ORAL HISTORY SOURCES OF LATVIA

HISTORY, CULTURE, SOCIETY THROUGH LIFE STORIES

A Selected Collection of Latvian Life Stories

SECOND EDITION

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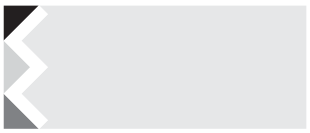

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Contents

Interviewers:

In Latvia

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Jolanta Upeniece

Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa

Māra Zirnīte

Ināra Reine

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In the USA

Dzidra Ziedonis

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A selection of oral history sources for the international conference "The Role of Oral History in Shaping Cultural and Personal Identity"

Māra Zirnīte

Since the reestablishment of independence in 1991, Latvia has developed a strong oral history tradition using biographical and life history approaches.

Life stories are valuable not only to scholars but to communities themselves as they seek to confront and remember their own histories.

We hope that this international conference will represent a broad range of approaches and theories to foster a conversation in a community of international scholars.

The conference has the following aims:

(1) To consider the concept of identity through the analysis of life stories;

(2) To discuss the theory and practice of life stories, as well as the theoretical and practical problems of this research;

(3) To gain insight into the role of the individual in culture and history;

(4) To consider how societies shape and present themselves to others.

The selected life stories have been chosen to illustrate the link between conference themes and real examples from research sources. History in life stories does not stand in isolation; it is incorporated in experience and reveals conditions that have altered people's lives, which are reflected in the telling. Life stories and oral histories encompass traditions, cultural experiences, language, people's perceptions and attitudes to life and a variety of aspects of identity.

On casual inspection, seemingly insignificant recordings on audiocassette may seem to be little more than random statements. At the moment at which a story is told, there indeed may be some random elements, in addition to that which is both permanent and indivisible from the person's being. That moment also reveals the character of the storyteller, their ability for storytelling, capacity for verbal expression, emotional disposition, level of education, ideas about composition, professional experiences and methods of presentation. The experienced observer is able to categorise these levels and is able to find the required information, and each researcher searches for their own most suitable method for this task.

The National Oral History (NOH) Archive was created as part of the National Oral History project at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia. The Archive serves as a basic source for research.

This book of selected life stories has been prepared to introduce researchers and the general public to the oral history and life story sources held by the NOH Archive. The first audio recordings in the Archive were made at the end of the 1980's when cassettes began to fulfil the role of carriers of individual memories.

Today the NOH Archive contains more than 2000 life stories.

The Association of Latvian Oral History (OH) Researchers *"Dzīvesstāsts"* ("Life Story") was formed, to promote a wide and thorough collection of life stories from both past and present inhabitants of Latvia – in light of the radical change in the composition of Latvia's population brought about by World War II.

This book consists of two parts. The first section contains 6 life stories recorded in Latvia, collected during field work in several regions and reflecting both themes and expressive styles characterising a variety of experiences. The second section consists of 7 life stories from the USA, as prepared for publi-

cation by Maija Hinkle, director of the Oral History project of the American Latvian Association (*Amerikas Latviešu Apvienība*). She also authors an introductory article to the section.

The five life stories from Latvia were prepared for publication by co-workers in the NOH project. Similar and contrasting memories of those who were deported from their homes in cattle trucks to Siberia are told by Alma Dreimane (from Zemgale, the south of Latvia), Ausma Arāja (from Sēlija, south-eastern Latvia), and Valērija Sieceniece (from Riga). There are fragments from the memories of a teacher, Pēteris Ančupāns (from Latgale, eastern Latvia), recounting the physical and emotional persecution undergone by himself, his brothers and the rest of his family. Large, dramatic events do not seem to appear in the life story of Austra Lāce, although it contains, both directly and indirectly, a description of the consequences to country life of both the Soviet period and that of the renewal of independence.

Within life stories, not only are the events and themes significant, but so is the sound of the spoken text, from which one can gain an impression of the Latvian language not only in terms of form, but also context. We wish particularly to call attention to the unique logic of dialects and the expression of emotions, which most directly reveal the character of the respondent. The life stories collected in Latvia are arranged so that differences between regional speech patterns are noticeable. The average age of authors of the life stories is between 60 and 80 years, and they represent a generation amongst whom differences in dialect are more pronounced than in those of younger people.

Comparing recordings made with ėmigrės in a number of foreign countries, it can easily be observed that besides the English language experience, there are many and varied influences that create the geographic (and of course social, political and cultural) characteristics of the Latvian language. Interviews recorded in Latvia display a pronounced influence of the Russian language, and not only in those returning from exile within Russia. The effect of Russian on the language stems from the whole of the Soviet period.

This book presents some examples from the Archive. This is the first such compilation, which necessitated determination of the best method of presenting the written version of spoken material so that the sound quality is also retained — that which is heard when listening to the cassette recording. Cassettes store sound and are capable of reproducing nuances significant to researchers: intonation, emotional overtones and, most importantly, the nature of the spoken language. Language speaks for itself, characterising the time, place and social milieu to which the storyteller belongs.

The selected life stories contain a variety of transcription methods, ranging from transcription of every word and sound (for example, "mmm.."), along with annotations of language speed and intonation, to accounts simplified to benefit the comprehension of the reader, omitting repetitions and so-called 'parasite words', and including sub-headings indicating content and plot, but without revision of the actual text, that is, retaining grammatically incorrect words if they characterise the account of the respondent.

In an introductory article, 'Selected Fragments of Latvian Life Stories', the linguist Nicole Nau presents examples of transcriptions – to enable linguistic analysis – that are divided not only into contextual and intonational phrases, but also into sentences and smaller parts of sentences.

