

# Mera Shulman

*I got acquainted with Ms. Mera Alterovna Shulman a month before her eightieth birthday. She is a short gray-haired woman with young eyes. She lives with her husband and daughter in a three-room apartment in one of new districts of St. Petersburg. You can do nothing but to show jealousy of her vital energy. Life of Mera Alterovna is interesting and rich. Her feverish activity permits her to meet a lot of people of different ages and professions. Possibly this particular situation serves as a source of her zest for life. Remarkably clear intellect of Mera Alterovna has kept for us numerous invaluable facts and details of her own life, life of her relatives, and life of the whole generation. She shares memories of her past generously, holding her time cheap. She takes us to nooks and corners of her memory and regardless of her own, informs us about terrible and painful details of her biography.*



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## My family background

I was born in Riga [Latvia] in 1925. Unfortunately I know nothing about my remote ancestors. The most remote ones I can tell about are my grandfathers and grandmothers. But my both grandmothers lived before my time. At the very beginning I'd like to tell that there were no aristocrats in our family. My paternal grandfather's name was Leyb Shulman. He was a shoemaker and lived in Livani (a small town to northwest from Daugavpils in Latvia). His wife name was Haya-Dina. I do not remember her maiden name. My grandfather died in Riga in 1930 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery.

My maternal grandfather Hirsh-Leyb Kravets was a tailor. One day he gave up his business and became an owner of a furniture store. It seems to me he had several stores. My grandfather perished during World War II on the territory of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. We do not know neither the way he died, nor when it happened. My maternal grandmother was Mera-Krenda, I do not remember her maiden name. I was named in her memory, but the second part of my name was lost when I received my passport. It happened because I was never called Mera-Krenda, always

Mera. That is why we decided to register me as Mera Shulman.

My grandmothers and grandfathers, both maternal and paternal spoke only Yiddish. My paternal grandfather wore kippah; and my mother's father put on kippah only to visit synagogue. Both my grandmothers wore wigs. Unfortunately I do not remember their style of dressing.

My maternal grandfather lived in a huge apartment in the center of Riga. In his apartment there were five or seven large rooms. After the death of his first wife (my grandmother) my grandfather lived there with his second wife.

In that apartment there was electricity and water supply, but no bath-room: they had to go to a bath-house. There was stove heating. The apartment was well furnished for that time. They had no garden, because the apartment was situated in the city center. I can not tell exactly if they had servants, it seems to me there was a house maid. No one played with children, except the parents.

My paternal father had a house in Livani, where I spent first five years of my life. This sort of houses keep their visage for years, therefore I think, that at that time I found it the same as it was long before. Its outer entrance hall was very dark: the walls were papered with Russian newspapers. Russian letters seemed to me very strange, and at the age of three I asked my Mum 'What do these hen tracks mean?' Mum named the letters, and that was the way I learned to read Russian. Earlier there was a garden around the house, but later it disappeared. I got to know about it from my father: there grew plum-trees, they gave rich harvest. Grandfather sent my daddy to collect plums from the ground, and my daddy simply opened the garden gate and let in pigs from the neighboring gentile's garden; the pigs quickly helped my daddy to manage his task.

My maternal grandfather was not religious. However, observing Jewish holidays, he arranged circumcision for all his sons. He visited synagogue on holidays and sometimes on Fridays. Sabbath celebration at his house was something like celebratory family dinner. Kashrut observance was reduced to purchasing of kosher meat. They never bought non-kosher meat. Jewish holidays were celebrated without fail.

My paternal grandfather wore kippah, prayed three times a day, put on tefillin – so in a word, he was a real Jew.

I can tell nothing about political views of my grandfathers. But I know for sure that they were members of no political parties.

My memory keeps almost nothing about their neighbors. From the story about pigs it is clear, that the neighbors were different: both Jews and gentiles. Livani was, perhaps, more Jewish shtetl, but many Latvians lived there too. Daddy told about their neighbor, a tailor Moshe Sandler. When he wrote down client's measurements, he wrote 'Di' and then the figure. Then again 'Di' and again figure. His explanation was the following 'The first 'Di' means 'Di Leng' [length], and the second 'Di' means 'Di Breyt' [width].

Unfortunately I remember nothing about friends of my grandmothers and grandfathers, about their circle of acquaintance.

When children of my grandmothers and grandfathers were little, families lived in small towns, therefore they never left anywhere for vacation (as was customary).

Unfortunately I can tell nothing about brothers and sisters of my grandmothers and grandfathers.

I also can remember nothing connected with military service of my grandfathers. I think that they had no army experience.

My paternal grandfather was very silent and modest man. He had typical appearance of a handsome Jew. He frequently walked around the house wearing tallit and tefillin. He used to read siddur. He never played with children. Probably his character was influenced by the absence of one eye: once being engaged in sewing boots, he wounded his eye by an awl and his eye came out.

Another grandfather was more sociable, loved his grandsons and played with them. Grandfather's shop was situated in the same street with my school, and we usually met in the morning at a bus stop and went in the same bus. I was happy: he always returned me money for my bus ticket (and I already had money for ticket from my parents!), and sometimes gave me some more money. Most often the given sum averaged 32 kopecks – enough for four bus trips! Once I was late for the bus and managed to see only my grandfather's fluttering raincoat. It was wormwood to me. Of course the point was not only and not so much as money: my grandfather loved me very much, and I returned his feelings. You see, I was his elder (and the only one during four years) granddaughter.

I always loved my native city Riga very much. It was a large and beautiful city, and so many relatives and friends I had there before the war! We liked to walk round the city, to date near the famous clock in the city center! I do not know the number of Jews there, but I know for sure that they were many. I also can tell nothing about the Riga Jewish community: this term was not in use at that time. In the city there were several synagogues. I remember the following names: Gogolshul, Petershul [the synagogues were called this way due to the names of streets they were situated in: Gogol Street and Peter Street] and a Jewish cemetery. Certainly, there were both rabbis, cantors and shokhetim, I do not know how many they were. I remember that my Mum bought hens in the market and carried them to shokhet. And in 1936, when my brother was born, they arranged circumcision for him on the eighth day (according to Tradition) directly in the maternity house, where my Mum gave him birth. So he was discharged from the maternity house being a Jew already.

