

Emilia Kotliar

EMILIA KOTLIAR

Russia

Moscow

Interviewer: Svetlana Bogdanova

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Emilia Kotliar is a quiet considerate lady with big hazel eyes. She is a little taller than average and she combs her dark hair back.

She has a very friendly expression of her face and dresses decently.

She lives alone in a 2-bedroom apartment in the southwest of Moscow. She has no close relatives left. She recently had a surgery on her broken femoral neck. She moves slowly with a stick.

She is a member of the writer' association and writes children's poems published in a number of popular magazines and her own books of poems.

Her apartment needs to be repaired.

Her apartment is furnished modestly, but it is clean.

Once a week the Jewish public charity fund 'A Hand of help' sends her a charwoman who cleans her apartment and another volunteer does shopping for her.

There are many icons and pictures on biblical and Testament subjects on the walls.

Emilia Kotliar lived through a very hard period of life associated with professional failures and her mother's lethal disease.

At the recommendation of archpriest Alexandr Men' she adopted Christianity in 1988, but she identifies herself as a Jew, anyway.



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My family background

My family came from Vasilkov [30 km from Kiev], a small town in Ukraine. The majority of population in Vasilkov was Jewish, but there were also Ukrainian residents in it. I visited it when I

was very small and I don't remember anything.

Unfortunately, I know little about my father's family. My father died young, when I was only 9. My paternal grandfather's name was Efraim Kotliar. His family led a patriarchal way of life. They were respected people in the town. My grandfather was wealthy. He owned a business. He was a glasscutter and made frames. There were 8 children in the family and all had higher education. All of his sons, and there were 5 of them, used to help my grandfather in his shop. My father Peisach Kotliar was the only son who didn't help his father in the shop. He was an idol in the family being talented and having all excellent marks at school. My grandfather used to say: 'I don't need your sawdust, I need your marks'. My father studied in a realschule [1](#). Its students got a good technical and mathematical education. I don't know for sure, but I think my grandfather had a house having his business. My grandfather was a merry man. The family sang very well. My father's younger brother Yasha had a particularly strong and beautiful voice. When the family got together they sang sitting at the table. They sang Ukrainian and Jewish folk songs.

My father's brother Yakov studied with my father in Moscow College of Light Industry and I've known uncle Yasha since childhood. I didn't see my father's other brothers and don't know what happened to them. My father's mother Mendel Kotliar had a meek character. She was bringing quietude, order and peace into the houses and demanded that her children made no mess of it. She was a housewife.

Their house was always clean and cozy. My grandmother taught the girls to do craftwork, sew and embroider. There was a custom in their family: whatever problems one had they had to wipe their shoes on a welcome rug and smile. They had to leave all their problems on the porch. There was a cheerful atmosphere at home. They loved each other very much and respected parents in the family. Undoubtedly, they observed all Jewish traditions in the past times. There was a synagogue and a Jewish community in Vasilkov. Unfortunately, I don't know how religious my father's parents were or how they observed Jewish traditions. I know that their older daughter Feiga after finishing a college in Sverdlovsk moved my grandfather and grandmother to live with her in Sverdlovsk in the Ural in about 1000 km from Moscow shortly before the Great Patriotic War [2](#). My grandmother died in 1942 and my grandfather died in 1943 in Sverdlovsk and there they were buried.

I know more about my mother's family. In her older age my mother tried to write about her town and her family, but she never got to finish it. She fell ill and asked me to finish her notes for her. Following her will I wrote a poem 'A gorgeous town' and dedicated it to the memory of my mother Anna Vaisman. This book was published by 'Mozhaysk-Terra' Ltd. in 2001 in 1000 copies.

My maternal great grandfather's name was Vigdor. Regretfully, I don't know his last name. He lived in Vasilkov and was a very bright person. He was a melamed. Besides, he was involved in various public activities. His wife died young leaving him with 6 children. He never remarried. His older daughter Leya, my grandmother, became a housewife. Vigdor taught Talmud in cheder. Studying Talmud was his favorite pastime. He was very fond of it. Vigdor was the authority of his community. He was very smart and his neighbors often addressed him with their problems, when there was a dispute, or they wanted to share heritage or had routinely problems. Grandfather judged them objectively. He studied Talmud 'for the development of brains' and read religious books. At his old age he worked at a slaughterhouse where he issued receipts for one kopeck. This was a slaughterhouse that belonged to the synagogue where they slaughtered poultry in accordance with kashrut rules. He was sitting behind his counter having coins and receipts in front

of him and a Talmud on his lap. Women even felt hurt that he didn't look at them issuing those receipts. He was plunged into his book. In 1920 white guard officers [3](#) during a pogrom [4](#) killed him. When they were shooting him, he was an old man with one leg. Something had happened to his leg and he had it amputated without anesthesia. Assistant doctors didn't have any anesthesia means in this small town where he lived. He walked with crutches and they shot the man with crutches. I dedicated a poem to him: *(translation by the line)*

In the eleventh year

Reb Vigdor got in trouble.

He went to 'elections'

In the neighboring 'capital',

Caught cold and was taken to hospital.

Gangrene developed.

Assistant doctors

Cut off his leg like a log without anesthesia.

Reb Vigdor clutched his teeth and kept silent.

Being a strong old man.

He came back to his village on crutches

And took to his usual activities,

As if nothing had happened.

The old reb

Like all Jews in town,

Was dreaming about his own plot of land,

About bread.

In the seventeenth he advised

his former pupils

to join the Bolsheviks

They would give them land!

