Boris Lerman

I met Boris Yosefovich in his 5th floor apartment. He and his wife Faina Vladimirovna are very hospitable hosts. Boris Yosefovich is a talkative, energetic and a cheerful person despite his suffering during the siege of Leningrad 1 and the Great Patriotic War 2, as well as since the death of his son.

He recently celebrated his 81st birthday and continues to lead an active life.

He has a good memory and is an excellent storyteller. Moreover, his friendliness and humor make his life story even more impactful.
It was a real pleasure to listen to his recollections and we are lucky that Boris Yosefovich shared his memories with us.

My family background

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Glossary

My family background

There is a saying that goes: ‘we all come from childhood.’ However, I like to be more specific: I come from the Jewish shtetl Ushachi in the Vitebsk province (now it is in Vitebsk region on the territory of Belarus - 40 kilometers far from the city of Polotsk). The city is situated on the bank of the Dvina River. It is also home to the picturesque Ushacha River, which is 70 kilometers long. In fact, the settlement was founded in the 17th century on the banks of the Ushacha River. The original settlers included Jews. It was a unique beautiful territory of lakes and woods full of fish and animals - gifts of nature. It did not take the citizens much time to reach a lake or a wood – the settlements were surrounded by nature.

Polotsk is now 1,140 years old. The city has a rich history. One can still find a small, one-storied house, where the Russian tsar Peter the Great lived for some time. And it was in Polotsk where local citizens aided in Napoleon’s defeat.

My father, his father, and his grandfather were born in Ushachi. My father’s name was Yosef, and my grandfather’s name was Shimen-Dovid. My grandfather died in 1915.

My father had had two elder brothers named Zalman and Isaya. Their houses were next door to ours. They also had a younger sister named Menye. She married a young local man, Sinkin. In 1911

they left for America. When they settled in New York, they sent special invitations for Menye's brothers to join them in America. I saw the invitation at home; everybody forgot about it. We probably only remembered it once we were living in the ghetto.

My Mum's name was Hane-Seyne (many of us had two names). She was born in 1879 in the settlement Drissa, which is situated on the Zapadnaya Dvina River (Vitebsk province, Belarus). Her maiden name was Klet. She was very beautiful. Shadkhan arranged her marriage, bringing her from Drissa for my father. They got married in approximately 1903. Their wedding took place in a synagogue (with a chuppah, etc.) according to all of the Jewish rules. At that time there were no official wedding records. Rather, my parents just remembered that they got married in the winter, sometime before Chanukkah and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905.

My parents also connected the dates of their children's births with different holidays, events, circumstances, or seasons. Then, when it came time for my siblings to leave home, they obtained their certificates of birth according to their appearance and with the help of witnesses. I was the first among our family members to receive the correct official certificate of birth (for June 24, 1925).

By 1922, my parents already had seven children: two daughters (Nekhama and Libe) and five sons (Berl, Haim, Shimen, Ele, Isaak).

In 1923, my oldest sister, Nekhama, moved to Petrograd [Petrograd was renamed Leningrad after Lenin's death in 1924]. My parents then had six children, but that did not last for long. In the same year, Mikhael was born. And again father had to work hard to support seven children.

In 1925, Libe left for Leningrad, but I was born immediately after she left. And again our family had seven children. I was named Bentse (Bentsion). I became Boris much later in the reserve regiment #111. This is how my name was 'changed:' Before our departure for the training tank battalion, the first sergeant asked my first and last names in order to complete the muster roll. I, of course, told him my real name. But the first sergeant interrupted me: 'What is your name, again? Say it in Russian.' He ordered for me to say my 'real' Russian name. I said 'Boris,' and that is how Boris became my name.

In 1927, Berl left for Leningrad too, but after his departure Leybe was born. Leybe was my parents' last child. Despite the fact that he was the youngest, he was very talented. Nowadays we call such children prodigies. He did very well in school—so much so that his classmates gave him a nickname: a mathematician. He was the best in chess (we made chess-men of spool of thread and drew chess-board on a cardboard). But during the war he was executed by shooting together with my parents by fascists.

When our parents had seven children, my father had to work hard to support a family of nine. How did he manage?! It is difficult to imagine.

Father began his professional life as a smith, and later (in the beginning of 1920s) he trained to be a wagoner.

He earned money mainly conveying passengers and luggage from Ushachi to Polotsk and back. Besides that he had to take care of the horse and the cow and to chop firewood for winter, etc. To tell the truth, even when the elder sons started helping my father, the hardest part of work still

rested on his shoulders.

To this day, I am haunted by the tune of a song my father used to sing while working (Michael Alexandrovich, a Soviet singer sang it and I still take care of his record). The song is called ‘Bin ich mir a Fuhrman.’ Here is its literal translation:

My home is road,

My bed is a cart.

My work is to hurry.

The horse is running at full speed.

In summer and in winter,

In hot and cold weather,

On the sands and in the marsh,

I sing this song.

And my Mum! I guess she deserves many awards, if we consider the fact that nowadays, mothers with only three children receive social services benefits. And my Mum (think about it!) gave birth to ten children and had no maternity leaves. She even knew nothing about maternity hospitals. And she spent so many days and sleepless nights beside the cradle, singing lullabies…

She washed many baby linens, worried about her children when they were sick (you understand that they were sick very often). She never received assistance from a nurse-maid. In Ushachi there were a lot of women who wanted to work as nurses, but my family could not afford such a service. Mum was pregnant almost all of the time, but she went on working till the very day of delivery. I remember my elder brothers joking: Leybe (the tenth child) was practically born in the vegetable garden near our cabbage plants.

