

# Ella Perlman

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Riga

Latvia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Ella Perlman gave this interview at the Rahamim Social Center in the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture [1](#) after a choir rehearsal. Ella has been with this choir for over ten years. She is a petite lady with nicely cut, grayish hair. Ella is very genial and friendly. She has a charming smile brightening up her face. I felt like I'd known her for years, when talking to her. Ella is very elegantly dressed. She makes her own clothes. Her clothes, jewelry and make-up are well-matching. She looks young for her years. Although Ella has poor health, including heart problems and the related complications, she leads an active life. She sings in the choir, takes part in various Jewish activities, goes to the synagogue, attends a sports club in the Latvian Jewish community and goes to exhibitions. Ella is a good conversationalist and a very interesting person. She radiates optimism. Ella told me she was lucky to have met so many good people in life. Is it not that her very presence makes people better?



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## My family

My father's family came from Jelgava [about 50 km from Riga], a town in Latvia. My grandfather's name was Zalman Greenfeld. He was born in Jelgava in 1875. All I know about my grandmother is that she was my grandfather's first wife. In this marriage they had two sons. My father, Hershe Greenfeld, was born in 1900, and his younger brother, given the Russian name of Max [see common name] [2](#), was born in 1902. If my memory doesn't fail me, his Jewish name was Mendl.

My grandmother died very young, soon after Max was born. After the required period of mourning my grandfather remarried and moved to Liepaja [about 200 km from Riga]. My grandfather's second wife Ella, whose name I was given, raised my grandfather's children. My grandfather had three other wives after my grandmother's death, but none of them lived long, somehow. My grandfather was a tailor. I don't mean to say that he was like those many tailor guys in Jewish towns, having to alter clothes several times. No, he was a real good tailor. He made new clothes for his wealthy clients.

Liepaja was a Jewish town within the Pale of Settlement [3](#). Its population was Jewish and German, for the most part. The Russian and Latvian population was smaller. The majority of the Jewish population were craftsmen, but there were also Jewish lawyers, doctors and tradesmen. There were many wealthy Jews in Liepaja. They owned houses, shops and stores. There was a synagogue and a Jewish cemetery in Liepaja. Residents of the town communicated in German, for the most part, even when Russian was the state language.

My grandfather was religious. I believe all Jews, irrespective of their wealth or skills, belonged to the Jewish culture. The wealthy and the poor alike observed Jewish traditions, went to the synagogue and celebrated Jewish holidays. My father's family also observed Jewish traditions. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home, went to the synagogue and followed the kashrut.

My father and his younger brother studied in cheder. They also finished a Jewish general education school. Then they went to study for a vocation. My father became a barber's apprentice, and later he worked in his tutor's barber shop. Max studied the jeweler's profession. He became a very skilled jeweler, and even opened his own shop. They both lived in Liepaja.

My mother's family lived in Jaunjelgava [about 80 km from Riga], a small town in the north of Latvia. During the tsarist regime Jaunjelgava was located within the Pale of Settlement and there were many Jews living there. I didn't know my maternal grandfather. His name was Zalman Westerman and he came from Jaunjelgava. This is actually all I can tell you about him.

My grandmother, Haya Westerman, was born in Birzai [about 100 km from Riga], Lithuania, on the border with Latvia. My great-grandmother died at childbirth, and my grandmother was raised by her relatives. I don't know how my grandmother happened to get to Latvia where she met my grandfather. Perhaps, their marriage was prearranged, and my grandmother moved to Jaunjelgava after the wedding.

They were a religious Jewish family and observed all Jewish traditions. My grandfather owned a bakery and an inn where rafts men were customers. They rafted wood down the Daugava River. My grandmother helped him with cooking for the customers.

There were six children in the family. My mother's sister Sheine was the oldest. Then came Yakov. Liebe was the third child in the family. My mother Hana was born after her. I don't know Mama's exact birth date. All I know is that she was born in the late 1890s. There was also a boy, born after Mama. Mama told me he drowned in a well in infancy. The last child was Dora. I don't know what kind of education Mama, her brother and sisters got. I think it might have been a Jewish elementary school. At least, they knew sufficient Hebrew to read a prayer. They spoke Yiddish in my mama's family.

My grandmother and grandfather were religious. They celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home. My grandfather went to the synagogue on Sabbath. Yakov joined him, when he reached the proper age. On Jewish holidays the whole family went to the synagogue, including my grandmother and the daughters. They strictly followed the kashrut. I guess this was the common Jewish way of life in Jaunjelgava. In such small towns Jews followed traditions and, living in small communities, knew each other well.

When World War I began, the tsar ordered the deportation of Jews from the Baltic Republics, including Jaunjelgava, to Russia. The tsarist government had no big trust in Jews. Mama and her family were deported to Penza [Russia, about 600 km from Moscow]. Her older sister Sheine was married to Hershe Shmakovich, a Jewish man from Riga, at the time, and they had two daughters: Taube and Sara. Mama helped her to take care of the children. My grandfather died in Penza in 1915. They stayed in Penza for three years, and when the revolution began in Russia [cf. Russian Revolution of 1917] [4](#), the family managed to return to Latvia. They decided against going back to Jaunjelgava, and settled down in Riga. After the revolution the Pale of Settlement was cancelled, and Jews were allowed to live in any towns or cities they wanted.

My father also moved to Riga about that time. He saved some money, sufficient for opening his own barber's shop. My father was hoping to have a good business in a bigger town, but unfortunately, it didn't work that way. He may have been a skilled barber, but he was a poor businessman. He went bankrupt a few years later. My father went to work for Borowskiy, who owned a barber's shop, and did much better than before.

During World War I Mama's brother Yakov Westerman volunteered to the front. He served in the Latvian army and fought for the independence of Latvia, which was established in 1918 [cf. Latvian independence] [5](#). Yakov was awarded an Order of Lačplesis, also called a Bear Order, for his courage on the battlefield. This was an honorable award. There were only few awardees in Latvia, and they were much honored. In 1935 my uncle was awarded a plot of land in a mountain forest for his service to Latvia.

Grandmother Haya remarried. She had known her second husband, Mendl Gordon, before she married my grandfather. Gordon also came from Birzai. He was very much in love with my grandmother. When he heard she was engaged, he went to America looking for a better fortune. I don't know how he was doing there, but when he heard from an acquaintance of his that my grandmother had become a widow, he went to Riga to propose to her. Mama told me that all the children were convincing Grandmother to give her consent to this marriage. Gordon was a good and kind man, and they all liked him. Besides, Grandmother was not that old to yield to grief.

Mama was a shop assistant, and my father did his shopping in this store. He must have liked her, coming to the store more and more often. They got to know each other and got married in 1924. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. Mama told me that Grandfather Zalman Greenfeld and Papa's younger brother Max attended their wedding. After the wedding my parents rented an apartment. Mama quit her job after getting married.

I was the first child in the family. I was born in the maternity department of the Jewish hospital in 1926. My sister and both brothers were also born in this hospital. I was named Ella after my paternal grandfather's second wife, who raised my orphaned father and his brother. My sister Joheved was born in 1928. In 1933 my brother Ber was born. His Russian name was Boris. My

youngest brother Lipman was born in 1937. We still have a little silver spoon that was given to Lipman, when he was born. His name was engraved on it.

Boris had his brit milah at home. This was a big ceremony, and my father invited his friends and acquaintances. When Lipman was born, Mama had to stay in hospital a little longer, and Lipman had his brit milah in the hospital. I remember that many people attended the ceremony, including Borowskiy, my father's employer. He was a nice and intelligent man. His wife was a dentist at the Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim [6](#).

My younger brother didn't live long. When he was three months old, Mama had mastitis. She had to go to the hospital, and so did Lipman. The hospital was quite at a distance from home, and Mama had to change trams. Lipman caught a cold on the way. It developed into pneumonia. When Mama was released from the hospital, she still went there to look after my little brother. She fed him from a bottle. Once Mama returned home very happy. She said Lipman had a good appetite and should be recovering, but that very night he felt worse and the doctors failed to rescue him.

After Lipman died, we moved into the house where Mama's sister Dora, her family, and Grandmother with her husband Gordon, whom we loved dearly and called 'Grandfather,' lived. Dora's husband, Robert Haitman, who was born in Riga, was a foreman at the chocolate shop of a confectionery factory in Riga. Dora used to work at this factory before getting married. In 1927 Dora's son Meishe was born.

I loved Grandmother Haya dearly, and often visited her. I remember playing with my cousin Meishe. They always had a chocolate bear on the table. The factory employees were given a big discount on factory products and Uncle Robert often brought chocolates home. Grandmother told us fairy tales and read stories from the Bible. We spoke Yiddish at home and learned German and Latvian playing with children in the yard.

Our apartment was on the fifth floor of a five-storied house. We had three rooms, a big living room and a kitchen, one children's room, and there was also one little room where relatives and guests stayed during their visits. Mama's sister Liebe and her family lived in the apartment on the same floor. Liebe's marital name was Monchnik. Liebe's husband Mikhl Monchnik was a shoemaker. Liebe was a cook at the canteen in the Jewish school. They had four children: the older daughter Fani, the sons Zalman, Abram and the younger Motl, who was almost the same age as me.

Mama's older sister Sheine also lived in Riga. Besides the older daughters Taube and Sara she had two sons: Menahem, born in 1922, and Zalman, born in 1924. Sheine was a housewife. Her husband and older daughters worked. Uncle Hershe was a butcher, Taube was a dressmaker, and Sara worked at the confectionery. Menahem, the older son, died from tuberculosis, when he was in his teens. Zalman was an active Zionist [7](#), and immigrated to Palestine in the early 1930s.