A Talmud scholar, philosopher,

Connoisseur of Jewish laws,

He failed to discern

Who Bolsheviks were,
Since it's this was with God: white is white,
Black is black
Yes is yes and no is no!
Could he imagine,
That God's covenants were nothing for Bolsheviks?
That was the thing:
They didn't hesitate,
With cheating people or the God
...In the twentieth
the white guard during a pogrom
shot reb Vigdor
by the wall of his house.

My maternal grandfather Isaac Vaisman was an extraordinarily kind and nice person. Grandfather Isaac had an artistic personality. He carved trays, cups and vases from wood. My mother told me they were amazingly beautiful. Everybody laughed at him and he used to do this work in hiding. My grandmother Leya had no confidence in his work. Why make them, those unpractical things? She told him off for his hobby and occasionally threw his works into a stove. Grandmother Leya adored her father Vigdor, though she had a hard childhood. She grew up having no mother and was responsible for the housework and raising her younger sisters and brothers.

Grandmother Leya!
What burden fell on your shoulders
What sorrow was awaiting!
From the age of thirteen
With a widower of a father
You had to raise
Five brothers and sisters!
You replaced their mother to them.
Vigdor, Leya's father was a genuine
Local Talmud scholar.

His daughter respected him infinitely

And pleased him in every way.

Dreaming to marry

Another scientist like her father,

Fond of Talmud.

But her father couldn't support

A 'golden son-in-law'

And poor Leya

Had to lock her heart .

A 'golden son-in-law' was one involved only in spiritual activities studying the Talmud and his wife's family was to provide for him. Since my great grandfather was very poor he couldn't support this kind of a son-in-law and Leya had to marry Isaac Vaisman, my grandfather, who was as poor as she was. This happened approximately in 1900. Of course, they had a traditional wedding and it couldn't have been otherwise at that time. Grandfather Isaac was meek and kind. I almost shrink thinking about my grandfather. He was the best person in the family. He was very patient and his wife scolded him. She didn't quite respect him for his being quiet and meek and was up in the clouds, though he did everything about the house. He was very handy. I don't know what he did before the revolution of 1917 [5](#), but afterward he worked as a janitor in a kolkhoz [6](#).

The name of my second great grandfather, my grandfather Isaac's father, was Leib. All I know about him is that he made a sukkah at Sukkot and installed a table and a trestle bed in it, dropped grass on the floor and compacted it, put flowers on the table and lived there until night frosts. He was very handy. My great grandfather Vigdor was more a philosopher while my great grandfather Leib was an earthly man. He was a craftsman. He was also shot in 1918 or 1922. A bandit from a passing gang [7](#) shot a bullet on the run. He was about 70 years old. His wife, my great grandmother died young of some disease and I don't even know the name of. My great grandfather Leib remarried. His second wife was very nice. I know little about them. People didn't talk about themselves in the past. There is a saying 'Every bush has its acoustics'. Everything was forbidden.

My great grandfather Leib

Was a poor man

In a small distant town.

His little house

Was all patched,

Like a dress.

His house was called

‘Leib’s palace’!

a samovar and a mattress with holes,

Iron cast in a Russian stove [8](#)

And candles in the 7-candle stand...

He got married in the same coat,

In which he came into this world!

Grandmother Leya and grandfather Isaac settled down in Stavishche town near Vasilkov after their wedding. Before the revolution of 1917 grandmother Leya owned a store selling her products on credit for peanuts. She sold salt, matches, soap and herring. Villagers from a neighboring village liked doing shopping in Leya’s store. She even sold on credit to those who didn’t pay back their old debts. When Jewish pogroms began Ukrainian families gave shelter to Leya’s family and rescued her children. At their old age my grandmother and grandfather worked in a kolkhoz. My grandfather was a janitor and my grandmother worked in a kolkhoz canteen. They lived in a small clay house. I visited there. There was a living room and a table covered with a fancy white tablecloth, a mirror and scarlet ribbon along the table serving as a decoration. There was a bed for guests in the living room. My grandparents slept in a corner in the kitchen. There was a Russian stove in the house. They fetched water from a well. They had a cow. There was a manger that dried up in the sun. It glittered and looked nice and I said I wanted to sleep in it and asked my grandmother to put a sheet there for me.

Grandmother Leya and grandfather Isaac had 8 children. Four children died in infancy and four survived. Grandmother Leya was very much attached to her father Vigdor and often left her home to visit him. Can you imagine what it was like when she came back home? When she returned the house was a mess and the children were hungry. She would have cuffed one in his nap and kick another. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War my mother’s younger sister Sophia Goloborodko took my grandfather and grandmother to live with her family in Uman [180 km from Kiev]. Grandfather Isaac died there in 1943 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. After the war grandmother Leya lived in Uman. She died in 1950 and was buried in the Jewish sector of the town cemetery in Uman.

My mother grew up in a very poor family. She was the oldest of all children. She had to do a lot of work. To tell the truth, her family wasn’t quite like a family. Grandmother Leya spent all her time with her father Vigdor and my mother had to do the housework. My mother was very proud and had a character. She had more problems than anybody else. When they punished her and told her to ask forgiveness she was stubborn and never asked pardons and thus, set her mother in opposition. The situation in the family was hard. My mother had congenital glaucoma, but nobody knew about it and nobody intended to know. She needed at least glasses, but she didn’t even get these. My mother was not supposed to do some work like sewing or standing by a fireplace, but they thought she just didn’t want to do this work. She was made to clean the farmyard and she worked there with my grandfather. So, frankly speaking, she had a hard childhood. And I think that when all this revolutionary agitation began she got interested in it and joined Komsomol [9](#) to somehow get distracted from home and her crazy family. Later my mother joined the party.