An example of the full text of a life story analysed in its entirety is the story of Alma Dreimane (Archive No. NMV 374), as prepared for publication by Baiba Bela–Krūmiņa, wherein transcription is word-for-word from two whole cassettes, without deviation from the spoken record.

It should be noted that the audio version contains much that cannot be reproduced on paper and the representations of visual aspects of the accounts are only approximations. Yet, there are particular assemblages of words, which, on reading, begin to resonate, and we are suddenly aware of intonations and speech mannerisms, and indeed we begin to visualise the speaker. This does not come easily, although all those working with spoken language texts should aspire to reach this level.

This edition of life stories is the result of collaborative work between interviewers and authors; transcribers who, to the best of their abilities, intuition and expertise, have typed the interviews, or more precisely, 'word processed' them; and those responsible for publication, who selected the interviews.

Thanks to all for your collaborative effort!

This book is intended also for colleagues-researchers from other social sciences, and for students, who in the process of studying research methodology, can become familiar with the various sources held by the NOH collection. The selection also allows the life stories of Latvians to present a wider perspective on the experiences of one generation, thereby providing a clearer appreciation that the past does not end, but continues within the lives of individuals.

This selection of oral history sources is the first step in the search for a means of communicating the interesting and extremely complex material of life stories to the wider public. We ask you to view this edition as a working copy, and we apologise for errors that may have occurred due to time constraints. We hope this work will promote discussion that will allow cassette recorded life stories to become more accessible to contemporary society and readers interested in history.

Symbols used in the life story samples

.. – Two dots show that the sentence is unfinished.

... – Three or more dots stand for a pause, with the number of dots commensurate with the pause.

Ja – Underlined words or phrases indicate emphasis by the respondent.

() – Rounded brackets indicate the respondent's explanation of a situation, or point of discussion, which differs from the rest of the sentence in terms of tone and/or speed.

[] – Square brackets indicate an omitted word, without which the text becomes difficult to compre hend.

[] – Italicised square brackets indicate commentary about the nature of the interview or the intona tion of the respondent.

[..] – Two dots in square brackets indicate a part of text that has been omitted.

Punctuation marks (. , ; ! ?) are used traditionally.

Questions asked by the interviewer before the respondent has finished their sentence are indented.

In transcribing the life stories, the particularities of conversational style were recorded, including pauses; and grammatical errors or the features of a particular dialect were not corrected.

Selected fragments of Latvian life stories

Nicole Nau

The following fragments are presented in a discourse-analytic transcription with parallel English translation for each sentence. They are meant to illustrate solutions for some of the problems of transcribing and translating voices.

The transcription is based on principles of GAT (Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem), a system developed and used by German linguists working in the field of discourse analysis 1. Not all principles of this system are realized here.

[ ] square brackets indicate overlapping speech of two speakers, e.g.:

A: mēs vienmēr [bijām jautri]

B: [es atvainojos] – ko Jūs teicāt?

In this example, the words "bijām jautri" and "es atvainojos" are spoken simultaneously.

( ) undeciphered segment

(.) very short pause (under 0.3 sec.)

(-)short pause (0.3–0.5 sec.)

(—) medium pause (0.6–0.8 sec)

(—) longer pause (> 0.8–1.0)

(1.2) timed pause with length

((text)) the text in double brackets is a comment; also used for non-linguistic sounds as laughter

<<quality> text text> the text in brackets is spoken with the indicated quality (e.g., with feeling, with laughter). This format is also used for marking loudness and tempo of speech, with the following abbreviations:

<f> *forte*, loud voice

<p> *piano*, low voice

<dim> *diminuendo*, lowering voice

<all> *allegro*, fast speech

TEXT the capitalized word or syllable is spoken with emphasis

!TEXT! strong emphasis

end=

=beginning the symbol = indicates that the utterances are spoken without any gap

hm=hm nonverbal communicative sound with two syllables

[1] See Selting, Maria et al. 1998. "Gesprachsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem (GAT)". In: Linguistische Berichte 173, 91-122; Dittmar, Norbert. 2002. Transkription. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Alberts Klibiķis (AK)**
Dzim. // Born	1913
Kods // Code	NMV 326
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Baiba Bela (BB)
Intervija notika // Date	28.03.1996
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Baiba Bela

Birzīte (1:11) The birch grove

The narrator recalls several incidents of his childhood on the countryside. The current passage is the beginning of one of these incidents, where he sets out the location of what is going to happen. The narrator's speech is slow and affectionate. Nouns referring to nature (like meadow, water, leafs, lake) are used predominantly in the diminutive form (indicated by ((dimin.)) in the translation). He further compares the landscape of his childhood, as he revives it in this passage, to a well-known painting by the Latvian artist Vilhelms Purvītis.