In my childhood there were no more cheders in Riga. And my daddy finished cheder. The schoolboys were guaranteed that after they finished that educational institution they would be able to write 'Jewish letter with Russian address'. That was their maximum program. By the way, I keep my father's letter in Russian: 'My dear children, I am safe and sound, and wish you the same.' that is full of characteristically Jewish mistakes. There were a lot of different Jewish schools there: Hebrew, Yiddish, and Hebrew with Ashkenazi bias. Among these schools there were both secular and religious ones. In Riga there were Jewish hospitals. People could choose a hospital according to their income: expensive ones, of average cost or charity hospitals for poor. There were mikves at the city bath-houses.

There was no special place (ghetto) in Riga for compact residing of Jews. Jews lived in apartments they could afford.

My parents had friends and we made friends with their children (our coevals). I remember that at first friends of my parents lived in a magnificent apartment. And later when we decided to visit them, I was surprised that we went to a different street. There we saw a dilapidated apartment. It

turned out that the head of the family (their surname was Ghershuni) lost his work and they had to find a cheaper lodging. It was unpleasant, but had no relation to their Jewish origin.

I can not remember a house in Riga without electricity or water supply. I know nothing about typical occupations of Jews in Riga.

I do not remember any special manifestations of Anti-Semitism in my childhood. Perhaps only one unpleasant episode comes to my memory. One day in the park a lot of people gathered to celebrate some holiday (I do not remember what holiday exactly). Schoolchildren took seats in front of the rostrum. Front rows were occupied by schoolboys of a Latvian school (I studied at Hebrew school). They saw us and started bothering us. We simply left, and on our way spoke to each other 'Was it necessary for us to be present there? Haven't we ever seen gentiles?' It was very unpleasant, but not insulting. We felt confident because we were able to choose school, friends, environment; we did not feel bound down. I had no friends among Latvian children; it was enough for me to have friends among ours.

For some reason I do not remember any military holidays. I remember Mother's Day [the first Sunday in May] and Independence Day [Latvian holiday, the Republic declared its independence on the 18th of November, 1918.]. I remember well red-white-red Latvian banners. I remember and can sing the National Anthem of Latvia: 'Dievs, sveti Latviju mus dargo teviju, sveti jel Latviju, ak sveti jel to! Kur latvju meitas zied! Kur latvju deli dzied, laid mums tur laime diet, mus Latvija!' [The National Anthem of Latvia, composed by Karlis Baumanis became official in 1918. In English translation it follows: Bless Latvia, O God/Our verdant native land sod/Where Baltic heroes trod/Our lovely daughters near. Our singing sons appear/May Fortune smiling here/Grace Latvia!]

Visiting market was not considered in our family to be a man's occupation. It was Mum's duty. Daddy went to the market only if Mum was sick. They both always bought food at certain dealers, the market was very large, but my Mum always knew whom to address. They bought food not only in the market, but also in shops. They often visited a shop, which belonged to a Jewish person. My parents made friends with him and his wife and always invited them to our family holidays.

The most important political events of those years I remember only at a child's level. In 1939 in Riga suddenly appeared two girls from Poland. One of them was assisted to get a job of a parlourmaid and the other one started working as a cleaner in the shop, which belonged to a Jew. They were accommodated in the house of my maternal grandfather's friends. The girls told a lot about fascists [the Nazi occupiers] in Poland. People gathered clothes and money for them and sent them back to Poland at the end of summer. The girls were going to spend money for buying a stove, because at home their old stove had been absolutely broken. Later I realized that it was an echo of the future war. But already at that period I understood how good was the level of our life in comparison with life of those poor girls.

I do not remember any important political events and do not remember my parents discussing something of that kind. I do not remember at all any political conversations at home. It seems to me that at that time people were politicized very little. Is it possible to be a characteristic feature of Jews in Latvia?

I'd like to tell you about my parents. My father Shulman Alter Leybovich was born in 1901 in Livani. He died on September 9th, 1980 after a serious incurable illness.

My Mum Shulman, nee Kravets Haya Hirsh-Leybovna was born on March 24th, 1902. She died on June 5th, 1966 from blood-stroke and was buried in Riga at the Jewish cemetery.

The first profession of my father was a cutter of footwear. In 1930 he got a job of salesman in furniture shop, which belonged to his father-in-law.

Later he opened his own furniture shop. In Riga there was a department store - a large wooden construction. There were a lot of furniture shops in it. My father rented one of them. In the period of 1930-1940, i.e. before the Soviets came to power my father was an owner.

My father was very clever and purposeful man. He always looked only forward and was very enterprising. But he was hard to get on with. Being offended by his relatives, he could have kept silence for half a year.

My mother was much easier to get on with. She suffered much, because her husband was a difficult man, but he gave her his full support.

Father loved all his children very much. He really adored his son, who was born 11 years after me. Father expected a son both instead of me and instead of my younger sister. He loved his daughters too, but if at the time when we were doing our homework his son wanted to walk on the table, he was allowed to do it. Daddy simply said to me and my sister 'Take away your copybooks for a minute.' I remember the following. My sister was ill with diphtheria at the age of 5. Doctor came and said that some medicine was urgently required, and that delay is deathlike. And it was about midnight. Father ran to a drugstore, which turned out to be already closed. He broke out its door, expecting that the noise would attract somebody's attention. And it happened: the indignant druggist came running, but having learnt about the point, he gave my father the medicine saying no word, and the girl was saved.

I remember my Mum always bustling about the house. She both cooked, and washed, and did the rooms.

My parents differed greatly in their educational level. Mother was much better educated than father. She finished a high school, therefore she knew Russian well. She brought me up in Russian language. I really imbibed it with my mother milk. Mum made an agreement with my father that he would not spoil me with his Yiddish. That was why while I was a little girl, my Daddy was almost silent. Father's relatives told him 'Oh, why did you marry an educated girl - will she count grains before putting them into the copper?' And Daddy answered 'No, she will not count grains, she will train the child and help him to do lessons.' My father realized the value of education very well, though he himself lacked it so much. Most of all my father aspired to give education to his children. He was so proud that all his children became engineers! Imagine, what the status of engineer meant for the person who had finished two classes of cheder and was able only to write 'a Jewish letter with Russian address'. This expression I heard from my father - in his time they ironically called this way the educational program at cheder. Mother tongue of my parents was Yiddish. They both spoke Lettish [Latvian], and Mum also knew Russian. Almost all Jews in Latvia spoke 3 languages. Spending our time in a court yard, we spoke both Russian, and German, and Yiddish, and Hebrew. It was a real discordant chorus. I was surprised, when I got to know that in Russia children study only one foreign language.

