

# Masha Zakh

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Tallinn

Estonia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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I conducted this interview with Masha Zakh in the Jewish community in Tallinn [1](#). Masha was willing to tell me about her family and her life story, though she warned me there was hardly anything quite thrilling there was to hear about whatever events in her life, but still she wanted this interview to be in the memory of her deceased father, of whom she has dim memories, and the family of her husband, who had passed away before time. Life did not pamper Masha, but she has never given up or lost her sense of humor. Masha is a plump lady of average height. One can tell she was quite pretty, when she was young. Her gray wavy hair is cut short. Masha is sociable and friendly. She lives with her daughter's family. Her mother-in-law helped her to raise her daughter at her time, and now Masha is raising her grandson.

My paternal grandfather and grandmother came from Tallinn. My grandfather's name was Meishe Stumer and my grandmother was Hane-Rokhe. I don't know when they were born. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. My grandmother was a housewife like all married Jewish women at the time. They had three children. My father, Solomon Stuper, was the oldest. He was born in 1905. My father's brother Zemakh was born in 1907, and his sister Bertha was born in 1909. As far as I know from what my mother told me, my father's parents were quite wealthy. My father studied in a general education Jewish school. His brother Zemakh and his sister Bertha studied in a Jewish gymnasium in Tallinn [2](#).

My father's family spoke Yiddish at home. All of them could speak fluent Estonian and Russian. Estonia belonged to the Russian Empire at the time. Russian was the official language, but all residents in Estonia spoke Estonian in everyday life. Russian was common in the areas near the Russian border. In Tallinn most residents spoke Estonian and German.

My father's parents were religious. They observed all Jewish traditions celebrating Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home. They went to the synagogue on holidays and celebrated Sabbath at home. My grandmother followed the kashrut. It goes without saying that she had special Pesach crockery. She kept it in a specific cupboard, and the family used it once a year on Pesach. As for everyday use, we had two sets of crockery: for meat and dairy products each. There were kosher stores and a shochet, a kosher slaughterer, in Tallinn. There was also a large choral synagogue [3](#). Doctor Aba Gomer [4](#) was the rabbi. Daddy told me he was an intelligent, kind and educated man. Gurevich was a chazzan in the synagogue. People arrived from remote areas to listen to his singing.

There was a large Jewish community in Tallinn. Estonians had a good attitude towards Jews. There were Jewish pogroms all across Russia during the tsarist rule, but they never happened in Estonia. After the war of liberation [5](#), when Estonia gained independence and became an Estonian Republic

6, the attitude of Estonians grew worse. Jews had equal rights with Estonian citizens, except that they were not entitled to having officers' ranks in the army. However, they could choose any career or trade. There was no Jewish quota of admission to universities 7, which was applicable everywhere else in the Russian Empire, including Latvia and Lithuania. Young Jewish people from all over Russia studied at Tartu University. In 1926 cultural autonomy 8 was granted to Jews in Estonia. This strengthened the Jewish community in Estonia.

My mother's family lived in Põlsamaa [about 250 km east of Tallinn], a small town in Estonia. My mother's father was born in Estonia, though I don't know the town he was born in. His name was Meishe-Ele Zitron. My grandmother Rachel Zitron, nee Eizmann, was born in Põlsamaa in June 1886. My grandfather was my grandmother's second husband. Her first husband, Mr. Strazh, died shortly after they were married and they had no children. This is all I know about my grandmother's first marriage.

My grandmother had five sisters: Anna, Reize, Rebecca, Fanny and Bertha. Anna, whose family name was Feitelson, moved to Saint Petersburg with her husband. After the revolution of 1917 9 the Soviet rule was established in Russia, and there was no way for them to move back to Estonia. Anna came to Tallinn after the war. Her husband and son died during the siege of Leningrad 10, but Anna survived. She never remarried. Grandmother's other sisters lived in Estonia. They gradually moved to Tallinn. Reize's family name was Maizel. She had two sons and two daughters. Rebecca, whose family name was Danzig, had two children: son Abram and daughter Dina. Fanny had a son. Bertha married Iekusiel Naimark, a Polish Jew. He moved to Estonia from Kodin, a town in the vicinity of Warsaw. She had five children: daughters Zelda, Miriam, Roche and Alte-Dina, and son Zelek-Mikhl. All of my grandmother's sisters were housewives.

My grandfather earned his living, and my grandmother took care of the household. They had two children. My mother Dina - her Jewish name Alte- Dina - was the older one. She was born in Põlsamaa on 31st December 1912. My mother's younger brother, whose name I don't know, was born in 1916. He died in a hospital in 1940. He was still very young. This is all I can tell about him. As far as I know there was just this one brother. My mother finished an elementary Jewish general education school. Her mother tongue was Yiddish. My mother's parents were religious. They observed Jewish traditions, celebrated Jewish holidays at home and went to the synagogue on holidays.

My grandfather died, when my mother was still a child. My grandmother, who had to take care of her two children, decided to leave Põlsamaa for Tallinn to be closer to her sisters. In Tallinn she rented an apartment from a building owner. My mother had to go to work, when she was still very young. She had to earn her living. Mama had no vocational training. She was employed as a worker at the socks and stockings shop, Punane Kojt haberdashery factory.