01	AK	Nu un tagad pēc tam ir (.) skaista pavasara diena – varēja maija mēnesī būt.	Well now, after that, one fine day in spring – it could have been in the month of May.
02	AK	Ir (—) tāda PĻAviņa, ai.	There was this meadow ((dimin.)), yeah.
03	AK	Tajā pļaviņā mēs ganām.	We pastured on that meadow ((dimin.)).
04	AK	Blakus tur ir labības lauki. Jau –	By its side there were cornfields. Already
05	AK	jau tutur – nu Vidzemē tikai rudzus sēja ziemājus, sazēluši jau tie lauciņi,	well there- in Vidzeme only rye was sown, winter crops, these fields ((dimin.)) had already turned green,
06	AK	jau tur zaļums, jau tur parādās asniņi.	there was green already, sprouts ((dimin.)) where showing.
07	AK	Un pāri tai pļaviņai – tai pļaviņai vēl SKAIDR, dzidrs ūdentiņš virsū, bet nu PLĀNS.	And accross the meadow ((dimin.)) – on top of the meadow ((dimin.)) there was clear, lucid water ((dimin.)), but shallow.
08	AK	Var redzēt katru kukainīti, kas tur lien vēl, virs ūdens un zem ūdens. (—)	One could see every beetle ((dimin.)) that crept there, above the water and under water.
09	AK	Un birzīte.	And a birch grove ((dimin.))
10		(1.3)	
11	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
12	AK	Tāda, kāda ir (—) Purvīša gleznā.	Such as in Purvītis' painting.
13	AK	<<smiedamies> Tieši tā, kā Purvīts būtu viņu uzgleznojis.>	<<laughing> Exactly as Purvītis would have painted it.>
14	AK	Un jau tāda birzīte, kurai jau lapiņas (—) jau, tāda –	Moreover, a birch grove ((dimin.)) which already had leafs ((dimin.)), yeah, such –
15	AK	Bez sniega.	Without snow.

16	AK	Purvītim ir divas – viņam ir agrs pavasaris, ar sniegu, vai ne, un otra –	Purvītis has two – there is the early spring, with snow, isn't it, and the other one –
17	AK	<<all> Nu taisni tāda, kā tur.>	<<all> Well, exactly like there.>
18	AK	Un aiz tās, aiz tās birzītes turpat netālu, kādus varbūt 50 vai 100 soļus, bij tas ezeriņš, tas Mazezers, ko mēs saucām, un tie purvi tur sākās tūlīt.	And beyond this, this birch grove ((dimin.)) right there not far away, maybe some 50 or 100 steps, there was the lake ((dimin.)), the Mazezers as we called it, and right there the swamps began.
19	AK	Ezera gals tur bij.	It was the edge of the lake.

Pārcelšanās uz Rīgu (5:27) Moving to Riga

When the narrator had finished his first grade in the local school (presumably at the age of eight), the family left the countryside and moved to Riga. Here, elements of the country-life (like pasturing) and of the industrialized, growing capital meet and melt together in the child's experience and in the old man's memory. The speech is very slow, with many pauses and hesitations.

01	BB	*Un Jūs atceraties, kāpēc Jūsu vecāki tieši uz Rīgu pārcēlās?* ( )	*And do you remember, why your parents moved to Riga?*
02	AK	Nu, to māju dalot, vai ne vai (—) kā saka, palika (—) nebij nekā vairs, ko darīt.	Well, having divided the house, so to say, there remained – there wasn't anything to do anymore.
03	AK	Mātei atkal – tā bij šiverīga sieva, tai bij atkal pazīstamo daudz.	My mother for her part – she was a dynamic woman, she had many acquaintances.
04	AK	Paņēma trīs gotiņas līdzi...	They took the three cows with them...
05	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
06	AK	Jā (-) dabūja dzīvokli.	Yes. They got an appartement.
07	AK	Tad jau Rīgā bij ta – tajās nomalēs (-) visur bij kaut kādas KŪtiņas, vai kur varēja LOPiņus turēt (-) un tēvs paņēma zirdziņu līdz.	At that time in Riga there were, everywhere in the outskirts there were cattle-sheds, where one could hold cattle, and father took along the horse.
08	BB	*Ā, un ar visiem lo[piņiem uz Rīgu, ja?]*	*Ah, and you went to Riga with all the cattle?*
09	AK	[Jā. Nu – to] Jā.	Yes. So to say – yes.
10	AK	Pārējo tad tur pārdeva, es atceros, ka ūtrupe bij, tur sabraukuši bij un tur pirka –	The rest was sold, I remember, there was an auction, people came and bought -
11	AK	tāpat kā tur (-) Blaumanim tas to šūpuli <<viegli smiedamies> nopirka> tur.	just like in Blaumanis' story, where one bought the cradle. ((the last but one word is pronounced with laughter))
12	AK	Un (1.2) tādā veidā tur iz-	And that way there -

13	AK	Un pirmo reizi (.) ar BĀnīti braucām, ar mazo bānīti aizbraucām līdz Valmierai (—) tad tur pārsēdāmies, pārkrāmējāmies tālāk.	And for the first time we went by TRAIN, we took the little train to Valmiera, there we changed trains, we rode on.
14	AK	Un es atceros, ka es Ieriķos biju ap ē (---) izkāpis ārā, tur staigāju pa staciju un BRĪnījos – pirmo reizi es redzēju elektrības LAMpiņu, jā.	And I remember that I got out of the train at Ieriķi, I walked around at the station and WONdered – for the first time I saw an electric LAMP, yes.
15	AK	Jā.	Yes.
16	BB	*Aha!*	*Aha!*
17	AK	Jā. (—)	Yes.
18	AK	Tad viņa bij ar tādiem gariem diegiem, tad laikam vēl bij ar tiem (1.2)	At that time it still had such long threads, presumably there still were these
19	AK	kā viņus sauca – ko- ē (—) nu! ogles diegiem laikam, nebij spirālēs vēl salocīti. (—)	how do you call them – ko- ehm, well – coal threads, they weren't yet folded up in spirales.
20	AK	Jā, tad.	Yes.
21	AK	Atbraucām Juglā.	We arrived in Jugla.
22	AK	Juglā tilts bij saspridzināts, tad bij koka tilts ar līkumu.	In Jugla, the bridge had been blown up, there was a wooden bridge then with a bend.
23	AK	Tas bānītis apgriezās, (1.5) un kur mēs izkāpām ārā (-) Zemitānu stacijā laikam.	The train turned round and we got off – probably at the Zemitānu station.
24	AK	Jā. Zemitānu stācijā. Nu to [vairs]	Yes. At the Zemitānu station. Well that
25	BB	[*Tas*] *jau tas jau arī nav tik* [*būtiski*].	*That's not so important, I think.*
26	AK	[Jā.]	Yes.
27	AK	Un pirmā māja bij Hospitāļu ielā, pirmais dzīvoklis.	And the first home was in Hospitāļu street, our first appartement.
28	BB	*Jā, un tur tās pašas visas gotiņas bij, lejā kaut kur kūtiņā, ja?*	*And there were all these cows you mentioned, somewhere downstairs in a cattle-shed?*
29	AK	Jā. Nu gotiņas bij tanī pašā vagonā.	Yes. The cows were in the same coach.
30	AK	Un (—) cara laikos bij, kara laikā bij tāds uzraksts: "Četri zirgi (—) vai astoņi zaldāti", tāds bij uz šitiem lopu vagoniem.	And at the time of the tsar, during the war, there was such an inscription: "Four horses or eight soldiers", that was written on these cattle coaches.
31	BB	((klusi smejas))	((laughs quietly))
32	AK	Mēs tur ar trīs gotiņām un zirdziņu laikam bijām vienā, un visa iedzīve, kaut kādas mēbelītes bij...	Likely we and the three cows and the horse were the only ones ((in the coach)), and all our household, some furniture...