Mum had to take care not only of her children. In fact, at that time, we did not have gas, electric, water supply, or central heating. Mum had to get up early in the morning to start a fire (kerosene was in short supply).

She also had to bring and chop firewood, bring water from far distances, and ‘invent’ breakfast for the entire family. I say ‘invent’ because we always lacked food. However Mum managed to feed and do all of the washing for every member of our large family. She was an excellent cook, because before her wedding she had worked as a cook for a rich Jewish family.

In Ushachi, each family had many children, but less than ten. Only our parents had ten children. Father and Mother were very proud of it and they did their best to send children to cheder and to Jewish school. In Ushachi there were two schools: Belarus secondary school and Jewish junior school. Although we children had more opportunities for education, our parents had received only a religious education.

The Jewish school was very small. There were small classrooms with school desks for pupils (three seats each). Our teachers were very strict, but fair. The teachers were also very competent and did

their best to help us in our studies and to grow up to be worthy Jews. As such, we took examinations and did not cheat.

There were people in need everywhere. There was shortage of everything: copybooks, pens, pencils, ink, etc. At school they gave us one textbook every two or three pupils. From spring until autumn we went to school barefoot. Sometimes they gave out one or two boots, but the children without fathers always received these shoes.

There were a lot of poor families. Some houses had dirt floors and windows at the ground level. Only tailors, shoemakers, tinsmiths, tradesmen, and office workers always had work and therefore managed to make ends meet. Wagoners lost their jobs when people started to have cars.

During the second half of the 1930s, the Sunday market in Uschachi was filled with people. It was possible to buy high-quality food there. You only had to have money.

In our shtetl there were three synagogues and two Jewish cemeteries. My parents and uncles Isaya and Zalman were very religious. At home we spoke only Yiddish: it was our mother tongue and favorite language. All of my siblings and I finished Jewish school and we all also studied in cheder – actually, all of them but me. By the time I started my education, the cheders were already closed. [In 1918 Soviet authorities permitted national minorities to teach their children at schools in their mother tongue. But in 1938 they issued an edict ordering to teach all schoolchildren in Russian.] To clarify, Cheder literally means ‘a room’ in Hebrew. In the context of education, a cheder is a room where children gather to study Hebrew and Torah.

Father was very religious. He never missed the morning prayers and always put on tefillin. He always took tefillin with him when he went out of town. And God forbid if he got home late on a Friday evening and missed lighting the Shabbat candles! He was not educated but was still a very wise person. Many people asked his advice (for example when they wanted to buy a horse or a cow).

Although Father was very religious, my parents never dressed according to Jewish tradition. Instead, they wore very modest secular clothes. Most of our neighbors were religious Jews.

We usually met our relatives in synagogue and at market on Sundays.

Members of our family never traveled farther than to Polotsk, and the purpose of those trips was only business affairs. We did not even consider going on vacations.

Also, Father was never called up [for military service].

Politically, our family was very loyal to the government. My parents never criticized the actions of authorities (or at least they never discussed their dissatisfactions in the presence of their children). They were afraid of saying too much; therefore, they always warned me to keep my mouth shut.

Growing up

I did not attend kindergarten. Rather, I stayed at home with Mum, my brothers, and my sisters. I do not remember having any particular school-like activities. We always had chores in the house and in the vegetable garden to do, regardless of our age. We also used to help grazing a cow and a horse.

We lived in a wooden house. During the winter, we closed half of the house to save on firewood for heating. We had no bathroom or bathhouse. We had to rent a bathhouse for washing until we built our own in 1935. We had no orchard, only a vegetable garden with potatoes and other vegetables. We kept a cow and poultry. Our parents never had servants. As I mentioned before, us children always worked around the house according to our abilities.

Our family lived modestly financially since only Father worked. You remember that our parents had ten children (seven of them lived at home; the older children had left home). Still, it was impossible for us to survive without our vegetable garden and a cow.

At home we had only religious books. Other books we borrowed at school. We did not subscribe to newspapers, but bought them. There was a library in Ushachi and it was possible to borrow books there, too.

I studied four languages: Yiddish, Belarusian, Russian, and German. At school I liked all subjects and received only excellent marks. I studied Yiddish for seven years and managed to finish my Yiddish education before Jewish schools were closed in 1938. I never studied Hebrew.

I remember many of our teachers. After the end of the war I saw some of them. The son of one of our teachers lived in Leningrad, and she always visited him after her retirement. We met since I was also living in Leningrad at that time.

Our family was religious and our parents were members of the Jewish community. We strictly observed all Jewish traditions (such as kashrut and the Sabbath). In fact, our family ate only kosher food. We had separate dishes for dairy and meat dishes, and special set of plates and dishes for Pesach (we kept these dishes in the attic during the rest of the year). We celebrated all Jewish holidays and went to synagogue. Despite our poverty, we celebrated Sabbath and holidays according to all religious rules and traditions.

For example, a month or so before Pesach it was time to make matzah. In 1930s, the authorities did not officially forbid making matzah, but they actively propagandized against it. At school, teachers strictly warned us not to take part in making matzah and threatened to expel from the Pioneer organization 4. Mum asked all of us to keep my participation in matzah making a secret. Everybody did.

Since my parents had eight sons, they arranged for a circumcision on the eighth day for each boy, as prescribed by the tradition.