My father became a shoe leather supplier. He cut out shoe top leather delivering it to shoe makers. My father lived with my grandmother and his brother Zemakh. My father's younger sister Bertha married Efraim Goldman, and they lived by themselves. The families of my parents happened to rent an apartment in the same apartment building. My parents just met on the staircase in their building. My father told his family that he would only marry Dina Zitron, if he were to get married at all. So it happened. My parents got married in October 1935. They had a traditional Jewish wedding. After the wedding they rented a large two-room apartment with a spacious kitchen in the

same apartment building. My father's sister Bertha and her husband also lived in this same building. In 1936 her daughter Fruma was born.

I was born in 1936. I was given the name of Masha after both my grandfathers. Both of them had the name of Meishe, and my name also started with M. After I was born, Mama had a maternity leave to take care of me, and when it was over, she resumed her work at the Punane Kojt factory. My mother liked going to work and communicating with people. She actually didn't have to go work. My father earned quite sufficient, but my mother wanted to be independent. Both grandmothers were helping to raise me.

We talked Yiddish at home. I pronounced my first words in Yiddish. I picked up Estonian later and since 1940 I've spoken Russian.

I can't say my parents were deeply religious, but they did observe Jewish traditions. We always celebrated Jewish holidays at home. On Pesach Mama always cooked traditional Jewish food. We celebrated all holidays according to the rules. On holidays my parents went to the synagogue. I cannot remember celebrating Sabbath at home, but my parents didn't go to the synagogue on this day. The older generation was obviously much more religious than their children. This was what they needed, while for their children this was merely a tribute to traditions.

In 1940 Estonia became a Soviet Republic [11](#). Nothing seemed to change for our family. We had no wealthy relatives, and our family was not persecuted. My father went to work as a shoe leather cutter at a shoe factory, and my mother continued working at the Punane Kojt factory. She was well-respected at work. I don't think there was any anti-Semitism before the war even during the Soviet rule in Estonia. At least, this is what my mother used to say.

On 22nd June 1941 the radio broadcast that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union. The war began [12](#). This happened at noon, and the war was already on-going in Belarus. They were bombing Kiev. A few days later my father was conscripted to the Soviet army [13](#). His brother Zemakh and Aunt Bertha's husband Efraim were drafted, too. We were still in Tallinn. We were scared. I remember everybody arguing about whether it was worth leaving Estonia for some remote areas in Russia. Both my grandmothers were saying that nothing bad was going to happen if we stayed at home. Estonians had always had good relationships with their German neighbors. However, my mother must have known more about fascism than my grandmother. She insisted that we went away. My mother was a resolute woman. She managed to convince the family to leave.

My mother, my grandmother Rachel and I packed whatever we thought we needed and went to the railway station. There were trains all over the tracks. As soon as a train was full of passengers, it departed. We managed to somehow squeeze into a train before it departed. My father's sister Bertha, her daughter Fruma and Grandmother Hane-Rokhe Stumer caught the next train. We didn't even know where we were going. What mattered was that we went as far away from the German army and the front line as possible. There were bombings on the way, but fortunately, our train wasn't damaged. This was a long trip. We arrived at Nizhniy Yar where Mama obtained a letter of assignment to Dolmatov, Kurgan region in Russia [about 1600 km north-east of Moscow]. This was where we spent our years in the evacuation. We lived in a house on Sovietskaya Street.

We rented a room. Initially there were six of us sharing this room: my father's sister Bertha, her daughter and Grandmother Hane-Rokhe joined us there. Mama and Bertha went to work. They had to work to be provided food cards [14](#). My cousin, my grandmothers and I received dependants' cards for 200 g bread ration per day each. The bread was heavy and under-baked. It also contained bran and straw. Our daily rate was one slice per day, while Mama and Bertha's rate was larger. They shared their bread with their children.

Our life in town was more difficult than in villages where they could grow vegetables on the land plots that were provided to them. Those, who lived in town, could only buy vegetables at a market or trade food for whatever valuables, but we still had insufficient food products. My cousin and I picked nettle in spring and summer, and my grandmother made soup with it. We were very poor and starved. It was a good thing that we managed to survive. Our landlords and even strangers were giving us assistance. This was a terrible time, but people were kinder trying to support the needy ones.

When we arrived in Russia, we couldn't speak any Russian. I knew few words and before long I picked up more Russian playing with our landlady's children. Gradually, everybody else learned it. My grandmother took me to the market with her. I helped her with interpreting before my grandmother picked up a sufficient vocabulary to be able to speak the language. Mama and Bertha learned from their Russian co-workers. In the evening we all listened to the news on the radio.

A year later Bertha found new accommodation in another street in the same neighborhood where she moved together with Fruma and Grandmother Hane- Rokhe. In late 1941 my mother was notified that my father was dead, and Bertha also received a notification about her husband Efraim's death. Both of them served on a Soviet battleship, which sank near the Hanko Peninsula, Finland. Mama didn't mention to me that my father had died. I heard about this after we returned home from the evacuation.

In 1943 my cousin Fruma and I went to the 1st grade in the local Russian school. Studying was a challenge for me. Perhaps, this was because Russian wasn't our native language. I don't know why, but I often received low grades for my efforts. My classmates and teachers treated me and other evacuated children well. They were sympathetic and helpful. I felt no stranger among my classmates. There was no anti-Semitism either.