33	AK	Un Hospitāļu ielā 12, tas nebij 13. dzīvoklis, bet 12.	And in Hospitāļu street 12, it wasn't appartement number 13, but 12.
34	AK	Netālu no baptistu baznīcas, un Maijkapara vēl papirosu fabrika tur bij kaut kur tuvumā.	Not far from the baptists' church, and then the cigarette factory of Maijkapars was there somewhere close.
35	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
36	AK	Jā. (1.2)	Yes.
37	AK	Un tad māte (—) jau tad kaut kur viņa bij dabūjusi pleķīti (1.6) te kaut kur pie Zemitānu stacijas.	And my mother got a small patch somewhere near Zemitānu station.
38	AK	Ā, tad viņa vēl skaitījās, saucās Aleksandra vārti.	Well, at that time it was still called Alexander's gates.
39	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
40	AK	Jā. (1.2)	Yes.
41	AK	Un ta viņu pārkrustīja par Zemitāniem.	And then it was renamed Zemitānu station.
42	AK	Un tur tāds trīsstūrītī placīts, no Zemitāniem iet pāri uz –	And there is such a triangular patch, from Zemitānu station to
43		((zvana telefons, visu laiku līdz XX))	((the telephon rings, from here to XX))
44	AK	uz ē – tad vēl nebij šitais bānis uz Jūrmalu.	to ehm – this train to Jūrmalu didn't exist then.
45	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
46	AK	Ulmaņu Kārlis bij nikns, ka viņš ir iesākts būvēt, bet nu iesākts esot, jāpabeidz esot.	Kārlis Ulmanis was angry because they had started to construct it, but once they had started, it had to be finished.
47	AK	Viņš bij ļoti turējies pretim, to bij ZOCIĶI izkaulējuši, tie. ((XX))	He had opposed a lot, these SOCIALISTS had wheedled it out. ((XX))
48		((XX = telefona zvans beidzas))	((XX = the telephon stops ringing))
49	AK	Viņam tas nepatika.	He didn't like it.
50	AK	Bet bānis gāja uz ostu, uz krasta staciju, tā kā tas trīstūrītis izveidojās.	But the railway went to the harbour, to the bank station, so the little triangle was formed ((by the rails)).
51	AK	Un no ostas gāja uz Čiekurkalnu bānis	And from the harbour a train went to Čiekurkalns
52	BB	*Aha*	*Aha*
53	AK	Jā. Tas – tā saucamais –	Yes. The so called –
54	BB	*Un tur pa vidu bij zemīte?*	*And there was a patch of land in the middle?*

55	AK	Un tur tāds trīsstūrītis.	There was this triangle.
56	AK	Un vēl viens – viena Fēniksa Fēniksa – nodaļa tur bij.	And there was also one part of the Fēnikss entreprise.
57	AK	Tā kā Fēnikss bij mums uz (1.2) nu tur kur tagad ir tas Kompresors, kas tur tagad ir.	As Fēnikss had been there – well, where there is nowadays this Kompresors, or what is there.
58	AK	Bet tur tad bij tāda pļaviņa un tajā pļaviņā es tur vienmēr tur visu vasaru tās gotiņas tur sargāju. (1.4)	But then there was this little meadow and I always pastured the cows on that meadow all summer long.
59	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
50	AK	Un tad (—) atceros tur (—) māte to pieniņu nēsāja, tur (-) gāja, staigāja caur Lielajiem kapiem, tur, kur nu kundes bij.	And then – I remember there – my mother took the milk, she went accross the graveyard, anywhere where she had clients.
61	BB	*Ah, tas bij viens no galvenajiem iztikas avotiem, no tām* [*gotiņām*?]	*Ah, then that was one of the main sources for living, from the cows?*
62	AK	[Jā.] Un Tēv-	Yes. And father -
63	AK	Tēvu – kaut kur viņi aizņēmās vieglā fūrmaņa ratus, un tēvs brauca par vieglo ormani atkal ( ) ar zirdziņu. (—)	They had borrowed a cabman's carriage somewhere, and father worked as a cabman ( ) with the horse.
64	AK	Bet slikts viņš bij šeptmanis, un tā (—) un kaut kādu iemeslu dēļ no tās mājiņas (—) viņi aizgāja, (—) un dabūja dzīvokli Kroņa ielā.	But he was a bad businessman, and so – for some reason they left the little house and got an appartment in Kroņa street.
65	AK	Tas ir pie Zemitānu stacijas, tad jau bij Zemitānu stacija, pāri dzelzceļam. (1.4)	That is at the Zemitānu station, at that time the Zemitānu station already existed, accross the railway.
66	AK	Un tur bij tad divas (—) divas degvielu noliktavas. (1.2)	And there were two fuel depositories.
67	AK	Šellam bija (1.5) un blakus taisni mums bija tāda vienstāvu mājiņa, kurā mēs dzīvojām (—) un bija Larnafta, krievu kaut kāda naftas būšana.	They were Shell's, and directly beside it there was such a small one-storey house, where we lived. And there was Larnafta, some Russian oil entreprise.
68	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
69	AK	Tā nesen atpakaļ nodega, dažus gadus.	Not long ago it burned down, some years ago.
70	AK	Un tā mazā mājiņa arī nodega.	And the little house also burned down.
71	AK	Un žēl, ka nepalika tur (1.3) nekas vairs.	A pity that nothing is left there anymore.
72	AK	Tā, tas ir tur, tie ir tie piedzīvojumi – tādi.	Well, that is it, these are the experiences.