I remember that at school, teachers started explaining that we lived better than we were before the October Revolution of 1917. They told us to ask our parents and to compare the ways of living before and after the Revolution.

So I asked Mum and she answered: ‘We were satisfied with food and well dressed. We lived better before the Revolution.’ At school I retold her words, and teachers cursed and almost expelled me.

We were surrounded by a lot of young people and children, so we had a good time! We used to gather at somebody’s house, play mandolins and balalaikas, and tell stories. In summer we went to the woods to gather berries and mushrooms and to swim in the lake. And in winter we went to ski and skate (we used self-made skis and skates since we had no money to buy new ones).

We often went horseback riding late at night. I enjoyed riding and especially liked to gallop bareback at full speed.

Although we had a lot of fun, there were also many negative aspects of life: fights at school and in the streets, unauthorized visits of the authorities to the gardens of collective-farms 5, and punishments for grazing horses on the collective-farm fields. Sometimes we were whipped for it. Gershen, a horse-trainer, would get particularly angry for the latter infraction. Many times he arrested our cow and horse, took them away from the field, and kept them in a shed as hostages until we brought him ransom (three or five rubles).

Despite the disorderly aspects of life, Jewish life flourished. People arranged weddings with chuppot, brit milot [circumcisions], Bar Mitzvot. On Purim, young people used to come to the Great Synagogue carrying rattles and other gadgets to make noises at the appropriate times. Sometimes we made so much noise that they sent us out of the synagogue.

In our shtetl we had our own Hakhamim [wise men], sorcerers, midwives, and physicians. Here I'd like to tell you about our neighbor Ele-Rose. When somebody got ill, they went to her for a so-called 'treatment' (now I recollect it with horror!). She would put her dirty hands into somebody's mouth or lick specks of dust away from somebody's eye.

When I read Sholem Aleichem 6 or Dovid Bergelson 7 (descriptions of Jewish life in shtetls), it seems to me that they describe my shtetl Ushachi: our life, troubles, and habits. Sholem Aleichem explained why Jews laughed and made fun all the time, despite their bitter lot and poverty: they had no choice but to do so.

The Jews of Ushachi experienced difficulties under all political regimes. I remember Mum told me that during the Civil War 8, two strong Russians from the Red Army came to Uschachi. They demanded gold and threatened to shoot everyone if their demands were not fulfilled. Mum started crying and asking for mercy. But they ordered Mother and Father to go to the closet and shot at them through the door. Father and Mother lay on the floor and therefore remained safe. Those guys took a bag of grain and left. And the hole made by the bullet remained in the closet door forever as a reminder of a happy ending.

At the end of 1920s and beginning of 1930s, the GPU 10 often arrested Jews and demanded gold, too. One day my father was also taken away to the GPU office, which was situated in a small house. I stood near the window and watched them beating him. In the afternoon they arrested Mum, and placed her into prison. But by the evening father was released (he was black and blue, his ear was smashed), and two days later Mum was released, too.

In the middle of 1930s, authorities started their slow but sure attack against Jewish culture and religion.

Local authorities gathered shoemakers and decided to create a workmen's cooperative association. They needed a space for their gatherings. So the authorities arrived at a wise decision to arrange the workshop in the Great Synagogue. To be fair, it is necessary to add that in the remarkable Roman-Catholic church they also arranged a special office where people brought their vegetables, fruit, mushrooms and berries to sell.

In 1936 authorities started building a new brick two-storied Jewish school. I transported bricks from brick-works to the building site in a cart for a scanty salary. But, alas! The building was constructed, but it did not house the Jewish school. In 1938, the government closed all Jewish schools. That school became a Belarusian school. Jewish, Belarusian, and Russian children studied there together.

After finishing school, young people tended to leave Ushachi. In 1938, my brother Mikhael left for Leningrad (he was born in 1923), and in 1940 it was my turn to leave.

I went by car for the first time in my life at the age of fifteen. In our shtetl there was only one car, and all of us went to the owner asking to go for a drive.

And my first trip by train was in 1940 when I went to Leningrad—before that I had never seen a train and had never left Uschachi. In Leningrad, I entered the Industrial School #7. [In industrial schools they trained young people to attain working specialties]. That school belonged to the plant named after Voroshilov 11. I studied in the group of opticians and mechanics. I finished the school and started earning money little by little, but then the war broke out.

In the Industrial School it was necessary to fill out a questionnaire about my siblings. It took a long time, and the employee who was assisting me got very tired and even asked to take a break from this hard work!

Nekhama (Nina) was my eldest sister. According to her documents she was born in 1908, but she was actually born in 1905. In 1923 she left for Leningrad where she worked and graduated from the Technological College. She got married in 1933. After the end of the war she gave birth to three sons, at this time they are all alive. She died in Leningrad in 1996 at the age of 90.

Libe (Lyuba) was born in 1907. She also left for Leningrad and worked there as a nurse. Later (during the war with Finland 12 and the Great Patriotic War, too) she worked in a military hospital. She died in 1968 at the age of 60. Libe had two children. Her daughter lives in St. Petersburg, and her son in Jerusalem.

Berl was born in 1909. He graduated from the Leningrad Pedagogical College. During the war he was at the front line. He died in 1990 at the age of 80.

Haim was born in 1913, Shimen in 1915, and Ele in 1917. All of them finished only Jewish junior school. During the war Haim and Shimen (as well as Berl) were at the front line. They died in Leningrad in 1993 and 1986, respectively. Haim’s two children died during the war, and Shimen’s daughter lives now in Jerusalem (Israel).