Nobody introduced my parents to each other. Daddy had courted a girl, who emigrated to America. She was a daughter of the owner of that furniture shop, where he worked as a salesman. Daddy went to rabbi and said 'What shall I do? I am ready to follow my beloved girl to America.' And rabbi answered 'Oh look, he has not enough Jewish girls here! He will go to that America!' At that time Daddy met my Mum. He invited her to the cinema and they went on. Certainly they got married in the synagogue under chuppah according to the tradition. My parents always dressed as secular people though.

Our parents rarely punished children. I mean corporal punishment. I already told you that Daddy stopped talking with us, when he was angry. But there were some exceptions, and one case I remember very well. I was 7 years old, and my sister was 2 years old. We lived on a high first floor. Below our window there was an abat-jour above the entrance door to the semi-basement. Together with my sister we climbed out to that abat-jour and were sitting there, kicking legs up and down. Our neighbors saw us, got very frightened and told everything to Mum. She complained to Daddy about us. He whipped me strongly, but I consider it to be fair.

Financial position of our family was quite stable. Mum never worked in her life. Her husband provided for the family. Children lacked nothing. Daddy commanded all money: he gave money to mother for daily needs. If Mum said reproachfully that Zelda, wife of her brother had bought a fur coat (to tell the truth, Mum wore a fur coat too), Daddy answered 'Do not look at those who are higher, look at those who are lower.' Daddy had the following unshakable rule: if he earned a ruble, he gave 50 kopecks for expenditure, if he earned two rubles, he gave one ruble – he saved half of his earnings, no matter how small they were. He said to Mum 'Listen, we have two daughters, we should give dowry twice.' We were well dressed and our family was well-to-do, but our income was average. At school there were many children much better provided for. I remember that my uncles, my mother's brothers were better off. When I asked, why their family had several-course dinners, and ours had only one, my parents answered 'Everybody is different.' Each summer we left for the seaside [small villages near Riga at the Gulf of Riga], but not to the same places with my aunts and uncles, but you see, sea and air are identical everywhere.

When we returned to Riga from Livani in 1925 Daddy at first rented a small two-room apartment in a large house. There was neither bath-room, nor a room for servants. Therefore we could not employ a parlourmaid. We lived there 13 years till 1938. By that time in our family there were already three children. Therefore we moved to a three-room apartment, where there was a nursery for me and my sister, a bedroom, a dining-room, a kitchen. The house was worse than the previous one. There was water supply, but no bathroom again. There was stove heating and (a sign of that time) woodsheds in our court yard. Furniture in our apartment was good as always. Of course! Both grandfather and father were professional furniture-makers! And one more: Daddy realized very well what it meant to have two daughters. We had two pianos for me and my sister, two sleeping sets: one for us, and the second one for our parents. At home we never had pets: my father did not like them at all. Because of his professional duties he had to visit many houses. You see, he was engaged not only in sale of new furniture, but also in buying up old samples for the subsequent restoration. So, after his visits he told us 'So, I come to perform the order and see a good girl sitting, doing her lessons and having a cat on her knees. And this cat strikes her copybook with its paw and the copybook becomes dirty!' My father with all his respect for studying and education could not imagine anything more awful, than to spoil a copybook.



We had no garden: it was impossible to have it living in the municipal apartment.

Only Mum helped us in our studies, we had neither nurses, nor governesses. When my brother was a little boy (do not forget that he was already the third child in our family!), we hired a parlourmaid for a short period of time to help Mum about the house.

There were not many books in our house, basically secular ones. My parents' attitude to books and reading was very different. Daddy never read anything. Mum liked to read very much and Daddy always became angry with her. When he came home, he wanted my Mum to meet him on tiptoe. And Mum liked to read a book lying in bed. And there it began! 'Books again!' He understood and encouraged Mum, if she read books to children, but reading for her own pleasure was naughtiness! I followed in Mum's footsteps and liked reading very much. Father could not and did not want to keep his eye on my reading. Mother could give me advice, but there was no need. I always was very independent, including my reading. I read all works of world known authors. I read books in Hebrew. War and Peace by Lev Tolstoy <sup>1</sup> I read in Russian when I was already an adult. My first War and Peace was in Hebrew. We had a lot of newspapers at home, even father used to read them. In Riga there were many good libraries, I loaned a lot of books there, and Mum preferred to read books we had at home. At that time women liked to read love stories, a lot of them were published in newspapers issue by issue.

I can not call my parents religious, but they observed the tradition. Certainly, my brother was circumcised. When he was three years old, they celebrated the Day of Opshern [hair trimming]. You see, according to Jewish Tradition, it is forbidden to cut boy's hair before he is three years old. To tell the truth, they cut his hair before, but nevertheless the holiday was arranged. I remember quite well matzah for Pesach, dreidel and Chanukkah gelt, and we always kept the fast on Yom Kippur. I am not sure that every Saturday we lighted candles: Saturday dinner at home (as well as at my grandfather's) was rather a family, than a religious event. My parents visited synagogue not very often, but on holidays they did it for sure. In the synagogue they had their own seats.

My parents belonged to no political party and even sympathized with no one. When friends or relatives tried to involve my father in political dispute, he always said 'Let THEM rack their brains.' I remember it for sure that my parents were members of neither social, nor cultural organizations.

I do not remember that my father had any connection to the army.

In a large city people use to communicate with neighbors little, therefore Mum especially liked to gossip with neighbors at dacha [summer house popular in Russia]. Among them there were many Jews, but also Latvians.

It seems to me that my parents did not choose only Jews to be their friends, but for some reason most friends of theirs appeared to be Jews. Father did not make friends with his colleagues, considering them to be his competitors. On holidays our relatives, grocery shop owner and his wife, and dacha neighbors used to visit us. Parents of my sister's friend, the Entins also often visited us. I remember his mother helped my Mum baking for guests.

Mother with all children spent all summer at the seaside. Daddy never went on leave. We met him on Saturday evenings. He spent with us only Sunday. We called it 'kissing season', because having got off the train Daddy kissed us. He never did it in winter at home.

