

INTERVIEW WITH ISRAEL LEMPERT (ISROEL LEMPERTAS) ^{1 2}



Vilnius, Lithuania

I met Isroel Lempertas in the Lithuanian community where he agreed to give me an interview at once. He was very busy, so he could not pay me enough attention. I suggested interviewing him in his apartment, but he refused saying that his wife was sick and made an appointment with me at the community office at his earliest convenience. Isroel is an athletic man of short height, with a mop of grey hair. He is very modest. He looks serious, refined and intellectual. I can feel that the conversation is not easy for him. Isroel takes hard every reminiscence of his childhood, parents and brother, who perished in the lines. That is why he does not say much about his kin and I did not want to hurt his feeling with extra questions.

— Interviewer: Zhanna Litinskaya, Vilnius, Lithuania, February 2005

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My family history

I was born in a Lithuanian frontier town Mazeikiai, located 250 km from to the North-West from Vilnius, not far from the border with Latvia. The population of Mazeikiai was about 5-7 thousand people. Jews were about 700- 800 people. There is hardly anything I know about my ancestors. Like most adolescents, when I was young, I was not interested in my past as I had to think of my education, work and family. Now, I would like to get the information on my lineage, but there is nobody I can ask about it. As far as I know my maternal kin was born in Mazeikiai. I remember my maternal grandfather Faivush Levinson. I reckon he was born in 1860s. Grandfather was melamed in cheder. As I was later told by his students he was a very advanced person and a teacher. He gave not only traditional knowledge in cheder, but he also tried to tell more about nature, birds and flowers, read unreligious books of modern authors. As far as I know, grandfather Faivush Levinson was not truly religious man. I do not recall him in kippah or with a hat on. Judging from the pictures, his head never was covered.

I do not know anything about my maternal grandmother. She died long before I was born. I do not remember any tales about her. I do not even know her name. When the World War One was unleashed, Jews from frontier territories, namely Kaunas province, including Mazeikiai which was part of that province during Tsarist times, were exiled to the remote districts of Russia. Anti- Semitistic tsarist military authorities deemed that propinquity of Yiddish and German and vast difference of Jewish appearance and mode of life from the rest of peoples, inhabiting that territory, would incline Jews to the espionage. Many Jewish families from Baltic countries turned out be exiled. My mother's family was exiled to Berdyansk, warm Ukrainian town on the coast of the Sea of Azov [1000 km to the south from Kiev]. When Lithuania gained independence [1] almost all Jews came back to the motherland. The family of Faivush Levinson also returned. I cannot say whether my grandmother was alive. As far as I remember grandfather Faivush lived in the house of one of my aunts. He died in 1933. He was buried in Mazeikiai Jewish cemetery in accordance with the Jewish rite. I was not present at the funeral. It was not customary for Jews to take children to the funerals of the relatives.

Faivush had many children. My mother's brothers left for America in early 1920s. All I know is their names - Louis and Benjamin and that they had wives and children. I do not know what happened to them. There were 5 daughters, including my mother born in 1897. The eldest sister, who was couple of years older than my mother, had a double name Rosa and Shifra. She was called Shifra in our family. Her husband Aba Mets did not have a permanent job. He got by odd jobs. Shifra and Aba had two sons- Rafael, 4 years older than me and Nahman, who was my age. When the Great Patriotic War [2] was unleashed, we fled with the family of aunt Shifra. Her husband Aba was in the labor front first [3]. He worked at some military plant in Siberia. Then he was drafted in the army and served in Lithuanian division #16 [the battalion is called Lithuanian because it was formed mostly from the former Lithuanian citizens, who were volunteers, evacuated or serving in the labor front formed in 1943. Aba was killed in action in 1943 shortly after he had been drafted. He was not a young man at that time. Shifra and the boy came back to Lithuania and settled in Vilnius. About 20 years ago, she and her children left for Israel. Shifra had lived a long life and died in early 1990s. Her sons are doing well in Israel now.

Two of my mother's sisters lived in the USSR. Elder sister Liya, who was one or two years older than my mother, left for Baku, Azerbaijan, where her husband lived. I do not know how they met. They loved each other passionately. Liya's husband was Russian and it was one of the reasons why she left Lithuania. But at that time marriages between

people of different nationalities were not acceptable. When Liya got married her name was Zimnikova. She was a housewife and her husband, whose name I do not remember, was assigned to different positions in the government of Azerbaijan. They had an only daughter Victoria. After moving to the USSR, Liya stopped corresponding with the kin in Lithuania, as it was considered dangerous and was persecuted in the USSR [Keep in touch with relatives abroad] [4]. Moreover, Liya's husband was in the government. I do not remember where Liya and her daughter Victoria were during WW2. After war Victoria was married to my friend. They moved to Vilnius. When Liya and her husband got old, they moved to their daughter Victoria in Vilnius and lived there till the end of their days. Aunt Liya died in late 1970s.

Before departure for Russia, my mother's second sister Anna (it was the name she was called during the soviet times, and her original Jewish name is unknown), who was 2 years younger, worked as a child-minder in the Jewish kindergarten in Mazeikiai. In early 1920s Anna illegitimately ran away from Moscow, USSR with her Jewish husband Kabo. Before Lithuania was annexed to USSR in 1940 [5] mother did not keep in touch with the sisters. Then she began corresponding with them. In autumn 1941, when fascist troops approached Moscow, Anna and her daughter Rina decided to get evacuated and came to us in Kirov oblast. After war Anna and Rina came back to Moscow. Anna died in the 1980s and Rina lives in Moscow now.

The fate of my mother's youngest sister, born in 1910, can be called tragic. Rahil married a pampered loitering Jew Jacob Rier from Riga. When WW2 began, Rahil's daughter Rosa turned 3. Rahil, Jacob and their daughter fled Mazeikiai on the second day of war. When our family got to Riga, Jacob insisted that his family should go to his relatives in the town of Salaspils 'to take a rest' in his words. We moved on, but Rahil's family was in occupation. In accordance with archival data, which I found after war, Rahil's family died in one of the most dreadful extermination camps in Salaspils. [6].