I’d like to tell you about my brother Ele later and in more detail.

Isaak was born in 1920. He graduated from the Pedagogical Technical School and worked as a teacher of German language in high school of Kublichi (20 kilometers far from Ushachi). He knew German perfectly. I’ll tell you about his death later.

Mikhael was born in 1923. In Leningrad, he graduated from the Timber Industry College and worked at the Institute of Fish Industry. During the war he was at the front line. Mikhael died in 2000 in Jerusalem (Israel). His son lives in Israel, and his daughter in Germany.

I went to Leningrad, and my mother, father, and younger brother Leybe remained in Ushachi. Leybe was a still schoolboy. Isaak worked as a teacher in Kublichi. My brother Ele, his wife Ester, and their four-year-old daughter Sonya lived in Polotsk.

With almost all of their children out of the house, it was time for my parents to reap the rewards of their hard work. It was fantastic that they managed to raise ten children without any assistance! All their children were already able to offer financial assistance to our parents, and I looked forward to receiving my first salary to do so as well. When Mum saw me off to the train from Polotsk to Leningrad, I promised her that I would come back in a year for holidays and bring her the most beautiful dress I could find. But I never received my first salary. And who ever would have thought that we parted, we would never meet again.

During the war

The Germans arrived in Ushachi on July 4, 1941. They arrived easily: in our area, the fascist armies moved forward with barely any resistance. In fact, on the sixth day of the war, the Germans took Minsk [capital of Belarus; Minsk is located250 kilometers from Ushachi]. Jews were so confused about what to do and where to move. Still, at that time, they believed that Germans would not harm innocent old people and children. Only several families left all their property and ran away before Germans appeared. Those Jews who remained in Ushachi perished later.

Among those who remained was my brother Ele. He (together with his family) came to Ushachi to visit our parents. On July 4, 1941 (early in the morning) they tied their cow to the cart and started moving eastward. Several families followed them. Having covered 35 kilometers, they reached the small Ulla River and saw the wooden bridge in ruins. The retreating Red Army soldiers, who did not want Germans to cross the river and pursue them, had destroyed it the day before. The Jews became panic-stricken. At that moment, the Germans approached them and ordered to come back home. The carts returned home.

At first, the Germans left Jews alone. It was a disturbing calm.

Later, my cousin Aron, Isaya’s son (Isaya was my father’s brother) was the first in our family executed by Germans. And at the end of summer 1941, all Jews in Ushachi were ordered to move to the left bank of the river into houses located around the small synagogue (those houses were cleared out beforehand). So that was the way ghetto in Ushachi was organized. Children and old men, sick and disabled people moved there. It was their last shelter.

My brother Ele managed to get out of the ghetto. People advised him not to come back. He could be rescued, especially because at that time partisan groups were being organized nearby. Ele thought it over, gathered some food, and made a decision to go back to his family. But in the ghetto, the Germans took the food away from him. Ele’s wife gave birth to a boy, but several hours later he died of hypothermia.

It happened on January 12, 1942. People in the ghetto were ordered to stand in line. The Germans said that they would be sent to the east by train. Jews moved forward under he escort of submachine gunners. They covered several hundreds of meters, and then the column was ordered to go right (to the left bank of the river). Everyone who was still able to think realized that it was their final journey.

Here I'll retell you the story of an acquaintance, whom I met in 1950: 'The day before the execution, the Germans forced twenty strong men to dig a hole near the road. The ground was very frozen, therefore the hole was not very deep. The Germans stopped the column in front of the hole, selected parties of 20-25 people, and shot them using submachine guns. Injured people were pushed down in the hole alive.'

Two days later, Germans brought about 200 Jews from the Kublichi shtetl to the same place. They were executed by shooting the same way as the previous group of Jews. Along with the Kublichi Jews, my brother Isaak Lerman, the German language schoolteacher, was shot, too. He would have preferred to remain alive but in hell, but he refused to work for Germans as an interpreter.

But in spring of 1942, powerful partisan groups sprang into existence. In Belarus there were 350,000 partisans. The headquarters of the partisan movement was situated in Ushachi. Partisans (among them there were many Jews) fought for Ushachi and managed to liberate it and all settlements around it. The fascist garrison was annihilated. The partisan zone of Ushachi became the most armed one in Belarus, and Germans were not able to reoccupy it.

In July 1944, I heard that my hometown had been liberated from the fascist occupation. I was eager to find my relatives. The Communist Party leader (assistant of battalion commander in political and educational work) of our battalion sent a letter of inquiry to a military registration and enlistment office of Ushachi. [Military registration and enlistment offices in the USSR and in Russia are special institutions that implement call-up plans.] Soon I received a terrible message: the Lermans (my father, mother, brothers, their wives and children – fourteen people in total) were executed by the fascists (shot together with hundreds of other Jews in 1942). I could not stop crying.

After the end of the war, only several Jewish families returned to Ushachi. Most of the town's former Jewish inhabitants settled in Leningrad. Now only two of them remained alive in Leningrad. Two more live somewhere in Israel, and one of them is in Los Angeles, in America. Only these five people remained from our large Jewish community—only one among many Jewish communities in Belarus that faced such a horrible end.