In November 1944 we heard that Estonia had been liberated from the fascists. My mother, my grandmother and I were the first to leave for home. Aunt Bertha, Fruma and Grandmother arrived in Tallinn a couple of months later. We had no problems with going back home. We were forced to leave our home and had the right to go back to our hometown. Our house was ruined by bombing. We stayed with our acquaintances. My mother went to the executive committee [15](#) where she received a two-room apartment on the 1st floor of a five-story apartment building. Initially it was stove-heated, and a few years later the municipal authorities provided for gas supply to the house.

Life was gradually improving. My mother went to work at the human resources department of a tram/trolleybus agency. I went to the 2nd grade in a Russian school. My grandmother did the housework at home.

In 1947 Mama married a local Jewish man. My stepfather's name was Haim Benjamin Kitt. He was born in Tallinn in 1909. This was his first marriage. He had not been conscripted to the army due to

his health condition. He was in evacuation in the Ural with his parents. My stepfather had three sisters and three brothers. They survived the war and returned to Tallinn. My mother and stepfather were members of the Party. They didn't have a traditional Jewish wedding. They registered their marriage in a registry agency and had a wedding dinner at home.

My stepfather moved in with us. My mother and stepfather had their room, and I shared my room with my grandmother. I got along well with my stepfather. I remember being impolite with him one day. He told me to clean the floor and I replied that he wasn't my father to give me orders. However, this was the only time we had an argument. My stepfather was the director of a perfumery store.

We spoke two languages at home. My mother spoke Yiddish to my stepfather and grandmother. My Yiddish was rather poor, and so they spoke Estonian and Russian to me. However, I could understand Yiddish well, but my knowledge was insufficient to speak it.

When my grandmother was alive, we observed Jewish traditions. My grandmother did the cooking and did her best to follow the kosher rules. It was hardly possible to buy kosher meat after the war. It was hard to buy any food at that time. However, if there was meat at home, it was beef, veal or poultry. My grandmother didn't accept pork meat. She watched it that we ate dairy and meat products separately. We didn't even add sour cream to meat soup. We celebrated all Jewish holidays according to the rules.

For some time after the war matzah wasn't available in stores and my grandmother made it herself. I was there to assist her, since matzah has to be rolled during a 15-minute cycle to be appropriate. My grandmother used to roll the dough and I poked holes and put it into the oven. It was hard to cook all traditional Jewish food on holidays during the post-war years, but my grandmother did her best to manage. She made gefilte fish or chicken. She tried to make something delicious for holidays.

My stepfather also celebrated Jewish holidays with us after he moved in with us. On Yom Kippur we fasted as required for 24 hours. Well, my mother or stepfather didn't go to the synagogue, though. They were members of the Party, and if somebody had known they observed Jewish traditions, they would have had problems at work. The Soviet rule didn't appreciate religious people and fought against religion [16](#).

During the war the large choral synagogue in Tallinn burned down. Germans killed Aba Gomer, the rabbi of Tallinn. They tortured him before taking away his life. The town authorities didn't restore the synagogue after the war. The religious people were provided a small wooden house to accommodate a prayer house therein. There was actually no rabbi in Tallinn before the 2000s. There was no rabbi in the prayer house. There was a gabbai, an old man. He knew Jewish traditions, Hebrew and could read prayers. The gabbai could also conduct the services on Jewish holidays, wedding ceremonies and funerals. However, he had no special education. People just elected a knowledgeable man.

My grandmother always went to the prayer house on Jewish holidays. She was old and I accompanied her as far as the prayer house and met her after the service. I went there a few times with my grandmother, but I didn't know traditions and couldn't understand any prayers in Hebrew.

My grandmother always celebrated Sabbath at home. She cooked food for two days on Friday morning. We bought challot for Sabbath. In due time in the evening my grandmother lit candles and recited a prayer over them. Well, the rest of us, but my grandmother, had to go to work on Saturday. Saturday was a standard working day in the Soviet Union. It wasn't before the 1960s, when it became another weekend day, which was officially a day off. Previously there was a six-day week with only Sunday off. Mama and my stepfather went to work on Saturday and I had classes at school. My grandmother tried to do no work on Saturday. She spent her Saturday reading the Bible [Old Testament].

In 1949 my stepbrother Leo Kitt was born. When my mother and he returned home from the maternity home, he was circumcised. The elders from the prayer house were invited to our home. There was also a doctor to do the circumcision. Though we knew well all those we invited to my little brother's brit milah, the authorities somehow found out that we had this event at home. My mother and stepfather had to go to the militia office for an inquest regarding this subject. They also were questioned by the district party committee. I don't know what they explained at the police and at work, but there were no further consequences. I don't know, perhaps, there was some reprimand imposed on them as party members. However committed the authorities were to combat religion and traditions, most local Jews had their sons and grandsons circumcised. Whatever efforts the authorities undertook, this did not hinder people from observing Jewish traditions. They even had a chuppah at their weddings.

1948 was the time, when cosmopolitan cases [17](#) were prosecuted in the Soviet Union. This campaign was widely covered in the mass media. Since there were no cosmopolitans in Estonia, they fought wealthier farmers. They were called 'kulaks' [18](#), a common definition in the Soviet Union. In 1948 and 1949 resettlement [19](#) of large numbers of these farmers to Siberia was going on. The rest of them were forced to join the kolkhoz farms [20](#). Also, those resettled on 14th June 1941, and were back from exile, were subject to resettlement again. The police had their records, and they were arrested again and were subject to resettlement to Siberia. Large numbers of people were affected then. The survivors returned to Estonia in the late 1950s, when rehabilitation [21](#) began, but many had died in exile and the Gulag camps [22](#).