I remember relatives of my parents. Mother had senior sister Rosa Hirsh-Leybovna Lifshits, nee Kravets. She was born in 1895 and died in 1941. She worked as a doctor in Latvia in a small village.

Another mother's sister was Sofiya (Basheve) Hirsh-Leybovna Kleener, nee Kravets. She never worked and was uneducated. She lived in Riga. Her husband had a furniture shop. When the war burst out, they did not manage to evacuate in time, because their children were sick with scarlet fever. Nobody knows when and how they were lost, and nobody saw them any more.

My Mum had four brothers. David Hirsh-Leybovich perished during World War I.

Lazar Hirsh-Leybovich was a furniture-maker. Before the war uncle Lazar sent his wife and two children to his mother-in-law to a small town situated close to the Soviet border.

Uncle Lazar went to evacuation together with us in the same train carriage. Our train went by that town, where his family stayed. He decided to leave the train and try to find them and save. But he did not even reach his family: he got the lead on his way. And his wife, children and mother-in-law were also shot by Germans. We got to know about it only in 1945 from the letter of their neighbor.

Borukh Hirsh-Leyboich, his wife Sonya and two children Ekhiel and Dovid visited us rarely. We were not good friends. They did not regard us with favor: we were poor relatives for them. When the war burst out, uncle Borukh came to ask advice from my father: all our relatives acknowledged him as worldly wise. Above the table of my sister a portrait of Lenin [2](#) hung. Uncle Borukh advised to take it off immediately. We never saw anybody of uncle Borukh's family again.

Pinkhus Hirsh-Leybovich was born in 1912. He survived during Holocaust, because he managed to evacuate together with his wife Sonya and two daughters Mirra and Fruma. He died in Riga in 1988 from heart attack. He worked as a furniture-maker. In contrast to my father he was skilful in writing reports in Russian. Daddy was envious of him, he said 'You see, he is talented from birth.'

My daddy disliked the Kravets (mother's relatives), but tried to be on good terms with them. Pinkhus and Lazar often visited us, and we did the same. Aunt Sonya (my mother's sister) lived rather far from us, therefore we met her not very often. There were a lot of occasions to meet our relatives: we celebrated together not only family holidays, but also Jewish ones.

## Growing up

I was born in Riga on June 11th, 1925. In our family I was the senior child. Immediately after my birth our family moved to Livani to my paternal grandfather. Father wanted to work there, save money and go back to Riga being already well-to-do. First five years of my life I spent in Livani in the house of my grandfather. During 4 years and 9 months I was the only child of my parents, and then their second child (my sister) was born. All the time until I was seven, i.e. when I went to school, I spent with my Mum. At home I never felt bored, though I do not remember anything of especial interest for me. I remember that I never went in for sport, but I wanted very much to ski. Daddy said 'Do you regret that your arms and legs are safe?' So I managed to ride a bicycle, but not very good.

I went to school when I was seven. I started from the second form at Jewish Hebrew school. At that time it was common to skip the first grade, if you were well prepared. I studied perfectly well. Everything was interesting for me, I can not name my favorite subject, I liked them all, except



history. In history I also had my excellent mark, but it was the most laborious one. At school there were outstanding teachers. They not only knew their subjects perfectly well, but also had various talents. For example, our teacher Korz was very talented for music. Under his guidance we played Haydn symphony using pipes and penny whistles. He did his best to invent something unusual for each holiday. In the second form we made very interesting performance Alphabet. I was the shortest, and he gave me Yud, because it was the smallest one. But at the same time I was explained that words Jew and Israel began with that very letter. [Yud is the tenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, in its written form it is only a small line. In Hebrew both Yehudi (Jew) and Israel start with Yud.] I was very proud to get that remarkable letter.

So many years have passed, but I still remember surnames of almost all our teachers. Our first teacher: Madame Meerson, teacher of natural history Mr. Pintsov... Certainly, at this sort of school there were no Anti-Semitic manifestations (and it had no possibility to exist there). By the way, the teacher of Latvian language, Madame Frei (a Latvian) used to say that she liked Jewish children very much and preferred to work with them. Our school was a six-year one. We finished it in 1939. All school graduates received badges, with an inscription in Lettish but with Hebrew letters 'The main city of Riga, Jewish school no.9, 1939'. Almost all my schoolmates perished during the war. After finishing that school I entered Hebrew gymnasium.

This gymnasium suggested very extensive program. In the beginning of school year it was necessary to bring an application form from parents where they indicated, what language they wanted their child to study. In the next form they added one language more, and so forth. After five years of education they graduated young people knowing five languages. From the very beginning I chose Latin, because I was going to become a doctor. The gymnasium practiced co-education (boys and girls studied together, but in classes they sat in different rows). In 1940 in Latvia Soviet power was established [occupation of the Baltic Republics] [3](#). Hebrew was immediately declared hostile and Zionist language, and our Hebrew gymnasium was turned into Yiddish school. A lot of my schoolmates left for other schools, but I did not, because I did not want to part with my favorite teachers. Unfortunately, it was my bitter mistake: soon the best teachers were fired; both children and adults were spied on. We took cover in the cloakroom to talk in Hebrew: it was absolutely forbidden. The school lost its former prestige.

Both at school and in gymnasium they taught us basics of Judaism. But religion was not among the main subjects. It was rather a tribute to Tradition. I remember well our teacher of religion from the fifth form, but unfortunately my memory did not keep his name. I know for sure that he perished during the war.

During my school years my friends were Jews for the most part. Mum did not allow us to go for a walk in our court yard: she was afraid that we could become 'street children', so we had friends only at school. Later, when we grew up, Mum realized that we would not fall under bad influence and permitted us to go for a walk. And we made new friends in our court yard: we played together, went for a walk round the city and to the Daugava river.

I can not remember anything special I was great interested in, my main passion always was reading. No public organizations attracted my attention, I never was a member of clubs or associations. On days off we went to the park, to the Zoo, to the cinema. Daddy worked all days long, even on Saturdays. Mum accompanied us, and when we grew up, she let us go alone. On

days off we visited our relatives, received them at ours. In summer we never went to children's camps and never spent vacations without our parents.

I do not remember when I went by a motor-car for the first time. I am sure that it happened after the end of the war. Before the war we went by cab and by tram, later by bus. It was possible to go to the seaside by train (by a steam locomotive, certainly). It makes one laugh, but for the first time in my life I visited a restaurant in 1990, when we celebrated the 60th anniversary of my sister. Our father hated restaurants: he never took there his family and never visited restaurants himself.