My father's brother Max Greenfeld, his wife Gusta and daughter Meriam also lived in Riga. Max was a well-to-do jeweler, and the family was wealthy. Max always gave us jewelry that he made himself on my mother's, my sister's and my birthday. I remember a nice silver chain with a Magen David that I received from my uncle. I always wore it.

In the mid-1930s Dora and her family moved to Palestine. Their daughter Sara was born one year before they left. In Israel their son Alik was born. After Dora left, my grandmother and grandfather

moved in with us. Life was hard: the family was big, and only my father worked and provided for the family. My parents and all children shared one room, my grandmother and grandfather lived in another room, and we had tenants renting the third room from us. These tenants were people coming to Riga looking for a job. We always had two to three tenants. This was our additional income, however small the amount was. It goes without saying that we only had Jewish tenants. When we, the children, grew older and could no longer share one room, my grandmother and grandfather found an apartment on our street. We visited them every day, and Grandmother was always happy to see us.

## **Attitude to judaism**

Our family observed Jewish traditions. On Friday morning Mama made food for two days. She baked challah and rolls for Saturday, and left a pot with chulent in the stove to keep hot till the following day. In the evening Mama and Grandmother, at the time when she was still living with us, lit candles and prayed over them. Then the family sat down to dinner. There was challah, chicken broth and gefilte fish on holidays.

We followed the kashrut, and Mama even kept utensils for meat products and those for dairy products in different cupboards not to be mixed. We also had separate utensils for Pesach. They were only used once on this holiday and then stored in the cupboard till the time came again. If special utensils were not enough, additional ones needed to be koshered. Mama had a big zinc plated tub, where utensils were put and water and ash was placed. They were kept there for some time before they were boiled. After this procedure utensils could be used at Pesach.

The apartment was thoroughly cleaned before Pesach. Breadcrumbs were collected. I remember Grandfather Gordon looking for chametz, sweeping them into a wooden spoon with a goose feather. Then they were wrapped in a cloth and burned in the kitchen stove. We had a black cast iron stove and the pipe connected to the chimney. Mama used to buy thin wood log bundles from a Jewish vendor. The thin logs were less expensive. After burning the chametz we could get the Pesach dishes and cover the table with a white table cloth. We only ate matzah through all the days of the holiday. There was not a single breadcrumb at home on Pesach. Mama and my aunt cooked a lot of delicious food on a holiday. They always made beigelech, aingemantz, that is, radishes cooked in honey, and imberlach, a delicacy of carrots with orange zest. On Pesach they always made beetroot kvas. There was also gefilte fish, chicken broth and matzah puddings with eggs.

We also had seder at home. Grandmother and Grandfather visited us. Aunt Liebe and her family also visited us at times. My father and grandfather, wearing white clothes, reclined on cushions [Editor's note: according to the Jewish tradition the eldest man in the family, the one who conducted the seder, was supposed to recline on something soft (usually pillows were used for that), which was the embodiment of relaxation and exemption from slavery]. My grandfather conducted the seder. He broke matzah into three pieces, and hid one between the cushions. One of the children was to steal this piece of matzah, and then request ransom for it. My brother posed the four traditional questions to my grandfather.

There was a dish with all traditional Haggadah products: bitter greeneries, salt water, horseradish and grated apples. On Pesach all drank red wine, and the children also had a little wine poured into

their little wine cups. A big glass of wine was placed in the center of the table for Elijah the Prophet. We recited prayers and sang Pesach songs.

We also celebrated other Jewish holidays at home. On Yom Kippur we always conducted the kapores ritual, using money instead of live chickens. Later the money was given to the synagogue for the poor. My parents fasted 24 hours according to the rules. The children were allowed to skip fasting, but we always asked Mama to allow us a half-day fasting. We were eager to feel like real Jews. On Rosh Hashanah Mama cut apples and served them with honey.

On Sukkot we had meals and prayed in the sukkah in the yard. Most tenants in our house were Jews. They made a stationary case for the sukkah in the yard, and it took no time to make a sukkah from tree branches and decorate it with flowers and ribbons. There was a table and chairs placed inside, so that all tenants could use it. On Chanukkah Mama lit another candle each day in the chanukkiyah, which was her dowry. On Chanukkah all guests of the house gave small change to the children. The total amount was sufficient to buy sweets or a little toy.

On holidays our parents always took us to the synagogue. We particularly liked the Simchat Torah holiday. It was a joyful and merry holiday. We had special flags, and each flag was stuck into an apple. I always felt excited, when the Torah was taken out. I still have this feeling.

Besides Jewish holidays, we also celebrated our family members' birthdays and our parents' wedding anniversaries. We also visited our relatives. When there were going to be many guests, we had celebrations in Aunt Sheine's apartment. They had a big apartment, and our large family got together there. We were very close. We all loved our grandmother and supported her. Yakov, my parents and Mama's sisters gave Grandmother monthly allowances. It was just occasionally that I heard about it. They didn't do it ostentatiously, but they honored their parents and always supported them.

The boys had their bar mitzvah, when they turned 13. It was a big ceremony. A boy was told to approach the Torah for the first time at the synagogue, and then he put on tefillin and tallit. Since that moment he was considered to be a grown up man, and could take part in the minyan like adult men. In the evening there was a party for friends and relatives. I attended the bar mitzvah of my cousins Zalman Shmakovich and Zalman Monchnik. Even my father's sister, living in Johannesburg, [South] Africa, visited Zalman Monchnik's bar mitzvah. I was told to read the excerpt from the Torah about the destruction of the temple in Israel. I was ten years old, but I remembered this moment for the rest of my life.

The Jewish life in Riga was rather active. There were a few Jewish publishing houses issuing a number of newspapers and magazines. The Jewish boys, who wanted to earn some money, rushed to publishing houses to take newspapers to sell them. They even competed in who was selling more. There were books in Yiddish and Hebrew. There were Jewish hospitals, elderly and ill people's shelters and children's homes. There was a Jewish vocational school where children from Jewish families could learn a vocation for free.

There were a number of charity societies. I remember a courier collecting donations for poor brides coming to our house. Girls were given money to buy a wedding dress and pay the wedding party expenses. Some organizations collected second-hand clothes and shoes for the poor. There were many Jewish stores. In some stores needy people could pay for things in installments with no



interest charges. There were many good things done for the poor.

There were small and big Jewish stores. I remember two haberdashery stores in our street. One owner was a man and the other owner was a lady. When the man saw a customer heading to his competitor's store, he would start pulling him/her by his/her sleeve to his store. Shop assistants from a clothes store on Mariyas Street appealed to pedestrians: 'Come in and keep buying! You'll get a discount!'

There were a few Jewish schools in Riga. Some taught in Yiddish and others taught in Hebrew. We went to the school where subjects were taught in Yiddish. The son of the rabbi of Rezekne [a city 242 km east of Riga] was the director of this school. We started school from a preparatory class. My aunt Liebe worked as a cook at this school. My cousin brothers and sisters also studied in this school, and we used to go to school together in the morning. This was a general education school, but we also studied religion and traditions and had Hebrew classes. I can still remember the Hebrew I studied at school. I can read, though I do not understand all words. We had to say a prayer before classes.

At school we received textbooks free of charge, and also, had free lunches. Aunt Liebe was a terrific cook, and we liked the food at school. I was a lively girl. I liked classes of physical education most of all. I was thinking of becoming a teacher of physical education, when I grew up. I was very fond of exercises on rings and bars. Every other day my school friend Basia Solomon, four classmate boys and I went to the Maccabi [World Union] [8](#) gym where we had gymnastics classes. We had a school uniform. My school friend's grandfather made uniform berets for the school. It was a black velvet beret with a white ribbon on one side. We wore these berets shifting them to one side a bit. My younger brother wanted a beret, and my parents ordered one for him, though he didn't go to school yet.

We had celebrations at school. We had no classes on Jewish holidays, but we had parties on children's holidays. School children gave concerts, and our parents attended them. There was a buffet and games. I also remember the song festival. This holiday was celebrated in Latvia in spring. Choirs from all over the country arrived in Riga and gave concerts in the park on the bank of the Daugava River. School choirs also gave concerts. Our school choir also took part in this holiday. Vendors were selling sweets, rolls and toys. At school we received files with coupons, for which we could get these treats for free. The expenses were covered by the Jewish community. I also remember vendors selling hot dogs. They were pork sausages, and at school the coupons for hot dogs were removed, so that none of us got tempted by this non-kosher food. We had kosher sausages with us. Aunt Liebe made a cranberry drink that we also took with us. The last song festival for schoolchildren took place in spring 1941.

My sister and I helped our mother about the house. In the morning Mama told me what I was to buy at the market after school. I always went to the market, when Mama did, and she showed me how to choose the products to buy. I knew the best vendors to buy meat, sauerkraut or vegetables from. The vendors also wanted to sell the best they had to the children, for them to have no problems at home about whatever they bought. On my way home I used to stop to look at the house being constructed nearby. Workers climbed steep ladders with a board loaded with bricks on their back. Looking at this house nowadays brings back the memories of those days.

On Saturday my parents didn't do any work at home. On Sunday Mama usually did the laundry. My father's customers, who wanted a shave or a haircut at home, made his additional earnings. In the summer, Sunday was a day off. Sometimes my father and the children went to the beach on the Daugava River. He was a good swimmer and taught us to swim. Mama also went with us every now and then.

During summer vacations Aunt Liebe went to work as a cook in the summer camp for young people in the vicinity of Riga. Young people had training in agricultural activities, preparing to move to Palestine. This was a camp of Betar [9](#), an organization for young people. Aunt Liebe's sons also stayed in this camp in the summer, and we visited them on Sundays. All children went to camps in the summer. All Jewish organizations for young people had camps: Betar, Maccabi and Hashomer Hatzair [10](#). They were called children's colonies.