My mother Luba Levinson was educated at home. I do not remember her saying that she went to lyceum. Grandfather Faivush taught his children himself. Yiddish was my mother's native language. Born in Tsarist Russia and having spent her adolescence there, she was well up in Russian, both written and oral. As for Lithuanian, she spoke with a heavy accent like most of Jews. Like many Jewish ladies, mother did not work when she was young. She lived in her parental house and helped grandmother with chores. I do not know how my parents met. Maybe it was a pre-arranged Jewish wedding. They got married in early 1920s.

I know hardly anything about my father's family. I remember grandfather David Lempert lived in Latvia, in the town Daugavpils, but I do not know if he was born there. In my father's words David was born in the middle of 19th century. Father said that grandfather David dealt with timber trade and was a rather well-off. Judging by the portrait hanging in our house, where David is with beard, with a kippah on his head and from the scares tales of my father I can say that grandfather was a religious Jew. During World War One, father's family was also exiled. In my father's words grandfather refused to live in Kharkov [Ukraine, 440 km from Kiev], where he worked in some offices of the Soviet Army. When the war was over, the family returned to Lithuania. I cannot say when grandfather David died. I think it happened before the family came back to the Baltic country. Maternal grandmother, petite lean woman, with her head always covered, lived with us. I do not remember even her name. Her health was very poor and she mostly stayed in her room in bed. We just called her grandmother. I remember her lighting candles on the Sabbath eve. She read her thick shabby prayer book while she was able to see. When I was five, i.e. in 1930, grandmother died. She was

buried in accordance with the Jewish tradition in the Mazeikiai Jewish cemetery. I do not know anything about father's siblings. I think he was an only son. At least I do not remember any talks about siblings.

My father Itshok Lempert was born in 1887. I do not know where he was born. Father was a very educated man. He finished lyceum and most likely some other education. Apart from mother tongue Yiddish, he was fluent in Russian. I cannot say how good was his Lithuanian, but it was definitely better than mother's. Father was exempt from the service in the tsarist army as he had myopia alta. Father was much respected in Mazeikiai. He worked as a chief accountant at the Jewish bank in Mazeikiai. He was a highly skilled accountant. He even had students. They came home to my father and he gave them private lessons in book-keeping. Apart from book-keeping and teaching, father was also involved in some social work.

My parents got married in Mazeikiai. I do not know if their wedding was Jewish as both of them, especially father, were unreligious. They might be married under chuppah out of mere respect for the relatives in order to observe the tradition. In 1923 my elder brother was born. He had a double name Mikhl-Duvid. He was named Duvid after grandfather, but I do not know the reason for his second name Mikhl. At home brother was called Duvid. I was born on the 17th of November 1925. I was named Isroel after one of my great grandfather, I do not know paternal or maternal. The surname of my father and grandfather was Lempert. I was born in independent Lithuania, so a Lithuanian version of my Jewish name was written in my birth certificate, namely Lempertas [Lithuanianization of names] [7] I still carry that name.

Growing up

Our family did not own any property and our parents always rented an apartment. I do not remember the peculiarities of our apartments. Usually these were 3-room apartments with a kitchen, without conveniences (there was an outhouse). Father was busy with his work and social activity and could not spend a lot of time with his children. Mother mostly took care of us. The air in our house, and conversations of our guests, mostly Yiddishists, affected our upbringing. Mother was a housewife, but she just ran the house, while others did all the chores. We always had a maid- a Lithuanian tacit and hard-working woman. As per order of my mother she cooked dinner, cleaned the apartment and did the laundry. My parents were not religious. They tried to observe Jewish traditions while grandmother, who lived with us, and grandfather Faivush, were alive. At least most kashrut rules were observed during cooking. There were separate dishes for milk and for meat in the house- from the set of china up to pots, pans and cutting boards. Meat was bought in a special Jewish store, where only kosher meat was on offer. One of the apartments where we stayed for a long time, belonged to the owners of the kosher store. There were three owners of the store - two brothers Glik and their widowed sister Mendelevich. Poultry was purchased in the store and taken to shochet. In my early childhood mother took me to shochet. I remembered his small house with a shed in the yard. There was always a line of Jewish ladies with cackling fowl. There was no pork in our house when grandmother was alive. On Friday she or mother lit Sabbath candles. That was it, there was no other preparation for Sabbath- no cooking of tasty things, baking challahs. There were no things in our house as compared to other Jews. On Sabbath father did not work. Jewish bank like other Jewish institutions was closed on Saturday. Father kept late hours at his desk reading and writing and I think he was violating Sabbath traditions.

We did not mark Jewish holidays. Grandfather Faivush came over to us and carried out Paschal seder. Grandfather reclined at the head of the table clad in festive apparel and kippah. A piece of matzah -afikoman' was hidden under his pillow. I was to look for it. Usually Duvid was the one who asked grandfather traditional four questions about the origin of the holidays. [Editor's note: It is always the youngest son that is supposed to ask the questions, so according to the tradition it should have been Isroel.] I also remembered Chanukkah. Potato fritters were usually cooked in our house. The children usually played with a whipping top. Grandfather Faivush gave us Chanukkah money. I do not recall celebration of other holidays. When grandfather Faivush died, we stopped marking even those holidays. It was not because we were lazy. It was because of my father's atheistic principles. Because of that neither I nor my brother? Duvid went through bar mitzvah.

Neither father nor mother went to the synagogue. A big two-storied synagogue was not far from our apartment. Rabbi Mamjoffe was a very respectable man. He got along with father and he called on us. Father and rabbi had long conversations over a cup of tea. I do not know the subject of their conversations. I assume those were theological and philosophic topics. The surname of Mamjoffe was written on my birth certificate and I remembered his ornate signature very well. Rabbi Mamjoffe was atrociously slaughtered by Hitler's soldiers during the first days of occupation. When I worked with the historic archives after war, I came across that signature once again and I was concussed by my reminiscences from childhood. I knew a lot of people who were murdered- my classmates from lyceum and pals of my parents. But these were casual acquaintances and I was not touched to the quick. The preserved signatory of Mamjoffe really touched my soul. When I remember that man, tears come to my eyes.