My sister Dina Alterovna Uden (nee Shulman) was born on March 2nd, 1930 in Riga. She died on April 17th, 2005 in the USA after a serious incurable illness.

I loved my sister very much, but when she was born it was difficult for me to get used to the idea that I was no more the only daughter of my Daddy and Mum. Probably, that was the reason why I broke my favorite doll to pieces, when at the age of several months my sister touched it.

When I grew up, I made good friends with my sister. We were on terms of intimacy with her.

Parents decided to send her to my school, and I helped her getting ready for it. We often talked to each other in Hebrew, so that our parents could not understand us.

My sister managed to enter the school, but studied there not for long: the war burst out. We evacuated in a small village in Chkalov (at present Orenburg) region. There Dina entered the fourth form of a four-year school. Later, thanks to efforts of our father we moved to Novotroitsk town. My sister finished there 6 classes. She finished her school education already in Riga after returning from evacuation. After finishing a seven-year school she tried to enter a Law School, but failed. Then she entered some another technical school and finished it. After that she tried to enter a Department of Law in the University, but failed again: sure that was already a manifestation of Anti-Semitism. My sister got a job in a fashion atelier to sew caps. Later she entered a correspondence course of the State Latvian University and graduated from it. She worked in Riga at a factory; it seems that they produced semiconductors. She was a very talented engineer, a real expert.

Her husband Ruven Abramovich Uden, an engineer worked at the factory, producing electrotechnical equipment. He was a gifted person: he drew, wrote verses. In 1956 their son Boris was born. All of them left for the USA in 1993.

My brother Elya Alterovich Shulman was born on January 9th, 1936. He died on October 10th, 1982.

I was not so close with my brother in compare with my sister, possibly we were affected by a great difference in age: 11 long years. I remember myself doing my lessons, and my little brother lying in my lap. At that time there were no pampers, therefore my relatives used to say 'Mera, come to dry your knees!'

My brother was sent to school in Riga after our return from evacuation. He finished that school and later a Technical School. Later, when I already lived with my husband in Leningrad he was in the army in Pushkin (a neighboring suburb of Leningrad). Actually speaking, only at that time we really got acquainted with him. After the army he studied at the Northwest Correspondence Polytechnical College and graduated from it. He married a good Jewish girl from Minsk. They made their home in

Minsk and gave birth to two daughters Olga and Anna. It was in Minsk where he died from cancer. He was only 46 years old.

I can not say that our family was religious. Perhaps the only one really religious person among my nearest relatives was my paternal grandfather. But certainly, we observed some Jewish traditions at home. Together with parents we rarely visited synagogue, but sometimes it happened. I remember that being a little girl, I kept a fast on Yom Kippur. At school they taught us religion, but our knowledge was not deep and we did not lay special emphasis on it. Nevertheless every day 15 minutes before the beginning of lessons, they lined us up in a corridor and ordered to read aloud either from the Torah or from the siddur. And I was the best reader at school, I was a real reciter. And what remarkable long hair I had! All the boys at school were mine. But I am sorry to look aside from Jewish Tradition! My brother attended neither cheder nor yeshivah, and times already changed: Soviet power came. Our parents taught us nothing regarding Tradition or religion. But there are things, which are observed in any Jewish family, even if it is far from religion. So, my brother was circumcised (they arranged bar mitzvah for him). We celebrated holidays regularly. And among other things, it gave us occasion to meet our relatives. I liked all Jewish holidays very much.

During my life I did not get to know what real Anti-Semitism felt like, but we were often bit (figuratively speaking) by people. But I realized it already after the end of the war. During my childhood, in Riga there was nothing of that kind. In evacuation also, because nobody knew who Jews were: local residents asked my father whether he had met Jews in Riga by chance. They were told that Jews had horns and tails - that was why they wanted to make that information more exact.

I do not remember Anti-Semitic laws in Latvia. In any case I did not feel anything of that kind. The same was with my father, as far as I remember. I can explain it by the following: my father knew his place very well and he always tried not to stand out against the background. He was always on good terms with furniture-makers - Latvians.

For citizens of the Soviet Union the war burst out on June 22nd, 1941 [Great Patriotic War] [4](#). It was the day - boundary between peaceful life and war nightmare. For Latvian inhabitants life started changing a year earlier.

### **During the war**

In June 1940 Soviet army occupied Latvia. At midday Riga inhabitants poured out into the streets and saw tanks decorated with ribbons, flowers, etc.

Every evening in all Riga districts they started showing Soviet films about happy life of Soviet people. Right in the streets Red Army men explained everyone (who wanted to listen them) how happy Soviet people were. Soon family members of Soviet officers came to Riga. Population of Riga increased, i.e. families of officers were settled in large apartments of Riga citizens. Wives of Soviet officers behaved unusually for Riga: they wore night-dresses instead of evening ones and cooked food in chamber-pots. I do not blame them: they simply never saw this sort of things earlier. Soon we heard about nationalization of houses and shops. They started with large and rich ones. My aunt Sonya's shop was nationalized. At that moment my father understood that he had to undertake something. His brother-in-law, husband of his sister was a real happy-go-lucky fellow.

Daddy always helped his family the way he could: gave them money or clothes. So that happy-go-lucky fellow immediately grasped the possibilities that Soviet authorities gave to idlers like him. He got a job of fireman. You see, there is much truth in what people say: the main examination for a fireman it to oversleep twelve hours lying on his side. But he remembered that my father had done much for him and helped him to get a job of fireman too. Father made my Mum the shop owner, and he himself turned into a worker (a fireman). It considerably strengthened his reputation in opinion of new authorities. Later we got to know through hearsay that people were being exiled to Siberia. Three schoolchildren from our school together with their parents were deported. I met one of them after the war. She lost all her phalanges at tree cutting [tree cutting was one of the main types of forced labour for prisoners of Soviet concentration camps].

We ran away from Riga on June 27th, 1941. By that moment the city was already bombed, it was terrifying. All our relatives gathered together in my grandfather's large apartment, there we slept side by side in the large internal corridor. One day my father looked through the window and saw people running somewhere. He understood that it is impossible to waste time any more and we rushed to the railway station. In the streets people stood near their houses. They looked at us in bewilderment 'Jews, where are you running? Today is Friday, Sabbath! We will leave also, but after Sabbath!' But alas! Nobody of them managed to leave. Our train was the last one. All of them were lost.