Of three men from our family that went to the front, only my father's brother Zemakh returned home. He served in the Estonian Corps [23](#), and took part in the liberation of Estonia from the fascists. Zemakh got married after the war. His wife's name was Anastasia. She was half-Russian and half-Estonian. She was a very nice person. After the war people didn't care much about mixed marriages. They loved each other well and lived in harmony. Their older daughter Ilona was born in 1946, and son Boris in 1950.

After returning from the front Zemakh went to work at the Prosecutor's office in Tallinn. Veterans of the war were well-respected then, and veterans of the Estonian Corps held high-level official posts in Estonia. However, Zemakh had to leave his office, when persecution of Jews in the form of fighting cosmopolitans and the Doctors' Plot [24](#) began. Actually, he didn't wait there until he might have any problems and left the Prosecutor's office for the Ministry of Road Transport. He worked there until retirement.

Zemakh's son Boris lives in Tallinn, and we keep in touch. Ilona lives in London, England. She visits Tallinn almost on a yearly basis, and we see each other. When she goes back, we talk on the phone



sharing our news.

I studied at school until I finished the 8th grade. I had Russian, Estonian and Jewish classmates. There was no different treatment of any of us. I faced no anti-Semitism at school. I think, my Jewish classmates would say the same. Our teachers and classmates treated us well. We choose friends based on our interests. I did all right at school. I wasn't in the ranks of the best students, but I was no failure either.

I was a pioneer [25](#) and a Komsomol [26](#) member. I wouldn't say I was eager to join the pioneers or Komsomol. It's just that it was common that all students joined these organizations, and I did, too. However, I didn't care too much about this. I had older and younger classmates. The age difference was three or four years due to the war. My closest friends, Pesia Marienburg and Tsylia Perelman, were Jewish girls. They live in Tallinn now. I keep in touch with them. My other Jewish friend Lilia Malkina lives in Poland. We correspond and talk on the phone. I also had Russian friends. Many of them moved to different towns and countries. We see each other, when they visit Tallinn. We are old now, but when we get together, we feel like schoolgirls again. We recall the time, when we were schoolgirls and spent vacations in summer camps.

In March 1953 Stalin died. We heard that he died at school. We had no classes on this day, and got together in the school conference room. The school principal held a speech, and everybody was crying. I cried, too. I wouldn't say I was grieving that much. I believed it was only natural when old people died. Besides, he was someone I didn't know personally, but tears must be as contagious as laughter. Everybody cried, and I did, too.

I left school after finishing the 8th grade. I believed it was time for me to go to work and support myself and my family. My friends Pesia and Tsylia also quit school. Pesia went to work as a shop assistant at the perfumery store where my stepfather, Benjamin Kitt, was the director. Tsylia went to work at a plant, and I went to work at the knitwear factory. My mother worked at the HR department at the factory. I was a worker in the knitting room. I was a winder machine apprentice. When my training was over, I started working there.

I also went to the 9th grade in the evening school for young working people. However, I quit this school after finishing the 9th grade. It was difficult to attend classes after work. Besides, I was young and wanted to have some free time for myself. Some time later our factory merged with the Marat knitwear factory. They had three-shift work cycle, which was substituted by a two-shift cycle and finally by a single-shift cycle. I was a quality assurance crew leader. I worked at the Marat factory till I retired.

In 1959 my grandmother Rachel died. She was a strong woman and had no diseases. She died in a tragic accident. My grandmother was cooking and didn't notice, when her apron caught fire. Before my grandmother could reach the bathroom to extinguish the fire, she was on fire all over. She had many burns all over her body. She was taken to hospital right away. She lived three days before she died from the burns. My grandmother was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

My grandmother Hane-Rokhe Stumer died in the early 1960s. My uncle Zemakh installed a monument on her grave. Besides my grandmother's name, he had my father's name inscribed on it. My father had no grave, and this gave us at least an opportunity to come to our Jewish cemetery and recite a prayer in the memory of my father.

I met my future husband, Lev Zakh, at work. He was a mechanic at our factory. Lev liked me and asked me to date him. I liked him, too. We kept seeing each other. I was in no hurry to get married. We got married in 1960. We had a common wedding. We registered our marriage, and our mothers made a wedding dinner. After the wedding I moved in with my husband.

Lev's family came from Tartu [Estonia, about 180 km from Tallinn] where both his father, Itzhak Zakh, and his mother, Ida Zakh, were born. Ida was born in 1898. As for Itzhak, I can't remember, when he was born. Both families were quite wealthy. Itzhak finished a German gymnasium. Ida also studied in a gymnasium, but I can't remember any details. Itzhak took up some training related to jewelry business. He became a skilled jeweler and could make whatever fine pieces of jewelry. Itzhak's only brother Khirsh finished the Medical Department of Tartu University. He was a doctor. My mother-in-law Ida had a sister. I don't know how my in-laws met, but what I know is that finally both brothers married the sisters. Itzhak was doing well. He earned all right.

My husband Lev, the only son of Ida and Itzhak, was born in Tartu in 1929. Two years after he was born the family moved to Tallinn. Itzhak was the breadwinner, and Ida did the housekeeping. Itzhak had a little jewelry shop in the center of Tallinn. Itzhak had one employee working for him. He was also a skilled jeweler.