We went to the colony at the Riga seashore. Everything was very well organized. We were assigned to units. Each unit had a tutor and teachers. If the weather was agreeable, we went to bathe in the sea in the morning. We had a big basket with sandwiches with us. We were not even hungry enough to eat them. After the swim we had lunch back at the camp, and then it was time for an afternoon nap. Those, who didn't feel like taking a nap, were allowed to read a book quietly. After this nap time we had afternoon tea and went to the forest where we picked flowers and berries and played. Then we returned to the camp and had classes. We recited poems, drew and did handicrafts. When we didn't go for a walk, we played or went to the gym. It was fun.

I remember Hiva and Gerta, the teachers. Hava taught us to embroider, knit and sew. I liked it. Once, my brother, my sister and I fell ill with mumps in the camp. We were taken to the special medical quarters, where the camp doctor looked after us until Mama came to take us home. When we recovered, we were allowed to stay another month in the camp to compensate for the days of our illness. So, we lived a good life before the establishment of the Soviet regime [cf. Annexation of Latvia to the USSR] [11](#), a much better life than what was described in the Soviet mass media later.

Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, but then I was too young to have any understanding of what was going on. All I remember is that in the late 1930s a boat with Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany arrived in Latvia. No other country wished to accept them. President Ulmanis [12](#) accepted all Jewish refugees, and also, issued Latvian passports to them. Therefore, I'm rather critical of the statements that strong anti-Semitism was demonstrated during the rule of Ulmanis. Would an anti-Semite help Jewish refugees? No, he would have sent them to die in fascist Germany without giving it much thought.

I don't think Jews lived badly during the rule of Ulmanis. My distant relative's husband took part in the war for independence of Latvia, like my uncle. He died in 1938, and the government had a gravestone installed on his grave. 'To a defender of Latvia' was engraved on the gravestone. Jews and non-Jews, veterans of the war for liberation, were buried in the same way then.

I remember Soviet troops coming to Riga in 1940. My cousin was in hospital at the time, and I went to visit him. On my way back I saw tanks on the streets of Riga. The faces and clothes of the tank men were dust-covered. The tanks drove slowly, and boys ran after them climbing on their armor. People threw flowers to the tank men. People had no concerns about the annexation of Latvia to the Soviet Union. All they knew about life in the USSR was what they read in newspapers or heard on the radio.



Besides, before these events, President Ulmanis had addressed the people with the appeal to stay quiet. He finished his speech saying, 'Stay where you are, and so will I.' However, he didn't keep his position for long. The Soviet regime arrested and killed Karlis Ulmanis, but this was still ahead of us, and nobody could tell what it was going to be like. We believed the Russians would protect us from German invasion. I remember how upset I was about not knowing the Russian language.

Shortly after Latvia was annexed to the USSR, election to the Seim [Latvian Parliament] took place, and the communists came to power in Latvia. There was a ban on any other party. All political leaders of pre-Soviet Latvia and many Jewish religious activists were arrested in the course of the first year of the Soviet power. Most of them perished in Stalin's camps [cf. Gulag] [13](#). However, the life of our family didn't change, except that my parents received Soviet passports instead of their Latvian passports that they had before. My father kept working in the barber's that no longer belonged to its previous owner. Mama was a housewife, and we studied at school. This was a Jewish school, only the new regime appointed a Jewish communist woman to be the new director. Religious classes were cancelled and the prayer before classes was no longer allowed.

We became pioneers [cf. All-union pioneer organization] [14](#) at school. We didn't quite understand what this was all about, but we knew this was the right thing to do at the time. There was a Palace of pioneers established and I went in for gymnastics there. I was doing well and became a member of the Latvian team to participate in the children's sports event in Moscow in summer 1941. However, this was not to happen due to the war.

Many of my father's clients were Soviet officers. My father could speak some Russian, and maybe for this reason they preferred him to other barbers. My father told us what they had talked about. We found their views weird. They were shocked by the plenitude of goods in our stores, while we found this only natural. If there is nothing in a store that means that the store is bankrupt. They were surprised there were continuous exhibitions in our parks and they were free for the most part. The officers' wives believed embroidered and laced night gowns to be evening gowns that they wore to parties at the Officers' House. This may sound funny, but this was true. Officers had money in the Soviet Union, but they could hardly buy anything for this money. This was the first time in their life that their wives saw what night gowns might be like.

## **During the war**

My father heard on the radio about the attack of Germany on the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941 [cf. Great Patriotic War] [15](#). Mama, remembering the escape of Jewish refugees to Latvia, insisted that we left promptly. She used to say that the annexation of Latvia to the Soviet Union gave us a chance to survive by fleeing to the rear of Russia where the German army couldn't reach us. My father was more optimistic about the situation, saying that Germans had already been in Latvia in 1915, and did no harm to the Jews. He was sure that the Germans were only going to fight the Bolsheviks [16](#), and had nothing against the Latvian population. However, he didn't really argue with Mama.

Many of our relatives shared my father's opinion. Taube, Mama's sister Sheine's older daughter, immigrated to Palestine in the 1930s. She got married there. Her marital name was Psafka. When Taube got pregnant, she came to her mother in Riga. She stayed another year in Riga before she went back to Palestine with her son. Shortly before the war Taube visited her parents again. She

was with her son. Sheine's other daughter Sara was single and worked as a shop assistant in a store. Sheine's family bluntly refused to go. Sheine's husband's parents stayed in Riga during World War I. They were telling people how loyal Germans were to Jews. They were sure that however hard Germans persecuted Jews in their own country, this wasn't going to be the case in other countries.

My father's brother Max didn't want to leave Riga either. He was a skilled jeweler and was sure that he was going to do much better, when the Germans came to Latvia. Mama's brother Yakov and his wife also decided to stay. Grandmother Haya and her husband Gordon refused to evacuate. They said they were too old to move elsewhere, and they feared evacuation much more than staying in Riga and the fascist regime. Only Mama's older sister Liebe agreed with Mama and believed it was best to leave Riga.

Meanwhile, we were still in Riga. Grandfather Zalman Greenfeld, who came from Liepaja to visit his sons in Riga, died before the Germans came to the town. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Riga. Bombings began two days after the war began. They were most frequent at nighttime, though the Germans used to drop bombs during the day, too. The air warning was on and we had to go to the bomb shelter. There were a few Jewish families living in our house. One was Rabbi Katz and his family. The owner of the house was a Jewish man. There were two Latvian tenants: the janitor of the house and a tenant, whose surname was Kalnynsh.

One night we didn't go to the bomb shelter. My cousin was ill and couldn't go with us, and we didn't want to leave him alone. However, we didn't stay in our apartment either. We spent the night in our neighbor's apartment on the first floor. That night we saw two young Latvian guys wearing military uniforms in the yard. They were looking into the windows on the first floor. They were probably looking for Jews. Then they climbed into Kalnynsh's apartment through the window, and we knew it was time for us to escape.

In the morning we went to the railway station to get train tickets. At first we were thinking of going to Moscow where we had distant relatives, but there were no tickets available. We went back home, packed our luggage and went back to the railway station. Aunt Liebe's family and Aunt Sheine's younger son Zalman went with us. There was a train at the platform, but no boarding was announced. We decided to board the train anyway and take whatever there was ahead of us. Nobody asked us for tickets. Some time later the train started without any announcement of departure. We were lucky to leave Riga a few days before German forces occupied it.

We left on 28th June. We had little luggage to travel light. Fortunately, 28th June was a cold and rainy day and Mama told us to wear warm coats. This served us well later. Mama had some extra underwear and a change outfit for each of us. She also took rings and earrings that Uncle Max, Father's brother, had given us. He gave my sister and me golden earrings on the occasion of finishing elementary school. Also, I had earrings from my grandmother. Mama had some jewelry as well. We had gold and silver, but we had lost our home. My father had a small suitcase packed with his instruments. He said that as long as he had his instruments we were not going to lack food. Even on the train he had clients that wanted a shave every day. I don't know whether he charged them or not.

There was a severe air raid in Pskov, and a bomb hit the last carriage of our train. We were told to board freight carriages. Air raids were frequent. When German planes were there, the train stopped

and all passengers scattered hiding around. The most critical hardship was lack of water. It's far more difficult to have no water than to have no food. When the train stopped people rushed looking for a puddle or a pond. We sucked this water in through handkerchiefs.

I had never left Latvia before. When our train crossed the Russian border, and when we were already in Belarus, it was enough to look out of the window to know that we were no longer in Latvia. How different Russian villages were from Latvian ones! Those were half-ruined huts, overrun with weeds, and what huge contrast they made to tiny cottages and well-groomed farm fields in Latvia. It was very sad to leave Latvia without knowing, when we were going to see it again.

I don't remember the name of the village we lived in through the first few months in evacuation. I remember a big, sooty hut where a woman and her many children lived. We were accommodated in her house. Two young guys from Jaunjelgava joined us on the way. Their surname was Mikhlsn. They were accommodated in the house with us. I remember Mama and Aunt Liebe making bread in the oven.

Sometime in September our men were recruited to the Soviet Army [17](#). They were my father, Mikhl Monchnik, Liebe's husband, their older son Zalman, my cousin Zalman Shmakovich and the Mikhlsn brothers. There were only women and children left. However, our men returned. When recruitment officers found out they were Latvian, they were sent back. [Editor's note: The Soviet regime did not trust those who lived in the areas that were annexed to the USSR. In particular, it restricted their freedom of movement. They were not supposed to be close to the border to prevent them from escaping from the country].

