Nina Polubelova

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Riga
Latvia
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya
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I interviewed Nina Polubelova in the premises of the social center Rahamim, which is under the auspice of the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture 1. Nina is a member of Rahamim's choir. I came to the choir premises and had to wait for the rehearsal to end. While I waited, I listened to the choir. It was amazing. Elderly people, even those who could hardly stand, were singing in beautiful, clear, inspired voices. I think that their singing would touch anybody. When the rehearsal was over, Nina with her eyes scintillating came up to me. Later on, after hearing her life story, I understood how important the choir was for her reviving background, being cut away by Soviet life, coming back to friends and like-minded people. Nina is a buxom, bright woman. She looks young for her age. She has nice neatly done fair hair and bright young-looking eyes. She is sociable, affable, and willing to reminisce over the past.

My father's family lived in Riga. There was a Jewish pale of settlement 2 in tsarist Russia, and Jews with the exception of doctors, lawyers and merchants weren't permitted to settle in big Latvian cities. My paternal grandfather, Zalman Levin, dealt with timbering. He evidently got a permit to reside in Riga. Grandmother Hanna was a housewife, which was customary back in that time. Married Jewish women didn't work as they were looked after by their husbands. I don't know where my grandparents were born. All I know is that they were both from Belarus. My father never told me how his parents came to move Latvia. Maybe he didn't know either. My father and his siblings were born in Riga.

My father was the eldest. He was born in 1904 and named Meyer. Samuel was born after my father. The third child was a daughter, who was given the Russian name 3 Rosa, and her Jewish name was Reizl. Then came Vulf. I don't know when my father's siblings were born. The gap between them wasn't big; it was between one and two years.

My grandfather was in charge of timber stock. He purchased logs in wholesale. They were processed at his enterprise and then that timber was sold further. The family did well. I don't know if they had their own house.

My father's family was religious, observing all Jewish traditions. I remember that my grandfather always wore a kippah at home. My grandmother wore high-necked dark dresses: woolen in wintertime and silk in summer. She had dark-colored dresses even in summer. My grandmother didn't wear a wig. Her hair was done in a roll, backcombed over the forehead. Jewish traditions were observed in my father's family; Sabbath and Jewish holidays were marked. On holidays the whole family went to the synagogue. My father and his siblings got Jewish education. Each of them had a bar mitzvah at the age of 13.

My grandfather understood the importance of a good education and assisted his children in that. Of course, everybody in the family knew Yiddish, but Russian was mostly spoken. At that time Latvia belonged to the Russian empire and the national language was Russian. All children were fluent in German. My father went to a Russian lyceum in Riga. Probably the rest of the children also studied there, I can't say for sure. Having graduated from the lyceum my father entered Riga University. I don't know which department. At that time there was an admittance quota for Jews in institutions of higher education, i.e. 5 percent 4 out of the overall number of students. Upon graduation from the university, my father spent some time in Paris, France. I don't know anything about that period of his life.

None of my father's brothers followed in the footsteps of my grandfather. Samuel and Vulf had a joint venture, but they had nothing to do with timbering. I don't know what they did for a living by 1940. Both of them were married. Of course, they married Jews; it couldn't have been otherwise in a traditional Jewish family. I vaguely remember Samuel's first wife. Samuel's son Valentin was born in 1930 in his first marriage. He had a daughter: Noemi, my coeval, in the second marriage. Vulf married a Jewish girl from Riga. I think her Jewish name was Rohl. She was tenderly called Raya in the family. Their only daughter Sarah was born in 1938. Of course, both brothers had traditional Jewish weddings. My father's sister Rosa immigrated to Paris in the late 1920s. I knew that she worked there, but I don't know where exactly. In Paris Rosa married a French Jew. I don't remember his first name, but his last name was Zilberman. Rosa's husband was a boxer and our kin didn't approve of that marriage. Their only son Lucien was born in Paris in 1936.

My mother's family lived in the small Latvian town Krustpils, not far from Riga. My grandparents were born in Latvia. I think my maternal grandfather was born in Krustpils. I don't know anything about my grandmother. My grandfather's name was Leib Levites, I don't know Grandmother's name. She died long before I was born. We didn't even have her picture. My grandfather owned an apothecary in Krustpils. My grandmother took care of the household. They had two daughters: my mother Rosa, born in 1905, was the elder one, and her sister Irina was born in 1910. Of course, my mother and her sister had Jewish names, but I don't know them.

Krustpils was a Jewish town like most small Latvian towns. Most of them were included in the pale of settlement, so sometimes there were more Jews in those towns than Letts, Russians, and Germans. Most of Krustpils Jewish population were craftsmen. All town tailors were Jews. Most tinsmiths, joiners, hairdressers and locksmiths were Jews as well. There were small shops in the houses of the hosts, where one or two people worked. There were large workshops with hired people. The trade was mostly under Jewish control. There were big and small shops, where poor people could buy necessary goods even on credit. There was local Jewish intelligentsia: doctors, pharmacists, teachers, and lawyers. There was a synagogue and a shochet in Krustpils. Apart from cheder there was also a compulsory Jewish school. Jewish families from Krustpils had a traditional Jewish mode of life. Probably in small towns like that, where almost all the people knew each other, nobody would take a risk in being a freethinker. Jewish people married only Jews. Traditional Jewish weddings were mandatory. I know that from my mother. I was in Krustpils only in my childhood. Now the town has changed.