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Rozmarija Bārsdele (RB)**
Dzim. // Born	1921
Kods // Code	NMV 279
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Baiba Bela (BB), Māra Zirnīte (MZ)
Intervija notika // Date	27.09.1995
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Baiba Bela

Valodas zināšanas (1:14) Language skills

The narrator had been deported to Siberia together with her family right after finishing high-school. The deportation and life in Siberia are the main themes of the first hour of the interview. The current passage is embedded in the description of her deportation. It's positive picture of multilingualism in pre-war Latvia contrasts sharply with the main theme and displays a contradiction: at the beginning (01, 02, 06), the narrator states that they were held in ignorance and "could not talk" to the forces of the deportation because of the language, Russian, but the interviewer's mentioning school (05) evokes a different memory of language skills. This contrast is mirrored in the way the different participants are mentioned. The Russian-speaking people in this passage are real people, humans (a teacher, children playing in the courtyard), while the forces of the deportation are always impersonal, they are referred to without direct mention (for example, *mūs aizveda* 'they brought us to / we were brought to', *mūs iedeva maizi* 'we were given bread').

01	RB	Bet neviens neko nesaka neko.	But nobody told us anything.
02	RB	[Krieviski] ar mēs nepratām.	Also we didn't speak Russian.
03	BB	[*hm=hm*]	hm=hm
04		(1.5)	(1.5)
05	BB	*Ja, skolā* [*jau nemācīja*]	*Of course, it wasn't taught in school.*
06	RB	[Sarunāties ar mēs] nevaram. (—)	We couldn't talk to them.
07	RB	N[ē, pēdējo gadu ģimnāzijā ma]ni mācīja,	No, I was taught Russian in the last year of the gymnasium.
08	BB	[*Jums* ( ) *druscin bij, ja.*]	*You* ( ) *had a little* -
09	RB	es vēl krievu valodā noliku eksāmenus uz pieci. (—)	I even passed the Russian language examination with the highest mark.
10	RB	Jo maza iemaņa krievu valodā man bij no baletskolas, jo mums baletskolotāja bij krieviete, un viņa ar mums runāja tikai krieviski.	For I had acquired some Russian language skill in balletschool, because our ballet-teacher was a Russian, and she spoke only Russian to us.
11	RB	Nu un tad [šo un to] jau iemanījās. (—)	So then one acquired something.
12	BB	[*hm=hm*]	*hm=hm*
13	RB	Māte ar bisķiņ pamāc[īja – cara laikā taču skolā gāja], (-)	My mother, too, had taught me a little – she had gone to school at the time of the Tsar,
14	BB	[*hm=hm* ( )]	*hm=hm* ( )

15	RB	krievu valodā mācījās.	she had been taught in Russian.
16	RB	Nu un mēs jau, latvieši, l- lielākoties (-) mūsu paaudze prata (—) ja ne krievu valodu, tad vācu valodu obligāti visi [zināja]. (—)	Well and we, Latvians, for the most part – in our generation everybody knew German, if not Russian.
17	BB	[*hm=hm*]	*hm=hm*
18	RB	Angļu, franču, tas tā.	English, French – that's another question.
19	BB	*Tas mazāk bij* [*toreiz*].	*That was less at that time.*
20	RB	[Kurš ku]rā skolā ticis mācīts, vai ne.	Depending on the school one went.
21	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
22	RB	Bet nu sabiedrībā jau vācu valodu obligāti visi zināja.	But in public everybody could speak German.
23	RB	Un ļoti daudzi mācēja arī krieviski.	And very many knew Russian, too.
24	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*
25	RB	Tā kā mēs bijām tāda tauta, kas runāja trijās valodās jau toreiz.=	We thus were a people which spoke three languages, at that time already.
26	BB	=*pārsvarā jā*	*so it was, yes.*
27	RB	Nu un tāpat ar bērniem sētā spēlējās, dažādu tautību bērni bij (—) ar maziem [krie]viņiem,	Well and all the same when children were playing together in the courtyard, there were children of different nationalites – little Russians,
28	BB	[*hm=hm*]	[*hm=hm*]
29	RB	ar maziem ēbrejiņiem un ar vis- ar polīšiem, vai ne.	littel Jews, and all-, little Poles, wasn't it.
30	RB	Un viens otram jau to kaut ko pamāca. (—)	And each one taught the other something.
31	RB	Un tā mēs valodas iemanījāmies.	And so we acquired language skills.

