiralteysky dockyard [the Admiralty dockyard was founded in 1704]. At that time our factory produced submarines - so it was in the secret list. Of course they had a valid reason not to admit me into the school. Probably I was a small fry for them. Anyway it happened.

I finished my industrial school and got the 5th grade (rather high for a final-year student of industrial school). My school-leaving certificate was full of good marks (do you remember my school teacher of mathematics?), because I liked studying at my school!

Due to my 5th working grade I got draft deferment. Therefore I was called up for military service at the age of 21, when all draft deferments were cancelled by authorities. I already told you that they sent me to a penal battalion - and I know nothing about the reason.

In the army I was a private. My fellow and I got axes and arm-saws. We were taken to the forest and got an order to cut 8 cubic meters of wood. Every day.

All my life long I went in for sports. I liked different kinds of sport and managed to get the 2nd category in track-and-field athletics and the 1st category in skiing.

In the army my physical fitness was of great assistance for me. At first we (together with my partner) could not fulfill our norm. Our political officer said 'I see that your team works rather badly.' And he took my partner away from me. Instead of him he gave me another guy, a real musclemann. That guy looked at me appraisingly and said 'He will not be able to follow my working pace.' I was silent. And the political officer said 'Try him!' So we started. I decided not to ask for his mercy until he himself stopped sawing. At last he became covered with sweat, I was wet also, and both of us got tired. But I won. Later he said 'I never expected it from a guy like you'.

To tell the truth, I looked rather weak: I was only 1,68 m high and my weight was 60 kg... But probably sport works wonders. For example, in order to ski 15-20 kilometers you need both spirit and strength. I liked sport. I considered skiing to be sport for horses. I dreamed to become a coach (to enter a school for coaches at the Leningrad College of Physical Culture named after Lesgaft). [Leningrad College of Physical Culture named after Lesgaft was founded in 1896.] But in order to become a student I had to finish 7 classes. After my army service I went to the 6th form (again) of the evening school. By the way, later I did not manage to enter the College of Physical Culture, because I failed at the Russian language examination. But my achievements in sports were much better.

After 3 months in the army during the evening roll-call an officer suddenly read out an order: 'Private Eirus is placed under the orders of the Leningrad military department beginning from tomorrow morning.' Soldiers' eyes started from their sockets. The same was with my eyes. What was the matter? The point was that all qualified workers from our factory had been drafted and the factory failed to fulfill the production plan. The director was reprimanded. He tried to explain that the factory lacked qualified workers and authorities brought all of us back to the factory. It happened in 1951.

After that I worked at our factory. Meanwhile I finished 10 classes. Then I entered and 6 years later graduated from the Timber College (evening course) in 1964. I decided to tread in my father's steps. I expected to be sent somewhere according to mandatory job assignment [26](#). But they gave me my diploma and let me go to the four winds. I found a job of engineer-designer and worked at different research institutions.

On graduation from my College I got acquainted with my future wife. We are still married. We have got a son. My wife Margarita Goldina was born in Khabarovsk in 1938. She graduated from the Sanitary College in Leningrad. She works as a department head at a regional sanitary and epidemiologic station. I got acquainted with her when I was 35 years old: I had no time earlier.

My wife's mother Maria is Russian. She worked in hospital as a doctor. My wife's father Efim Goldin was a Jew from Mogilev, a retired lieutenant colonel. All his life long he worked in the Far East. He knew Japanese language very well. He used to say that it was Japanese language that saved his life when a lot of professional soldiers suffered from repressions. Efim was able not only to speak, but also to make leaflets, write newspaper articles in Japanese, he also worked with prisoners. Efim knew that if he was in Leningrad, he would have been arrested for sure. He served in different regions on the country; therefore my wife (being a little girl) studied at different schools in great number of towns. By the way, it engraved in my mind that there was a period in their life when they lived in Birobidzhan [27](#).

Family of my wife observed no Jewish traditions, because her father was a political worker and a military man. They were absolutely not religious. You see, civilians were able to have private life, but political workers were treated more strictly [28](#), especially in the army. Military men use to live in military camps together with their families. Very often their families live in the same house with families of other officers as in large communal apartment; therefore it is difficult to keep secrets. And we must take into account that at that time there was a terrible number of informers. Anyway my wife came from not religious family.