In 1945, my cousin Emma returned to Ushachi and immediately started investigating the circumstances of execution of its Jewish inhabitants. She found eyewitnesses who told her about it. But nobody wanted to show her the very place of execution. They only said that it happened near the cemetery, but Emma found there only flat ground, covered with grass. Later Emma found a courageous woman who showed her the exact place of execution. People put columns in that place and built grave mounds over the holes; they also planted trees around the place.

In the 1950s, the inhabitants of Leningrad, Minsk, Vitebsk, Polotsk, etc. collected money and put iron fencing and a small cement obelisk on the tombs. In the 1960s, we decided to put a commemorative stone plaque there. The authorities refused to finance it (they explained that there were no money for it). Again we arranged fund raising and ordered a stone in Vitebsk. When it was time to erect the monument, local authorities decided to pay for it, but forbade writing the word Jews on the plaque. So the following text is written there: 'On January 14, 1942 on this place 925 Soviet citizens - inhabitants of Ushachi settlement and Kublichi village - were executed by shooting by German soldiers.'

After the war

So every year after the end of the war, the former Ushachi inhabitants (sick or disabled) came to visit the commemorative plaque from all over the Soviet Union. They gathered to commemorate their murdered relatives. After all, before the war, 2,000 people lived in Ushachi and 80% of them were Jewish.

Years passed, and we changed the date of our visit to Ushachi to the first Sunday of August (it was easier for us to come there during summer holidays). We gathered to recite the Kaddish and to commemorate the memory of our tortured and murdered dear ones. Every year the number of visitors thinns out. In 1996 we were ten; in 1997 only four. In 2000 nobody arrived except me. I was alone standing in the rain and reciting Kaddish. The tomb was neglected and everything was downtrodden and rusty. I addressed the local authorities with a request to take care of the plaque for the Ushachi citizens. They promised to do so. And indeed later they later did everything necessary.

Here I'll tell you some words about my brothers and sisters who lived in Leningrad at the beginning of the war. Haim, Berl, Mikhael, Shimen, and Libe were mobilized on June 25, 1941. My sister Nekhama remained in the city. Blockade, bombardments, cold, and the most terrible famine began.

When Germans laid siege on Leningrad we stopped our studies. Transport did not function. Our school was located near the Bolshevik factory and I lived in Vereyskaya Street near Vitebsk railway station. It was necessary to walk twenty-four tram stages to reach the school. At school I received breakfast (some porridge and 75 grams of some kind of bread). There I waited for dinner (they gave us 175 grams of bread more). I did not eat everything at dinner, but took it home and shared with Nekhama (she received only 125 grams of bread per day) 13.

Later I was not able to walk anymore, so they gave me a children's bread ration card for me to receive 125 grams of bread instead of 250 grams.

It is necessary to say here that when we came to Leningrad we no longer observed Jewish traditions.

In the middle of February 1942, a messenger from Smolny came to our place. [Smolny monastery housed supervising Communist party and Soviet state bodies of the city.] He was well dressed and well-groomed. He brought us instructions regarding my sister's and mine evacuation me. Those directions came from the Ministry of Petroleum Industry. You see, my sister's husband (Solomon Mikhailovich) was evacuated to Nizhni Tagil and worked at a defense enterprise there. He held a very important post in petroleum industry; therefore, he managed to arrange our evacuation from Leningrad. He sent a telegram through the Ministry with instructions to provide our departure from the besieged city.

On the appointed day we put our belongings on a sledge and left our house. We had bought the sledge from our neighbors. I walked about 100 or 150 meters, and then understood that I was not able to make the next step: my legs went weak. My sister cursed me to get up: 'Let's go quickly, I'm afraid we may be late!' I asked her to go alone, to save herself. So I persuaded my sister to go, and remained there in the street alone. My sister left the besieged city and reached Nizhni Tagil where her husband worked.Later I somehow crawled home, reached our apartment, and lay in bed to die.

On the radio I heard the voice of Olga Berggolts: ‘Hold on a bit longer, just a little…’ [Olga Berggolts was a poetess, who wrote her patriotic poems in the besieged Leningrad].

But my destiny carried me along another way. Two days later I heard a knock at the outer wall (the doorbell did not function). A short soldier (a Jew) came in carrying a huge package in his hands. I immediately understood that someone had lent me a helping hand.

The soldier said that he had a parcel from my brother Haim (from the Leningrad front) for his sister Nina. The soldier had served with Haim. They were anti-aircraft gunners at the famous Road of Life 14. There they were fed well, and had some extra food at their disposal.

The soldier refused to give me the parcel since Nina was absent. In the accompanying letter my brother said that he had sent us parcels several times before, but they did not reach the addressee. The first time messenger fairly confessed that he had kept the parcel for his family when he found his wife dying and his relatives suffering of starvation. The second time the messenger told Haim that he did not find us because we had died. For the third parcel, Haim permitted the messenger to keep it if he found us to be dead. So that third messenger was in front of me.

I explained him that Nina and I were brother and sister, she had left, and Haim was my brother. I showed him our photograph and my passport (I got it in June 1941). But the soldier remained unmoved by all of this information: he wanted to see Nina. I cried and begged to give food to me because I was dying of starvation. He thought it over, had compassion on me, and gave me the parcel, but only when I wrote a letter to Haim confirming the receipt of the food. Our apartment was communal 15. If my hungry neighbors had seen my food, I think they would have taken it away from me, probably killed me, and eaten the food as well as me.

I had a small iron stove. I opened the parcel and could scarcely believe my eyes: flour, crackers (big soldier's crackers), a piece of honey (rolled in a piece of paper), and tea! I made pancakes using my stove, and a week later I felt better. It was possible for me to go on living.