My mother had brothers David Vaisman and Shakhna Vaisman and sister Sophia Goloborodko. David had a higher education and lived in Leningrad [present St. Petersburg, today Russia]. He worked as a shipbuilder. During the Great Patriotic War he stayed in Leningrad and survived in its siege [10](#). He almost starved to death and showed no signs of life. He was taken to a morgue where he recovered his consciousness. The aftereffects of this siege had an impact on his health. He was sickly and died in Leningrad in 1950. He was buried in Leningrad. He had a family: wife Anna and sons Alexei and Isaac. David, his wife and children were not religious. Shakhna was born in 1910 and had a secondary technical education. He lived in Kadievka, Ukraine, in about 900 km from Moscow. He worked in the system of mine management. His wife Rosa was Jewish. They had a son named Leonid and a daughter named Yelizaveta. His family wasn't religious. Shakhna died in 1989 and was buried in Kadievka. Sophia was born in 1912. She lived in Uman, Ukraine. She had primary education. She was a housewife. She had four children: three daughters – Anna, Larisa and Lubov and son Vladimir. Her husband Goloborodko, whose surname I don't know, was a Jew. None of them was religious. Sophia moved grandmother Leya and grandfather Isaac to live with her in Uman. Sophia died in 1959 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Uman. My mother kept in touch with her brothers and sister. She corresponded with them and they visited us in Moscow. She had the closest relationships with her brother Shakhna.

My father was a middle child in his family. He finished a realschule with honors. My father wasn't a member of the Communist Party, though he sympathized with the revolutionary movement. He spoke at a meeting. I don't know what Party he spoke for, but I believe it was an incidental matter since it wasn't what he really was up to. My mother and father gave up observing Jewish traditions and religion when they were young. This was the way it was at that time: the Revolution of 1917, when everything was breaking up and crashing, the routinely way of life was replaced with something different when new authorities were building up different ideology, propagating and forcing communism and atheism into people's minds. Besides, I don't think they would have found jobs had they remained religious. Soviet authorities did not appreciate religiosity and struggled against it [11](#) in every possible way. If my father had come to his plant with his kippah on and a beard and had begun to pray, can you imagine what it would have been like? Same with my mother. Although her grandfather was a Talmud scholar and she accompanied grandfather to the synagogue every day carrying his tallit for him she didn't see anything beautiful in the life of her family regardless those traditional ceremonies. She didn't see that it was a good life and therefore, she didn't quite accept it. My parents and their brothers and sisters did not just nominally give up religion, they actually parted with it. Young people joined the revolution and began to study. They had nothing to lose. Most Jews were so poor that it could not be worse for them. Many finished cheder, but few could afford to go to yeshivah. Not all of them were smart enough to go into theoretical studies of the Talmud. Becoming a melamed? How many did a small town need? Two at the most. The rest of them had to take to trade or patching jackets or sewing? There were no vacancies in this little town and even skilled craftsmen earned little. Other towns also had their own coopers, tailors and tradesmen. Therefore, they rushed into revolution. A road to new life opened to them.

My mother and father met in Vasilkov. After finishing the realschule my father couldn't find a job near home. He found a job in Kazan', about 720 km east of Moscow, my mother joined him there and they got married. My father worked as technical manager in a leather factory. It was a small factory. Then the factory sent my father to study at the College of light industry. My mother didn't

tell me anything about my father: how they met or what kind of person my father was. She was very withdrawn and stern and she was not good at sentimental talk. It probably had to do with her severe childhood years.

Growing up

I was born in Kazan', Russia, in 1925. In Kazan' my mother worked in zhensoviet (women's council) [editor's note: Women's councils – departments, included in Party organs at the direction of the party Central Committee in 1918. Their members were women activists and their tasks included ideological work with women industrial employees and peasants with the aim of their socialist education. Reorganized in 1929] with education of Tatar women. They didn't know Russian and were taught in likbez [12](#) schools. We rented an apartment with three big rooms in a private house. There was a small kitchen. There was a real big stove with oven forks, wood and cast iron pots. Water was delivered to houses in barrels. There was a cellar with huge bottle green pieces of ice in it. There was food stored on them. The cellar was a very tempting place: there was sour cream in ceramic pots, milk and pelmeni dumplings. It was a very delicious cellar. My father was sent to study in Moscow in 1931 and our family followed him there: my mother, I and our nanny. The nurse was with us since I turned 2 and stayed 14 years.

My father entered Moscow College of Light Industry. My mother also entered this college after finishing a rabfak [13](#) school. We didn't have a place to live and our nanny went to work for other people. We lived out of town. I liked it there. There was a wooden house, so mysterious, in the woods. There were pine trees. We rented this "izba" hut, but then my mother was accommodated in a hostel and so was my father. They lived in different rooms on different floors and since children were not allowed to stay in hostels there were always problems with my presence there. My mother lived with some girls in her room and I was with them. Later I went to a kindergarten. Children could stay there overnight, but it turned out, this was not for me. I was withering away there. Nobody actually looked after me or how I ate there. Our family was poor. Then my parents got another room and there was a student girl living there with us. She was a stranger living with us. I remember my father asking her: 'Sonia, I need to get dressed. Turn away, please'. We lived in this room until 1938. In 1934, before my father defended his diploma, they convinced him to go to Irkutsk [4120 km east of Moscow] to become production manager of a big plant. Of course, an ill-advised step. He should have defended his diploma and besides, the climate in Irkutsk was very bad, but he went there. We were going to follow him. We started packing our miserable belongings, when all of a sudden we received a cable that he died. He only lived there 3 months. And there is still no clue to this mysterious story. We didn't understand whether he was ill or what he had. My father's brother Yasha went to his funeral. My father was buried in a town cemetery. They never told me anything about it. My mother got severely ill and didn't tell me anything later: she didn't remember. And a long time afterward I asked my father's brothers about my father's belongings or letters. There was nothing left. Well, this was a strange and tragic story. After my father died we were told to move out of this room, but we didn't have a place to go. They threatened to call militia. Four years later my mother received a room in a communal apartment [14](#) in Moscow where we lived until 1966.