At first I worked at the Research Institute of Mechanical Engineering. There I had problems with the chiefs. My work was interesting. I was fond of new industrial technologies and I worked in the department of new technologies. I already chose my future dissertation topic and it was approved. I only needed to make an agreement with the head of laboratory, because it was necessary for me to have access to laboratory for carrying out tests.

I addressed the laboratory chief with a suggestion to change my working place for his laboratory. He asked me about the reason. I answered frankly that I was going to write a dissertation and it was necessary for me to work on vibrating machines. He refused. I guess my item 5 played its role. Besides he was a PhD and was afraid of rivals. You see, I heard rumors about him: he was that sort of a department head who had to receive and approve suggestions of different development engineers in his duty bound. People said he collected a number of those innovations, summarized and gave himself out to be the real author of them. I think it was possible.

This story had its background. Some time before I suggested my first invention. Talking to him, I hinted that I had no objection to his participation in my work. I said that I appreciated his experience. In fact it was an invitation to become my co-designer. He seemed to agree and took my data. But several months later when I reminded him about our talk, he said 'No, we will not work together. We will submit our ideas separately'.

In our Institute there was a Patent Department, where employees checked every invention before applying for a patent in Moscow. The process of checking usually took about a year and covered both our country and foreign ones. Regarding my first invention, I made that check together with my coworkers earlier and the Patent Department employees knew me very well. One day they called me and informed that they received another application for patent from that laboratory head. They said that the topic was very similar to mine. They also asked me why I was not present in the list of authors. I visited the Department and found out that he took my idea as a basis and added some details! Point at issue! But as I had registered my invention first, the Institute director decided to send my application first.

So the laboratory head nursed a grievance against me, in spite of the fact that I had invited him to become my co-author. It was him who appeared to be unscrupulous! And certainly he started to press me. I understood that it was time to leave the Institute. And I left my service.

Later (since the beginning of 1970s) I worked in different institutions, I already told you about it. I have six copyright certificates. But it brought me no profit...

When my brother left for Israel (it happened approximately in 1996), he called me to follow him, but I refused. The point is that I am an engineer and I like to work. In the beginning of 1990s (when Perestroika came) they simply knocked me out from the institute and said that I could take comfort in my pension (at least), while many other people had got nothing. But I considered myself to be still able to work; I considered my head to be still worth something. You see, in fact Israel is a large village! They have no industry: mainly rural economy. They certainly try to regulate, but it is very difficult for them. Even now when my brother comes to visit me (he usually does it every 2 years), he says that it is very difficult to find job in Israel.

Germany is absolutely different. Everybody knows that it is a hi-tech industrial country with advanced exact science. I wanted to go to Germany. It also happened many years ago: approximately when my brother left for Israel. Germany offered to cover traveling expenses and free-of-charge accommodation. At present it is better not to go there: it is useless. Recently a friend of mine had to come back from Germany: welfare payment was the only income she could get there. But those people, who managed to leave for Germany earlier, live there much better. I remember a lot of people standing in line to get into the German embassy! At that time I wanted to leave for Germany together with my son. But later everything changed: my son found good work and decided that it would be silly to give up his new work.

My son Igor was born in 1964. He finished 7 classes, then technical school. He was sent to work at a car pool. But later he changed it for a bread-baking plant. He worked there as a driver till Perestroika. At present he repairs automobiles at a privately owned car repair service: it means that his salary is high. He is married for the 2nd time. And I have two grandsons; Alexey and Mikhail (Alexey is by my son's previous marriage). His wife's name is Elena.

And my brother and his family live in Israel. They are very pleased to have left. At present we are often informed about firing in Israel. I suggest my brother's family to come back if they are frightened. They answer 'No, we'll never return!' They left about 10 years ago, when Israel already became independent. Sorry, I am not sure about the Israeli historical events: I do not keep my eye on it...

My brother's daughter Julia was the 1st to leave for Israel. She graduated from the Architectural College. [The Architectural College was founded in 1832.] She started working at the beginning of Perestroika and soon realized that she had no future there as an engineer. She also had nobody in sight regarding marriage: all men around her were married.

Here in St. Petersburg we used to receive appreciable assistance from the Hesed Avraham Welfare Center [29](#): food packages and medical care. But it depends on your pension: the poorer you are the greater assistance you get. To tell the truth, since my pension had been increased (I have a status of the former citizen of the besieged Leningrad), I did stop addressing the Hesed Center.

We never received any assistance from Germany.