Apart from the synagogue there were couple of more Jewish institutions. There was a mikveh not far from the synagogue, but our family did not go there. There were charitable organizations, such as Jewish kindergarten, canteen for the indigent. Our family was middle class, it was not rich. Books, papers, father was subscribed for, were the priority in our house. Since childhood we used to read them. We had radio in the 1930s. It was rather rare and expensive back in that time. My brother and I were given a bike. There were few Jewish children who had a bike and it was a kind of luxury. In summer we went to dacha [summer house], which parents rented in a small Lithuanian hamlet. Mother made us take a stroll in the forest for a long time, but brother and I were homesick and wanted to see our friends. We felt tedious in a hamlet. The living wage of our family was pretty decent. The majority of Jews were much poorer. There were a lot of rich people among Jews. Usually these were businessmen, owners of the stores, Jewish doctors and lawyers. I do not remember their names. All I know that the stores in the downtown mostly belonged to the Jews.

One of the local Jews Tulia, owned a house. The first apartment we rented was in his house. Tulia had large egg storage. He dealt with wholesale of eggs and even exported them to England. I did not enter the lyceum because of one of his daughters. My elder brother Duvid went to Ivrit lyceum. Gradually the number of students was cut and it was in the wane. Brother did not finish that lyceum and lately studied in the working school of the labor organization in Kaunas. There was an elementary Jewish school in Mazeikiiai. I had studied there for couple of months and got ill. I was taught by my father and crammed for the lyceum by a tutor who came to us. I entered the 3rd grade of Lithuanian elementary school. Having finished it, I took entrance exams to the state Lithuanian lyceum. One of the entrance exams was Bible study. I practically flunked it, having got a satisfactory mark. The teacher, who took the exam on Bible, was the daughter of rabbi Mamjoffe. When I was not in the list of the admitted, Mamjoffe's daughter

ran to my mother, repenting and blaming herself. She thought I was not admitted because she gave me a low mark. Two of Tulia's daughters were in the list of the admitted to the lyceum. They did not have brilliant knowledge and given satisfactory marks for the entrance exams. Tulia just bribed the director of the lyceum having arranged parties in his honor. I had studied in the 4th grade of Lithuanian elementary school and the year after I succeeded to enter the second grade of the lyceum. Thus I turned out to be in the same grade with Tulia's daughters. They were good girls. I made friends with them and helped them with homework. In general, mostly Jews, my classmates, were my friends, I remember Borya Mendeleovich, son of the owner of butcher store, Jacob Gusev, Meishke Mitskievich. All of them perished during occupation.

There were Lithuanian guys in the class up till 1938. We got along with them. In general, there were very few anti-Semitists in Lithuania. I think, Lithuania was one of those countries, there anti-Semitism was rather weak as compared to the other countries, especially by the middle 1930s. Before 1924 there was a 'golden age' for Jews in Lithuania. Jews were not oppressed in any way. There were Jews in parliament [8], when in 1926 there was a coup d'etat in Lithuania [9] Tautininki came to power, there was an end to democracy. Communist party, 60% consisting of Jews, was banned. Jews were driven out from parliament and from leading positions in the state. But, that was not it. Dictator Smetona [10], came to power and he thought that Lithuanians should be leaders and the rest should keep quiet and help Lithuanians make a happy state. Though, Smetona treated Jews pretty well and we practically felt no anti-Semitism. Of course, in every day life anti-Semitism was displayed in different ways. I remember that once Lithuanian guys in elementary school tried to put some pigs fat on the lips of Jewish guys. But it was childish unmalicious prank. It was as if guys did not understand what they were doing. I came across with a real anti-Semitism in late 1930s. By that time I did not have any particular political interests. I paid attention to the conversations of my father and friends and later on I understood that father belonged to any party- neither communist, nor any other. He had his own views, 'left' views. There were Zionist organizations in the town, including Betar [11] and Maccabi [12]. I did not go deep in the politics I joined «Maccabi», where I played ping-pong and communicated with people of my age.

In 1938-39 pro-Nazi public opinion was streamlined in Lithuania. The teacher of arts, a Lithuanian, called upon fascism among youth. I do not know who of them did it, but each morning there were anti-Semitist posters in the lobby of lyceum, namely a Jew with a 'snoot', plaits, distorted appearance and clothes, with a humped back. Those posters were removed, but next morning they appeared again. I know for sure that two guys from that circle shot Jews, including their classmates in 1941 during one of Hitler's actions. There was a very beautiful girl in our class, the daughter of the director of Jewish bank, Kock Glikman. Many guys wooed her, including one of those guys. She did not want to go with him and he shot her with his own hands during one of the actions in 1941. Many people, at least our family, understood, that fascism would bring calamity to our country and many people looked up to USSR. I am not sure if my father knew about political processes and repressions carried out by Stalin in USSR [Great Terror] [13]. He had never talked to me about it.

During the War

When soviet soldiers came in our town in June 1940 many people welcomed them hoping for a better life. [Editor's note: In reality probably it was rather few people who welcomed the occupying Red Army in Lithuania. This is more than 50 years of Soviet propaganda, that regarded the occupation of the Baltic states as 'Liberation', that makes itself felt at this episode.] There was a train with soviet militaries and couple of tanks. I remember I and other boys rushed there, encircled the soldiers and tried to speak Russian to them, though we hardly knew anything in Russian. Many guys boasted on stars from the fore-and-aft caps the soldiers gave them. First there was a state of all-in-all euphoria. During the first day there was a meeting on the central square. My father took the floor. He welcomed soviet soldiers in his mother tongue-Yiddish. For the first time within many years Yiddish was heard from tribune in Mazeikiai. Then meetings were held almost every week and almost the whole town got together to listen to the speakers. Euphoria gave way to disillusionment. Many products vanished from the stores. Only one sort of bread remained and it was low-grade. There were hardly any manufacture goods, including soap and napkins. Nationalization was commenced. The bank where father was employed, was nationalized, but father kept on working there. People who owned any type of property or hired workers, were arrested and exiled to Siberia [Deportations from the Baltics] [14]. Tulia and his family were exiled and many other. Tulia died in Siberian camp. His wife died in exile, but his daughters managed to come back to their native town in middle 1970s at an adult age. They did not stay in Lithuania long and left for Israel.