Lev went to the Jewish gymnasium in Tallinn, and Ida worked as a teacher in a Jewish kindergarten. Everything went well. Even when the Soviet rule was established, it didn't affect the Zakh family. The shop was appropriated by the Soviets, but Itzhak and his employee continued working in the shop. The resettlement didn't affect the family either. When the war began, the family evacuated.

As for Khirsh, Itzhak's brother, his life was harder. His daughter Sima married a young Jew from a wealthy family. His father owned a small jewelry store on Viru Street in Tallinn. In 1940 Soviet authorities appropriated this store, and on 14th June 1941 the whole family had to forcefully depart to the town of Kirovsk in Siberia. Sima's four children were born in Siberia. Avi and Nafthole, the older brothers, were quite strong and healthy. After Nafthole Sima had a daughter. At the age of six months the girl fell very ill. There was no doctor in this village near Kirovsk where the family lived. It was winter. They wrapped the girl in a blanket to take her to a doctor in the town. The girl died on the way. This was a terrible blow for the family. A couple of years after her daughter died Sima gave birth to a boy. His name was Benjamin. So the family had three sons.

They finally returned home after 15 years in exile. This became possible in 1956, after Stalin died, and after the 20th Congress of the Party [27](#), when Khrushchev [28](#) allowed rehabilitation of those in exile. However, the family wasn't allowed to reside in Tallinn. They received an apartment on the outskirts of Tallinn. Sima went to work as a teacher in the kindergarten, and later she was promoted to the position of director of this kindergarten. Sima worked there till she retired. Her sons received proper education and had their own families. Avi, the oldest son, died of cancer. Sima is still alive and all right. I often talk with her on the phone, and we visit each other. Sima is 87, but she is hale and hearty, she has a bright mind and good memory.

There was another tragic accident in my mother-in-law's family. Her cousin Frieda, much younger than Ida, was a very beautiful woman. Frieda and her family lived in Tallinn before the war. When the war began, Frieda didn't want to leave her home. She was telling my mother-in-law that there was nothing bad about the Germans, and that they were not going to hurt Jews. Estonia had been under German rule at some time, and there was nothing terrible happening. They knew German



well, and she believed things were going to be all right. She was saying they would wear yellow stars, if necessary. What else was there going to be? They had managed more or less during the Bolshevik [29](#) rule, and they would survive the Germans somehow. Therefore, Frieda stayed in Tallinn.

When the Germans occupied Tallinn, they started arresting and killing Jewish residents. Many Jews stayed in Estonia thinking like Frieda did. Frieda was arrested right on a street. German soldiers pushed her into a bus where they raped and shot her. Some acquaintances told my mother-in-law what had happened after she returned to Tallinn.

My husband's family was in evacuation in Barnaul [Siberia, over 3000 km from Moscow]. My husband went to school there. Itzhak and Ida worked in a shop. They were accommodated in the house of a Russian family that treated them well. My mother-in-law told me that no one ever commented on their Jewish identity. Vice versa, their surrounding was helpful and supporting. They returned to Tallinn in late 1944, when Estonia was liberated. Itzhak went back to his jewelry store, and Lev went to work as a mechanic at the knitwear factory. He also studied in an evening school where he finished the 10th grade. My mother-in-law was a housewife after the war.

My husband's parents were kind to me. My father-in-law died in 1960, shortly after my husband and I got married. He was buried according to the Jewish rules in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. We lived with my mother-in-law. My in-laws led a traditional Jewish way of living. My husband's parents were religious. My husband was not as deeply religious as his parents, but he also observed Jewish traditions. Even during the Soviet period my mother-in-law did her best to follow the kashrut. She only cooked Jewish food. We only ate beef and poultry. We never had any pork or sausage at home.

When my husband's family returned to Tallinn after the war, my husband's parents always went to the prayer house on Jewish holidays. The former prayer house was quite near our house, but later it was removed, and the prayer house moved to another premise on Magdalena Street. This was quite a distance from our house, but my in-laws went to the synagogue regardless. After my father-in-law died, my husband and I accompanied my mother-in-law there and after the service we saw to it that she got back home safely. I attended the prayer house with her a few times.

My mother-in-law was a great cook. On holidays she always made something special: gefilte fish, chicken broth and forshmak with herring. We always had matzah on Pesach. My husband and I bought bread anyway, while my mother-in-law only ate matzah on Pesach. She also strictly observed the fast on Yom Kippur. On holidays our relatives got together at our home. Sometimes we visited them.

We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. However, we celebrated them at work. This was a mandatory requirement. We were also bound to go to parades on 1st May and 7th November [30](#). Those, who missed the event received no bonuses.

My mother-in-law only spoke Yiddish at home. My husband knew Yiddish well to speak it with his mother. Ida also spoke Yiddish to me. I understood everything she was saying, and I replied in Yiddish mixing it with Estonian, if I lacked words to express myself. My husband and I only spoke Russian between ourselves and to our daughter.

We had no children for quite a long time. Our only daughter Ilona was born in 1965. At that time maternity leave only lasted three months, and when it expired, I had to go back to work. My mother-in-law was there to take care of my daughter. When Ilona turned three, she went to a kindergarten. However, Ilona started getting ill very often, until finally my mother-in-law said she preferred to take care of a healthy child, rather than staying at home with a sick child. Ida actually raised our daughter, actually. She died, when my daughter was in the 9th grade.