The news spread across the village promptly, and we felt the hatred toward us. We were forced to leave the village. The locals were saying that our men bought off their release from the army, when their husbands and sons were dying at the front, having no money to pay. My parents realized that the situation was dangerous and decided to go to Penza, where Mama's family lived during World War I. We managed to catch a train in that direction, but we never reached Penza. Uncle Mikhl got off the train, when it stopped, to buy some food and missed the train. We had previously agreed that if one of us missed the train, the others were to get off at the next station and wait. The next station was Perm [about 1100 km from Moscow]. We stayed in the evacuation point in Perm waiting for Mikhl, and it took us quite a while, until finally we were sent to the kolkhoz [18](#) Shirokiy Log, Badyn district, Perm region. We took a boat going down the Kama River, went as far as Osa, where we crossed the river and got to the kolkhoz village on horse-drawn wagons.

When we were crossing the river on a boat, my father's suitcase with the instruments fell into the water, and my father was very upset. He hoped very much to support us doing his job. However, when the chairman of the village office heard that my father was a barber, he found a hair-cutting machine and gave it to my father. My father could work now. Uncle Mikhl was a good shoemaker, and he also had sufficient work in the village.

We worked in farm fields. We came from a town and were no good at farm work, but we learned how to work with reaping hooks or manage the horses. I remember Mama and me working at the cropping, harvesting crops and then making sheaves. We had scratches from the straw, they were sore and painful. After the harvesting we were sent to work with a threshing machine. Mama threw sheaves into the threshing machine, and I led the horses in circles to keep the threshing machine

working. Then we worked at a big, wooden fanning machine.

Every morning we covered a few kilometers to get to work. I went to the stables to get the horse and go to the threshing machine. I led the horse by the bridle rein, when one day I thought, 'Why not ride the horse?' I tried to climb on the horse's back, when it hit me on my stomach with its hoof. Fortunately, it was not too bad. However, since then I feared going to the stables, and asked somebody to take the horse out of there before I took the bridle to ride the horse. When the field work was over, I learned spinning. Some villagers kept sheep and brought me sheep wool. I spun the wool, dyed the yarn and learned to knit. I received food products for my work.

Mama worked at the kolkhoz barn yard. She shoveled the grain to keep it from rotting. The crew leader was a kind woman. She knew how hard it was to provide for a big family. The villagers were Tatar people for the most part, but Luba, the crew leader, was Russian. After work she told Mama to put grain into her mittens to cook it for the children at home. We starved and ate anything we could. When a horse died, it was not buried. It was cut into pieces, and villagers cooked them to eat.

The first spring in the village was particularly bad. The three of us picked sprouts growing through the snow. Mama made soup from them. It was just this grass and water. We didn't even have salt. This soup caused much pain in the stomach. It was impossible to eat it, but we couldn't help eating it. At least, it filled the stomach for some time.

We had to do something. I saw beggars coming to the village, and villagers gave them something. My brother and I went to other villages. Beggars in Russian villages begged saying 'for Christ's sake' crossing themselves. I knew it was sinful for Jews to cross themselves, but then we would have got nothing, if we didn't. We begged saying 'for Christ's sake' and crossing ourselves, and in the evening I prayed begging the Lord to forgive my brother and me for this sin. The Lord did forgive us and helped us to survive.

Life improved after this spring in 1942. In the spring we were given a plot of land to make a vegetable garden. The soil was loamy, but it wasn't too bad to grow vegetables. The carrots were so big; I've never seen carrots this big ever since. Growing vegetables took a lot of effort, but there were so many vegetables that they were sufficient to get us through the winter. We had potatoes and onions, made sauerkraut in barrels and pickles. We picked mushrooms in the woods and dried them for the winter. We feared hunger no longer and felt more confident.

At first we were accommodated in the house of a local tenant, but later we were accommodated in a vacant house. There was more space for us, but now we had to think about the wood to heat the house. The temperatures dropped to minus 50. I went to the woods to cut trees. I cut a tree, chopped it up and took it home on sledges. We made plank beds, and when it was too cold, we slept on the Russian stove [19](#) bench.

We heard that the Latvian division [20](#) was established. My cousins and the Mikhlsen brothers went to the military office. They were recruited to the army. My father was over the military age and volunteered to the Labor army [21](#). Aunt Liebe and her family moved to Badyn, the district town 25 kilometers from our village. There were four of us left: Mama, my sister Joheved, my brother Boris and I. Life was hard, but we knew there was nobody to help us and we had to take care of ourselves. Mama baked bread in the Russian stove. She made brew in a tub, and then made

dough. Then she had to bake the loaves. There was a special wooden shovel to put the loaves into the stove and take them out of there. We had heavy cast iron pots that we could only handle with special holders. It was hard to learn things about living in the village, but when we did, things started improving.

Mama was a good housewife. She even used potato peels to make soup. There were many bird cherry trees around. We dried the berries, milled them into powder, and Mama made jelly drink from it. We used everything we had at hand. However, there was no rescue from hunger. Joheved was a weak and sickly girl. She was constantly ill and kept coughing. Mama was concerned about her developing tuberculosis. Fortunately, we had neighbors that had evacuated from Leningrad. It was a family. The husband was a party activist, and was appointed the second secretary of the district party committee in the district town. He helped Mama to make arrangements for my sister to go to the children's health center for evacuated children from Leningrad. The children were provided with food, medications, and there was a school at the center.

There was no school in our village, and we had to cover a few kilometers going to school in another village. We had no shoes. My brother wore birch cortex baste shoes. We didn't have any cloth to give him to wrap his feet and he had his feet rubbed sore and had to stay home. We treated him with whatever we had at hand, but it didn't work. I had to take my brother to the local medical office where the doctor's assistant treated him. That man from Leningrad that helped Mama to make arrangements for my sister to go to the health center suggested that Mama sent my brother to the children's home where he would be provided with food and could go to school. My brother didn't stay there long. All the children had lice. The food was far from being good. The personnel of the children's home stole food products from the children.

My brother ran away from the home and told the story to our acquaintance from Leningrad. The audit confirmed everything he said. The employees involved in violations were punished, but my brother bluntly refused to go back to the children's home. He said he'd rather starve with us than go back to the home. He was given valenki boots [warm Russian felt boots] in the children's home, and now he could go to school in the district town. I couldn't attend school. I had to go to work to help my mother provide for the family.

My brother and I shepherded the kolkhoz cows. We were promised to be given milk for our work every day, but they didn't keep their promise. I was afraid of milking cows. Cows might kick or hit you with their horns. There were a few goats in the herd. My brother used to hold them while I milked them. My brother and I drank some milk, and brought the rest of it home. Probably, if it hadn't been for this milk, we wouldn't have survived.

Occasionally Mama visited Aunt Liebe in the district town, and they visited us at times. Uncle Mikhel was a shoemaker. Their older daughter Fani was a skilled dressmaker. Before Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union she worked for the wealthy owner of a garment store. Her master sent her to Paris to purchase fabric and latest designs. During the Soviet regime Fani continued working in the garment store. She made clothes for local customers. Their older son Zalman was in the army. Their middle son Abram was retarded due to meningitis in infancy. He was not subject to military service. Their younger son Motl, who was the same age as me, fell ill with pleurisy, when we were in the kolkhoz. He needed medications and good food, and Fani worked from morning till night to provide these for him. She didn't have good food herself, giving whatever she had to her brother.

When Fani became too weak, she was taken to hospital where they determined she had tuberculosis. She managed to bring her brother to recovery, but nobody could help her. There were no medications, good food or warm clothes.

Then another sorrow hit the family. Uncle Mikhl, while working at the shoemakers', talked to other employees, and once he mentioned that life in Latvia had been much better before the Soviet times. Somebody reported on him and he was arrested. There were investigations and then a trial. Fani died on the day of the court sitting. My uncle was sentenced to five years in the Gulag. Motl was regimented to the army, and my aunt was left there with Abram. Liebe sent Abram to talk to us and convince us to move to the district center. Mama was reluctant to leave the kolkhoz. We already knew people and they knew and supported us. They were Tatars, for the most part. We learned to speak some Tatar. We also knew our ways with getting food. We grew vegetables and had goat milk.

However, Mama did want to give Aunt Liebe a hand, and we decided we should move in with them. Abram and I went to the town, and Mama and the younger children were supposed to join us later. The kolkhoz promised to provide them with a wagon. Abram and I were to walk 25 kilometers to the town, but this wasn't the worst thing about getting there. It was in spring, and the flood had washed away the bridge across the river. I had to cross the river as deep as above my waist, and the water was ice cold. The Lord helped me and I didn't fall ill.

A few days later Mama, my sister and brother arrived. We had to start our life from scratch. Mama and I worked at the local factory. In winter we tousled the wool that made the material for making felt boots. In summer Mama worked as a janitor at the factory. Life was very hard. Abram cut wood at the lumber storage. He suggested I went to work with him. We went to the wood where he cut trees, and I was to pull them to the road. The snow was deep and the tree trunks were heavy. This was hard work. It was more difficult than cutting those trees. In summer we went to work at our vegetable garden. We had to cover 25 kilometers to get there. At times we were lucky when somebody gave us a ride on a wagon or in a tractor. When the weather was agreeable, we stayed overnight in the woods near the vegetable garden.

I remember a postman walking along the streets in Badyn at night. The women ran out into the streets and stood stock still wondering if he would pass by or bring them a letter or a death notification. We also looked forward to letters from the front. Zalman sent two or three letters before we received a notice that Private Zalman Monchnik had perished in action near Leningrad in November 1942. Motl sent his last letter from Poland in 1944. He wrote that the Germans were retreating, the Red Army was chasing the enemy away and the war would be over soon. We never heard from him again. No letter or death notification.

My father also wrote us letters. After serving some time in the Labor army he volunteered to the front. He wrote brief letters, but at least we knew that he was alive. This gave us hope. We kept writing letters to our relatives in Riga, but never heard back from them. We tried to search for them through the evacuation bureau, but they responded they were not in their records. We had no information about them, but we were hoping for the better.