In fact, that parcel saved me. Soon I was able to walk and decided to go to the Central Administrative Board of Industrial schools (it was situated near the Circus). There I told them that I was left alone and physically was not able to reach our school canteen.

An employee asked me distrustfully: ‘Who is the director of your school?’ – and other similar questions. I answered all of them correctly. And again, a life-saving miracle: they gave me permission to eat at the canteen at the Industrial School #38, which was situated ten minutes walk away from my house.

They wrote: ‘Put B. Lerman down for allowances until trams resume operation.’

This occurred on February 25, 1942. And on March 8 we learned that our school was going to be evacuated by crossing the Ladoga Lake (the Ladoga Lake is 40 km far from Leningrad) southward (to Stavropol region). The director warned me that I had to be evacuated with my school. So I packed my things and went with that school. Every student was allowed to bring one person (a relative) along, but I had nobody to take with me.

We reached the Finnish railway station and moved towards the Ladoga Lake. There we spent a night. The next day we boarded the train. We were lucky to get into the heated car, but there were too many of us In it: we were only permitted to seat. So it took us 22 days (sitting in the car) to reach a settlement in Stavropol region. It was Gorbachev's birthplace 16. There they placed us in a school building and fed us like prize turkeys. People did not starve there. When we got off the train we were given a loaf of bread (one for every two people) and a piece of lard. It was like a dream! Bread seemed to be sweet honey. They also gave us soup and porridge. So we were fattened up and sent (again by train) to Moscow to aircraft factory.

I entered the army as a volunteer in summer of 1943. At that time I worked as a turner and had an exemption from military service. But I wanted to volunteer. The factory produced airplanes; therefore every worker was part of the war effort already. When I told the director that I wanted to volunteer anyways, he told me to return to my work. Later I went to the military registration and enlistment office, and they advised me to tell nobody and go directly to the army base to join.

‘And what will happen at my factory?’ – I asked. ‘Later we will inform them that you left for the front line,’ they responded.

So I went to Ryazan (a city 200 km far from Moscow) to the training tank battalion. Later we received new American self-propelled guns and were sent to the 1st Tank Army, to the Tank Corps #11. I participated in defense of Moscow until 1944.

Later I fought against the Germans in Belarus and in Ukraine. When our self-propelled gun was knocked out in Poland, the driver was taken to the hospital and I became a motorcycle submachine gunner at the reconnaissance battalion. I liberated Poland along with the soldiers of the 1st Tank Army.

On March 29, 1945, when we liberated Gdynia (a city in Poland), we learned that the Germans had retreated and had left a lot of technical equipment. So we went to have a look at it.

On our way to do so, we saw barbed wire and people puttering about. We stopped. Since I could understand German, I was sent to go closer and to get a sense of the situation. I walked closer and saw the barbed wire and a locked gate. I asked: ‘What is going on here?’ And I got the answer: ‘This is a camp.’

I came in and saw people lying, kneeling. Some of them were dead. Those who were able to speak said that they were Jews and were afraid to leave. I explained to them that the war was finished and that they were free.

And we went on to find German technical equipment. It turned out that it was damaged and could not be repaired. I only picked up only two wrenches.

On our way back to Gdynia we saw people who had left the camp. They were more dead than alive. They were trudging along the road carrying bread (slices and loaves), probably given to them by local residents. Now it seems to me that that concentration camp was situated 40 kilometers from Gdynia on the shore of the Baltic Sea.

We were the first to enter Berlin (it happened on April 21, 1945). We participated in street fights and attacked Reichstag. Usually the infantry goes behind the tanks, but in Berlin it was the

opposite: we moved in front of tanks.

When we approached the Reichstag, we received an order to organize special assault groups consisting of four to ten tanks and 40-60 submachine gunners (the number depended on the number of soldiers we could gather around one). The soldiers went in front of the tanks, armed with panzerfausts (weapon of the latest design - a prototype of modern grenade launcher). Soldiers made their way through the streets of the city. They were able to destroy tanks from a distance of 100-200 meters. If we had been armed that way in the beginning of the war, German tanks would have never cut their way through the Soviet Union.

The assault groups approached the city center from different directions. Our group moved ahead to Imperial Office, under which Hitler was in hiding in a deep underground shelter. On April 29, we were already very near to that Imperial Office, but suddenly we received an order to change the direction of our attacks since the shock army #5 was approaching the same location from the opposite angle (and running into each other could result in incidental casualties).

Later we learned that Hitler committed suicide.

On April 30, Soviet army commanders delivered an ultimatum to the Germans, but they refused. Therefore we started taking the city by storm: artillery, Katyushas, airplanes bombed the city. The Germans' resistance was broken down, and they surrendered their guns in front of their houses.

We celebrated a long-awaited VICTORY with pride and elation.

That was the end of the war. Our tank battalion was lodged in German military barracks in Dresden. I served for four more years in Germany.

I only got home in 1949. On my worldly-wise soldier's jacket people could see the following decorations: Order of the Great Patriotic War (2nd Class) 17, Order of the Red Star 18, Medal for taking Berlin, Medal for liberation of Warsaw, Medal for Victory over Germany 19.

I served honestly and was considered to be a very efficient soldier. I remember that after demobilization headquarters of our battalion received two letters of acknowledgement. Our commanders decided to write the first one in my name (Boris Lerman), and to adjourn consideration of the second letter.