Ilona was four years old, when my husband fell ill. He had headaches and was weak, but at first he ignored the symptoms. When doctors finally examined him, the diagnosis was frightful: he had malignant growth in his brain. It was too late to have a surgery, and neither the doctors nor we could relieve his suffering. In January 1970 Lev died. This happened a few months before he was to turn 41. We only lived ten years together. We buried my husband in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn.

I stayed with my mother-in-law after my husband died. I couldn't go back to my mother. My stepbrother was there, and there was not much space in their apartment. Besides, my mother worked, and there was nobody at home to look after my daughter. Besides, my mother-in-law was very happy to have Ilona and me with her. She was very attached to her granddaughter, particularly considering that she was absolutely alone. Ida actually raised my daughter, and this was a great contribution on her behalf.

However, it was due to Ida that I never remarried. She told me that she didn't mind, if I decided to take care of my private life, but she wasn't going to have to put up with a stranger at her home. I understood my mother-in-law and had no bad feelings toward her. I know how terrible it must feel to outlive one's own son. So, we lived our life together. Ida died in 1982. Her grave is near her husband and son's graves in the Jewish cemetery.

When Soviet Jews were allowed to move to Israel for permanent residence in the 1970s, many of our relatives left. My father's cousin brothers and sisters, four of six brothers and sisters of my stepfather moved there. His two brothers died in Tallinn. My mother-in-law's family also moved to Israel and so did my father's cousin sister. I gave them whatever support I could, but I never considered departure myself for a number of reasons. I was at home here, and I felt uncertain about giving up everything, moving to another country and starting there from scratch. Had my husband been alive, we might have decided for moving to Israel, but I was afraid of going there with my young daughter and old mother-in-law. Besides, I'd lived my whole life in Tallinn and just could not imagine living elsewhere but in Estonia. The thing is, even visiting the Soviet Union from Israel was not allowed at the time. People were going there for good leaving their friends and relatives behind. That was nobody's fault. It's just that life changes and so do people. They have their own life and make new friends.

My daughter studied in a Russian general education school. She did well at school. She was a quiet and friendly girl. After finishing school, she entered the Light Industry College for the specialty of 'secretary and document control.' After finishing the college, my daughter came to work as a secretary. When Estonia gained independence [31](#), the factory was closed as an unprofitable enterprise. It took Ilona a few months before an acquaintance of hers started her own business and offered Ilona a job in her office. This is where Ilona works now.

Ilona married Anatoliy Avdeyev. Anatoliy is Russian, but I had no objections to their marrying each other. I only wanted Ilona to be happy with her husband. Anatoliy was born in Tallinn in 1956. His

father served in the Navy and moved to Tallinn after the war. Anatoliy is the youngest of three sons. He works in a security company in the port in Tallinn. Anatoliy is a shift supervisor.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, when Estonia gained independence, only the ones born in Estonia before 1940, or children of the victims of resettlement, regardless of their place of birth, were granted the Estonian citizenship. The ones who arrived in Estonia after its accession to the Soviet Union had to obtain the citizenship. Many people left the country, and the rest of them believe this to be rather unfair. However, they have to learn the language, pass their exams to obtain the citizenship, which they are rather reluctant to do. Anatoliy passed the exam and was granted the citizenship of Estonia. He's a bit shy to speak Estonian. He needs to work on his pronunciation. My grandson can speak fluent Estonian, and he often corrects his father.

My grandson was born in 1990. He was given the name of Lev after my husband. I was still working, when he was born. When he turned one, my daughter talked to me about my retirement in order to be my grandson's babysitter. I agreed and quit my job in 1991. We live together and share all household responsibilities.

Lev only spoke Russian before turning two. We spoke Russian at home. When my grandson started working with our neighbors' children, he made an Estonian friend. I was his interpreter for some time, but one day I said: 'Well, that's it. From now on you study the language and start speaking it.' And he did. We sent him to an Estonian school. At first we were thinking of sending him to a Jewish school, but we changed our mind. Teachers and students speak Russian in the Jewish school. Lev is going to live in Estonia. Therefore, he will need Estonian to continue his studies after school and to work thereupon. And so, we sent him to an Estonian school. He is in the 9th grade now. He is taller than me. Before the 8th grade he only had the highest grades in all subjects. Now he starts getting the 'good' ones. Lev has many friends at school. After classes they keep calling him asking, if he would go out. Unfortunately, Lev prefers the company of his computer. I don't think it's healthy to spend so much time at the computer. I tell my grandson to go see his friends, but I rarely succeed.

My stepbrother, Leo Kitt, was born with a heart disease, which became apparent, when he was a child. However, Leo never gave up. He finished an Estonian general education school in 1967. He still keeps in touch with his school friends. Leo then finished the Light Industry College. He worked as an engineer in a design office. When perestroika [32](#) began in the Soviet Union, and private entrepreneurship was allowed, Leo started his own construction business. He is doing all right. His business is not booming, but he is not starving either.

Leo married Rena, who was born in Tallinn. Rena's father is a Jew, and her mother is Estonian. Leo and Rena get along very well. They love each other dearly. They have two children. Their older son Robert was born in 1977, and Lenart, the younger one, was born in 1983. Robert was a very talented boy since childhood. He finished a general education school with a gold medal and entered Tartu University. When at school, he participated in various Olympiads and contests. He had numbers of medals and awards. Upon graduation, Robert became a post-graduate student. He defended his dissertation, and now he is thinking about the professorship. He's a smart guy.