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Jūris Birkhāns (JB)**
Dzim. // Born	1925
Kods // Code	NMV 140
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Baiba Bela (BB), Ginta Elksne (GE)
Intervija notika // Date	15.04.1994
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Ginta Elksne

Makšķerēšana (3:28) Fishing experiences

Juris is a joyful and lively narrator, who likes to entertain his listeners. In the first part of the interview, he talks about hi s childhood in Cēsis and recalls several funny incidents like the one of the current passage.

01	JB	Krustmātei bij (-) tāds pielūdzējs.	My aunt had this suitor.
02	JB	Nu, viņa apprecējās ļoti vēlu ar viņu, bet tad viņi tā sagājās un, es domāju, ka tā stipri platoniski.	Well, they married rather late, but then they were together, and I think, it was completely platonic.
03	JB	Bet viņš bij – viņš bija arī ierēdnis un (—) kaislīgs makšķernieks.	And he was – he also was a civil servant, and a passionate angler.
04	JB	Un viņš mani ņēma vienmēr līdz, pat no trīs gadu vecuma.	And he always took me with him, even when I was only three years old.
05	JB	Un es – es vēl esot drusku šļupstējis un – un ieķēries tai makšķerkāta galā, it kā piepalīdzēdams un teicis: "Tolēģi, tolēģi, et tev palīdēšu!"	And I – I am told that I still prattled a bit at that time, and and I was holding the fishing rod as if to help and saying: "tolleague, tolleague, I'll help ye!"
06	GE	((*smejas*))	((*laughs*))
07	JB	Tolēģis – <<smiedamies> tas ir kolēģis>.	Tolleague – <<laughing> that is colleague.>
08	JB	Es viņu tā arī visu mūži saucu – par kolēģi.	All my life I called him this way – colleague.
09	JB	Un viņš mani arī, [tā viņš] mani bij iesaucis.	And he, too, that was the name he used for me.
10	GE?	[((*smejas*))]	((*laughs*))
11	JB	Un tad mēs gājām pa – es gāju viņam līdz uz tām – ne jau nu uz visām makšķerēšanām, bet kad nu varēja, (—) cik nu vecums atļāva.	Then we went to – I accompanied him on this – well, not everywhere, but as much as possible, with respect to my age.
12	JB	Vēlāk jau mēs braucām pa Gauju un dzīvojām pa, pa nedēļai (—) lejpus Cēsīm, kādus sešus kilometrus vai vairāk uz saliņas, (—) kādu nedēļu no vietas, kad viņam bij atvaļinājums.	Later then we went by boat on the river Gauja and lived for a week or so below Cēsis, some six kilometers or more on an Island (—) spent a week or so on the spot, when he was on holiday.
13	JB	Bet nu no sākuma tā – tā bij tāda līdzstaigāšana.	But it started with my accompanying him.

14	JB	Un, es atceros, kad viņš –	And I remember, when he –
15	JB	Tas bija tāds dramatisks notikums no makšķernieku viedokļa. (—)	That was kind of a dramatic event for an angler.
16	JB	Vienā darba dienā, nu, kā jau ierēdņi beidz, kādos četros.	One working day, well, when civil servants leave off work, about four o'clock.
17	JB	Nu labi, ja mēs ap kādiem pieciem varējām būt pie tās Gaujas.	Fine, if we could be at the Gauja at about five.
18	JB	Un tagad viņš tā, joka pēc, bija paņēmis līdaku makšķeri, vairāk jau tā, manis dēļ, uz to makšķerēšanu.	This time, for fun, he had taken with him a pike angle, more for me, for fishing.
19	JB	Un ar mazo makšķerīti izvilka mailīti, uzlika virsū un iemeta.	And with the small angle he pulled out a fry, put it on and cast it in.
20		(1.5)	
21	JB	Nu, tāpat jau nu, (—) vēl tur tādi palaidņa puikas bij, kas mums tur sameta smiltis no augšā – no augstā krasta ūdenī un – it kā baidīdami tās zivis prom.	Well, — there were also some naughty boys, who were throwing sand from above, from the above bank, and – like scaring away the fish.
22	JB	Un pēkšņi tas pludiņš pazūd, (—) un nu es tik redzu – un es –	And suddenly the bopper disappears, and I just see – and I –
23	JB	man bij toreiz, es nezinu, vai (—) vai bij seši vai septiņi gadi tikai. (—)	I was at that time, I don't know, only about six or seven years old.
24	JB	Un tagad nu ir kaut kāda liela zivs, makšķerkātam nolauž galu, viņš nu saķer to šņori un velk pie malas, (—) un ar visām savām glaunām drēbēm tai zivij virsū, (—) <<smiedamies> dziļāk krastā, pa – viss ar dūņām> un tik bļauj: "Tu paņem man no kabatas nazi!"	And now there is some big fish, the fishing rod's end breaks off, he catches the line and pulls it ashore, and jumps on the fish all in his fine clothes, <<laughing> pulls it closer to the bank, all in the mud> and just yells: "You take the knife out of my pocket!"
25	GE	((*smejas*))	((*laughs*))
26	JB	Viņš gribēja pārgriezt to šņori pušu, lai varētu atpiņķerēt tur to zivi vaļā. (—)	He wanted to cut the line in two, in order to get the fish free.
27	JB	Un man bij-	And I was –
28	JB	tā zivs spārdīja to asti –	the fish was kicking its tale –
29	JB	man bij bailes [iet viņam pie tās kabatas <<smiedamies> klāt, lai,>]	I was afraid to approach his pockets <<laughing> to>
30	GE	[((*smejas*))]	((*laughs*))
31	JB	lai es to nazi varētu dabūt.	to get the knife.
32	JB	Beigās jau nu es to izdarīju (—) un (—) nu tā bij diezgan - (—)	Finally I did it, and, well it was rather –