Some time later after my father died my mother entered the History Department of Moscow University. My mother liked history much. At first her co-students who were young girls, gave her a

hostile reception since she was a mature woman already. I was 9 years old then. Those girls sniffed and chuckled about me, but then my mother somehow happened to become a head student of her course. They called her 'our Mom'. She was awarded a Stalin's stipend [Editor's note: Stalin's stipend was awarded to most advanced college and university students]. Shortly after my father died our nanny returned to us. My mother received a stipend and nanny had her pension and I was given minor monthly allowances after my father's death. We were hard up, but we didn't lead secluded life. We received guests, especially when we lived in the hostel our door was always open. My mother was tight-lipped to talk about herself, but she was very sociable otherwise. She had many friends when a student and later she made friends with her colleagues and I had many school friends. We were very close with the family of Shakhna Vaisman, my mother's younger brother. His family lived in Kadievka [1100 km south of Moscow]. He worked in the coal industry. He visited us in Moscow with his son Lyonia and daughter Sima and we visited them in Kadievka. Shakhna's son Lyonia served in the army and once he came to see us in Moscow. Handsome and tall and his military uniform was so becoming. My mother's younger sister Sophia with her numerous family and grandmother Leya lived in Uman. We met very rarely. There is nobody left in Uman. Sophia and her younger son Vladimir died. Sophia died in 1959 and Vladimir died in 1973. Their graves are in Uman. Sophia's three daughters Anna, Luba and Larisa moved to Germany in 1990 and live in Portenschmiede.

I went to school in 1932. I went to a preparatory "zero" class. I finished this zero and 3 primary forms in this district school and then my mother sent me to the 4th form at the preparatory department of Central Music School at Moscow Conservatory. My initial audition went well and they admitted me to their piano class, but then it turned out that my hands were not technical enough. Later I understood that it had something to do with my vestibular apparatus. For example, I can dance waltz step turning to one side, but cannot change to another. My hands were not quick enough. Therefore, I didn't do quite well at school. After the war I didn't go back to this music school. They also got general education in this school. It was an amazing and unique school, a cradle of talented and gifted children. Leonid Kogan [Editor's note: Leonid Kogan – (1924 – 1982) a virtuoso Jewish violinist and professor, graduate of Moscow Conservatory, laureate of several international contests and Lenin's Award] was in my school. Later he became an outstanding musician of world class. There were many talented children, but only few came all the way up. It took colossal work, luck and skills to go up. They became schoolteachers or worked in orchestras. Many became ordinary musicians. The boy I shared my desk with became my friend. We went home together after school and went to the zoo. It was friendship of two children.

There were many Jews. Everywhere. It was some sort of a 'Jewish Zoo'. There were 18 children in my class, but only 12 attended classes regularly. Some were ill and others had other reasons. It was the end of the 1930s [15](#). This was the period of arrests of their fathers and there were children of 'enemies of the people' [16](#) in my class. Their fathers were in jail or had been executed, but they didn't have a status of turncoats in the class. They studied like everybody else and we were all equal. I would like to say that this music school added a lot to my spiritual education, even though I didn't feel quite comfortable there since I was sort of backward. I often went to the Bolshoy Theater [17](#) and to concerts at the conservatory, we were given free tickets. Besides, I studied with talented children and enjoyed talking to them. There were no conflicts in our class and children behaved themselves. They just didn't have time for fooling around. In the morning we had music classes and studied theory and at 2 our general classes began. Therefore, there was a good atmosphere in

class and we had nice teachers who were selected by special requirements.

I didn't join Komsomol. Here is what happened. It's not that I was some hero or something. I was sickly and at the time when my classmates joined Komsomol I was ill. Nobody asked me about it or mentioned it afterward and I wasn't quite eager to touch upon this subject. I was an active pioneer at my previous school. I was very interested in pioneer movement and believed it was something interesting. Once I went to a pioneer meeting. So I came there and listened. One speaks looking into his notes, then another one does the same – how dull. So by the time I returned home I stopped being an active pioneer. Something broke up in me. I wasn't interested in public movements since then. My mother believed in communist slogans and tried to convert me to her views, but she failed. I was passive and somewhat deferred. Maybe it was because I was often ill. Besides, it was something not for me. She started a few times when I was an adult: 'Why don't you join the Party? Life would be easier for you. You have an antisocial position.' But she understood that if somebody didn't want something, then it didn't make sense to force this person. So it all went past me.

I didn't face any anti-Semitism before the war and my mother didn't either. There were many Jews at the university where my mother studied.

Then my school sent me to the best and biggest pioneer camp 'Artek' in the Crimea [1200 km south of Moscow] on the shore of the Black Sea. I liked this camp very much. It was a model camp and lots of funds were allocated in it. There was good food and we had beautiful uniforms, there were interesting children and at the end of our term we had a party around a big fire. There was a Kabardinian boy in the camp and he was a symbol of Artek. Kabardinians are backward mountainous people. Even now only few of them have education and it was symbolic that their boy came to this wonderful camp. We even sang song about him in Artek. During holidays he rode a horse and it was beautiful. We also arranged amateur concerts and sang songs. There was a piano in the camp. We sang pioneer and other songs. Some children sang, some danced and it was nice and joyful. I sat at the seashore gathering seashells. I brought home a suitcase full of seashells.