Leo holds a very important position in a bank. He is a pension division manager. He often travels to Japan where they have an affiliate. Robert has two sons, one was born after another. Robert built a house for his family in the outskirts of Tallinn. It's a beautiful neighborhood, and the houses there are nice. The children just enjoy living there. Lenart, the other son, is a 3rd-year student at Tartu

University. Five years ago Leo had a heart surgery. Everything went very well, and my brother says he has never felt better in his life.

My mother died in 1991. My stepfather lived two years longer. He died in 1993. They both lived a long life, and people treated them with respect. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. All our relatives were buried there. The generation of my parents is gone, but also, all of our relatives of my age are gone. My father's sister Bertha died in the early 1970s. Her daughter Fruma married an Estonian man. He is a very nice person. In 1970 their son Edward was born. When he was three years old, Bertha took him for a walk. Edward fell and broke his arm. My aunt was so upset that she had a stroke. Poor thing, she was paralyzed for a long time before she died. My cousin Fruma also died of breast cancer in 1994.

Frankly speaking, when perestroika began in the Soviet Union, I had no high expectations in this regard. We were so used to whatever promises party leaders made never keeping them. I didn't think Gorbachev [33](#) was the man capable of turning the country in an opposite direction. One day Gorbachev visited the Marat factory during his trip to Estonia. He seemed too gentle and irresolute to me. He was joking and laughing. This was not the way Soviet leaders presented themselves. However, in the course of time I started noticing changes in our life. Actually, I've never been interested in politics. All I cared about was my family and my job. Why think about politics, if there is nothing you can do to change it.

However, some changes were evident at the beginning of perestroika. The first thing that drew my attention was that Soviet newspapers started covering events in Israel. Also, the manner of presentations changed a lot. While calling Israel an aggressor before, during perestroika newspapers became more objective writing about Israel. They also wrote that people in Israel were talented and hardworking. During the Soviet rule traveling abroad or visiting relatives was impossible, while during perestroika this became possible. My father's cousin sister lives in Israel. She must be 90 years old, probably. She invited me to visit her. I didn't visit her then, though for other reasons: tickets were expensive, and besides, my health condition didn't allow me to travel that far. I believe we've benefited a lot from perestroika.

In 1991 the Soviet Union broke up. It was hard to believe this could be true, considering how monolithic and powerful the country had been and then it disappeared all of a sudden. Estonia gained independence. I can't say unambiguously that it was good or bad. Everything has its pro's and con's. It's good that we live in our own country now. It's a good thing we can think by ourselves how we want to live.

However, there are some things I don't like about it. During the Soviet time people were free to move from one Republic to another. There were no borders separating them. Members of one family live in different regions. They are not so free to reunite nowadays. My mother's cousin sister lives in St. Petersburg, Russia. It becomes a whole problem, if we want to visit her. We need to obtain a number of papers and have visas adjudicated. It takes a lot of time and effort. Traveling to any country, but Russia, is easy. My mother cousin's birthday is in summer. She's invited us. My daughter has been busy gathering all necessary papers for herself and her son since winter. She's also saving for this trip. It's rather expensive. I don't like it that all roads to the FSU Republics have been closed for us.

Everything else is all right. Life in Estonia is gradually improving. There is no anti-Semitism in Estonia. In this apartment building we are the only Jewish tenants. The rest of them are Estonian, but they are very friendly, and very polite with me.

Our Jewish community was established in 1985. Now I can't imagine my life without the community. It goes without saying that the community supports us in the material sense. They deliver food packages to pensioners, partly pay our utility bills, particularly in winter, when our heating bills are so high. Now I have a higher pension. The state ensured that those who were in evacuation and those subject to resettlement had equal allowances and benefits. This includes partial coverage of the cost of medications, while before these were taken care of by the Jewish community. What can I say - this is a significant support.

Well, I think, the most important thing that the community does for us is getting us together. This is so very important. I have a family, but I enjoy visiting the community so very much. I like talking to people there. The community provides support and the joy of communication to lonely people. We get together on all holidays. We celebrate Jewish holidays, and they are always very nice. We also celebrate birthdays. Each month people having their birthday this month get together to celebrate. The community takes care of the treats, greetings and gifts. They may also invite their own guests to the event. It's very important for these people to know that they are remembered and needed. Therefore, the community has become a family for many Jewish people.

Glossary:

## **1 Jewish community of Estonia**

On 30th March 1988 in a meeting of Jews of Estonia, consisting of 100 people, convened by David Slomka, a resolution was made to establish the Community of Jewish Culture of Estonia (KJCE) and in May 1988 the community was registered in the Tallinn municipal Ispolkom. KJCE was the first independent Jewish cultural organization in the USSR to be officially registered by the Soviet authorities. In 1989 the first Ivrit courses started, although the study of Ivrit was equal to Zionist propaganda and considered to be anti-Soviet activity. Contacts with Jewish organizations of other countries were established. KJCE was part of the Peoples' Front of Estonia, struggling for an independent state. In December 1989 the first issue of the KJCE paper Kashachar (Dawn) was published in Estonian and Russian language. In 1991 the first radio program about Jewish culture and activities of KJCE, 'Sholem Aleichem,' was broadcast in Estonia. In 1991 the Jewish religious community and KJCE had a joined meeting, where it was decided to found the Jewish Community of Estonia.

## **2 Tallinn Jewish Gymnasium**

During the Soviet period, the building hosted Vocational School #1. In 1990, the school building was restored to the Jewish community of Estonia; it is now home to the Tallinn Jewish School.