Our lyceum was declared a secondary school and the 7th grade of lyceum was the 9th grade at school. Other than that things were the same. I entered Komsomol organization [15]. I was rather active- conducted meetings, called upon people to support soviet regime, drew wall posters. One year with the Soviets went by very quickly. On the 21st of June 1941 we had school- leavers party at school. I came home late and did not stay in bed for a long time. Early in the morning we heard the roaring of the planes. The town was bombed. The Great Patriotic War was unleashed. People were panicking, trying to escape, abandoning their houses. Some Jews thought that Germans would do them no harm and decided to stay. Our family did not have a dilemma- to stay or not to stay. By the evening of the Sunday, 22nd of June we left the town on foot. There were four of us - the families of aunt Shifra and mother's younger sister Rahil. People were fleeing. There were crowds of fugitives on the road with suitcases, rucksacks and bales. The road was bombed and I saw death for the first time. Not all people got up after the bombing was over. Retreating units of the Soviet Army walked along with us. We had walked for couple of days until we reached Latvian border and stayed for couple of days at some train station in Latvia waiting for a train. We had a problem with food. We did not take much with us and we ran out of food pretty soon. Father and uncle Aba Metz exchanged our things with products and our family managed to get by couple of days. Then we managed to get on the train heading to Riga. Upon our arrival we were placed at some school, where evacuation point was organized. We slept in a large hall on the floor. In the afternoon all evacuees were given some soup or porridge and bread. The situation was rather unusual mildly to say. By 1940 we had lived in bourgeois Lithuania and were used to relative comfort. We decided to stick together as it was easier to overcome trouble with the support of kin, which was really precious under those circumstances. In a day or two Jacob Rier, husband of aunt Rahil insisted that we should stop by in Sauspils and take a rest in the place of his relatives and wait for the stir to end. He was not used to the complications and aunt Rahil obeyed her husband. We said goodbye to her and their little Rozochka. At that time we did not know that we would never see them again.

We moved on in about ten days. We took a train, which was supposed to evacuate some plant. Couple of empty platforms were attached to the trains so that the fugitives could get on them. There was barely any room. The train started. We had been on the road for no less than 3 weeks. Before we got on the train, father got some [food] products in exchange for some things. At the evacuation point we were given dry ration- rusks. At first, we did not starve. When the products were over, we felt famished. During stops father and elder brother got off to look for food. Sometimes we got some food from the local people by exchanging them with what they had and at times they managed to get a pot of soup given to the evacuees at the stations. The road was being constantly bombed and the train made frequent stops. Then evacuees scattered in different directions hiding in some natural shelters. I saw a lot of deaths, but it was impossible to get used to it.

We arrived in the town of Kirov [850 km to the east from Moscow]. First we settled at the evacuation point. We were kept there for couple of days. The so-called 'buyers' - the chairman of kolkhoz [16] and construction supervisors came there. As a rule they selected young people. In a while we and the family aunt Shifra were sent to some kolkhoz in Kirov oblast. First I was involved in agricultural works and then in carpentry. Father was confined to bed because of illnesses and hunger and died in late 1941. At that time aunt Anna and Rina came from Moscow. She also went to work at kolkhoz. All of us lived in one room in the house of the local kolkhoz people. They treated us really well, but the food was catastrophically scarce though I got trudodni [17] and ration and mother received tiny dependent's ration. I dreamt of studies in spite of the war. I still thought of entering the institute. When Moscow Teachers' Training Institute was evacuated in Kirov, I was enrolled for the first course of Physics and Mathematics department. I was not exactly what I was dreaming about- to become a historian or a philosopher, but I was not to choose. I lived in the hostel of the institute in Kirov. Mother really suffered when father died. She often was unwell. I managed to make arrangements for my mother to have a room in my hospital. She was hired as a cleaner in the hostel and was given a room there. She also was on duty in the hostel. My student life went by very fast. It was easy for me to study and I did well. We lived in a cold hostel like one family, we shared everything we had. Everyday with bated breath we listened to the round-ups from the lines. Guys of all kinds of nationalities studied with me, but our friendship was cemented because of our common grief. There were no discords. I had studied only for a year and a half. At the beginning of 1943 my brother and I were drafted in the front-line forces. My brother worked at some military plant all the time and he came to the military enlistment office on numerous occasions, but he was not drafted, and now was the time.

We were sent to the newly-formed Lithuanian division # 16, [18] positioned in the town of Balakhna, Nizhniy Novgorod. Mother stayed in Kirov and we agreed that she would stay by the institute all the time so it would be easier for us to find her after war. By that time the situation in the lines was considerably different - after defeat of the fascists in the vicinity of Stalingrad [Stalingrad Battle] [19], nobody questioned the victory of the Soviet Army. My brother and I were in the different places. I had spent couple of months training and was sent to the front shortly afterwards. Unfortunately, my brother was not in the lines for a long time. He was killed in action shortly after he was drafted in the front-lines.