During the war

I had no idea that there was to be a war and was quite indifferent about a treaty between the USSR and Germany [18](#). Only my nanny Anna Dormidontovna spoke in agitated manner turning to Stalin's portrait. I need to mention here that there was a portrait of Stalin in every family. 'What are you doing, what are you doing? Why are you shipping them all our wheat and giving them our bread?' (She meant fascists). The nanny stayed with us until the war and during the war she left us. I have no memories about the days when the war began. I remember that later, standing round a corner I thought: 'What if I catch a spy?' I was stupid and didn't understand anything. And I thought: 'What is it like when bombs begin falling all of a sudden I wonder.' I didn't know a thing about the war and what we were up to. I understood that something terrible happened, but I didn't apply it to myself. Nothing was going to happen to me and my life could not be terrible.

We took hiding in the basement and bombshells to find shelter from bombs. There were many people hiding in metro. The University where my mother studied evacuated to Sverdlovsk, about 1400 km east of Moscow and my mother and I went there, too. We didn't find any suitable accommodation in Sverdlovsk and my mother quit University and decided to go with me to the

vicinity of Alapayevsk about 138 km north of Sverdlovsk, to Kostino village where my mother was teaching history. My mother rented a corner in a village hut. Life was terrible there. There was only hunger. I didn't go to school since there was only a 7-year school in the village and I was to study in the 9th form. I was hanging around there. There was a woman in evacuation in this village. She worked in a club before the war. She was a nice and tactful woman of about 60 years of age. She gathered young people into something like a drama club and we performed in surrounding villages. We didn't get anything for it, but we were at least busy. People called us 'artists'. There was no entertainment in villages. There was a radio near the library in the village and there was no electricity. Our performances were like holidays for them. People had a very hard life in the kolkhoz. They worked hard and worked a lot for almost nothing. Our landlady had 7 boys. Can you imagine what it took to provide food for them? The oldest was 12. He didn't go to school since he had to work in the kolkhoz. The only food we had were potatoes in jackets. And I remember an episode. My mother and I are eating when there appears a little face with begging eyes. This was one of our landlady's sons. So what were we to do? We gave him a potato. Older children never begged, probably their mother told them not to, but younger ones always asked for food. It was hard to see this. Alapayevsk was a town near Sverdlovsk where members of the czar's family were killed, including czarina's sister Yelizaveta Fyodorovna, but in those years nobody knew about it, this was concealed. It was an industrial town. There were many steel casting and military plants in it. We stayed in Alapayevsk for a year, but I didn't go to school. I was too weak from hunger. We rented a hallway in an overcrowded apartment. My mother taught history in a vocational school. I worked as a tutor in a kindergarten for about 8 months. In 1943 we returned home. As soon as victory was won in Stalingrad we could go to Moscow. There was nobody in our room, but it was looted and ravaged. They even stole our piano. Later my mother found this piano at our neighbors' and they returned it. Moscow was military and there were newspaper strips on windows and bulbs were painted dark blue. We arrived and right away got under bombing. We also waited for news from the front every day. This was the most important thing for us. I remember my mother and I having 10 potatoes. They lasted 10 days: we had one half potato each per day. We boiled it and cut into halves and this made our meal. Nobody could help us. My mother's relatives also had a hard life. My grandmother Leya's sister Maria Rudnik lived in Moscow. She had 7 children. They had a miserable life. We kept in touch with her at the time, but what could she do for us when she was starving, too?

My father's brothers Israel and Volf perished at the front. My father's cousin brother Aizenberg, unfortunately, I don't remember his name, was a singer and had a very good voice. He perished in one of death camps.

When we returned to Moscow, my mother defended her diploma and went to teach at school. My mother graduated from University brilliantly and was offered to start her postgraduate studies, but she had problems with her eyes. I told her: 'Mother, you won't be able to read this pile of books'. She could not write much. When she wrote me letters later it took me a while to guess what she wrote about. With her handwriting she couldn't write articles or reports. She went to teach history in school # 12 [In the USSR schools had numbers and not names. It was part of the policy of the state. They were all state schools and were all supposed to be identical], where children of 3rd-rate chiefs studied. They were capricious and spoiled children. One came to the second class, another one came to the third, but they liked my mother's classes. They gave her pictures on historical subjects, she managed to arouse their interest in history. She worked there until 1948 and then her