- **Glossary:**

## **[1](#) NEP**

The so-called New Economic Policy of the Soviet authorities was launched by Lenin in 1921. It meant that private business was allowed on a small scale in order to save the country ruined by the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War. They allowed priority development of private capital and entrepreneurship. The NEP was gradually abandoned in the 1920s with the introduction of the planned economy.

## **[2](#) Kalinin, Mikhail (1875-1946)**

Soviet politician, one of the editors of the party newspaper Pravda, chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of the RSFSR (1919-1922), chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR (1922-1938), chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1938-1946). He was one of Stalin's closest political allies.

## **[3](#) 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.

## **[4](#) 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.

## **5 NKVD**

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

## **6 Enemy of the people**

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

## **7 Dacha**

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

## **8 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

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

## **9 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)**

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

## **10 Trotsky, Lev Davidovich (born Bronshtein) (1879-1940)**

Russian revolutionary, one of the leaders of the October Revolution of 1917, an outstanding figure of the communist movement and a theorist of Marxism. Trotsky participated in the social-democratic movement from 1894 and supported the idea of the unification of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks from 1906. In 1905 he developed the idea of the 'permanent revolution'. He was one of the leaders of the October Revolution and a founder of the Red Army. He widely applied repressive measures to support the discipline and 'bring everything into revolutionary order' at the front and the home front. The intense struggle with Stalin for the leadership ended with Trotsky's defeat. In

1924 his views were declared petty-bourgeois deviation. In 1927 he was expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Kazakhstan, and in 1929 abroad. He lived in Turkey, Norway and then Mexico. He excoriated Stalin's regime as a bureaucratic degeneration of the proletarian power. He was murdered in Mexico by an agent of Soviet special services on Stalin's order.

## **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 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."

## **13 Ispolkom**

After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

## **14 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.



## **15 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)**

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannenengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannenengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

## **16 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.

## **17 Komsomol**

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

## **18 Estonia in 1939-1940**

on September 24, 1939, Moscow demanded that Estonia make available military bases for the Red Army units. On June 16, Moscow issued an ultimatum insisting on the change of government and the right of occupation of Estonia. On June 17, Estonia accepted the provisions and ceased to exist de facto, becoming Estonian Soviet Republic within USSR.

## **19 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.

## **20 War with Japan**

In 1945 the war in Europe was over, but in the Far East Japan was still fighting against the anti-fascist coalition countries and China. The USSR declared war on Japan on 8 August 1945 and Japan signed the act of capitulation in September 1945.

## **21 Fighting battalion**

People's volunteer corps during World War II; its soldiers patrolled towns, dug trenches and kept an eye on buildings during night bombing raids. Students often volunteered for these fighting battalions.

## **22 Road of Life**

It was a passage across Lake Ladoga in winter during the Blockade of Leningrad. It was due to the Road of Life that Leningrad survived in the terrible winter of 1941-42.

## **23 Official invitation for residence in Leningrad**

after the lift of the siege in Leningrad in January 1944, the city authorities established temporary restrictions on the evacuated citizens' return home. These restrictions were caused by considerable destruction of available housing and municipal services and acute shortage of housing. For entry in Leningrad, it was necessary to have an official invitation of a ministry, plant, establishment, or a member of the family residing in the city. Such an invitation was called 'a call-in'.

## **24 Residence permit**

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

## **25 Item 5**

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

## **26 Mandatory job assignment in the USSR**

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

## **27 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues

up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

## **28 Struggle against religion**

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

## **29 Hesed**

Meaning care and mercy in Hebrew, Hesed stands for the charity organization founded by Amos Avgar in the early 20th century. Supported by Claims Conference and Joint Hesed helps for Jews in need to have a decent life despite hard economic conditions and encourages development of their self-identity. Hesed provides a number of services aimed at supporting the needs of all, and particularly elderly members of the society. The major social services include: work in the center facilities (information, advertisement of the center activities, foreign ties and free lease of medical equipment); services at homes (care and help at home, food products delivery, delivery of hot meals, minor repairs); work in the community (clubs, meals together, day-time polyclinic, medical and legal consultations); service for volunteers (training programs). The Hesed centers have inspired a real revolution in the Jewish life in the FSU countries. People have seen and sensed the rebirth of the Jewish traditions of humanism. Currently over eighty Hesed centers exist in the FSU countries. Their activities cover the Jewish population of over eight hundred settlements.