In the summer of 1943 I turned out to be on the leading edge. I was a private in the infantry. It was the hardest and most dangerous military profession. We always were the first to confront the enemy face -to-face. Our division was the part of the First Baltic front [20]. We swiftly moved along the territory of Russia, then Ukraine and further to the West. We were fed well in the army. It was the first time during the war times when I was full with the food. Of course,

living conditions were much to be deplored. We slept in the dug-out. Sometimes we settled in the houses of the liberated hamlets so that we could sleep in a warm place and take a bath. But it happened on very rare occasions. I was not a coward. I was one of the first who rushed in the attack. Before one of the fiercest battles I joined the Communist party. I did it consciously and deliberately. In the lines all those who wished were admitted in the party, without any bureaucratic routines. So I was admitted in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. I remember that often we darted in assault with the Stalin's name and we did it willingly. We thought he was the one who encouraged us and assured us in the victory. It was the way we were brought up. During one of the most serious battles I was ahead of everybody. I jumped in the enemy's trench and killed the fascists who were there. As it turned out my deed turned out to be decisive in liberation of the village we were attacking. I do not remember its name now, but it was somewhere on the border of Russian and Belarus. After that battle my commander included me in the list of the awardees. I felt strange. I was a modest guy and I did not think my action to be extraordinary. Soon there was a resolution and I was conferred with the Order of Fame [21]. Soon I was elected a Komsomol organizer of the squad and became the aide of the political officer [22]. I was to follow the rounds-up of the fronts, estimate political situation. By the way, news- paper were delivered daily and had political classes with the soldiers when they were not in the battles. The war was about to end and the front was advancing to the Western borders of the USSR.

In the summer of 1944 my motherland Lithuania was liberated. I always corresponded with mother. As we agreed, she kept on working in the hostel of the Teachers' Training School. She was evacuated in Moscow with that institute. Mother asked me to be cautious not to be hit by the bullet, but I was never a coward. Strange as it may be the most difficult for me at the front was the lack of the conveniences, the chance to wash my face, take a bath and put clean clothes on, not fascist bullets and the fear of being killed at any moment. Marshes, filth, gnats and not getting enough sleep desponded me the most. My character did not fit the military service, though I was quite good in the battles being a brave soldier. At the end of 1944 the invitation for the officers' courses was sent to our regiment. It was suggested that I should go there. I did not want to be a career soldier as I did not like military service. I wanted to continue my studies at the institute. I understood that the war was winding up and it would be difficult for me to be demobilized at the rank of an officer. But still, I agreed. I even do not know why. Probably, because I was highly responsible. I left for the courses, which were to last for 3 months. These were officers' courses of the First Baltic Front. It happened right after Lithuania had been liberated. We settled in Riga. The war was about to end and the courses were constantly prolonged to save as much officers as possible. When the war moved to Eastern Prussia, we were sent to the former German Kaliningrad region [23], having been liberated by soviet troops. We met victory here. We were exulting. We were so happy to know that the war was over and now it was the time to think of our future.

After the War

We had been already conferred the officers' rank and I became a junior lieutenant. Shortly after our victory we were allocated to different military units. I was sent Vilnius and assigned Komsomol organizer of regiment # 249, where I used to serve. First I lived in the barracks with everybody. Our regiment was in Severny Gorodok, it was the name of one of the outskirts of Vilnius. Mother stayed in Moscow for a while. She was supposed to have a permit to come to Vilnius. When I managed to get a permit for her, I went to Moscow to take mother in Vilnius. In Moscow I saw aunt Anna and cousin Rina. By that time they came back from Kirov oblast, where they stayed during war. First mother and I rented our lodging in Vilnius. It was a small room without conveniences. In 1946 many people left Vilnius for Poland

and many apartments were empty. [In 1946 soviet authorities permitted to leave the territory of the USSR to all people, who were born on the territories annexed to the USSR in the period of 1939- 40s.] I was given a small two-room apartment with a kitchen, but without conveniences. Finally, we had our own house and we settled there with mother. I had been writing the requests on demobilization, but they were returned to me unsigned.

I was demobilized only in 1947. I was happy. The only thing for me to do was to find a job and go to the institute. The real hardship in my life started. At that time in Lithuania, as well as in the rest of the USSR, anti- Semitism [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [24] was thriving. I came across it when I was seeking a job at the institute. I finished one year and a half in the period of time when most people did not even manage to finish 10 classes. It was enough to find a job. Besides, I was born in Lithuania, a front line soldier with the awards, the member of Communist Party, which was rare. I wanted to be a lector. I had that experience in the regiment and got along with people. Nothing happened. First, I addressed the "educational agency" Znaniye [Znaniye all-Union society, a public educational agency supporting spread of political and scientific knowledge.]. I was offered a job as an accountant. I had not experience in that. Then, the second secretary of the Central Komsomol Committee of the Republic, the fellow soldier, recommended me for a position of the aide of the first secretary of the Central Komsomol Committee. Of course, I did not succeed. I addressed other organizations. First I was welcomed as I did not look like a typical Jew, but when it was the time to see my last name during processing of my documents, the head of HR department found any reason to refuse me. Of course, they never said that the true reason was my Jewish origin. Finally one good fellow soldier helped me get a job as a literary worker at the paper 'Sovietskaya Litva'. [Russian language Lithuanian newspaper. Between 1944 and 1990 it came out six time a week in 70,000 copies daily (1975)]

The same year- 1947 - I submitted the documents to the Vilnius university, Physics and Mathematics Department. The pro-rector, responsible for academic studies, an inveterate anti-Semitist, told me: «you studied at the Teachers' Training Institute. Take another attempt». But I was helped by the party organizer of the university, who was from Mazeikiai. He knew my father very well and insisted that I should be admitted to the second course as I was the member of the party and a front-line soldier. Students of those years did not look like modern students. At that time we were adults having gone through war. I was also responsible for my mother. She could not work, so I was the only bread-winner. When I was in the third year I was employed by Chair of Marxism and Leninism as teachers' assistant. There was a lack of teachers in social studies Lithuania, who were fluent in Lithuanian and Russian languages. On the third course I was appointed as an assistant to the teacher in Marxism and Leninism. There were 3 students-teachers in the entire university, including me. Upon graduation I successfully defended my diploma and I was not to worry of the mandatory job assignment [25]. They even did not ask what I would like to do. I remained teaching at the university.