eyes got worse and she retired. She was allowed to retire due to her poor sight. Then she went to lecture in the association of blind people. I went to work as a tutor in a kindergarten. I couldn't continue my studies in my music school due to my hand defects. My hands turned out to lack technicality. I had finished the 9th form of district school #9 in Moscow. I didn't like it in this school after my previous school at the Conservatory. It was like farce. Most teachers were in evacuation or at the front. Our teachers had low qualifications and it was ridiculous how they conducted their lessons and I kept thinking about our wonderful teachers at the Central Music School. My mother knew my opinions and agreed that I should become a tutor in a kindergarten. I worked there 4 years. It was hard work, but I managed and children were good to me. I couldn't work as a music teacher at school due to my hands. There were 37 children in my group. It was a big group and besides, children of the war, they were problem children. Many didn't have fathers, they had dramatic living conditions and they were all hungry. They were nervous and excitable children. In general, they made a hard company. While working in the kindergarten I finished a pedagogical school with honors and entered a Pedagogical College without taking entrance exams. I was only allowed to not take entrance exams at the Preschool Department. I wanted to go to the Philological Faculty, but I just wasn't strong enough to take exams there. I finished my college with honors. I worked a mandatory term [19](#) in the kindergarten and then couldn't find a job for a long time until I managed to become a preschool education teacher at the Pedagogical School. I began writing poems. At first I didn't think much of it, but then I caught myself sitting at an exam at school putting down my lines instead of listening to a student. This shouldn't be! I met young poets and we became friends and they told me that I had to quit school immediately. 'Or, you will always remain a teacher and will never become a poet'. I left school, though we didn't have anything at home. I found a job in a publishing house with low payment. I was to write responses to beginners of poets. In 1958 my first book was published and I received a small fee for it. So I lived. My mother didn't talk me out of it. She understood this was my cup of tea. I enjoyed writing poems tremendously, though it wasn't easy, hard to find a word I needed, on the whole, it was hard work. Soon young poets began to get invitations to recite poems at schools and in libraries. I communicated with young poets in the poet section in the house of literature workers or in a café there. I wasn't a member of the Union of writers, but they allowed me to the house of literature workers. We recited our poems to one another there. I didn't finish Literature College. There was a literature association 'Magistral' ['highway' in Russian] where I attended classes and took my entrance into literature. Igor Levin, a wonderful pedagogue, conducted classes. We recited our poems and criticized each other. It was a good school. Levin invited best poets of the time to our sittings and they shared their views with us, recited their poems and listened to ours. I learned a lot at those classes. In 1961 I entered the Union of Writers. It was difficult to become a member of this Union at the time. I only had one book issued and I needed recommendations. S. Marshak [20](#) gave me one. Somehow they admitted me, though my poems left much to be desired and unusual and people felt stunned. Then I began to have my books published. I had 6 books for adults and 15 children's books. I also translated 10 children's books. My publishing house gave me books for translation. I met famous poets to be in 'Magistral' like Bulat Okudjava [a famous Russian bard (1924-1997)]. We were closely acquainted for a lifetime. It was hard to have books published, not only for me, but for all. Some people were against my books. There were spokes in my wheels and there were other things, but I had a wonderful editor: Victor Faigelson. He worked in the poetry section of 'Soviet writer' publishing house. He came to work there upon graduation from University. He adored poetry and poets and frankly speaking, he supported me. How? For example, it was very

important to have not a piece read by a person who might have wanted to drown me. I had no idea who was going to read my poems, but he found ways to have a nicer person read my poems. Reading and issuance of statement took a long time and then I was nervous about what they wrote about my poems since if proofreader wrote a few negative sentences that meant that a book was canceled. Then one had to worry about having his book included in planning of publications. Even if they did include it, they might revise their plans. These were all nerves. Then there might be small edition, since my book might have been in little demand. If it hadn't been for this editor I wouldn't probably have had one book issued. My latest book is 'Gorgeous Town'. It wasn't published for a long time and I received an official note that the editorial portfolio was full and they were not going to publish my book. I was going to take it from there, when Faigelson all of a sudden read this paper and then said to me: 'You go home and take a rest and don't show up here'. I left and then my book was published some time later. So this was the way Victor Faigelson was. He supported all talented people.

After the war

After the war I faced anti-Semitism in everyday life. In 1948 mass persecution of Jews began. Being a Jew I was very concerned about it. Murder of Mikhoels [21](#), cosmopolitanism [22](#) and 'doctors' plot' [23](#). I happened to meet a boy, medical Professor Yegorov. His father was arrested during the period of 'doctors' plot'. He and his family were very worried. Many acquaintances turned away from his family then. One acquaintance of mine hanged himself at that period. His uncle was arrested under this case and he was hunted down. There was anti-Semitism among members of the house of literature workers. Not always evident and open, but there it was. One renowned poet was a militant anti-Semite and didn't conceal it. Everybody knew him and avoided him. Routinely anti-Semitism was at its height and our co-tenants in our communal apartment tormented us. We used to have no conflicts before when all of a sudden our neighbors began to shout into a telephone receiver: 'There are Jews living here'. Of course, this was badgering against us. Other co-tenants didn't interfere and kept silent, and my mother and I were distressed. Our neighbor used to polish his boots by our door grumbling: 'Jews, Jews'. My mother and I lived in this communal apartment until 1960 and then the union of Writers gave me a one-bedroom apartment in the center of Moscow. 10 years later, in 1976, I received this apartment. The Union of Writers gave me this apartment since it's impossible to write poems when there is another person in the room.

When in 1953 Stalin died, I was very upset. I thought it was going to be worse without him. I believed in his wisdom. I understood so little. One acquaintance said: 'Better, Emilia. It's going to be better'. I didn't believe him, but later everything fell in its place. I remember Stalin's funeral. I almost died in the crowd. I didn't go there by myself, our college obliged us to go. There were no excuses accepted. My mother didn't know. I wasn't at home a whole night. What could she think? And we could hardly get out of the crowd. We were on the edge of death. Denouncements of the 20th Congress [24](#) were a shock for me. My mother was happy that the truth found its way. My mother had different outlooks since she was a historian, but she didn't share her opinions with me.

When I began writing poems and then became a member of the Union of Writers my life changed. I got very interesting friends who were poets. Later they became renowned poets in the country. I can name Victor Bokov, Bulat Okudjava and others. They visited us on New Year, my birthday or my mother's and we often celebrated on of my friend's birthday at our place. We had joyful and

noisy parties. I spent vacations in houses of creativity of the Union of Writers, mainly in the vicinity of Moscow and made new friends there. My mother lectured in the association of blind people. She had friends there and they also visited us. Since I was plunged into my creative work my mother cared about our simple life at home.