My mother's parents observed Jewish traditions. Sabbath was always observed, and Jewish holidays were marked. On holidays the whole family went to the synagogue. Nobody worked on Saturdays and my grandfather's apothecary was closed. My grandmother observed the kashrut. I don't know where my mother and her sister got Jewish education, but both of them knew how to read in Ivrit and knew the prayers. My mother and her sister went to a Russian lyceum. After the Russian Revolution of 1917 5, Jews in Russia got a permit to live in any cities they chose, and they moved to Riga. My grandmother died in Krustpils and was buried in the Jewish cemetery. My grandfather settled in Riga with his daughters.

My grandfather closed down his business in Riga. My mother began working as a pharmacist in a private apothecary. She was educated, but I don't know the details. My mother had worked for a year in the apothecary and in that time she met my father. Her sister Irina also studied somewhere besides the lyceum. Irina worked as a librarian. She took vocal lessons. Irina left her job after getting married. Her husband was a Jew from Riga: Ieruhim Gurvich. They didn't have children.

I don't know how my parents met. I know for sure that it wasn't a pre- arranged marriage. They must have had a traditional Jewish wedding, as both my paternal and maternal grandparents were religious and wouldn't have agreed to a secular wedding. At that time my grandparents' opinion was of importance.

After the wedding my parents rented an apartment. It was a big four-room apartment in downtown. My mother kept working after getting married. I was born in 1933. I was named Nina. When I was born, my mother didn't want to quit her job and become a housewife. My parents hired a baby-sitter for me. My mother did all the work about the house. The baby-sitter was Lett from a village. She lived with our family. Her bed was in the children's room. When I got older, I had a governess instead of a baby-sitter. She spoke Lettish and German with me, and it was she who taught me those languages. I knew German best of all. I spent my childhood with those two loving women. My parents worked and came back home in the evening, but they always found time to play with me, to read me a book and tuck me in.

Russian was spoken at home. When my parents wanted to conceal something from me, they spoke French. I understood Yiddish since childhood as my paternal grandparents spoke it. My father spoke Yiddish with his brothers in the presence of my grandparents. If they weren't around, Russian was spoken. Apart from Yiddish, my grandparents knew Russian and German.

On Sabbath and Jewish holidays we went to see my grandparents. My father's brothers came there with their families. I was close with my cousins and always was happy to see them. On Sabbath my grandmother lit candles and prayed over them. Then everybody sat at a festive table. I remember my grandfather blessing the bread before starting a meal. On Jewish holidays my father, his brothers and my grandfather went to the synagogue, and my grandmother went there with her daughters-in-law and grandchildren. After the synagogue everybody came to their parents' place. My grandmother was a great cook. I remember how tasty her dishes were. The holidays were marked with all rules being observed. All men wore kippot. My grandfather put his kippah on every day, but my father and his brothers only on Sabbath and holidays.

On Pesach my grandfather led the seder. It was the only night in a year, when children weren't made to go to bed, but stay with the adults at the table. We felt grown-up on that day. My grandfather, clad in white attire, would recline on the pillows. His seat was at the head of the table, which was covered with a white cloth. There were festive dishes and goblets with wine on the table. The largest goblet with wine for Prophet Eliagu was in the center of the table. My elder cousin Valentin asked my grandfather the traditional paschal questions. Grandfather hid the afikoman, read the Haggadah. Everybody sang mirthful paschal songs. In general, things were done the way they were supposed to. On Yom Kippur my parents fasted for 24 hours. I was a kid, so I could get away for not fasting. Other Jewish holidays were marked, but I don't remember them.

There was a large Jewish community in Riga until 1940. Before 1917 Riga Jews mostly lived in Moscowskiy forstadt 6, the district of the poor Jews on the outskirt of the city. Jews made the most population of that part of the city. Jewish houses were in the Old City. Well-off Jews could settle in the downtown area. There were no Jewish streets and houses in downtown. People lived in the parts they could afford. I remember one time, when my mother took me to a Jewish wedding. Her friend who lived in the Jewish house in the Old City was getting married. All the neighbors came to her wedding, and that astounded me. It was the first time in my life when I saw a true Jewish wedding, with a chuppah, rabbi, Jewish dances and musicians playing Jewish music. Maybe my love for Jewish songs stems from that. My parents noticed my musical talent and in 1940 they found a singing tutor for me. He always gave me kisses and I hid under the grand piano from him. My music classes lasted less than a year, since the war was about to be unleashed.

In 1940 Latvia became a part of the Soviet Union [see Annexation of Latvia to the USSR] 7. I remember tanks moving in the downtown Riga. We went out to welcome the Soviet army 8. I remember that everybody was with flowers. The faces of the people were blithe. Tank hatches were open and Soviet soldiers got out of them. People hugged them and gave them flowers. There was no shooting, no resistance. There was normal life. It seemed to me there were barely any changes for our family. Of course, the adults perceived it in a different way. From the scraps of conversation of my parents I remember that the newcomers' behaviors and manners surprised them. At that time that didn't affect me. Before 1940 Russian was spoken at home, so it was easier for us than for those who didn't know Russian.