My cousin brother Abram also received a subpoena to the army. He wasn't fit for military service, but he had to prove this and had to go to the medical commission. He had to go to another town some 90 kilometers from our district center. My aunt was very concerned about this trip, since he



was her only surviving child. I accompanied Abram to the town. The trip took us a few days. We stayed with Tatar families overnight. The medical commission acknowledged that Abram wasn't fit for military service. Abram and I went back home.

We kept track of the news from the front. When we heard that the Soviet forces reached Latvia, we rejoiced. We hoped that it wasn't going to be long before we could return home. On 9th May 1945 we heard on the radio that Germany had capitulated and the war was over. Everybody was happy, greeting each other, but this happiness was mixed with sorrow and tears for those, who never lived to see this day. We were waiting for news from my father, hoping to go back home together, but there was nothing from him. We finally left, hoping that my father would find us.

There were other tenants living in our apartment. They had no information about our family. Fortunately, our former neighbor Kalnynsh was still there and he knew about our relatives. Kalnynsh told me that my father was alive, though he was an invalid. He was severely wounded in his leg in battles for Latvia. After the hospital my father returned to Riga and spent a night at the Kalnynsh apartment. He left the morning after, telling Kalnynsh that he wanted to be no burden to his family.

Kalnynsh also told me that my uncle Hershe Shmakovich returned from the [Riga] ghetto [22](#) and lived in his apartment. We went to see my uncle. He was there alone. His family had died in the ghetto. He was also in the ghetto with his family, including his daughter Taube and her two-year-old son, who had come from Palestine to visit the family. Sara, Hershe's second daughter, was killed by Latvians before the Germans came to Riga.

Uncle Hershe was in the ghetto. Able-bodied men were separated from women, children and old people. Prisoners of the ghetto were killed in the Rumbula forest [23](#). They were to walk there, and if somebody fell exhausted they were killed on the way. The Germans needed specialists. They needed food, clothes and needed people to fix those. They were in need of shoemakers, tailors and barbers. My uncle was one of them. My uncle worked as a butcher. He didn't only cut meat, but also made sausages and smoked meat. He was also the best at making salt meat. I've never had such delicious salt meat as he had made. He made salt beef for holidays. He took brisket meat and tongue, rubbed them with salt and garlic and added some saltpeter to make it pinkish.

These workers were kept in separate quarters that were guarded. They were taken to work on trucks. Later they were kept in the Salaspils [24](#) camp for some time, and from there they were taken to a 'Dulag' in Liepaja from where prisoners were sent to concentration camps in Germany. [Editor's note: 'Dulag' is an abbreviation of the German word 'Durchgangslager' meaning 'transit camp.']

The prisoners of the 'Dulag' were liberated by the Soviet Army in Liepaja on 8th or 9th May 1945. My uncle told me about this day. Prisoners were allowed to move around the camp without restriction, but then, when the Soviet Army was already near Liepaja, there were many more armed guards in the camp. Somebody told my uncle that when the Russians broke through to the town, the Germans were going to kill the inmates of the camp. My uncle knew it was time to escape. He ran to the kitchen where Latvian cooks worked and asked them to shelter him. They were probably afraid of the Germans and the Russians and told him to go away.

My uncle ran into the basement of a wooden hut in the camp quarters. The basement was filled with water, but Hershe was too scared to leave it. He stood in the water as deep as up to his throat a whole night. He got so weak before morning that he was almost fainting. He thought he was going to drown in this basement. He went out of the basement and saw a soldier wearing a camouflage uniform. He asked him, 'Are you our soldier?' The soldier replied that he was a Soviet soldier and gave my uncle a cigarette. Hershe was safe.

The Germans didn't have time to kill the other inmates of the camp and they were also liberated by the Soviet army. My uncle and Zalman Shmakovich, who served in the Latvian division, were the only survivors of their family. Zalman demobilized in 1946 and returned to Riga. Grandmother Haya and her husband Gordon died in the ghetto. My father's brother Max Greenfeld, his wife Gusta and their daughter Meriam were in the ghetto and then killed in the Rumbula forest.

My mother's brother Yakov Westerman's sons Zalman and Nohum left Riga with other Jewish guys. They managed to get to Russia and volunteered to the front. They were wounded, but they survived. Zalman lived in Riga for the rest of his life, and Nohum immigrated to Israel in the 1970s. He has passed away [in the year 2000]. Yakov and his wife died in the Riga ghetto. Other Jewish tenants of our house were also killed. The majority of the Jewish population of Riga was killed by the Germans.

My uncle was the only tenant in his apartment. He wanted us to stay with him. He lived in one room, gave Aunt Liebe and her family one room, and then we stayed in another room, and his friend Iosif Perlman stayed in a little room that was meant for housemaids. Iosif, like my uncle, was taken to the ghetto to work for the Germans.

We found my father at a home for invalids in the vicinity of Riga. I went to see my dad. When I saw him, taking an effort to walk, I hugged him and started crying. I asked him why he didn't write us and told him that we were happy that he survived, even if he was badly injured, but he was alive and that was what mattered. I spent two days with my father. The personnel was kind to me. I had meals at the canteen and I was allowed to stay there overnight, before my father and I could go home.

Uncle Hershe got married. He met his second wife Gita after the war. Gita lived in Riga before the war. She was married and had two children. She evacuated with her children, when the war began, and her husband went to the front. In evacuation Gita heard that her husband was dead. She had lost her husband, and my uncle had lost his family during the war. They got married, and Gita and her children moved in with my uncle. She was a nice lady and we became friends with her.

## **After liberation**

We were very poor and even starved at times. My father received a low pension of an invalid and Mama didn't work. I was the only one to work, but I had no vocation. Since my father was an invalid of war, the chairman of the district social security office helped me to get a job at the invalids' garment shop [cf. artel] [25](#), making shirts for men and children. Each employee was responsible for a single operation. I sewed cuffs on sleeves. It wasn't too hard, but this job required accuracy and attention. It didn't take me long to learn. This wasn't the best paid job, but then each kopeck counted. I joined the Komsomol [26](#) in this shop.

I was eager to study. I had finished six grades of the Jewish school before the war. There were no Jewish schools left after the war. They became Russian schools. My Russian was poor. I learned to speak it during evacuation, but I could hardly write in it. So, instead of going to the seventh grade, I had to go to the fifth grade of a Russian evening school. My sister and brother also went to the fifth grade, and so it happened that we were in the same grade, with the only difference that they went to the daytime school.

I liked school. My favorite subject was mathematics. I was the first to solve any problem in my class. My teacher of mathematics always praised me. History was very difficult. I had problems remembering dates. My sister and brother finished eight grades of the Russian general education school. My brother also went to a music school. He went to the class of brass instruments at the Palace of pioneers. My brother's music teacher recommended my brother to go to the music school. Boris learned to play the clarinet and the piano. I studied two years and had to quit school after getting married.

Sometime later I quit work in the invalids' shop and became an apprentice at the garment factory. It didn't take me long to learn the profession. A very nice lady was the forewoman of the shop. She had no children, and treated me like her daughter. She cooked at home and brought me lunches. The factory provided free lunches to its employees. In fall, employees helped farmers with the harvest. This was a good time. We were young and went to swim in the Daugava River or had dancing parties after work.

After the war we observed Jewish traditions. However difficult life was, we celebrated all Jewish holidays at home according to the rules. There was no place to buy matzah, so we made it ourselves, and later we accepted orders from others. My uncle and his wife Gita, our family and Iosif Perlman were involved in the process of matzah baking. We made plain matzah or egg matzah. People brought us flour and eggs and then came back to pick their matzah. Mama and Gita made the dough and this was the most difficult part. Someone rolled the dough, someone made little holes with a wheel and another person was responsible for the baking. Each person was responsible for an operation. We had our clients for whom we made matzah for years.

Mama also made special wine for Pesach for our family and for others. This took a lot of effort. My brother always helped her. First he had to beat raisins in a bag that he hit with a stick. Mama had special cloth bags for this purpose. Then these raisins were placed in bottles, and the bottles were left for fermenting. When the wine was ready, it was to be filtered several times through special paper filters. The wine turned out delicious, and our clients were very happy with it. Nowadays special wine for Pesach is sold in stores, and I can assure you that Mama's wine was no worse.

We started preparations for the holiday in advance. Gita worked and came back home late. Mama and Aunt Liebe spent their days cooking. We were a big family and needed lots of food. They made gefilte fish, forshmak from herring and beetroot kvas drink. There were no sweets in the stores, and Mama and Aunt Liebe made pomerantz. This required a lot of effort. They cooked ground carrots with sugar, watching it to keep it from burning, added ginger, cinnamon, zest, honey, raisins and eggs. When sugar turns into caramel, the mass is scooped onto a dish and cut finely when it gets dry. It took a lot of time, but it was worth it. I used to make it for my daughters. They also made strudels and puddings. We did our best to make it a holiday.

We also celebrated Victory Day [27](#) on 9th May. This was the biggest holiday for all of us. If it hadn't been for the Soviet Army, there would have been no survivors, and we knew it well. On Jewish holidays we went to the synagogue. Of course, the Soviet authorities didn't appreciate such activities. It was common knowledge that party members weren't supposed to attend the synagogue. It became known at work and they were sure to have problems. As for common people, this was no problem. Only two of eight synagogues in Riga operated after the war. One of them was also closed sometime later. On holidays there wasn't an inch of room inside and outside the synagogue. Soviet holidays were just additional days off for us. We celebrated them at work and went to parades. We couldn't help going, since the management wouldn't have given us bonuses, and they made up a significant part in our family budget.

When we returned to Riga, we continued correspondence with Mama's sister Dora, who was living in Palestine. We sent her cards before holidays or wrote letters. They wrote to us about life in Palestine. My cousins wrote me how they were building this country, bringing soil onto the bare, stony slopes to plant trees on them. They planted eucalyptus trees on swamps, draining them and turning them into fruitful land. They wrote about the attacks of the Arabs and told us about their friends that were killed. It goes without saying that we were very happy, when in 1948 Israel was officially recognized.