Fortunately, all of my brothers and sisters returned from front line alive. They all died natural deaths. Libe died in 1968 (she was 60 years old). Shimen died in 1986 (at the age of 70). Berl died in 1990 (he was 80). Haim died in 1993 (at the age of 80). Mikhael died in Jerusalem (he left for Israel in 1990 together with his son and grandson) in 2000 at the age of 77. Nekhama died in 1996 at the age of 90.

One day after my return to Leningrad I heard by the radio that the trolleybus depot had invited people for apprentice training. I decided to become a trolleybus driver. At that time that trolleybus depot was the only one in the city. Five years later I became a 1st class driver. When the 2nd trolleybus depot was opened, I was sent there as the best driver. I worked and at the same time studied at the evening courses of the Leningrad Electromechanical School. I got a diploma of a specialist in operation and repair of municipal electric transport. When there were more trams in the city, I taught courses for tram drivers. Later I worked as a chief inspector for electric transport

safety regulations. In 1985 I retired on pension [in the USSR and in Russia men can retire on a pension at the age of 60].

I met my wife Haya Wolfovna (here people call her Faina Vladimirovna) after the war. Her sister was married to my cousin. I used to visit them. I wanted to find a woman who already had an apartment, but I did not manage to do so. Neither of us had an apartment, so we rented a room in a semibasement. Then we got married. I had only a soldier's blanket with me. We had no money to arrange our wedding. So our relatives collected money and helped us plan a modest wedding ceremony (not religious, of course). It was on New Year's Eve.

My wife was born in Polotsk. She studied at the Belarus school. She could speak Belarusian, but she grew up speaking Yiddish at home. Her father was a qualified tailor and her mother worked as a dressmaker. Their family was well-to-do. Right before the beginning of the war they bought a big house. When the Germans started the bombardment of Polotsk, they hid themselves in a special self-made dugout.

My wife’s father was clever. One day warm summer day (June 30, 1941), he and his family went to a bombproof shelter located near the railway station. After the white alert he heard the announcement that the last train to the East was leaving in one hour. My wife’s father appeared to have a head on his shoulders: he took his three daughters and his wife to the railway station immediately, not stopping at home. They all squeezed themselves into the freight car: mother, father and their children. That was the way they left for Totsk of the Chkalovsk region carrying nothing with them. But they managed to escape. In evacuation my wife’s father worked in a military workshop (he cut out overcoats).

We lived in our semibasement for about a year. Later we got a room (we had been on the waiting list). My wife worked as a chief accountant for the central chemist's warehouse. Her salary was 61 rubles (the sum was not great; you can compare it with 120 rubles – the salary of an engineer).

Our son was born in 1961. He studied very well and he was also a strong athlete. Later he began university, having passed the required exams. He got excellent marks in all of his exams except composition (there he made one mistake). He studied in the college of the paper-cellulose industry. Leonid knew that he was a Jew, but he did not care. We did not bring our son up as a Jew. He was sociable and cheerful.

I’m also a cheerful person but feel wronged by my life. Once I wrote a story describing my life. It was called My Destiny. It was published in the book by Lazar Ratner: Unloved Children of Fatherland.

My son graduated from university and was a qualified engineer. At that time, his documents were ready for departure to Israel. Later he got ill and he died in 1995.

So I remained with my wife Haya Wolfovna. Our grandson Vadim is very close to our hearts. He was born on August 28, 1985. He promised to take the place of our son for us, and we promised to replace his father. At this time he is a professional soldier. He participated in war in the Chechen Republic [Chechen Republic is situated in the Caucasian region of Russia]. During the summit in summer 2006 he was in security detachment at the Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg.

My daughter-in-law (Vadim's mother) is Russian. Once we decided to send our grandson to a Jewish summer camp, but to our surprise they did accept him: they required to documents confirming that his mother was Jewish.

Anti-Semitism in our country occurred at the state level, but as far as I am concerned, I also came across everyday manifestations of anti-Semitism. For example, in the army they did not beat or hurt me, but they told spiteful jokes about Jews in my presence. They used to say that Jews did not want to fight and did not want to be at war. And I laughed with them—I had no choice.

After the end of the war I never came across manifestations of anti-Semitism. I never felt it myself and never witnessed other Jews experiencing it either. People around me respected each other and one another's religion. At that time people were more tolerant than they are now.

Here I'd like to say some words regarding anti-Semitism in 1980-1990.

When the Pamyat society appeared (writer Vassilyev was the leader of that anti-Semitic nationalistic organization), they organized anti-Semitic meetings. I used to watch people at those meetings (they took place in different places of the city). I used to be seated, listening, and guessing if I was present at a Nazi meeting in Munich of 1930s in Germany. I listened to awful speeches: speakers incited people to kill Jews, etc. And nobody objected. I was the only Jew there and I was afraid to utter a word.

In October 1989 in Leningrad, there was a meeting arranged on behalf of Palestinian Arabs. From announcements I understood that Pamyat had arranged the meeting. Nevertheless I decided to see everything first-hand. I could barely trust my own eyes and made me think about about what was going on.

Professor Romanenko opened the meeting. He wore a scarf a la Yasser Arafat (the former Palestine leader). He spoke about the way he himself helped Arabs to fight against Zionists and Jews, who were the root of all evil.

Serving in Germany I had learned much about activities of Hitler and Goebbels, the greatest evildoers of all times and peoples. I can tell you with confidence that their speeches against Jews were much more polite than the speeches of Leningrad fascists-racists.