In 1940 before Latvia was annexed to the USSR, my father's sister Rosa Zilberman, her husband and son Lucien came to see us. Paris had been occupied by the Germans and they fled from Paris miraculously. They moved in with my grandparents, who lived in a large apartment by themselves. I made friends with Lucien.

In May 1941 Grandmother Hanna died. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Riga. She had a traditional Jewish funeral. One month after my grandmother's death, the war was unleashed 9. On Sunday 22nd June 1941 my parents were going to take me for a stroll in the park. We had breakfast. While my mother was doing things about the house, my father listened to the news on the radio. Then I found out that the German army had attacked the Soviet Union and battles were held in Belarus.

Soon after the German aviation started bombing Riga. When the signals of the air raid alarm were heard, we were supposed to go down to the air-raid shelter. Most often they bombed at night for some reason. Probably from Aunt Rosa, my parents knew that the Germans didn't spare Jews. They decided to evacuate. Not everybody in the family was willing to leave. Grandfather Zalman flatly refused to leave his house. He said he was too old to drop everything and run away, besides he said that during World War One he had seen Germans and their good attitude towards Jews. My mother's father also didn't want to evacuate. Of course, we could understand the old people, but my father's younger brother, Uncle Vulf, also decided to stay in Riga with his family. The rest of the people weren't against departure.

The four families went into evacuation: us, my father's brother Samuel and his family, Aunt Rosa, her husband and son, Aunt Irina and her husband. Vulf helped us a lot. He made arrangements for the truck driver to get us to the train station. We packed hastily. We decided not to take many things. The only thing I could talk my mother into was to take my new coat. In spring I had a coat made with rabbit fur collar and fur muff. I loved that coat and couldn't leave it. Then I had been wearing it in the postwar years and it was the only piece of warm garment I had. That coat and muff took most of the room in a small suitcase, carried by my father. My mother was pregnant at that time and couldn't carry heavy things. On the way to the train station Letts were firing at us from the buildings. Those people were definitely Letts, as Germans hadn't come into the city yet.

All of us were able to take one train. It was very hard as there were no tickets, people were squeezing in the cars pushing away the feebler ones, but still we got onto a train and took seats. We didn't know where the train was heading. The only thing we knew was that we were going to Russia. There were frequent air raids on our way. When the Germans started bombing, everybody jumped out of the cars trying to hide. Such bombings were at the Doroshino station. We darted into the forest, where huge mosquitoes were about to eat us alive. We reached Pskov [today Russia, about 300km from Riga]. There we were told to leave the train as it was needed for militaries.

Passengers were supposed to get on locomotives. We were guarded by fate. As soon as all the passengers had left the train, it was blown up. There was a locomotive for us to take. We were on the road for a long time and then were told to get off the locomotive at some station and take the barge. Again we were moving in an unknown direction. Finally we happened to be in Almaty [today Kazakhstan, 3500km from Moscow]. All four families got there safely. We and some other evacuees were housed in barracks. I don't remember the details. After a month my mother gave birth to a girl. She was named Anna after Grandmother Hanna. Anna lived only for a month. I don't remember her funeral, as I didn't attend it. I only remember that my father carried a tiny casket under his armpit. It was a little bigger than a shoebox.

My father was drafted into the army in Almaty. His eyesight was poor and the medical board by the military enlistment office disqualified him from military service. My father was drafted into the labor army 10 in Kazakhstan. There he worked as a truck driver by the end of the war. My mother and I remained on our own. We didn't have a place to live and it was problematic for my mother to find a job. There were crowds of evacuees in Almaty: separate families and entire organizations. My mother thought that it would be easier for us to survive in a small town or a hamlet. We stayed in Almaty for a while and headed for the small town Issyk [today Kazakhstan]. Aunt Rosa, her husband and Lucien went with us. Uncle Samuel and his family stayed in Almaty.

Unfortunately, my mother's expectations were unmet. She couldn't find a job as a pharmacist or as a nurse, so she started working in a kolkhoz 11: in the field. Rosa also worked with my mother. They were given 450 grams of bread for work from dawn till sunset. My mother found lodging for us in a basement. Aunt Rosa lived with her family separately. Apart from us there was another Jewish family in the basement. They were evacuated from Kiev [today Ukraine]. We had a hard life. Rosa's husband died a couple of months after our arrival in Issyk. He was a big agile man and it seemed to me he suffered from malnutrition most of all. Of course, Rosa tried to feed their son in the first place. Her husband was getting feebler. I think he died of hunger. It's miraculous that we survived as all of us could have starved to death. The only thing we had to eat was 450 grams of bread and boiled water. One Kazakh lady had pity on us and gave us some dried corn seeds. Local people fed poultry, chicken and geese, with that. Those seeds were hard like stones and we had to boil them all day long.

It was time for me to go to school, but I couldn't go to the first grade, as I didn't have clothes. My mother and I left with one outfit each, which was on us: each of us had one summer dress and one pair of sandals. The only warm clothes we had were my coat with rabbit fur and my mother's woolen jacket. She put it in the suitcase thinking that there might be cool summer nights. The Soviet mass media stated, even before war reiterated, if somebody dared to attack the Soviet Union, the enemy would be defeated on his territory. My mother must have taken those words seriously. At any rate our clothes and shoes were unsuitable. My mother bought us both wooden shoes from the market, and I was wearing those clogs all winter long.