33	JB	man likās, ka tas bij zandarts, līdaka tā katrā ziņā nebij.	I think it was a pike-perch, in any case it wasn't a pike.
34		(1.4)	
35	JB	Mēs pa ceļam, mājā ejot, jau pie kaimiņiem nosvērām – 20 mārciņas, toreiz tie svari gāja mārciņās.	On our way home we already weighed it at our neighbors' – 20 pounds, weights were measured in pounds at the time.
36	JB	Nu, tas ir gandrīz – nu drusku mazāk par desmit [kilo ap]mēram.	Well, that's almost – well, slightly more than ten kilogramm round about.
37	GE	[*ooh!*]	*oh!*
38	JB	Nu un pa ceļam – nu (—)	Well and on our way –
39	JB	Mans kolēģis to zivi uzkāris uz mieta un – un nes, tā aste gandrīz pa zemi, tā zivs jau bij toreiz manā augumā.	My colleague had hung up the fish on a stake and – and carried it, the tale almost on the ground, the fish was my height at that time.
40		(1.9)	
41	JB	Pretī nāk tur tādi vasarnieki, un es – tik – to es gan laikam pats neatceros, bet man vēlāk tika atstāstīts, ka es esu pa – jau pa lielu gabalu kliedzis: "Mēs nepārdodam! Mēs [nepārdodam!"]	Some tourists were crossing our way, and I – I don't remember this myself, but was told later that I had shouted already from afar: "We don't sell it! We don't sell it!"
42	GE	[((*smejas*))] ((*smejas skaļi*))	((*laughs loudly*))
43	JB	Tā man ar to makšķerēšanu jau no – no agras bērnības gāja vaļā.	So my fishing experiences started already in early childhood.
44	JB	Es saku – pirmo reiz, to es pat atceros, kā mēs gājām, trīs gadu vecumā.	I say – I even remember the first time that we went, at the age of three.
45	BB	*hm=hm*	*hm=hm*

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Velta Krūze (VK)**
Dzim. // Born	1931
Kods // Code	NMV 392
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Māra Zirnīte (MZ), Baiba Bela (BB)
Intervija notika // Date	1995
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Ginta Elksne

Vētra (1:54) The storm

While they were speaking about the narrator's childhood, about birthday parties and Christmas celebration, the interviewer asks the narrator, whether she recalls any special instance of such a home party. This question evokes the following passage, which links private life to the fate of the Latvian nation. Retelling an incidence her mother had told her, the narrator uses natural forces (thunderstorm) as a metaphor for the Latvian fate. The importance of this image is underlined by the emphases with which these words are pronounced.

01	VK	Nu ko... Man ir atmiņā palicis pēdējais 18. Novembris.	Of course... I remember the last time we celebrated November 18th.
02	VK	Tas bija m- trīsdesmit devītā gadā.	It was in 1939.
03	VK	Četrdesmitā gada 18. Novembrī jau tēva vairs mājās jau nebija.	For in 1940 my father wasn't at home anymore.
04	VK	Mums bij svinīgi klāts galds ar- ar svecēm un – un mans tēvs jau laikam zināja, kas mums draud.	We had a festive table laid, with candles, and – and my father probably already knew what would happen.
05	VK	Viņš teica runu, (-) teica, kad būs ļoti (.) smagi laiki un kad lai Dievs dod mums to visu izturēt.	He held a speech, he said that very hard times were to come and he wished God would help us endure it all.
06	VK	Tas ir tāds – nu, tāds svinīgs brīdis pie – pie svētku galda.	That was such a ceremonial moment at the festive table.
07	VK	Un tad līdz=	And then –
08	VK	=Sakarā ar to man nāca prātā, ka mana mammiņa bija aizsardze.	I recall in this context that my mother was in the defence guard.
09	VK	Un Aizsargu svētki bija vai trīsdesmit astotā gadā vai? (—)	And the defence guard had their festivity in 1938, or?
10	VK	Man liekas, ka trīsdesmit astotā.	I think it was in 1938.
11	VK	Aizsargiem bij kaut kāda divdesmit gadu jubileja vai?	The defence guard then celebrated their twentieth anniversary or so.
12	VK	Liekas, ka divdesmit gadu jubileja.	I think it was the twentieth anniversary.
13	VK	Un un un un tad Uzvaras (-) Uzvaras laukumā (—) tagad kur tas Karātavu kalniņš, ja?	And – at the Uzvaras place, where there is now the Karātavu hill, you know?
14	VK	Tur kādreiz rīkoja – pēdējie Dziesmu svētki tur ar bij, tur tika izbūvēts un un un un tur tika rīkoti tie aizsargu svētki.	There once was – the last song festival also took place there, and – and there these defence guard festivities were held.