It happened so that I never got a family of my own. My mother was my only close person. My mother was ill for a long time before she died. She was bedridden for 10 months. I attended to her and my friends were helping me. I wasn't alone. I wouldn't have managed it alone. My mother died in 1993. I buried her in the Khovanskoye town cemetery in Moscow. There was no Jewish sector in this cemetery. I had a very hard period before my mother died: both in my creative work and because of my mother's illness. My life was always hard, but it was particularly miserable during that period. My mother's hopeless disease and I had no support. Besides, I had no luck. I wrote little and didn't have anything published at all. I didn't know where to apply myself and what to do with myself. We had very little money to live on. I received rare and low royalties and a health pension, or I would rather say, poor health pension. I needed money for my mother's medical treatment. And then I met archpriest Aleksandr Men' [Editor's note: Aleksandr Men' (1935-1990) Fr Alexander Men' served as a priest in the Russian Orthodox church for thirty years. His legacy includes an Orthodox University, a Charity Group at the Russian Children's Hospital, and a Youth Missionary School. Fr Alexander is sometimes referred to as the architect of Christian renewal in Russia. He was a prolific writer, whose books cover all areas of religious thought, capped by a multi-volume study of world religions. On September 9, 1990 he was murdered. Fr Alexander's murder was never solved] and adopted Christianity. He was such a bright and light person that I followed him.

My parents gave up Judaism and didn't give me religious education, and I had a craving for religion. Perhaps, I took after my great grandfather Vigdor in this respect. There was a hollowness in my heart. I was a very credulous simpleton in my childhood and youth. They told me at school that religion was a tale of uneducated old women. Teachers said this at school and chucked all religion out of my soul. I wasn't religious at school and at 30 I became an atheist. However, I wasn't an active atheist, I was passive. I couldn't resist general moods.

I heard about father Alexandr Men' for the first time from my close friend Tamara Zhirmunskaya, a Jew and a poetess. She had stresses at home and was distressed about the situation. Alexandr Men' whose spiritual daughter she had been for 10 years actually put together splinters of her soul. He busied himself with her like he would have with pieces of a broken cup and brought her to her feet. After I heard her story I realized that I had to see him. This was in 1988.

One Sunday my friend and I went to his church out of town. At the beginning everything was a surprise for me. It was a small wooden church. There was a crowd of people, there was no room to move. Almost all of them came from Moscow. They were mainly intellectuals. Students, college lecturers. Many Jews. It was a fancy service and I felt like part of a stunning performance. His every move, each word, the sound of his voice, his oration imbued all. He was shining. There were strong fluids of light and kindness coming to people from him. I met a person who was convinced that Christ existed and I believed him.

Afterward I attended his lecture 'Spiritual perestroika' in the house of literature workers. I was shy and I went behind the curtains and said: 'I do need to talk to you' and he gave me his address. It

was easy to address him. There were always people around him. He was very democratic. He didn't even have arrogance inside. Although he knew his value he valued others. The following Sunday I went to the address he gave me and there was another service. There was confession. I waited till he talked with all others. They actually tortured him with their questions. He didn't refuse one person. He listened to people and helped them to resolve their everyday issues. I waited till he finished talking with them and in 10 minutes I told him about my sorrow and problems. He replied: 'I understand, I understand'. He was sitting in a small old arm-chair when he jumped to me like a tiger, recited a prayer and laid his hands on me. It felt so good. They said he had healing hands and I can confirm it. He said I had to cross myself very quickly and attend confession at least every three weeks. Then I had a feeling of faith. I began to write spiritual poems. I was different. Yes, a miracle happened to me. My life changed. I had lived with a quarter of my heart before, but then it became free and I started breathing. And all of sudden poems came like from space, generously. I wrote a book of poems. I started attending a temple and I made friends and they are still my friends. I stopped being alone. At first I was afraid of the thought that I was a Jew and Orthodoxy was religion of Russians and I didn't go to church for a long time. I didn't know that Alexandr Men' was a Jew. And only after I got to know that he was a Jew I felt at ease and began to cross myself. Alexandr Men' fully acknowledged his belonging to Jewish people and even believed it to be an undeserved Gift of the Lord. He highly valued his being a Jew and was proud of it. 'Kinship with prophets, apostles, Virgin Mary and Christ is a great honor and great responsibility as a member of the Lord's people,' he said. In his opinion, a Christian Jew was still a Jew. He didn't baptize me. I was baptized after my mother died. During two years of her illness I couldn't leave her and after she died Father Alexandr was not among the living any longer. In September 1990 he was murdered with one hit of an axe on his head on the way to church. I couldn't understand how one could raise his hand on a priest. This was horrible and it was a loss for me. 13 years passed, but they haven't discovered the truth about this crime. Who plotted and committed it and will this murder ever be disclosed? Father Alexandr belonged to the group clergy whose spreading influence was viewed by communists and their police as a threat to their power. For KGB and anti-Semites Alexandr Men' was a suspicious figure. I think that they or the latter or together they murdered Alexandr Men' to make him silent. Perhaps, the axe, this weapon of murder, was a symbol. They shook their axes fighting against Jews during pogroms. Father Alexandr was concerned about increasing xenophobia in Russia. He saw a grain of Russian fascism in it. KGB authorities manipulated these fascists.

I stayed in hospitals 9 times in my life. Every time it was terrible. Last time in May 2002 I broke neck of femur on my left leg. I had limped slightly on my leg and had severe trombophlebitis. I sat on my bed 17 without moving, and even slept sitting. I thought it was trombophlebitis, but it was a fracture with displacement. I didn't even fall I just sat on a bench somehow incautiously and then I fell from my bed and it led to displacement. I was alone, but members of our community helped me. Other patients in my ward were jealous about me. Their relatives didn't visit them as often as my friends. I had a surgery. It was free of charge, but as it is customary in this or other hospitals I gave my doctor 100\$ [Editor's note: it is not uncommon to give small gifts or money, usually dollars, to doctors in Russia unofficially, in return for good treatment. Doctors usually expect such expressions of gratitude. This practice has always been especially widespread in bigger cities]. He was a nice doctor. I didn't think that such skilled doctor would do this surgery on me, but he was on duty when I came to hospital and he started talking to me. I had health problems, and my heart was poor and I had diabetes and lots of other things. He said: 'And what shall we do with you?' I