All of us were emaciated. I hardly left the house being shattered by feebleness. The hardest was to stand winter frosts. My mother had to work in order to feed us. Our neighbors, whose living conditions were much better than ours, gave us potato peelings. My mother washed them and made soup, but it was impossible to get by with that. Our neighbors were constantly doing some commerce. They went to the villages and brought potatoes and salt from there. Once they convinced my mother that I should sell their salt at the market. They promised to give us potatoes for that. I had been standing at the market all day long, but I wasn't able to sell anything. The salt wasn't fine, and besides it was dirty. People came over, took a look and left. I didn't know how to praise my goods like other salespeople did, or talk people into buying. Thus, I came home with nothing. That was the sales experience in my life. My mother was worried that I would get sick. Garlic was the only thing she could buy at the market. Every evening she gave me a clove of garlic. Maybe it really helped me, as I didn't get sick during evacuation. Then there appeared an organization in Issyk, which helped the evacuated. They were supposed to give some food, but instead they gave some beet kvass. I remember my mother brought large bottles of that kvass and we drank it. It tasted good.

The local population sympathized with the evacuees. There was no animosity. Issyk was mostly inhabited by Kazakhs, but there were some Russian people as well. They had never seen Jews, but still soon they started using the word 'kike.' I remember when I went out, local boys were running around and crying, 'Kike, running on the rope.' I don't know if they knew what that word meant, but they teased me constantly.

I don't remember why we had to move out from the basement where we had been living since our arrival in Issyk. It was hard to find lodging. My mother and I roamed from one house to another. There were times when we had to stay in forsaken stables.

My mother was lucky to find a job as a nurse in a local children's hospital in Issyk. There was a barrack by the hospital, where its employees were living. My mother was given a place there, even shabby linen. I was emaciated and the chief doctor suggested that I should be hospitalized to be nourished better. I remember the time spent in the hospital. It was scary. Children were weary, looking dystrophic, like cadavers. I followed my mother in the wards, where she gave injections. She always told me to go away as there were some people with contagious diseases. I was scared to stay without my mother.

We didn't hear from my father. My mother knew where he was and was worried whether he was alive. My mother corresponded with her sister Irina, who lived in Almaty. We found out from her letters that she had a baby, who died shortly after parturition. Uncle Samuel also passed away. His family lived in Almaty.

In 1944 Rosa and Lucien went to Almaty from Issyk. My mother wasn't willing to go with her, but she didn't want to stay in Issyk either. We covered a distance of over 1500 kilometers and went to Novosibirsk [3000km from Moscow]. We were housed in long barracks, where evacuees lived. It was easier to live in Novosibirsk as compared to Issyk. There were coal mines not far from Novosibirsk and evacuees were given coal for heating. My mother and I were given warm clothes. My coat was too small for me. We weren't suffering from cold neither outside nor inside. My mother found a job at a bakery plant. Apart from food cards 12, plant employees were able to buy bread at the plant. There was a canteen where the employees and their children were given food once a day. It was easier with products in a big city, not like in Issyk. My mother got food cards for both of us: one worker's card and one dependent's card. We didn't receive only bread for the cards, but also cereal, fat and a little bit of sugar. I put on weight for some time and didn't look like a skeleton anymore.

Finally, I went to school in Novosibirsk. I was ten and was supposed to go to the third grade for my age, but I didn't know letters, I didn't know how to read and write. In spite of that the teacher talked my mother into letting me go to the third grade in order to give me a try. I remember my first teacher with gratitude. She paid a lot of attention to me and taught me after classes. At first, I merely listened to the teacher in the classes and memorized things, listened in the class, as I didn't know how to read. I remember, once she called me to go to the blackboard and I got 1 [Editor's note: '1' means 'very poor']. I came home feeling really proud and told my mother about my 'success.' Gradually things were getting better. Either the teacher was very good, or I was capable, in about half a year I caught up with the majority of the class. I went to my mother's plant after classes. She fed me at her canteen. If there was time during lunch break, I sang for the employees of the plant. I had been singing since childhood and enjoyed when people liked my singing and applauded me.

We had lived by spring 1945 in Novosibirsk. Aunt Irina persistently invited us to Almaty and in the end my mother decided to move there. I don't remember now how long it took us to get to Almaty. We had to change trains, and sometimes wait for our train for hours. We moved to Almaty in early May and rented a room in the house of a local family. We knew that Latvia had been liberated from the fascists by Soviet troops. On 9th May 1945 we found out about the end of the war and the unconditional surrender of Germany. Of course, all of us understood that the war was about to end, but still we took the news as unexpected joy. Unacquainted people hugged each other in the streets, congratulating each other. In the evening everybody was out singing, dancing, watching festive fireworks. Everybody rejoiced in regained peace.