## **Marriage and children**

I knew my uncle's friend Iosif liked me. He was the same age as my father, born in 1901, and I thought he was an old man. However, some time passed and my relatives and Iosif's relatives started telling me to marry him. Life after the war was very hard, and I knew it would be less difficult, if I had a husband like him. Of course, I was thinking of having a younger husband and having more in common with him, but circumstances forced me to sacrifice my youth and marry Iosif Perlman, who was 25 years older than me.

I didn't regret it. Iosif was a good husband. He cared about me and helped me with everything. He went shopping with me, didn't allow me to carry heavy things and stood in lines to buy food. There were always lines in Soviet stores. He was a very kind and caring man.

We got married in 1948. We had a chuppah in my uncle's apartment and had a traditional Jewish wedding. Mama and my aunt did their best cooking. We only invited our relatives, but there happened to be a lot of them. We celebrated our wedding and then lived together in the little room in my uncle's apartment.

Iosif was born in the town of Saldus [100 km from Riga], Latvia, in 1901. His father's name was Leizer Perlman, and his mother's name was Braine. I don't know what his father did for a living, but his mother was a housewife. There were seven children in the family. I don't remember his older brother's name. He moved to Palestine in the late 1910s. Then there were the daughters, Sofia and Mary, sons Henrich, Benno, Zvi and my future husband, Iosif, the youngest in the family. Their family was a religious Jewish family. The boys studied in cheder till the age of 13, when they had their bar mitzvah. All the children finished a gymnasium.

During the tsarist time Sofia and her father moved to Moscow, Russia. Sofia was going to enter [Lomonosov] Moscow [State] University [28](#), and her father went with her to support her there.

However, they had no opportunity to return to Latvia due to the revolution in Russia, when Latvia became an independent state in 1918. Residents of Soviet Russia weren't allowed to travel to Latvia or even correspond with their relatives [as it was dangerous to keep in touch with relatives abroad] [29](#). They stayed in Moscow and didn't see the rest of their family before 1940, when Latvia was annexed to the Soviet Union. Iosif and his brother Henrich went to visit them there. My husband's older brother Zvi and his family moved to Africa in the 1930s. Benno and Henrich were married and Mary got married as well. Henrich wife's maiden name was Yakobson. Their daughter was born in 1933, and in 1936 they had a son.

Iosif was regimented to serve in the Latvian army after finishing the gymnasium. He told me that soldiers lived in barracks, but Jewish soldiers were allowed to go home on Saturday. After the army he entered the Electric Engineering Faculty of Riga University, where he studied radio equipment and telecommunications. In the summer students had practical training at enterprises. Iosif had his training at the Union radio factory in Riga for two years in a row. The factory produced radios and telephone equipment. Iosif finished the university course, but he never defended his diploma. However, he was a good specialist and had a relevant job.

When the war began, Iosif's family didn't want to evacuate. Henrich, his older brother, went to the Territorial Army, and from there he joined the Latvian division. The rest of the family ended up in the ghetto: Iosif's mother, his sister Mary and her family, Henrich's children, Henrich's wife and two children and Benno and his family. Iosif's father, Leizer Perlman, died in Moscow in 1941, shortly before the war began. He was buried in the Vostriakovskoye Jewish cemetery in Moscow. The rest of the family have no graves. There is only a memorial at the place where they were shot.

Iosif was taken to the Salaspils camp, and some time later he was sent to a work camp where he met my uncle Hershe. Iosif did electric engineering work in the camp: he installed telephone lines, electric wires and radio communications. I know little about this period in his life. The memories were too hard, and he didn't talk much about this period. He told me a little bit, when we went to the memorial opening ceremony at the former Salaspils concentration camp area. When Iosif returned to Saldus from the camp, he heard that his family had been killed. He didn't want to stay in his empty family house and moved in with my uncle. His older brother Henrich survived at the front and returned home. He heard about the tragic end of his family and went to his sister in Moscow. Henrich died in 1958, and was buried near his father Leizer's grave in the Vostriakovskoye cemetery.

Our first daughter was born in 1949. We gave her the name of Bertha, and her Jewish name is Braine after my husband's mother, who had died in the ghetto. We were still living in this little room of about six square meters. There was no space even for a child's bed, and our daughter slept on a chair. When my brother was regimented to the army, we put our daughter's bed in my parents' room. My maternity leave lasted one or two months. I wanted to nurse my little baby, and I quit my job. I went back to work, when my daughter turned three.

I went to work as a knitter at the Mara knitwear factory. Our shop specialized in gloves. I was to knit fingers on the knitting machine. My sister also went to work there. Our Jewish identity didn't affect our employment. I'm sure this was an issue for doctors, engineers or key managers, but this fact didn't matter for workers. However, after the war anti-Semitism was apparent. Even in the streets people could curse or hit a Jewish person, or even call him/her 'zhyd.' This wasn't expressed

by the Latvians, but by the Soviet people that had moved to Latvia after the war.

Routinely anti-Semitism was particularly strong shortly before Stalin died, during the period of the Doctors' Plot [30](#). It was clear that this campaign was directed against Jews. There were rumors that Jewish people were to be deported to Birobidzhan [31](#) in Siberia. This might have been the case, if Stalin had not died in March 1953. Many people cried after him, but for the most part they were those who had come from the Soviet Union. Latvian people weren't so emotional about it. Of course, they didn't express how they actually felt about this, but in truth, neither my relatives, nor I felt any sorrow. We remembered life in Latvia before its annexation to the USSR, and the comparison was not in favor of the Soviet regime.

In 1954 my second daughter was born. We named her after my grandmother Haya-Genia, and her Russian name was Yevgenia. We called her Zhenia affectionately. I didn't quit work after she was born. I left breast milk with my mother to feed her. Mama also took the baby for walks. However, some time later I realized I had to look for a new job. We worked in shifts at the factory, and this wasn't very convenient. I went to work as a seamstress at the garment shop. I was to sew on sleeves. This was a difficult task, but I managed all right.

My husband and I observed Jewish traditions. We spoke Yiddish and Russian at home, and our daughters knew both languages since early childhood. I wanted my daughters to speak their own language. So many Jews, particularly those, who came from the USSR, couldn't speak their language. I'm very proud of knowing how to read, write and speak Yiddish. Speaking your own language is so much joy!

We celebrated all Jewish holidays at home. Our daughters knew everything about each holiday and what was to be cooked. I understood they might not apply this knowledge in the future, but I thought they had to know things. On Yom Kippur we fasted. Even when I was pregnant and breastfed the babies, I fasted. The Jewish law allows ill people and pregnant women to refrain from fasting, but I wanted to follow the rules.

My sister and brother lived with us. My brother was good at music and wanted to continue his musical education after school, but life was hard, and he had to go to work. However, he played at the amateur orchestra in the evening and practiced playing at night. He was recruited to the army and served on the Soviet/Chinese border where he played in the regiment orchestra. He had one leave during his service. After his service in the army, Boris returned to Riga and went to work. In 1957 he married a Jewish girl from Riga. Her name was Ada. She was born in 1936. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah at home. Their older daughter Tsilia was born in 1959, and Tatiana, Taube in the Jewish manner, was born in 1963.

My sister Joheved married Semyon Katz, a Jewish man, in 1955. Their only son Zvi was born in 1961. After a short while she divorced her husband. She worked and raised her son, and we provided her with assistance. When my brother and sister got married, they moved out. My husband, my daughters and I stayed with my parents in our apartment. We all gave money to our parents. This is the way it should be.

My father died in 1956. We buried him at the Jewish cemetery in Riga according to Jewish traditions. After he died, Mama felt worse and worse. We were hoping she would recover, but this was not the case. My husband arranged for her to go to a health center, but she only felt worse



there. I took Mama back home. Sometime later her doctor said she needed an operation and had to go to the hospital. I quit my job and spent all the time by her bedside.

After the surgery the surgeon told me that they saw they could do nothing to help my mother, when they cut her open. Mama didn't know about it. She was sure the surgery was a success and she was going to recover. I spent all nights beside her, watering her lips, when she asked for water. When Mama was released from hospital, she was feeling much better. She used to sit in the park for a long time.

After my father died, Mama received a small pension. She didn't have to pay for her food eating with us, but she needed pocket money to buy some sweets or even have a new dress made for her. She had known her dressmaker since before the war. My brother and I gave her allowances, so that she could enjoy little things. She died in 1963. We buried her beside our father's grave.

In 1957 my aunt Liebe and her family moved to Israel after her husband returned from the Gulag. Emigration to Israel wasn't allowed in the Soviet Union, but Jews could go there from Poland. Aunt Liebe's husband Mikhl Monchnik came from Poland. The family was allowed to move to Poland. From there some time later they moved to Israel. Her son Abram was married. His older daughter Tsilia was born in the late 1940s, and his younger son was born in 1950. They all live in Israel. My aunt and her husband have passed away, and my cousin already has great-grandchildren. We corresponded with my aunt and she sent us pictures. At that time we could never believe that they would be able to visit us.

My sister and her son also moved to Israel around the late 1960s. A couple of years later my brother and his family also moved to Israel. It took them some time to settle down there. Joheved was a manicurist, and her son studied. They liked their new life. My brother went to work at the leather goods factory and his wife also found a job. Their daughters received an education and got married. They are doing well. In 2001 Taube, my brother's younger daughter, died. She left two children, the younger of them was under one year of age.