I did not associate state anti-Semitism, commenced with the assassination of the great Jewish actor Mikhoels [26], extermination of Jewish Anti- fascist Committee [27] and ended with the preposterous so-called 'doctors' plot» [28] with Stalin's name. I thought there were the willingness of the local state activists to outdo others in front of all-union dignitaries. I should say that I personally was not touched by anti-Semitistic campaigns. I kept on teaching successfully. Judging by the way tutors and students treated me, I can say I was respected. I took hard Stalin's death in 1953. Gradually I came to understanding his true role and the resolutions adopted at divulging the Party Congress

[29] were taken by me as logical and necessary. The truth was revealed. Only now, after perestroika [30] we came to know almost everything about transgressions of the soviet régime and gangster leader Stalin.

I had worked in the university by 1989, before the outbreak of perestroika. I had defended candidate theses [Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [31]. When the independence of Lithuania was restored [32] I confirmed my title. Now I am the doctor of History. I should say I did not accept perestroika at once. It was hard for me to object all those ideas I was sincerely devoted to- the ideas of socialism and communism. Being the nee of Lithuania I understood very well that Moscow was alien in our country. Now I completely agree with the term 'soviet occupation, when it goes about soviet regime. I support the independence of my country, its membership in European Union. I hope that Lithuania will overcome temporary obstacles and become a flourishing European country.

I am happy in my private life. I met a wonderful Jewish girl at the university. Polina Aibinder was the student of the medical department. We had a lot in common. Both of us were born in small Lithuanian towns. She was born in Kupiskis in 1930. Her father Zelik Aibinder was a tailor and mother was a housewife. Polina had a sister Rosa Aibinder. In 1941 she did not manage to get evacuated and had to go through all the horror of Vilnius ghetto [33]. Rosa survived. Shortly after war was over she left for Israel. She is still living there. In 1941 Polina and her parents left the town and were evacuated in Chuvashia. Upon return Polina's family settled in Vilnius. Polina and I started seeing each other. In 1951 we got married. We had a very modest wedding. We registered our marriage in a regional marriage registration office and had a small party with closest people in my aunt's apartment as there was no room in our apartment. We moved in my mother's place. In 1952 our elder son came into the world. We named him David after my brother. Our second son Ilia was born in 1957.

Our family lived the way all common families lived by the soviet regime- from check to check. We did not have any riches, but our life was pretty decent. My wife worked as a doctor. Children, like others, went to the kindergarten, then to school. Mother helped us the best way she could. In early 1960s she was getting more and more unwell. She took to her bed and in died in 1965. She was buried in the Jewish sector of the cemetery [34], but without any Jewish rites being observed. We went on vacation every year, sometimes with children. Like most people from Vilnius we went to the spas [Recreation ?enters in the the USSR] [35] in Palanga [popular resort in Lithuania on the coast of the Baltic Sea]. We got trade-union travel vouchers and had to pay only 30% of the trip, so we could afford to take a vacation every year. Children went pioneer camps on the territory of Lithuania. In early 1970s I bought a car and we took an interest to travel around Lithuania. We went to Crimea and the Carpathians [Ukraine]. In couple of years I got a land plot for my orchard. At that time there collective horticulture was developed and workers were given land plots of 600m². The land plot was small and the cottage built could not exceed 30 square meters. We enjoyed taking care of our garden, orchard and flowerbeds. All could fit in our house- we, our children and grandchildren. When the restrictions as for the size of cottages were cancelled, I expanded my cottage. Now we have a pretty decent heated dacha [summer house].

David graduated from the Mathematics Department of Vilnius University. He was an excellent student, but still he had problems with a job. He was given a mandatory job assignment teach mathematics at the elementary school, though he ranked the 2nd of the 3rd best student and was dreaming of scientific work. Finally I managed to find a place for him - to perform research at the University, but David was dissatisfied: the salary was skimpy, there was no way for

the growth and he could not work on his own. He had a family - his wife Liza, a Jew, who worked as an accountant and two daughters, Elena and Anna born in a row in 1982 and 1983 respectively. In early 1990s David and his family left for Israel. There he does well. He is a mathematician/programmer. His wife is working as an accountant. My favorite granddaughters served a full term in Israel army. Now both of them study at Haifa University. My son's family lives in Petakh Tikvah. I visited him for couple of times. I am happy he managed to achieve what he sought.

My younger son Ilia also finished Vilnius university. He is a historian. His wife Larissa is a Ukrainian Jew. During soviet regime she came to Vilnius to enter the institute like many Jewish young people as it was much easier in Lithuania as compared to other republics. [There was relatively less discrimination against Jews upon entering higher education in Lithuania than elsewhere in the Soviet Union.] Larisa finished university, Russian philology department, defended candidate theses. She is the candidate of science now. Larisa is currently dealing with Judaic. Ilia has two children- the elder Olga, born in 1986, entered Moscow university, Judaic department. She studies Jewish philology. My only grandson Alexander, whom I call Sachenka - I call all my grandchildren tender names: Lenochka, Anechka, Olenka - [Russian diminutives for Elena, Anna and Olga] born in 1989 is finish Vilnius Jewish school this year. By the way, Jewish school in Vilnius is not private, but state.

Another, probably the most important thing for the Jews is the revival of Jewish life, which became possible with perestroika and independence of Lithuania. Now I came back to the life I used to have so many years ago. In the period of time when the state of Israel was founded, when it was at war - six-day war [36], Yom-Kippur war [37] etc., I, like many other people could not help, but admire Israel. Many people displayed solidarity with Israelies. I kept silent at the party meetings, when my peoples was stigmatized. Now I am proud of Israel and I am happy that my son lives there. I do not think of immigration. I cannot split myself for each of my sons and for each of my motherlands. Let things remain the way they are. Besides, my Polina is very sick. Couple of years ago to had to retire because of her poor health. Now, she rarely leaves the apartment.

When I resigned from the university I was employed at psychological laboratory by the university dealing with research of educational issues. At the same time I was offered to teach Jewish history at the Jewish school, which was recently open. It turned out, that I was learning together with my students, being one class ahead of them. In my childhood and adolescence I did not study Jewish history and now I opened that wonderful history world for me. I had worked by 2004 and now I am taking a rest for a year. Though, I cannot call it a rest. Earlier, when my younger son took a keen interest in Holocaust, I started collecting materials on that horrible page in the Jewish history and understood that Jewish life and community appealed to me. Probably it was an inner need to do possible and impossible for the Jewry to be revived. Now I am a member of the Board of the Community of Lithuanian Jews. Now I have the chance to do my best for the community. I did not become religious; my family marks Jewish holidays and mandatory fasts on Yom Kippur to commemorate my ancestors and millions of those who perished.