Irina started packing for home straight after 9th May. We had stayed in Almaty for about a year. Finally, my mother decided to move. Irina found out that the apartment we used to live in before the war, was occupied by other people. She went to Ispolkom 13 to apply for lodging in another house. We moved to the apartment, where I'm currently living. My mother went to our previous apartment hoping that some of our things were still there, but she came back empty-handed. In evacuation we learned how to get by with minimal things. Upon our return we hoped for a better life. When we returned to Riga, my father came. He had been demobilized from the army. He started working as a driver. My mother worked in a pharmacy. I went to the third grade of a

Russian school. It used to be a Lettish school before the war and the teachers spoke poor Russian. Half of the children in my class were from Latvia, and half the newcomers from the USSR. It was of no importance for us. Maybe it would be harder for adults to get along, but the children were more flexible. All of us were pioneers 14, and then Komsomol 15 members. In other words, we were Soviet children. Though, people let me feel that I was a Jew. Teachers treated me well, anti-Semitism was displayed among children, but I never felt it coming from Lettish children. Offensive words were spoken by children who came to Latvia from the USSR.

When we came home, we found out about the fate of our relatives, who hadn't left Riga. All of them perished: both my grandfathers, Uncle Vulf, his wife and three-year old daughter Sarah. We don't know the circumstances of their death, whether they died in the Riga ghetto 16 or during the execution of ghetto prisoners in Rumbula Forest 17. We didn't find out about all the fascist atrocities right away. Only in 1947 the Nazi and politsei were tried. None of them remained alive.

After school Aunt Irina gave me music classes. She had taken lessons with a singing tutor and she taught me everything she knew. I always sang during school holidays. When I studied at school, I found out that there was a people's conservatoire in Riga, where gifted young people were admitted. Unlike in ordinary conservatoire here no diplomas were given, but the classes were taught by the professors from real conservatoires. I found out about the entrance exams. When I saw the members of the board, renowned singers and professors from the conservatoire, I lost my voice from fear. I was asked to sing, but I couldn't produce a sound. I turned back and left. Then Irina scolded me, and I didn't make any more attempts.

The events taking place in the USSR in the late 1940s, early 1950s, didn't affect our family. During the Doctors' Plot 18 my mother was working in the pharmacy, but she wasn't fired, not even nagged. In general, it was almost unnoticeable for us. I remembered the day of Stalin's death: 5th March 1953. I was in the tenth grade. Everybody was crying, when there was an announcement on Stalin's death. I don't know why but I also burst into tears. Maybe I was influenced by the fact that everybody was crying around me: teachers and students. The situation was solemn: there were wreaths everywhere; the school orchestra played a funeral march, there was mourning. I remember that I had to answer a question on the blackboard in my chemistry class before the mourning meeting. The teacher gave me an excellent mark saying that even on such a hard day for the country I did well. I was flattered by her praise. I cried and mourned after lessons.

Everybody was at a loss. We got used to the fact that everything in the Soviet Union was done in Stalin's name. He was a decision-maker and we couldn't picture our lives without him. Life went on. In a while people started coming back from the Gulag 19, those who were deported in 1940 20. Then one of our distant relatives was released from the camp. He came to Riga. I knew nothing about him; I didn't even know that he existed. My parents had a long conversation with him, but I didn't take part in it. I remember that I was curious to see the man who had spent many years in Northern camps. After the Twentieth Party Congress 21 and Khrushchev's 22 speech I learnt a lot, but I wasn't interested in politics that much.

I was fond of chemistry in school. I liked that subject from the first class, and it became more interesting when we started organic chemistry. I got excellent marks in chemistry and before finishing school I firmly knew that I would like to become an organic chemist, but my mother wanted me to become a doctor and insisted that I should enter a medical institute. Maybe during my entrance exams for the first time in my life I felt that I was different from anybody else. I can't say that the examiners tried to lower my grade, but I felt that the attention was focused on me and that I was tested by other criteria, not only knowledge. I entered the dentistry department of the Medical Institute in Riga and found out soon that my mother, who had worked in medicine for a long time and knew a lot of doctors, pleaded with her acquaintance doctors for me in the board. Probably my mother could understand things were unperceivable for me at that time, and that there would be no chance for me to enter. I finished two terms at the Medical Institute and understood that it wasn't my cup of tea. I wasn't willing to work as a doctor all my life. I was lucky to transfer to the second course of the Chemistry Department of Riga Polytechnic Institute. I did well. I had excellent marks during the entire period of studies. I didn't feel anti-Semitism. Both teachers and students treated me fairly. I sang at the first course.

I got married during my studies at the institute. I'll tell you a funny story of how I met my husband. During my studies me and some of my group mates left for training in Leningrad [today Russia]. Of course, after work we took a walk along the city, went to the theaters, museums. We went dancing almost every night. I loved dancing as much as singing. I couldn't live without that. One guy from Riga was my dancing partner. He wasn't from our institute. He left earlier than me and asked me out to the dancing club in Riga. I was shortsighted since childhood and was shy to wear glasses. I went on the date and thought that I saw my guy, white dance was announced, and so I asked that guy for a dance. It turned out that it wasn't the guy who had asked me out for a date. We got acquainted and danced all evening long. Then he saw me off. That guy was my future husband Vladimir Polubelov.