said 'Surgery' 'What if you remain on the table?' I said: 'It's also a way out'. So he did this surgery on me. It was well done. They inserted an artificial joint. Staying in our hospitals is a great ordeal. I don't like recalling this hospital. For example, if you need a night pot or want a wash you have to pay each time. I had 150 rubles [\$6 at the time] in my drawer, an attendant saw money and took it looking as if she was doing me a great favor. But there was nothing else to do. I was helpless and couldn't rise from my bed. Those attendants were like gangsters and doctors were good specialists. They watched my health condition and my heart constantly. There were 8 patients in my ward and all were bedridden and helpless. One might even have died there at night if the door had been closed and nobody would have noticed. At night there was one attendant for 70 patients in the hospital. What could she do? Besides, her salary was very low and there were not many willing to take this job. It's hard and low paid work. Now I can walk in my apartment, go downstairs to pick my mail, but my walking radius is limited.

I had big hopes for perestroika [25](#). It was like some fresh wind blowing. I do not watch TV now, but when I watched it, Duma meetings and speeches of various politicians I had hopes for something better. As for Gorbachev [26](#), I do not blame him. He raised the 'iron curtain' [27](#). This stupid Cold War that swallowed all our money and brought our state to ruin. It became easier to breathe and I got to know more. It was always hard to be published. For different reasons. In the past it was a state monopoly and only literature officials, absolutely ignorant and uneducated, could decide to publish or forbid a book, whether it complied with moral and ethical standards of a Soviet citizen or not, there was censure and ideological commission and a book also needed to be included in publication plan. Now one can publish anything, but it is a matter of money, which I don't have. My savings were gone during default in 1990. Besides, I am old and cannot go around and 'legs feed a wolf', they say. There were many democratic slogans during perestroika and they seemed to have a meaning. I was glad about it and had hopes. But unfortunately, these events happened at my old age and illnesses when I couldn't be an active member of society any longer. I don't care that some people became rich and I am almost a beggar. I won't get rich regardless of regime. I don't need it. I have moderate demands and don't need extra riches, they are a burden and do not contribute to creativity.

So who am I? A Jewish woman in blood turned to Christianity. Of course, I am a Jew. Jews were my ancestors. I am interested in their life, history and traditions. I think I am genetically linked to Jewry. I don't know why, but I am touched by Jewish folk songs and dances. If I had healthy legs, probably hearing Jewish music I would start dancing. I like Ukrainian and Russian songs, but listening to them, I do not have this anxious feeling that overwhelms me when listening to Jewish songs. I didn't get any religious education and was raised in a family of atheists, but I cannot say that my linking with Jewish people is merely ethnic or determined by a stamp in my passport. This is not the only reason why I feel my connection to Jewish people. If in the past religion in Russia was determined by nationality, now it's not so. Not all Russian become Christian and the word Jew is not a synonym of a follower of Judaism. Though I adopted Orthodoxy, I've identified myself as a Jew. I don't attend a Jewish community since I haven't left my home since I fractured my leg. When I asked the Hand of Help for help a curator visited me and when she saw icons on the walls she was struck dumb and didn't know what to do at first, but then she decided to include me in the patronage list after talking to her management.

Gossary:

1 Realschule

Secondary school for boys in Russia before the revolution of 1917. Students studied mathematics, physics, natural history, foreign languages and drawing. After finishing this school they could enter higher industrial and agricultural educational institutions.

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 White Polish Guard - Polish troops jointly with the White Guard army fought against the Red army in 1919-1920 trying to destroy the Soviet regime, restore the czarist rule in Russia and annex Ukraine to Poland

This effort failed. The Red army won a victory. This military action involved mass Jewish pogroms.

4 Pogroms in Ukraine

In the 1920s there were many anti-Semitic gangs in Ukraine. They killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

5 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during WWI, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

6 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)

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

7 Gangs

During the Civil War in 1918-1920 there were all kinds of gangs in the Ukraine. Their members came from all the classes of former Russia, but most of them were peasants. Their leaders used political slogans to dress their criminal acts. These gangs were anti-Soviet and anti-Semitic. They

killed Jews and burnt their houses, they robbed their houses, raped women and killed children.

8 A big stone stove stoked with wood

They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. There was usually a bench made that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in winter time.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

12 Likbez

‘Likbez’ is derived from the Russian term for ‘eradication of illiteracy’. The program, in the framework of which courses were organized for illiterate adults to learn how to read and write, was launched in the 1920s. The students had classes in the evening several times a week for a year.

13 Rabfak (Rabochiy Fakultet - Workers’ Faculty in Russian)

Established by the Soviet power usually at colleges or universities, these were educational institutions for young people without secondary education. Many of them worked beside studying. Graduates of Rabfaks had an opportunity to enter university without exams.

14 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 shared apartments continued to exist

for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of shared apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

15 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.

16 Enemy of the people

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

17 Bolshoi Theater

World famous national theater in Moscow, built in 1776. The first Russian and foreign opera and ballet performances were staged in this building.

18 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

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

19 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.

20 Marshak, Samuil Yakovlevich (1887-1964)

Writer of Soviet children's literature. In the 1930s, when socialist realism was made the literary norm, Marshak, with his poems about heroic deeds, Soviet patriotism and the transformation of the country, played an active part in guiding children's literature along new lines.

21 Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (real name Vovsi)

Great Soviet actor, producer, pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry.

22 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The antisemitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

23 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.

24 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

25 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.

36 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.

27 Iron Curtain

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.