At the meeting I listened to the people standing around. A group of young people (well dressed and handsome) talked about the humanity of Hitler regarding the Jews: he did not touch them until 1938 and permitted them to leave Germany. They said it was necessary to avoid that mistake in Leningrad. From their perspective it was necessary to kill all Jews here and to give them no opportunity to leave. One person dared to oppose: he said it was impossible to accuse all Jews, not all of them were guilty. People almost beat him.

After that meeting I came home and immediately wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU [the Communist Party of the Soviet Union].

In the beginning I wrote: 'To the secretary general M. Gorbachev (CC Leningrad regional CPSU Committee). From a CPSU member (since 1948), war veteran and pensioner.'

Below I wrote the following: ‘Every year I visit the grave of my relatives who were executed by shooting. I used to lay flowers on the grave, walk along their road of death from the ghetto to the place of execution, and think about the following. Is it real that one day my children and grandchildren will have to walk along the similar road at the point of bayonet, forced by Leningrad Nazi rogues? Far be it from me to think so. But when Hitler started his movement in Munich pub with a few gangsters, everybody laughed and did not take them seriously. The Pamyat organization is really dangerous. They blame Jews for everything, and insist that Jews have already organized fighting groups to begin an armed struggle against Russians. I do not believe that the country’s leaders support Pamyat. Otherwise Pamyay would not complain that authorities gave them no permission to arrange that meeting. So I am obliged to address you and to bring to your attention the activities of the Pamyat Society. Do not give them an opportunity to propagate Fascism.’

In the end of the letter I asked to the recipient to show it to M. Gorbachev because it was very important.

Ten days later I got an answer that my letter had been received and would be considered.

Later they called me from the city Communist Party Committee [that committee supervised all spheres of the city life] and informed that my letter had been forwarded to them. They assured me that everything was under control, and they would never allow Pamyat to propagate Fascism.

Later I received a call from the regional Communist Party Committee. They said the same: ‘Do not worry.’ I said that fascism was rising again. And they answered ‘Do not worry, it cannot be allowed.’

Then they called me from Moscow (from the Central Communist Party Committee): ‘We inform you that your letter was taken into account.’

When my friends left the USSR, I figured everyone had a chance to make his own decision to leave or not. If you leave, you have no way back. My friends complained from Israel that it was difficult to live there for the first five years. But everything depended on your personal activity. For example, my nephew started in Israel as an unskilled worker even though he was an educated engineer. Soon they understood that he was intelligent and gave him engineer’s work. Later he became a chief engineer.

During the wars in Israel [20, 21] I listened to the Voice of America 22 by radio. I used to share the news with everybody. I was a real fan of Israel. At our institution people called Israeli soldiers gangsters. I wanted to retort but my coworker stopped me and forced me to keep silence.

When Perestroika came at the end of 1980s 23, authorities started the democratization of the country. I was very pleased with it. I read newspapers where they denounced communists, and was pleased again.

I did not visit Israel before 1989. But in 1991 and in 1998 I visited my only brother Mikhael there.

In Jerusalem I visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial where among other victims of Nazism I found the names of my relatives executed by fascists that terrible day of January 12, 1942 in Ushachi near Polotsk.

To my great regret Mikhael got ill and died in 2000. Therefore I cancelled my next visit to see him.

Our life changed after 1991: it became very poor. People could buy nothing in shops, but my son worked at a factory and received special food packages for factory workers.

At this time I am an active member of the St. Petersburg Jewish organization for war veterans and disabled soldiers. We often visit Jewish schools and talk with schoolchildren, especially on Jewish holidays.

In the Hesed Avraham Welfare Center 24 we usually have dinner (earlier it was free-of-charge, and now we pay fifteen rubles for it). During hard times we received food packages from Hesed.

When I learned about the Doctors' Plot 25 from a newspaper, I lived in a communal apartment. When the doctors were liberated, I told my neighbors about it, but they assaulted me.

After Stalin's death most people were silent, but pleased at heart.

As for the events of 1968 (Prague Spring 26), I supported Czechoslovakia.

I liked traveling very much: I visited a lot of cities and towns of our country. I keep great number of photos from my trips to different boarding houses and tourist areas in the USSR.

In 2005, our country celebrated the 60th anniversary of our Victory 27 in the Great Patriotic War. Veterans took part in celebrating of the Great Victory. My wife and I were invited to watch a concert at the Octyabrsky Concert Hall. We had our picture taken at the entrance.

I tried to avoid conflicts throughout my life. Everyone must be conscientious and responsible. I was never reprimanded. I was honorably mentioned forty-five times throughout my professional life. My photograph can be seen on the Board of Fame from all of the time that I worked.

Glossary:

1 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.

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

3 Lenin (1870-1924)
Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

4 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.

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

6 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916)
Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

7 Bergelson, Dovid (1884-1952)
Yiddish writer, arrested and shot dead together with several other Yiddish writers, rehabilitated posthumously.

8 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups – Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored

setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.9 Reds: Red (Soviet) Army supporting the Soviet authorities10 GPU: State Political Department, the state security agency of the USSR, that is, its punitive body.

11 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.

12 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 Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim 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.

13 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.

14 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)
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15 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.

16 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

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

17 Order of the Great Patriotic War

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

18 Order of the Red Star

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

19 Medal for Victory over Germany

Established by Decree of the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR to commemorate the glorious victory; 15 million awards.20 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.21 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

22 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.

23 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.24 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.25 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.

26 Prague Spring

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to

the reforms.

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.