In evacuation we stayed in a small sovkhos [5](#) in Chkalov (Orenburg at present) region, which was situated 110 kilometers far from the railway. I worked at the cattle-breeding farm, I had to assist cows during the act of delivery. Fortunately the cows managed to do it without me! There was only a four-year school. In 1942 my father was mobilized. He found himself in the building detachment in Novotroitsk city (500 kilometers far from the place, where we stayed). At first he built cesspools, but soon they took into account his first profession (a footwear cutter) and sent him to a studio to work as a shoemaker for army needs. Father imparted his anxiety that his daughters had no place to study, to his chief. After much effort his chief obtained for father an authorization to take us to him. So, we arrived and settled in the corner of a large barrack partitioned off by a curtain. In the barrack there lived 60 Red army men. There we went to school: I went to the 9th form and my sister to the 5th one. It was there where I received the school-leaving certificate. My sister finished 6 classes.

Our family was lucky: despite of all deprivations of the war time, we were all together. We knew nothing about the rest of our relatives.

### **After the war**

We returned to our native Riga in October 1945. We found city to change little. The synagogue was burned down. The same happened with the department store, where my father's furniture shop was situated. Population of Riga changed terribly: none of the Jews survived. All our relatives were lost. We know nothing about their death or about their burial places. We managed to learn (absolutely by accident) terrible truth about death of my aunt Rosa. Rosa Lifshits, nee Kravets was the elder sister of my mother. She was a doctor and worked in a small village in Latvia. All her life she lived among peasants, helped them to give birth, treated them medically, and shared all life severities with them. In 1949 after my son's birth I got ill with mastitis. A doctor from our polyclinic visited me and I recognized him to be a collaborator of my aunt Rosa Lifshits. He told me that at

that time he ran away from Germans using a bicycle. He came to pick up Rosa and offered her to rescue together with him. She said that it was not necessary, because all local inhabitants were her patients. She was sure that they would stand up for her. Calmed down, the doctor left alone. Later it turned out that aunt Rosa was shot by Latvians (probably by her patients) even before Germans came.

Only our family and the family of my uncle Pinkhus (they were in evacuation in Tashkent) survived the war. Therefore our circle of acquaintance changed. And Mum felt badly and spent more and more time at home. I do not remember our meeting with neighbors and their reaction to our returning.

Our apartment was completely plundered. After the end of the war Mum saw her dresses on the yard-keeper, and Daddy found our bedroom suite at the market. They gave him a great discount and he bought it. At first we lived at our distant relatives, and then Daddy rented another apartment, which fitted us more. In 1946 I got married. My husband left for Leningrad and entered the Leningrad Electrotechnical College named after Lenin. I visited him regularly during 5 years and dreamed to settle in Leningrad one day.

I do not remember anybody from our circle of acquaintance, who emigrated to Israel. At any rate, our family members did not ask themselves this question. I do not remember that I had any political outlook. To tell the truth, I refused flatly to join the Komsomol [6](#), though they tried to persuade me. I'd like to say that my political views meant the complete absence of any political views. I rejected the very idea of living political life.

I entered the Riga University in 1947. I studied there for 2 years at chemical department. Then I became pregnant and allergic to smells unavoidable in chemical laboratories. I changed the College and continued my studies at the Agricultural Academy (technological faculty for food-processing), which graduated engineers. I was admitted to the 3rd course. After graduating I was sent to Tallinn [Estonia]. I left my little son in Riga with my parents. In Tallinn I took up a post of technologist at sausage workshop. I lived there 4 months and then handed in an application requesting to send me back to Latvia for work, so that I could be closer to my son and my parents. Besides I underlined that I knew Lettish and had no idea about Estonian. They complied with my request and sent me to Tukums (70 kilometers from Riga).

I worked there as a master at butchery for two years and a half. They gave me personal transport: telega with a horse. [Telega is a four-wheel carriage.] I left the service in 1954, when my husband graduated from College in Leningrad. I took my son away from my parents and we moved to my husband to Leningrad. I got a job at the Electrosila Factory together with my husband. [Electrosila Factory is a Leningrad Corporation for construction of electric machines – one of the largest USSR factories in this sphere.] I was set to do not very interesting work, because my speciality was not adequate for the job. I held that position during 10 years. And after that to my great surprise and surprise of all my relatives, I entered the Leningrad Northwest Correspondence Polytechnical College. While studying I did not interrupt my work and graduated from the College in 1968.

During all my life I came across manifestations of Anti-Semitism, which came not from authorities or official persons, but from the so called 'private persons'. I also confronted different problems regarding national question: in Tukums I replaced master of the workshop, who was Latvian – representative of the local population. It caused a certain discontent, and not because I was Jewish,

but most probably because I was not Latvian. At Electrosila Factory I faced no State official Anti-Semitism. I made new friends. For me nationality of a person (my friend) was of no importance. I doubt whether I could marry not a Jew. I married particularly my husband and it seems to me that I did not think whether he was Jewish or not.

I met my future husband during the war, in evacuation. In 1943 I was a pupil of the 10th form. It happened in Novotroitsk. In our class there appeared three Jewish boys - escapees (from Poland in 1939). All of them were very capable, but their Russian was poor. Therefore they studied at our school only two weeks and were sent down. One of these boys entered Technical school, where they were more interested in their technical abilities. He had a reading-book of Russian literature for the 10th form. I was in great need of that book and its owner often brought it to me at my request. Besides he helped me to accomplish tasks in physics. And later he fell in love with me. We got married in 1946 in Riga.

I did not take my husband's name, because I did not like it and got accustomed to my maiden name. Besides I did not want to change my passport and school-leaving certificate and it would have been necessary for me in case of changing my family name.

My husband Israel Abramovich Ptakul was born in Poland in Lodz on November 1st, 1923. His mother tongue was Yiddish. His father was very sick; he was unable to work because of his illness. His wife, a seamstress provided for the family. All their family huddled together in one small room.

My future husband graduated from the Technical School in Novotroitsk with honors. Later he graduated from the Leningrad Electrotechnical College and got a job at Electrosila Factory. He worked there until his retirement in 1997. He had a speciality of electrical engineer.