Vladimir was born in Leningrad in 1937. He spent his childhood there. During the war he and his mother were in evacuation and his father was in the lines. After the war they settled in Riga. Vladimir was an only child. He also studied at the Polytechnic Institute, the radio department. Neither my parents nor I cared that Vladimir was Russian. I was practically raised during the Soviet regime and went to a Soviet school with internationalist spirit. After the war my parents took it calmly as well. It was important for them that my husband and I got along. They were right. Vladimir wasn't only a good husband, but he became an excellent father to our daughter and loving son-in-law. After getting married, we lived with our parents. Upon graduation I started working in the laboratory of the chemistry plant in Riga. Vladimir worked as a radio engineer in the military unit. Our daughter Elena was born in 1964.

Upon return to Riga from evacuation my parents didn't stick to Jewish traditions and didn't mark Jewish holidays. Soviet holidays were celebrated such as 1st May, 7th November 23, Victory Day 24, Soviet Army Day 25, New Year. Of course, we marked birthdays of all members of the family. At that time Jewish holidays, Jewish religion, seemed obsolete to me and I thought it would be ridiculous for educated people to follow it.

In 1964 my father died shortly after Elena was born. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Riga. There was my grandmother's grave, so my father was buried next to his mother. My father's name was embossed on my grandmother's tombstone. His funeral was secular, not in accordance with the Jewish rites. My mother died twelve years later, i.e. in 1976. There was no space by my grandmother's and father's graves; therefore, my mother was buried in another alley, but in that cemetery. Aunt Irina died in 1957. She was also buried in that cemetery.

In the 1970s, the Soviet regime permitted Jews to immigrate to Israel. I didn't even consider that opportunity. My husband was Russian and it was unlikely for him to immigrate to Israel. There was no sense in leaving. I liked my job. My colleagues treated me loyally. I didn't think our lives to be too bad, so I didn't even consider immigration. I sympathized with those who were immigrating, I even pitied them as they were doomed to live far away from their friends and kin and have a different mode of life. I understood that they would have to get acclimatized and take trouble in finding a place to live and a job. At that time many of my friends left as well as my relatives: my cousin Valentin, Uncle Samuel's son, cousin Lucien. Uncle Samuel's daughter Noemi immigrated to America. I was worried about them. I was happy that they were able to blend in with new life. We keep in touch. They send me nice letters. The most important thing is that they are confident in the future of their children and grandchildren.

My daughter did well at school. I must have plied her with love to chemistry as having finished school Elena decided to enter the chemistry department of the Polytechnic Institute. Though she was more attracted to inorganic chemistry, and it was okay. Upon graduation my daughter found a job in her specialty. Elena got married after graduation. Here she also followed into my footsteps. She didn't marry a Jew, but a Lett. Her husband's name is Morov. They live separately. Their first daughter Yana was born in 1990. When her daughter was born Elena was on maternal leave for a year, and when it was time for her to go to work, it turned out that the firm she worked for, didn't exist any more. It was a hard period when Latvia regained its independence 26. Many enterprises closed down at that time, as they couldn't survive under new conditions. There was huge unemployment that we didn't come across with in Soviet times. Elena couldn't find a job for a long time. When she found a job finally, the company was liquidated after a while and again she remained unemployed. My neighbor was a director of a kindergarten. Once I asked if there was a vacancy for Elena. She hired my daughter. Elena didn't expect to like working with children. Now she is deputy director of the kindergarten. She is happy with her work. Elena's second daughter Dana was born in 2001. Yana goes to a Lettish school. My younger granddaughter goes to a kindergarten.

I retired in 1988 during perestroika 27. Many people admired the early stage of perestroika and were agog to see the changes in life. I took it as another action of the Soviet regime and was skeptical towards it. Even now I can't say what perestroika gave me. I wasn't at the age to rejoice in liberty of words, press, traveling. Of course USSR citizens got an opportunity to go abroad and invite their relatives after perestroika, but I was elderly and sick, so there was no use in going anywhere. Perestroika resulted in runaway unemployment, lower living wage, and empty shelves in the store. Soon there was the breakup of the Soviet Union [1991]. I took it hard. All of us got used to the Soviet Union, and the entire system was ours, our reality. We lost something when it broke up. It was many years ago. Nowadays life is as if the Soviet Union had never existed. Latvia and other former Soviet republics became independent and all of us had to learn how to live with a new reality. I can't say that it was easy for everybody or that the life now is easier.

The current mode of life is for young people who are able to adapt to new life conditions. Even many young people can't find a job, as one of the mandatory requirements is to know Lettish. Many people don't know this language, as it was enough to be fluent in Russian during the Soviet regime. It takes time to learn the language, but it's hard to go by in the period of studies without having any income. In general, common people have a hard living fearing that there would be no certainty in the future. During the Soviets we were guaranteed that we would live comfortably when reaching old age; medicine was free of charge, and now having skimpy pension and wages we have to pay outrageous amounts of money for medicine, and most people don't have it. It's the hardest for the pensioners, as they can't afford even necessary things.

Probably the only thing that perestroika gave me is revival of Jewish life in Latvia. The Latvian Society of Jewish Culture, LSJC, was founded during perestroika. It's an unreligious Jewish community. There is a religious community, which finally became legal during perestroika. The Soviet regime always struggled against religion 28, not only against the Jewish one. Approximately at that time I started coming back to Jewry. We kept friends with one Jewish family, which lived in our house. They invited me for the celebration of the Jewish holidays. At that time my reminiscences from childhood came back. I remembered how Jewish holidays were marked in the house of my paternal grandparents, and the way my grandfather carried out the paschal seder. I wanted it to be in my family as well. I learnt from my neighbor how to cook Jewish dishes. I didn't know what they were called.