I was thinking of moving to Israel as well. I knew our daughters would have a good future and prospects there. I was also young enough to start life from scratch. My sister sent us an invitation letter. Only relatives could invite the rest of their family to justify the departure. This was called 'for the purpose of reunification of families.' However, my husband couldn't finally make up his mind. He agreed to what I was telling him, that we were to be all right, but he didn't dare to make this step. He was afraid that if we were refused the permission for departure, we wouldn't be able to find a job here. He was also concerned about living in a new country. He was afraid of everything. Perhaps, it was his age, or maybe it was the impact of the ghetto and concentration camps that made him so uncertain. So we delayed and delayed our departure till we stayed in the USSR for good.

My husband was well-respected and valued at work. He was the chairman of the trade unions and he was responsible for distribution of lodgings and tickets to resorts. We shared a little room all together. My husband's enterprise was building a house for its employees and I asked my husband to apply for an apartment. He replied that there were other people having no place to live whatsoever. Other people were receiving apartments, but we stayed in this little room. The only thing my husband did for us was that he obtained tickets to pioneer camps for our daughters. Nobody could make him ask for something for himself. He would have rather died than asked for

benefits for himself. This was what he was like.

I took another job. I went to work as a presser and then a seamstress at the knitwear shop. There was a choir in this shop and I joined it. I liked singing since I was a child, even though I've never studied singing. I've always sung Jewish and Latvian songs. I've preserved this love of singing.

My husband and I did our best to raise our daughters to know they were Jewish. They knew Yiddish, Jewish traditions and religion. They studied in a Russian general education school. My older daughter didn't want to continue her education after finishing the tenth grade. She went to work. She became an apprentice at the stock factory. She worked there before getting married.

Our daughter married Andris Tzelmale, a Latvian man. My husband was very upset about Bertha's future marriage. Of course, we wanted her to have a Jewish husband, but this wasn't the main thing about the marriage. There are good and bad people, and it's also true about Jewish people. What mattered about my daughter's choice was that she was happy. I'm happy that my daughter made the right choice. My son-in-law has made a good husband and a caring father, and also, he's treated my husband and me well. He is always willing to help and support me. I love him dearly. Whatever has happened in my life, I've met great people. I am grateful to God for this.

Bertha and Andris have three sons. The oldest, Arvid, was born in 1972, the second, Philip, was born in 1977, and Robert was born in 1985. Our older grandchildren have finished their studies and go to work. The younger one is finishing the gymnasium this year and will decide what he wants to do. Young people have great opportunities. I've helped my daughter to raise her children. This is a hard job. I love my grandchildren, and they love me.

Our younger daughter Yevgenia entered the College of Commerce after finishing eight grades of the gymnasium. She studied well, and after finishing her studies she was offered a job in Riga during the job distribution [cf. mandatory job assignment in the USSR] [32](#). She worked as senior shop assistant and liked her job. She married a Jewish man. She also kept her maiden name, Perlman, after getting married. In 1988 her daughter was born. She gave her the name of Hana after my mother. My granddaughter's Russian name is Anna.

They lived with us. We spoke Russian with our granddaughter, but when we wanted to talk in confidence, we switched to Yiddish. So it happened that our granddaughter could understand and even speak Yiddish before going to school. We sent her to a Latvian school. My daughter thought that if the girl was going to live in Latvia, she had to know the language and history of the country. When my daughter decided to move to Israel, Anna went to the fourth grade of a Jewish school. Before moving to Israel she had a good command of Hebrew. It was a good start. Now Anna can speak fluent Hebrew.

## **Life after the fall of communism**

At first I didn't care about perestroika [33](#). I wasn't interested in politics and didn't believe the promises made by Soviet politicians. Then I saw that many things in our life were changing for the better. There was openness and newspapers wrote about the things that could have been only mentioned in a whisper and to close people before. During the Soviet rule there was a ban on religion. During perestroika the authorities stopped persecuting people for religious rituals. People could go to the synagogue or church without fear. The most joyful event for me was that we were

allowed the opportunity to correspond with relatives and friends living abroad and there was no censorship, and we were also allowed to travel to other countries. I always wanted to go to Israel and I always knew that it could never become true. I prayed to God that He give me a chance to see Israel, and maybe my prayers have reached Him.

I've been to Israel twice. It's a wonderful country. I made my first trip there in 1996. My brother's wife was to turn 60, and I wanted to be there on this day. When our plane was approaching Tel Aviv and I saw the country through the window, I couldn't hold back the tears of joy. This was probably the biggest joy in my life. I stayed a month that time. I went on tours all over the country.

I've been to all places I read about in the Torah and the Bible. I was in Kesar where I saw the huge amphitheater with stone seats. I was in the Rotshield Park and I was amazed that all the text on signs was written in English, Hebrew and the Braille script for blind people. I was amazed at how they care about blind people and other people with physical handicaps. There are access ramps for paralyzed people moving in wheel chairs. One can tell that the country takes care of its residents, and this was a new and happy thing to know. I was given a tree leaf in the park and I brought it home. It is very dry, but it reminds me about those happy days.

I also visited Israel another time, when my daughter was already living there. I'm sorry I can't go there again. On 18th January 2006 my granddaughter Anna will turn 18, and I would like to be with her on this day. However, my health condition keeps me from traveling. I follow the events in Israel. Unfortunately, our country is surrounded by enemies, and citizens of the country face danger every day. I always pray to God to give peace to this beautiful country, and to ensure that the people of Israel are wealthy.

Another good thing started during perestroika. The Jewish life began to revive, and this was very important for me. The Latvian Society of Jewish Culture, which was actually a Jewish community, was established. From the first days we knew how we needed it. There is a Jewish choir at the community, and I went there the moment I heard about it. Many people there didn't know the language or Jewish songs. We had to recall the rhymes and search for them step by step, and we also sang the tunes for the accompanier to pick up the tune, until finally our choir generated a rather sufficient repertoire. We give concerts in the community, tour Latvia and have good receptions everywhere.

I went to Liepaja with the choir. This is the town of my childhood and my father's home town, and also, my grandfather lived here. Then I went there for the second time. I attended the opening ceremony of the memorial to the Jewish victims. The memorial is grand and beautiful. In the community I found a book with the names of Jewish victims. There are quite a few people with the Greenfeld surname. They must be my father's relatives. I counted eleven relatives, who died in Liepaja during the Holocaust. I didn't know them, and their names don't ring a bell to me, but they were all Greenfeld: Wolf, Mendl, Esther, Lumen, Rosa, Izia and others.

In 1991 the Soviet Union fell apart, and all former Republics, including Latvia, became independent countries [cf. Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic] [34](#). I have no regrets about the breakup of the USSR. Each country should live as is best for its people. I think that in the Soviet Union we all lived like in a huge shared [communal] apartment [35](#), where everything happened as Moscow dictated.

Why does Russia complain that Russians are persecuted in Latvia? They came here uninvited, and they forced the Baltic countries to be annexed to the USSR, and now they oppose the requirement that Russians have to study the Latvian language. How can it be otherwise? Can they live in the country without knowing its language? They should have no bad feelings about the fact that each country wants to have its own apartment and life, and it does not appreciate uninvited guests.

However, I don't agree with the aggressive nationalism directed against anybody, who is different than you are. Once I was in a bus with my neighbor. She moved to Latvia after the war. She had lived in Belarus and was in captivity in Germany during the war. She doesn't know Latvian and she will probably never learn it, considering her age. We spoke Russian and one passenger commented loudly, 'You're in Latvia, and you are supposed to speak Latvian here.' I replied that we were free to speak any language we chose. He shifted his attention to me and told me rudely to get out to Israel. I replied that I would go when and where I wanted, and that I didn't need his permission and that his hands were in Jewish blood up to his elbows, if he dared to say this to me. I felt hurt.

I speak good Latvian and I think I am supposed to know the language of the country I live in, but was this of such significance for my father and my relatives, who gave away their lives and health to protect Latvia from fascists? I think this is a sensitive issue and it requires a flexible approach. But what is important is that one shouldn't judge people and not look for enemies.

In the early 1990s my husband started feeling ill and weak. He couldn't go out and stayed at home reading the Torah. When I had to go out, I left food for him. I had to care about him, as if he were a child. I bathed and fed him and helped him to put on his clothes. I wouldn't have managed, if my daughter and son-in-law hadn't helped me. He died in August 1997, two months before his 96th birthday.

However, there is a record of his story. Shortly before my husband died a journalist from Moscow visited us. She videotaped my husband's story about his life in the ghetto and concentration camps for the Spielberg Fund [USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education], to have it for future generations. After my husband died we received a videotape of my husband's interview from America. My older grandson made copies of this video for us.

We buried my husband at the Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish tradition. Our rabbi conducted the ceremony. The men gathered for a minyan requiring at least ten men. We made an engraving on my husband's gravestone in three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish and Latvian.

I've lived alone after my husband died. My older daughter Bertha, her husband and sons often come to see me. My friends visit me. I participate in the Jewish life in Riga, and I find it very interesting. I go to the synagogue every day. It's become a necessary thing for me. I've made quite a few friends in the community. I have friends in the choir, in the gym and those I talk to, when we get together with our rebetzen. I often see her. She is a wonderful lady. She's arrived here from Israel with her son and husband. We recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of their life in Riga, Latvia. She tells me stories about the history and traditions of the Jewish people. She's established the 'Jewish Mom' society. She invites Jewish people from all over the world. We discuss whatever Jewish news we've read in newspapers and share all kinds of news. Thanks to this society I read Jewish newspapers and magazines from France and the USA.

When our rebetzen heard that I could read in Yiddish, she gave me a magazine. I read each and every page of it and found it very interesting. Our rebetzen made arrangements for me to have this press delivered to my home. Once I knew that a Jewish magazine was published in France, I wrote to this magazine in Paris, and they also arranged for me to receive it at home. I enjoy reading these newspapers a lot. They write about the life of Jews all over the world. I've read in these newspapers that nowadays many non-Jewish Americans study the Jewish language. It's the same here. There are non-Jewish students at the Department of Judaic Studies at the Latvian State University. I'm very happy about it. The more people learn the Jewish history and Jewish traditions, the less anti-Semitism will exist. This is what I believe.