We brought up two children. My son Lev Israelevich Ptakul was born in Riga on March 21st, 1949 and lived there with my parents during five years. In 1954 I brought him to Leningrad. There he went to school. He had difficulties in his studies, only in the 8th form he took an interest in sciences and started receiving good marks. But by that time he already made up his mind for leaving the secondary school for a professional one. Unexpectedly for his teachers and for himself he went through examinations in the 8th form having only excellent marks. Teachers persuaded him to stay at school, but he did not want to alter his mind. At the technical school he got a speciality of milling-machine operator and worked in Leningrad at the Zvezda factory, producing diesel electric power stations. He served in the army and later entered the Leningrad Northwest Correspondence Polytechnical College. He graduated from it with speciality of mechanical engineer. Unfortunately my son is single. He left for Germany in 2001. He is satisfied with his life; several times he came to see me. He has no job in Germany: he is a welfare recipient.

My daughter Lubov Israelevna Ptakul was born on April 22nd, 1959 in Leningrad. When a child, she said 'I understood the way you gave me birth on the birthday of Lenin. You are engineers: you first draw and then give birth.' She was very good and clever girl. She has clever fingers as her father and grandfather had. She finished school in Leningrad in 1976 and entered the faculty of primary education at the State Pedagogical College named after Hertsen. At first she worked as a teacher at primary school, and now she teaches Russian language and literature in senior forms. She did not marry. I blame her father for it. He was always afraid of her early marriage and stopped my slightest attempts in this direction.



We gave no traditional Jewish education to our children. Time, when they were growing was not conducive to it. We never told them that they were Jews, but it was made without us. One day little Lev asked me, who the Jews were and why he was a Jew. I explained him that there were different peoples: Russians, Jews. But he was upset: obviously boys in the court yard had explained him that it was not so honorable to be a Jew. And when my son grew up, he used to say 'And nevertheless it is good that I look like a Georgian.' Certainly we told our children about the war, about our lost relatives, about our life in evacuation. We never celebrated Jewish holidays, never visited synagogue (we even did not know, where it was). We also never celebrated Christmas or Easter.

We did not observe Tradition, but at the same time arranged circumcision for our son. Our children got some idea about Jewish Tradition, when we visited our relatives in Riga. They celebrated all Jewish holidays and some of them happened to be during our stay there. At home we never ate matzah, never used separate plates and dishes for meat and dairy, never cooked traditional Jewish meals. At present we have not so many friends, but among them there are Jews and gentiles (I think fifty-fifty).

Most often we met our relatives in Riga. Seldom events in our family gathered them in Leningrad. Running a few steps forward, I'd like to tell about three visits to Riga especially memorable for me. In 1978 we went there for wedding of my nephew Boris Ruvenovich Uden, the only son of my sister. He married a Jewish girl from Riga Polina Tsyruunik. The wedding was very beautiful, they celebrated it in a cafe on the Riga seaside. At present my nephew and his family live in the USA. His only daughter Marianna will soon become a lawyer. In 1990 we celebrated in Riga the 60th anniversary of my sister Dina. During that celebration there was an occasion, which has turned upside-down all my life. I am going to tell about it a little bit later.

And in 1993 we went to say good-bye to the family of my sister, who were going to emigrate to the USA altogether. Certainly we went to the old Jewish cemetery to give the last glance at the native graves. At the cemetery there is a tombstone with the following inscription 'In commemoration of all gentiles, who saved 55 Jews at the risk of their life.' This inscription is made in Hebrew and in Lettish. We also visited that place, where the synagogue was situated: that very synagogue, which we visited together with our parents during our childhood. The synagogue was burnt down during the time of occupation. People built some sort of memorial from its ruins.

To tell the truth, we felt neither dictatorship of authorities, nor its weakening. We had regular work, an apartment: we wanted to change nothing in our life. From 1954 till 1986, when I worked at the factory, I did not even think about anything connected with Judaism: you see, we did not want to be fired. My husband often listened to the Voice of America [7](#) broadcasting station, we kept an eye on victorious wars of Israel, but only with each other, in a low voice and in the kitchen we could discuss it. Our position was not affected by severance of diplomatic relations with Israel, though I can say that we were not indifferent. None of our relatives visited Israel before 1989. We had no troubles connected with our Jewry. Probably it can be explained by the fact that we had no significant positions. Only Lubov failed to enter where she wanted. You see, she dreamed to study at the Philological faculty of the Pedagogical College named after Hertsen. We went to the College entrance commission together with her. A benevolent woman from that commission asked to show Lubov's passport. When she saw 'a Jewess' in the column 'Nationality', she said 'Do not wreck nerves of your girl [8](#)! Give her documents to the faculty of primary school education. The number of enrollees is less there and they are not so strict with THIS.' So we followed her advice.

Lubov entered the College from first. Another example: in 1966 when I graduated from the College, I wanted to get job at the design office of Electrosila Factory. But its staff department did not permit it. And in 1960s my husband won a contest of engine projects. After that they invited him to the Leningrad Kirov Engineering Plant. He agreed, but asked to tell the staff department that he was Jewish. My husband was right: they refused to give him job and moreover – they asked him to recommend somebody also intelligent, but Russian. And one more. Possibly it is not very important, but you will understand my feelings. After my retirement I was got fixed to a job as a registering clerk in the T.B. prophylactic center. A year later I occupied there position of seamstress and worked during 8 years. Once on the eve of the New Year day I decided to please my co-workers. I dressed myself as Santa Claus and sewed small presents for all co-workers. My colleagues were delighted and thanked me very much. After that everybody went to the table, laid for festive dinner. And I was told the following ‘Take chocolates and sweets, but do not sit down to table with us. We are used to celebrate holidays only with OUR crew members.’

Broadly speaking, as times goes by you understand that there were a lot of Anti-Semitic manifestations, but we deceived ourselves, suggesting the idea of living normal life. You see, it is difficult to confess yourself that the only life you have was not very successful.

Until 1993 we had no relatives abroad.

Memories do not disturb or trouble me. You know, in this case they say in Yiddish ‘bis tzum knep, nit bis tzum hartz’ [Only up to buttons, but not up to heart.] Certainly, we were pleased to hear about the fall of the Berlin Wall, because nobody likes to live almost all his life behind the iron curtain [9](#)! Only now I understand that the events of those years resulted in fundamental changes in our life. To my mind it has changed for the best.