I baked hamantashen, strudels, made forshmak, gefilte fish. I don't know why I wanted to learn how to cook those dishes. The first holiday marked in our house was Pesach 1995. That year our neighbors immigrated to Israel, and my husband and I decided to organize a feast at home. My husband approved of my kindled interest in Jewish traditions and history. Of course, there was no one who would be able to make a true seder in our family, but still I made traditional paschal dinner: there was matzah, mandatory dishes like bitter herbs, horseradish, salted water, a goblet for Eliagu, etc. My daughter also celebrated Pesach with us. It was the time when she started taking an interest in our history and traditions. Of course, she knew that I was a Jew, but she didn't pay much attention to that. I explained to her that the Jewish nationality was identified by my mother, thus my daughter is a Jew. Probably it wasn't important for her, but I wanted her to know.

In about that period of time I came to the LSJC. I wanted to learn Yiddish, find out more about Jewry. I also went to the synagogue for the first time. I knew nothing. I didn't understand anything. At that time I felt myself hurt and deprived and I wanted to fill the gap. There's a pretty good library at the LSJC. I tried to find Yiddish and Ivrit textbooks there, but failed. The circle of Yiddish language studies by the LSJC dealt with colloquial language only. I was enrolled there. My spoken Yiddish is pretty good: both listening comprehension and oral speech, but I didn't learn how to read in Yiddish. I don't think my parents knew how to read in Yiddish either. So, I can't read Yiddish, but my pals who know how to read Yiddish retell me the most interesting articles. I often go to the library, read books by Jewish authors in Russian and German. I read a lot about Jewish traditions and history. It's very important and interesting to me. I made many friends in the LSJC and my husband is happy for me.

When the Jewish choir was founded by the LSJC, I joined it. At first, I didn't attend rehearsals regularly, but within the last five years I try not to skip any single rehearsal. Besides, I feel happy when I'm singing. Besides, I have the opportunity to communicate with people. When people retire, they are cooped up most of the time, and it makes them despondent. When I attend rehearsals I feel fully-fledged, which is important for me. I know that people need our choir. We often take tours to different Latvian towns. We have a full house at our concerts, which aren't attended only by Jews, but also by people of other nationalities. We are often thanked after concerts, given flowers and I see tears in the eyes of the audience. It's very important for me to know that even now I can do good to people. Our choir is like a family. We get together to mark birthdays of our members, and celebrate Jewish holidays. The community, the social center Rahamim became our second home where we come with joy or with trouble, where we would be helped in everyday issues and given succor.

Glossary:

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

2 Jewish Pale of Settlement
Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

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

4 Five percent quota

In tsarist Russia the number of Jews in higher educational institutions could not exceed 5% of the total number of students.

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 World War I, 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 Moscowskiy forstadt

during the rule of Elizabeth I in the 1720s Jews were forbidden to reside in Latvia, and they were chased away from the country. During the rule of Elizabeth II this decree was cancelled in part. Visitors were to stay in a Jewish inn in the vicinity of the town. Those Jews, who obtained residential permits were allowed to live in Moscowskiy forstadt in the vicinity of Riga. In 1771 the first Jewish house of prayers was opened there. In 1813 residents of the Slock town (present-day Sloka, vicinity of Riga Yurmala town) were allowed to reside in the Moscowskiy forstadt. Jews actively populated this neighborhood in the suburb. Even when Latvia became independent in 1918, and the Pale of Settlement was eliminated, poor Jewish people moved to Moscowskiy forstadt, where prices were lower, and there were synagogues and prayer houses, Jewish schools and cheder schools, and Jewish life was easier. Moscowskiy forstadt was a Jewish neighborhood before June 1941. During the German occupation a Jewish ghetto was established in Moscowskiy forstadt.

7 Annexation of Latvia to the USSR

upon execution of the Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact on 2 October 1939 the USSR demanded that Latvia transferred military harbors, air fields and other military infrastructure to the needs of the Red Army within 3 days. Also, the Soviet leadership assured Latvia that it was no interference with the country's internal affairs but that they were just taking preventive measures to ensure that thi9s territory was not used against the USSR. On 5 October the Treaty on Mutual Assistance was signed between Latvia and the USSR. The military contingent exceeding by size and power the Latvian National army entered Latvia. On 16 June 1940 the USSR declared another ultimatum to Latvia. The main requirement was retirement of the 'government hostile to the Soviet Union' and formation of the new government under supervision of representatives of the USSR. President K. Ulmanis accepted all items of the ultimatum and addressed the nation to stay calm. On 17 June 1940 new divisions of the Soviet military entered Latvia with no resistance. On 21 June 1940 the new government, friendly to the USSR, was formed mostly from the communists released from prisons. On 14-15 July elections took place in Latvia. Its results were largely manipulated by the new country's leadership and communists won. On 5 August 1940 the newly elected Supreme Soviet addressed the Supreme Soviet of the USSR requesting to annex Latvia to the USSR, which was done.