I look forward to our choir rehearsals. Each meeting is a holiday for us. Old and ill people sing in the choir, but when they start singing, they look young and happy. One lady in the choir is blind. She is 86, and her daughter takes her to the choir rehearsals. The daughter also sings in the choir. Both have beautiful voices. Both attend all rehearsals. Some of those I started singing with have passed away. Old age and diseases have no mercy. However, we are like one family. We visit and support people, if they fall ill. We also remember the deceased ones. When I visit my husband and parents' graves, I also bring flowers to put them on the graves of our deceased choir members. Many of them had no relatives left to visit their graves.

The Rahamim social center supports me a lot. They pay my heating bills during the heating season. They also provide medications that are very expensive here. I also have medical insurance for free. The synagogue bought me two trips to the recreation center. I had free treatment and massages there. This is all very important, considering that my pension is not sufficient to cover all expenses. It's also very important for me to know that I've not been abandoned and that there are people remembering and caring about me.

I observe Jewish traditions at home. We celebrate Jewish holidays in the Jewish community, but I also celebrate them at home. I go to the synagogue and then my daughter, her husband and their sons visit me, and we sit at the festive table. I light candles and pray on Friday.

I read a lot about the Holocaust. It's scary to read about it, but I believe, people should know and remember, or it may be repeated in the future. On 4th July we go to the memorial at the place where fascists burnt the choral synagogue with many Latvian Jews inside. This is the day of mourning and memory. Old people and young people come there. The memory goes from generation to generation.

## **Glossary:**

### **1 Latvian Society of Jewish Culture (LSJC)**

formed in autumn 1988 under the leadership of Esphik Rapin, a cultural activist, who was the 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 the establishment of a 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 auspices of the Society. There is a museum and documentation 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 by the LSJC.

## **2 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.

## **3 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 percent 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.

## **4 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.

## **5 Latvian independence**

The end of the 19th century was marked by a rise of the national consciousness and the start of national movement in Latvia, that was a part of the Russian Empire. It was particularly strong during the first Russian revolution in 1905-07. After the fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917 the Latvian representatives conveyed their demand to grant Latvia the status of autonomy to the Russian Duma. During World War I, in late 1918 a significant part of Latvia, including Riga, was taken by the German army. However, Germany, having lost the war, could not leave these lands in its ownership, while the winning countries were not willing to let these countries be annexed to the



Soviet Russia. The current international situation gave Latvia a chance to gain its own statehood. From 1917 Latvian nationalists secretly plot against the Germans. When Germany surrenders on 11th November they seize their chance and declare Latvia's independence at the National Theatre on 18th November 1918. Under the Treaty of Riga, Russia promises to respect Latvia's independence for all time. Latvia's independence is recognized by the international community on 26th January 1921, and nine months later Latvia is admitted into the League of Nations. The independence of Latvia was recognized de jure. The Latvian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

## **6 Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim**

established by the community with the same name. It existed in Riga since the late 19th century. In 1924 Ulrich Millman and the Joint funded construction of a hospital where they provided assistance to all the needy, not just Jews. The hospital consisted of three departments: therapeutic, surgery and neurology. Director of the hospital was Isaac Joffe, director of Riga's health department in the early 1920s. Doctor Vladimir Minz, one of the most outstanding surgeons, was head of surgery. He was the first surgeon in Latvia to operate on heart, brain, and do psychosurgery. Fascists destroyed the hospital, its patients and personnel in summer 1941. Doctor Joffe perished in the Riga ghetto in 1941, Professor Minz perished in Buchenwald camp in February 1945.

## **7 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

## **8 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

## **9 Betar**

Brith Trumpledor (Hebrew) meaning Trumpledor Society; right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpledor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended

for many months during the Bar Kohba uprising. Its aim was to propagate the program of the revisionists and prepare young people to fight and live in Palestine. It organized emigration through both legal and illegal channels. It was a paramilitary organization; its members wore uniforms. They supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During WWII many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

## **10 Hashomer Hatzair**

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

## **11 Annexation of Latvia to the USSR**

upon execution of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 2nd 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 this territory was not used against the USSR. On 5th 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 16th 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 17th June 1940 new divisions of the Soviet military entered Latvia with no resistance. On 21st June 1940 the new government, friendly to the USSR, was formed mostly from the communists released from prisons. On 14-15th July elections took place in Latvia. Its results were largely manipulated by the new country's leadership and communists won. On 5th August 1940 the newly elected Supreme Soviet addressed the Supreme Soviet of the USSR requesting to annex Latvia to the USSR, which was done.

## **12 Ulmanis Karlis (1877 - 1942), a prominent Latvian politician, born to the family of a land owner**

Ulmanis studied agriculture at the ETH Zurich, Switzerland and at Leipzig University, Germany and then worked in Latvia as a writer, lecturer, and manager in agricultural positions. Ulmanis was one of the principal founders of the Latvian People's Council (Tautas Padome), which proclaimed Latvia's independence from Russia on November 18, 1918. A constitutional convention established Latvia as a parliamentary democracy in 1920. Ulmanis was the first Prime Minister of a Latvia which had become independent for the first time in 700 years. He also served as Prime Minister in several subsequent Latvian government administrations during the period of Latvian independence from 1918 to 1940. He also founded the Latvian Agrarian (Farmer's) Union. On May 15, 1934, Ulmanis as Prime Minister dissolved the Latvian Parliament Saeima and established executive non-parliamentary authoritarian rule. In 1936 Ulmanis unconstitutionally merged the office of President and Prime Minister in his own person. Although the U.S. State Department had information at that time that the Soviet Union had agreed to exile Ulmanis to Switzerland, he was in fact arrested by

the Soviets and deported to points unknown. His fate was only learned in the post-Gorbachev era. Ulmanis is now known to have died in a prison in Krasnovodsk in the present Turkmenistan during World War II.

### **13 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.

### **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 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.

### **16 Bolsheviks**

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16th April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II

Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

## **17 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- two years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet- three 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 three years and in navy- four 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 two years in ground troops and in the navy to three years. That system of army recruitment has remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

## **18 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.

## **19 Russian stove**

Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed for children and adults in wintertime.

## **20 Latvian division**

Latvian rifle division 201 was formed in August/September 1941. The formation started in the Gorohovetski camps in the vicinity of Gorky (present Nizhniy Novgorod), where most of evacuated Latvians were located. On 12 September 1941 the division soldiers took an oath. By early December 1941 the division consisted of 10,348 people, about 30% of them were Jews. 90% of the division commanders and officers were Latvian citizens. In early December 1941 units of the Latvian division were taken to the front. From 20 December 1941 till 14 January 1942, during the Soviet counterattack near Moscow the division took part in severe battles near Naro-Fominsk and Borovsk. The casualties constituted 55% of the staff, including 58% privates, 30% junior commanding officers. Total casualties constituted about 5700 people, including about 1060 Jews.

**21 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.

## **22 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.

## **23 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 Sonderkommanden 1005 opened the graves and burned the remains of victims in spring and summer 1944. They also crashed burnt bones with

bone crushing 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 at the site of the Rumbula burial. They installed a memorial gravestone with the words 'To the victims of fascism' were engraved in Latvian, Russian and Yiddish.

## **24 Salaspils**

The biggest concentration camp in Latvia, located on the railway line near Riga. All together over 53,000 people from various countries were killed there. The killed were placed in pits in several layers, occupying about 2,600 square meters. Inmates were also used as workers at the peat bog, lime factory and others. Today, there is a memorial and the museum 'Road of Ordeal' on the spot of the former concentration camp.

( [http://www.logon.org/\\_domain/holocaustrevealed.org/Latvia/Latvian\\_Holocaust.htm](http://www.logon.org/_domain/holocaustrevealed.org/Latvia/Latvian_Holocaust.htm) )

## **25 Artel**

a cooperative union of tradesmen or producers involving shares of overall profit and common liability.

## **26 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.

## **27 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)**

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

## **28 Lomonosov Moscow State University, founded in 1755, the university was for a long time the only learning institution in Russia open to general public**

In the Soviet time, it was the biggest and perhaps the most prestigious university in the country. At present there are over 40,000 undergraduates and 7,000 graduate students at MSU.

## **29 Keep in touch with relatives abroad**

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

## **30 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.

### **31 Birobidzhan**

Formed in 1928 to give Soviet Jews a home territory and to increase settlement along the vulnerable borders of the Soviet Far East, the area was raised to the status of an autonomous region in 1934. Influenced by an effective propaganda campaign, and starvation in the east, 41,000 Soviet Jews relocated to the area between the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, by 1938 28,000 of them had fled the regions harsh conditions, There were Jewish schools and synagogues up until the 1940s, when there was a resurgence of religious repression after World War II. The Soviet government wanted the forced deportation of all Jews to Birobidzhan to be completed by the middle of the 1950s. But in 1953 Stalin died and the deportation was cancelled. Despite some remaining Yiddish influences - including a Yiddish newspaper - Jewish cultural activity in the region has declined enormously since Stalin's anti-cosmopolitanism campaigns and since the liberalization of Jewish emigration in the 1970s. Jews now make up less than 2% of the region's population.

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

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

### **33 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.

### **34 Reestablishment of the Latvian Republic**

On 4th May 1990 Supreme Soviet of the Latvian Soviet Republic has accepted the declaration in which it was informed of the demand 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 3rd March 1991, over 90 percent of the participants voted for independence. On 21st August 1991 the parliament took a decision on complete restoration of the prewar statehood of Latvia. The western world finally recognized Latvian independence and so did the USSR on 24th August 1991. In September 1991 Latvia 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.

### **35 Communal apartment**

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.