## **3 Tallinn Synagogue**

Built in 1883 and designed by architect Nikolai Tamm; burnt down completely in 1944.

#### **4 Aba Gomer (?-1941)**

born in Belostok, Poland, and graduated from the Department of Philosophy of Bonn University. He lived in Tallinn from 1927 and was the chief rabbi of Estonia. In 1941, he was determined not to go into Soviet back areas and remained on the German-occupied territory. He was killed by Nazis in the fall of 1941.

#### **5 Estonian War of Liberation (1918-1920)**

The Estonian Republic fought on its own territory against Soviet Russia whose troops were advancing from the east. On Latvian territory the Estonian People's Army fought against the Baltic Landswehr's army formed of German volunteers. The War of Liberation ended by the signing of the Tartu Peace Treaty on 2nd February 1920, when Soviet Russia recognized Estonia as an independent state.

#### **6 First Estonian Republic**

Until 1917 Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. Due to the revolutionary events in Russia, the political situation in Estonia was extremely unstable in 1917. Various political parties sprang up; the Bolshevik party was particularly strong. National forces became active, too. In February 1918, they succeeded in forming the provisional government of the First Estonian Republic, proclaiming Estonia an independent state on 24th February 1918.

#### **7 Five percent quota**

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

#### **8 Jewish Cultural Autonomy**

Cultural autonomy, which was proclaimed in Estonia in 1926, allowing the Jewish community to promote national values (education, culture, religion).

#### **9 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.

#### **10 Blockade of Leningrad**

On September 8, 1941 the Germans fully encircled Leningrad and its siege began. It lasted until January 27, 1944. The blockade meant incredible hardships and privations for the population of the town. Hundreds of thousands died from hunger, cold and diseases during the almost 900 days of the blockade.



## **11 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.

## **12 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.

## **13 Soviet Army**

The armed forces of the Soviet Union, originally called Red Army and renamed Soviet Army in February 1946. After the Bolsheviks came to power, in November 1917, they commenced to organize the squads of worker's army, called Red Guards, where workers and peasants were recruited on voluntary bases. The commanders were either selected from among the former tsarist officers and soldiers or appointed directly by the Military and Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party. In early 1918 the Bolshevik government issued a decree on the establishment of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and mandatory drafting was introduced for men between 18 and 40. In 1918 the total number of draftees was 100 thousand officers and 1.2 million soldiers. Military schools and academies training the officers were restored. In 1925 the law on compulsory military service was adopted and annual drafting was established. The term of service was established as follows: for the Red Guards - 2 years, for junior officers of aviation and fleet - 3 years, for medium and senior officers - 25 years. People of exploiter classes (former noblemen, merchants, officers of the tsarist army, priests, factory owners, etc. and their children) as well as kulaks (rich peasants) and cossacks were not drafted into 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 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War was unleashed and the drafting into the army became exclusively compulsory. First, in June-July 1941 general and complete mobilization of men was carried out as well as partial mobilization of women. Then annual drafting of men, who turned 18, was commenced. When WWII was over, the Red Army amounted to over 11 million people and the demobilization process commenced. By the beginning of 1948 the Soviet Army had been downsized to 2 million 874 thousand people. The youth of drafting age were sent to the restoration works in mines, heavy industrial enterprises, and construction sites. In 1949 a new law on general military duty was adopted, according to which service term in ground troops and aviation was 3 years and in the navy 4 years. Young people with

secondary education, both civilian and military, from the age of 17-23, were admitted in military schools for officers. In 1968 the term of the army service was contracted to 2 years in ground troops and in the navy to 3 years. That system of army recruitment remained without considerable changes until the breakup of the Soviet Army (1991-93).

#### **14 Card system**

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

#### **15 Ispolkom**

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

#### **16 Struggle against religion**

The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

#### **17 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.'

## **18 Kulaks**

In the Soviet Union the majority of wealthy peasants that refused to join collective farms and give their grain and property to Soviet power were called kulaks, declared enemies of the people and exterminated in the 1930s.

## **19 Deportations from the Baltics (1940-1953)**

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

## **20 Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz)**

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

## **21 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union**

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

## **22 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.

### **23 Estonian Rifle Corps**

Military unit established in late 1941 as a part of the Soviet Army. The Corps was made up of two rifle divisions. Those signed up for the Estonian Corps by military enlistment offices were ethnic Estonians regardless of their residence within the Soviet Union as well as men of call-up age residing in Estonia before the Soviet occupation (1940). The Corps took part in the bloody battle of Velikiye Luki (December 1942 - January 1943), where it suffered great losses and was sent to the back areas for re-formation and training. In the summer of 1944, the Corps took part in the liberation of Estonia and in March 1945 in the actions on Latvian territory. In 1946, the Corps was disbanded.

### **24 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.

### **25 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.

### **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 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.

## **28 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)**

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

## **29 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.

## **30 October Revolution Day**

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

## **31 Reestablishment of the Estonian Republic**

According to the referendum conducted in the Baltic Republics in March 1991, 77.8 percent of participating Estonian residents supported the restoration of Estonian state independence. On 20th August 1991, at the time of the coup attempt in Moscow, the Estonian Republic's Supreme Council issued the Decree of Estonian Independence. On 6th September 1991, the USSR's State Council recognized full independence of Estonia, and the country was accepted into the UN on 17th September 1991.

### **32 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.

### **33 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931- )**

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.