8 Soviet Army

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards- 2 years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- 3 years, for medium and senior officers- 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priest, factory owner, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted in the army. The law as of 1939 cancelled restriction on drafting of men belonging to certain classes, students were not drafted but went through military training in their educational institutions. On the 22nd June 1941 Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting in the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was 3 years and in navy- 4 years. Young people with secondary education, both civilian and military, with the age range of 17-23 were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to 2 years in ground troops and in the navy to 3 years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

9 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.

10 Labor army

it was made up of men of call-up age not trusted to carry firearms by the Soviet authorities. Such people were those living on the territories annexed by the USSR in 1940 (Eastern Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Karelia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina) as well as ethnic Germans living in the

Soviet Union proper. The labor army was employed for carrying out tough work, in the woods or in mines. During the first winter of the war, 30 percent of those drafted into the labor army died of starvation and hard work. The number of people in the labor army decreased sharply when the larger part of its contingent was transferred to the national Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Corps, created at the beginning of 1942. The remaining labor detachments were maintained up until the end of the war.

11 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.

12 Card system

The food card system regulating the distribution of food and industrial products was introduced in the USSR in 1929 due to extreme deficit of consumer goods and food. The system was cancelled in 1931. In 1941, food cards were reintroduced to keep records, distribute and regulate food supplies to the population. The card system covered main food products such as bread, meat, oil, sugar, salt, cereals, etc. The rations varied depending on which social group one belonged to, and what kind of work one did. Workers in the heavy industry and defense enterprises received a daily ration of 800 g (miners - 1 kg) of bread per person; workers in other industries 600 g. Non-manual workers received 400 or 500 g based on the significance of their enterprise, and children 400 g. However, the card system only covered industrial workers and residents of towns while villagers never had any provisions of this kind. The card system was cancelled in 1947.

13 Ispolkom

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

14 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

15 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.

16 Riga ghetto

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

17 Rumbula forest

the location where Latvian Jews, inmates of the Riga ghetto and Soviet prisoners-of-war were shot is in the woods near the Rumbula railway station. At the time this was the 12th kilometer of the highway from Riga to Daugavpils. The drawings of common graves were developed. There was a ramp made by each grave for prisoners to step into the grave. Soviet prisoners-of-war were forced to dig the graves to be also killed after performing their task. The total number of those killed in Rumbula is unknown. The most accurate might be the numbers given in the report of the police commander of Latvia, who personally commanded the actions in Rumbula. He indicated 27 800 victims in Rumbula, including 942 from the first transport of foreign Jews from Berlin, executed in Rumbula on the dawn of 30 November 1941, before execution of the Riga ghetto inmates. To hide the traces of their crimes, special units of SS Zondercommanden 1005 opened the graves and burned the remains of victims in spring and summer 1944. They also crashed burnt bones with bone crashing machines. This work was done by Soviet prisoners-of-war and Jews, who were also to be executed. In the 1960s local activists, despite counteraction of authorities, made arrangements in place of the Rumbula burial. They installed a memorial gravestone with the words 'To the victims of fascism' were engraved in LATVIAN, Russian and Yiddish.

18 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.

19 Gulag
The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

20 Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)
After the Soviet Union occupied the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in June 1940 as a part of establishing the Soviet system, mass deportation of the local population began. The victims of these were mainly but not exclusively those unwanted by the regime: the local bourgeoisie and the previously politically active strata. Deportations to remote parts of the Soviet Union continued up until the death of Stalin. The first major wave of deportation took place between 11th and 14th June 1941, when 36,000, mostly politically active people were deported. Deportations were reintroduced after the Soviet Army recaptured the three countries from Nazi Germany in 1944. Partisan fights against the Soviet occupiers were going on all up to 1956, when the last squad was eliminated. Between June 1948 and January 1950, in accordance with a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR under the pretext of 'grossly dodged from labor activity in the agricultural field and led anti-social and parasitic mode of life' from Latvia 52,541, from Lithuania 118,599 and from Estonai 32,450 people were deported. The total number of deportees from the three republics amounted to 203,590. Among them were entire Lithuanian families of different social strata (peasants, workers, intelligentsia), everybody who was able to reject or deemed capable to reject the regime. Most of the exiled died in the foreign land. Besides, about 100,000 people were killed in action and in fusillade for being members of partisan squads and some other 100,000 were sentenced to 25 years in camps.

21 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.

22 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)
Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

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

24 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)
National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

25 Soviet Army Day
The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

26 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic
On May, 4 1990 Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Republic has accepted the declaration in which was informed on desire to restore independence of Latvia, and the transition period to restoration of full independence has been declared. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held on march, 3 1991, over 90 percent of the participants voted for independence. On 21 August 1991 the parliament took a decision on complete restoration of the prewar statehood of Latvia. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so did the USSR on 24th August 1991. In September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations. Through the years of independence Latvia has implemented deep economic reforms, introduced its own currency (Lat) in 1993, completed privatization and restituted the property to its former owners. Economic growth constitutes 5-7% per year. Also, it's taken the course of escaping the influence of Russia and integration into European structures. In February 1993 Latvia introduced the visa procedure with Russia, and in 1995 the last units of the Russian army left the country. Since 2004 Latvia has been a member of NATO and the European Union.

27 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.

28 Struggle against religion
The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to

synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.