I dote on Lithuania. Now I like things, which I could not accept at once- crushed communistic regime was like a breath of fresh air, something which was necessary for our country to exist, but there are things in Lithuanian politics, which I disapprove, i.e. getting away with everything, connected with the USSR. I do not think it is the right thing to do. I do not like a negative attitude toward the victory over fascism. Here many people think that we should have fought with Hitler against USSR. I am strongly against it! Hitler captured half of Europe, enslaved and exterminated millions of

people. I was in the lines and I know: because of our combined efforts we gained a victory over fascism and we should always keep it in mind. I hope that my country would get over the difficulties with growth.

GLOSSARY:

[1] Lithuanian independence: A part of the Russian Empire since the 18th Century Lithuania gained independence after WWI, as a result of the collapse of its two powerful neighbors, Russia and Germany, in November 1918. Although resisting the attacks of Soviet-Russia, Lithuania lost to Poland the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city of Vilna (Wilno, Vilnius) in 1920, claimed by both countries, and as a result they remained in war up until 1927. In 1923 Lithuania succeeded in occupying the previously French-administered (since 1919) Memel Territory and port (Klaipeda). The Lithuanian Republic remained independent until its Soviet occupation in 1940.

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

[3] 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.

[4] 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.

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

[6] Salaspils: The biggest concentration camp in Latvia, located on the railway near Riga. All together over 53,000 people were killed there from various countries. The killed were placed in pits in several layers, occupying about 2600

square meters. Inmates were also used as workers at peat bog, lime factory and others. Now there is a memorial ensemble and the museum "Road of Ordeal" on the place 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))

[7] Lithuanization of names: Voluntary Lithuanization of family names was introduced during the First Lithuanian Republic, banned during the Soviet occupation (1939-1991) and reintroduced in the Second Republic. Often it involves the attachment of the characteristic Lithuanian '-as' ending after the family name.

[8] Jews in the Lithuanian parliament: After Lithuania gained independence (1918) in the Seim (Parliament) about 30% of the representatives were Jewish. After the 1926 coup the Seim was dissolved, authoritarian rule was introduced and there were no longer Jewish representation in the government.

[9] Coup d'etat in Lithuania in 1926: According to the Lithuanian Constitution of 1920 the country was declared a democratic republic. Conservative and liberal factions were predominant in the Seimas (parliament) in the following years. On 17th December 1926 a conservative coup was engineered, led by the conservative leader Antanas Smetona. All liberals and leftists were expelled from the Seimas, which then elected Smetona president and Augustinas Voldemaras as premier. In 1929 Smetona forced Voldemaras to resign and assumed full dictatorial power. He was reelected in 1931 and 1938. (Source: http://www2.omnitel.net/ramunas/Lietuva/Lt_history.shtml)

[10] Smetona, Antanas (1874-1944): Lithuanian politician, President of Lithuania. A lawyer by profession he was the leader of the autonomist movement when Lithuania was a part of the Russian Empire. He was provisional President of Lithuania (1919-1920) and elected president after 1926. In 1929 he forced the Prime Minister, Augustin Voldemaras, resign and established full dictatorship. After Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union (1940) Smetona fled to Germany and then (1941) to the United States.

[11] Betar: Brith Trumpeldor (Hebrew) meaning the Trumpeldor Society. Right-wing Revisionist Jewish youth movement. It was founded in 1923 in Riga by Vladimir Jabotinsky, in memory of J. Trumpeldor, one of the first fighters to be killed in Palestine, and the fortress Betar, which was heroically defended for many months during the Bar Kokhba 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. Its members supported the idea to create a Jewish legion in order to liberate Palestine. From 1936-39 the popularity of Betar diminished. During the war many of its members formed guerrilla groups.

[12] 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.

[13] Great Terror (1934-1938): During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

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

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

[16] 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.

[17] Trudodni: a measure of work used in Soviet collective farms until 1966. Working one day it was possible to earn from 0.5 up to 4 trudodni. In fall when the harvest was gathered the collective farm administration calculated the cost of 1 trudoden in money or food equivalent (based upon the profit).

[18] 16th Lithuanian division: It was formed according to a Soviet resolution on December 18th 1941 and consisted of residents of the annexed former Lithuanian republic. The Lithuanian division consisted 10.000 people (34,2% of whom were Jewish), it was well equipped and was completed by July 7th 1942. In 1943 it took part in the Kursk battle, fought in Belarus and was a part of the Kalinin front. All together it liberated over 600 towns and villages and took 12.000 German soldiers as captives. In summer 1944 it took part in the liberation of Vilnius joining the 3rd Belarussian Front, fought in the Kurland and exterminated the beseeaged German troops in Memel (Klaipeda). After victory its headquarters were dislocated in Vilnius, in 1945-46 most veterans were demobilized but some officers stayed in the Soviet Army.

[19] Stalingrad Battle (17 July 1942- 2 February 1943) The Stalingrad, South- Western and Donskoy Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19-20 November 1942 the soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330 thousand people) in the vicinity of Stalingrad. The Soviet troops eliminated this German grouping. On 31 January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91 thousand people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

[20] First Baltic front: 'Front' is the largest Soviet military formation during WWII; all together 52 'fronts' were established, each bearing the name of a region, city, or other geographical term of their location. The First Baltic Front was established in October 1943 to support operations aimed at the liberation of the Baltic Republics and Belarus, it existed till March 1945.

[21] Order of Fame: Order of Fame is of three classes. It was established by the Order of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of USSR as of the 8th of November 1943. Privates and sergeants were awarded with that order in Soviet Army, and in aviation- junior lieutenants, who displayed courage, bravery and valor in the battles for the Motherland.