My life greatly altered after 1990. It happened the following way. In 1990 all our family went to Riga to celebrate the 60th anniversary of my sister. One of the guests told everybody about her Hebrew studies. She demonstrated her achievements, naming everything on the table in Hebrew. At first she named bread and butter, but when she came to sausage, I got greatly excited: she made a mistake and I (being not conscious of it) corrected her loudly. Here it is necessary to take into account that for 50 years I not only did not speak Hebrew, I even tried to forget it. When we came back to Leningrad, I met my friend from Electrosila Factory and asked her where it was possible to find Jews in Leningrad. She advised me to go to the Synagogue. I had no idea where the Synagogue was situated, but I managed to find it. There two announcements arrested my attention. The first one was an invitation to become a member of cooperative society Development for persons interested in studying and teaching Hebrew. [Cooperative society is an association of people for team work in the sphere of economic activity: they offered paid services to institutions, organizations and citizens. In 1990s a lot of cooperative societies appeared in the USSR: earlier it was impossible. Teaching Hebrew was one of possible paid services.] The second announcement notified about organization of the Leningrad Society for Jewish Culture (LSJC). [The Leningrad Society for Jewish Culture was founded by Jewish activists. It was officialy registered in 1989.]

I went to the LSJC and got exactly to Hebrew lesson. I addressed the teacher on Hebrew (I started recollecting it with difficulty) and asked his permission to be present at his lesson. I did not like the level of studies at all. I realized that I wanted to teach and not to study and addressed the cooperative society Development. I have got to know that in the city there was only one expert in

this sphere – Valery Izievich Ladyzhensky. My first difficult test was to understand time and place of our meeting, which he dictated me in Hebrew. But I managed and we met. Valery gave lessons at home. There were a lot of persons interested, because it was a period of great aliyah. [Aliyah means going up (Hebrew). In Hebrew they say ‘to go up to Israel’ and not ‘to come to Israel’. That is why to make aliyah means to repatriate to Israel. Great aliyah means great number of repatriates.] Groups of 10 students each, alternated each hour. Valery delivered a part of his groups over to me. And already a month later I started giving lessons to groups at home. My students were interesting people; it was a pleasure for me to teach them. Soon I finished Hebrew advanced course under Ladyzhensky leadership. I am very grateful to Valery Izevich. He left for Israel long ago, but we are still in touch. We are friends and correspond until now. I visited him in Israel.

A year later I went to Ulpan Halom and offered them my services of a teacher. I got a job there. [Halom is a Hebrew school for children and adults, it works in St. Petersburg since 1992.] It happened in August 1991, and I work there up to the present day. During these years I had time to work both at the Jewish University, at Migdal Or School and at Lamed Sunday School. [Petersburg Jewish University was founded in 1989 and it was the first institution for Judaica studies in the former USSR.] [Petersburg Jewish gymnasium Migdal Or exists since 1991. There are 180 pupils at two departments (for boys and for girls). Most graduates continue their studies in different Jewish educational institutions abroad, mainly in Israel.] [Lamed Sunday school was founded at the Petersburg Jewish University in 1992 for people interested in Judaica. About 50 students visit the school free of charge.] The Migdal Or School is a religious one, therefore my work there had its funny peculiarities. According to the time-table, my lesson followed the lesson of religion. Schoolchildren used to be late for my lesson. I went searching for them and usually found them with their teacher of religion. The teacher said ‘I can not let them go, because the prayer is such long.’ However I’d like to say that education at that school was good and teachers were very qualified.

During last four years besides Hebrew I taught Yiddish at the Jewish Community Center. It seems to me that it is my teaching activity in the sphere of Jewish education that has filled my life with real sense. It is a pity, certainly, that it happened when I was already more than at mature age; and it is unthinkable that it could never happen. Just imagine! The language, which I tried to forget all my life, to suppress it in itself, has become my permit to the new interesting world.

Usually I am short of time, therefore I watch life of the Petersburg Jewish community mainly through my lessons at the Jewish Community Center. A lot of interesting events take place there: exhibitions, lectures; everyone can find interesting occupation. I do not use community services, but I remember that once I received half a kilo of matzah for Pesach.

Hesed Welfare Center [10](#) does not help me. You see, I live with my daughter, and I know that there are so many lonely aged people. Thank goodness, my earned income is rather high, and in our family there is nobody to spend it on drink, so we manage.

At present when I think about important events (for example, Revolution in Hungary), I feel more and more that our thoughts were in contradiction with our forced words. We understood that Hungarians did not ask to liberate them [1956] [11](#). The same is with the Prague Spring [12](#). As far as the Doctors’ Plot [13](#) is concerned, I remember strong feeling of fear and expectation of

massacres. When Stalin died, I cried bitterly as all other people around. Sure, we were not sorry for him, but we were afraid that it could become even worse. We were also afraid not to cry hard, when everybody around you did it. But as I already said, all political events we could discuss only with my husband and only in a whisper.

## Glossary:

### **1 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich (1828-1910)**

Russian novelist and moral philosopher, who holds an important place in his country's cultural history as an ethical philosopher and religious reformer. Tolstoy, alongside Dostoyevsky, made the realistic novel a literary genre, ranking in importance with classical Greek tragedy and Elizabethan drama. He is best known for his novels, including War and Peace, Anna Karenina and The Death of Ivan Ilyich, but also wrote short stories and essays and plays. Tolstoy took part in the Crimean War and his stories based on the defense of Sevastopol, known as Sevastopol Sketches, made him famous and opened St. Petersburg's literary circles to him. His main interest lay in working out his religious and philosophical ideas. He condemned capitalism and private property and was a fearless critic, which finally resulted in his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901. His views regarding the evil of private property gradually estranged him from his wife, Yasnaya Polyana, and children, except for his daughter Alexandra, and he finally left them in 1910. He died on his way to a monastery at the railway junction of Astapovo.

### **2 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.

### **3 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)**

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

### **4 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.

## **5 Sovkhoz**

state-run agricultural enterprise. The first sovkhoz yards were created in the USSR in 1918. According to the law the sovkhoz property was owned by the state, but it was assigned to the sovkhoz which handled it based on the right of business maintenance.

## **6 Komsomol**

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

## **7 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.

## **8 Item 5**

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

## **9 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.

## **10 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.

## **11 1956**

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

## **12 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.

## **13 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.