[22] Political officer: These "commissars," as they were first called, exercised specific official and unofficial control functions over their military command counterparts. The political officers also served to further Party interests with the masses of drafted soldiery of the USSR by indoctrination in Marxist-Leninism. The 'zampolit', or political officers, appeared at the regimental level in the army, as well as in the navy and air force, and at higher and lower levels, they had similar duties and functions. The chast (regiment) of the Soviet Army numbered 2000-3000 personnel, and was the lowest level of military command that doctrinally combined all arms (infantry, armor, artillery, and supporting services) and was capable of independent military missions. The regiment was commanded by a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, with a lieutenant or major as his zampolit, officially titled "deputy commander for political affairs."

[23] Konigsberg offensive: It started on 6th April 1945 and involved the 2nd and the 3rd Belarussian and some forces of the 1st Baltic front. It was conducted as part of the decisive Eastern Prussian operation, the purpose of which was the crushing defeat of the largest grouping of German forces in Eastern Prussia and the northern part of Poland. The

battles were crucial and desperate. On 9th April 1945 the forces of the 3rd Belarussian front stormed and seized the town and the fortress of Königsberg. The battle for Eastern Prussia was the most blood-shedding campaign in 1945. The losses of the Soviet Army exceeded 580,000 people (127,000 of them were casualties). The Germans lost about 500,000 people (about 300,000 of them were casualties). After WWII, based on the decision of the Potsdam Conference (1945) the northern part of Eastern Prussia including Königsberg was annexed to the USSR and the city was renamed as Kaliningrad.

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

[25] Mandatory job assignment in the USSR: Graduates of higher educational institutions had to complete a mandatory 2-year job assignment issued by the institution from which they graduated. After finishing this assignment young people were allowed to get employment at their discretion in any town or organization.

[26] Mikhoels, Solomon (1890-1948) (born Vovsi): Great Soviet actor, producer and pedagogue. He worked in the Moscow State Jewish Theater (and was its art director from 1929). He directed philosophical, vivid and monumental works. Mikhoels was murdered by order of the State Security Ministry

[27] Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC): formed in Kuibyshev in April 1942, the organization was meant to serve the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through media propaganda, as well as through personal contacts with Jews abroad, especially in Britain and the United States. The chairman of the JAC was Solomon Mikhoels, a famous actor and director of the Moscow Yiddish State Theater. A year after its establishment, the JAC was moved to Moscow and became one of the most important centers of Jewish culture and Yiddish literature until the German occupation. The JAC broadcast pro-Soviet propaganda to foreign audiences several times a week, telling them of the absence of anti-Semitism and of the great anti-Nazi efforts being made by the Soviet military. In 1948, Mikhoels was assassinated by Stalin's secret agents, and, as part of a newly-launched official anti-Semitic campaign, the JAC was disbanded in November and most of its members arrested.

[28] 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.

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

[30] 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.

[31] Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees: Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktorantura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

[32] Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic: On 11th March 1990 the Lithuanian State Assembly declared Lithuania an independent republic. The Soviet leadership in Moscow refused to acknowledge the independence of Lithuania and initiated an economic blockade on the country. At the referendum held in February 1991, over 90% of the participants (turn out was 84%) voted for independence. The western world finally recognized Lithuanian independence and so too did the USSR on 6 September 1991. On 17 September 1991 Lithuania joined the United Nations.

[33] Vilnius Ghetto: 95 % of the estimated 265,000 Lithuanian Jews (254,000 people) were murdered during Nazi occupation, no other communities were so comprehensively destroyed during WWII. Vilnius was occupied by the Germans on 26th June 1941 and two ghettos were built in the city afterwards, separated by Niemiecka street that was outside both of them. On 6th September all Jews were taken to the ghettos, at first randomly to either Ghetto 1 or Ghetto 2. During September they were being continuously slaughtered by Einsatzkommando units. Later craftsmen were moved to Ghetto 1 with their families and all others to Ghetto 2. During the 'Yom Kippur Action' on 1st October 3,000 Jews were killed and in three additional actions in October the entire Ghetto 2 was liquidated and later another 9,000 of the survivors were killed. In late 1941 the official population of the ghetto was 12,000 people that rose to 20,000 by 1943 as a result of further transports. In August 1943 over 7,000 people were sent to various labor camps in Lithuania and Estonia. The Vilnius ghetto was liquidated under the supervision of Bruno Kittel on 23rd and 24th September 1943. On Rossa Square a selection took place, those able to work were sent to labor camps in Latvia and Estonia and all the rest to different death camps in Poland. By 25th September 1943 only 2,000 Jews officially remained in Vilnius in small labor camps and more than 1,000 were hiding outside and were gradually hunted down. Those permitted to live continued to work at Kailis and HKP factories until 2nd June 1944 when 1,800 of them were shot and less the 200 remained in hiding until the Red Army liberated Vilnius on 13th July 1944.

[34] Jewish section of cemetery: In the USSR city cemeteries were territorially divided into different sectors. They often included common plots, children's plots, titled militaries' plots, Jewish plots, political leaders' plots, etc. In some Soviet cities the separate Jewish cemeteries continued to be maintained and in others they were closed, usually claimed to be due to some technical reasons. The family could decide upon the burial of the deceased; Jewish military could be for instance be buried either in the military or the Jewish section. Such division of cemeteries still continues to exist in many parts of the ex-Soviet Union.

[35] Recreation Centers in the USSR: trade unions of many enterprises and public organizations in the USSR constructed recreation centers, rest homes, and children's health improvement centers, where employees could take a vacation paying 10 percent of the actual total cost of such stays. In theory each employee could take one such vacation per year, but in reality there were no sufficient numbers of vouchers for such vacations, and they were mostly available only for the management.

[36] Six-Day-War: The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

[37] Yom Kippur War: The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

Footnotes:

1. Interview with Israel Lempert at the Centropa - Central Europe Center for Research website.

Link: <https://www.centropa.org/biography/israel-lempertas#My%20family%20history>

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