15	VK	Un pēc tam mamma stāstīja, ka Aizsargu svētku laikā esot sācies – ŠAUSMĪGA !VĒTRA!, šausmīga – LIETUS, PĒRKONS, ŠAUSMĪGA !VĒTRA! esot...	And afterwards my mother told that during the defence guard festivities there had come up a TERRIBLE !STORM!, a terrible – RAIN, THUNDER, A TERRIBLE !STORM! had –
16	VK	KAROGI, nu, <<all> karogi bijuši tā viens pēc otra,> ja?	the FLAGS, well, there had been flags in a line, you know?
17	VK	Tā mastos smuki uzvilkti, tie esot nesti pa gaisu un LAUZTI un -	Nicely put up on masts, and she told us that they had been carried into the air and been BROKEN and...
18	VK	Un tad mammai ienācis tas kaut kas tā prātā, vai patiešām latviešu tautai būs kaut kas tik šausmīgs jāpārdzīvo.	And then my mother thought something like, will the Latvian nation really have to suffer something that terrible.
19	VK	To viņa toreiz teica, trīs – man liekas, ka trīsdesmit [astotā vai –]	And at that time she said, in was, I think, in 1938 or –
20	MZ	[*Pēc tam, ja?*]	*Afterwards, yes?*
21	VK	trīdesmit devītā...	1939...
22	VK	Pēc tās – pēc tās briesmīgās vētras.	After that terrible storm.
23	VK	Un patiešām tas – tas tā bija.	And so it really was.
24		(6.0)	

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Biruta Leite (BL)**
Dzim. // Born	1910
Kods // Code	NMV
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Māra Zirnīte (MZ)
Intervija notika // Date	1994
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	?

Kā mēs sākām kopīgo dzīvi (5:40) How we began living together

The narrator had been deported to Siberia two times . In the years between, when she was in her late thirties, she lived in Cēsis and found her second husband. The current passage is about how they came together.

Biruta speaks fast, often omitting words' endings and using many tags like *vai ne* 'isn't it' etc., which are only occasionally included in the translation.

01	MZ	*Es vēl gribētu, vai jums nebūtu nekas pretī, tas vienkārši drusku cita rakstura jautā-jums, bet kā jūs skaitījāt, ar kuru mirkli jums tā ģimene bija nodibinājusies, kaut arī viņa nebija oficiāli noformējama, tas vienkārši nebij izdarāms. Jā to arī -*	*Now I would like, if you don't object, that's a bit another kind of question, but how do you count, at what moment did you begin to live as husband and wife, although not officially, as it wasn't possible to register the marriage officially.*
02	BL	Jā	Yes.
03	MZ	*Bet nu teiksim kas jums, tas bij, viņš pārnāca pie jums dzīvot, jeb kā – kā jūs to kopīgo dzīvi organizējāt?*	*Let's say, how did you, he came to live at your place or else – how did you organize your living together?*
04	BL	Jā. Viņš pārnāc pie mans dzīvot – man Cēsīs bij istabiņ, kur man onkuls un tante bij dzīvojuši.	Yes. He moved to my place – I had a room in Cēsis at that time, where my uncle and aunt had lived.
05	BL	Eduard Veidenbaum māsīc un brālens.	Eduards Veidenbaums' cousins.
06	BL	Viņ bij pārgājuš uz ē to nespējniek namu, uz Cēsu, vai ne, to iestādi.	They had moved to this ehm invalids' house, in Cēsis, this institution.
07	BL	Nu un ta mēs pārgājām –	Well and then we moved –
08	BL	es pārgāj tur dzīvot, un ta viņš atnāca pie manis, vai ne, nu un ta mēs tā nodibinājām to ģimeni, vai ne.	I moved in there, and then he came to my place, didn't he, well and so we founded our family.
09	BL	Nu protams, ka bij sava patikšan, sava interese bij, vai ne, nu un tā, un viņam jau sevišķi bij, vai ne.	Of course, there had been liking, interest, and so on, and especially on his part.
10	MZ	*Viņš bij tas ē galvenais ē [tas]*	*The ehm main person who*
11	BL	[Nu] gandrīz jāsaka tā, ka viņš bij tas [iniciātors, jā]	Well, yes, more or less, it was he who was that initiator, yes.
12	MZ	[*tas vadošais*]	*the moving force*

13	BL	jā, iniciātors, vai ne.	the initiatior, yes.
14	BL	Nu un man jau ar bij tā, ziniet, nu kā nekā, es bij tik vientuļ tanī Sibirijā, vai ne, un ne[vien cilvēk]	Well, I also had such, you know, how could it be otherwise, I had been so lonely in Siberia, and no single person –
15	MZ	[*Jūs taču*] *visus ilgus gadus bijāt viena pati...*	*You really had been alone all these years...*
16	BL	Nu tak – septiņus gadus, vai ne	Well, yes – for seven years.
17	MZ	*Jā.*	*Yes.*
18	BL	Nu un tā kā viņš, nu ļoti sirsnīgs bij un ļoti, zināj, ka viņš ir šķīries, vai ne. [Un]	Well and as he was, well, very affectionate and very – I knew that he was divorced, though. And
19	MZ	[*Un viņš*] *par Jūsu dzīvi – Jūs arī bijāt viņam stāstījusi?*	*And did you tell him about your life, too?*
20	BL	Nu kā tad jā, skaidrs, vai ne.	Of course I did, that's evident, isn't it.
21	BL	Un nu bij jau vēl tā, kad es tur uz viņ māj uz laukiem, kad viņš tur bij vēl, dažreiz tad es ar uz tiem laukiem tik aizbraukus tur, kur viņam tā ģimene bij, vai ne.	And besides, I also used to go to the countryside, where he lived at that time, where he had his family.
22	BL	Nu jāsak tā, ka mēs ar to viņa sievu līdz pašām viņas mūža beigām mēs ļoti labi satikām.	Well I have to say, I was on very good terms with first wife, all the time until her death.
23	BL	Bez kādiem tādiem strīdiem, bez kāds tāds plēšanās, vai ko. [Un]	Without any quarrelling, whithout any fight. And
24	MZ	[*Un*] *kā viņš izskaidroja, kāpēc viņš bij šķīries?*	*And how did he explain, why he divorced?*
25	BL	Nu es saku – sākās tā privatizācija, nu fui, kolhozu darīšan un viņš griba – tika iesaistīts kolhozā.	I say – the privatization began, no, the collective farming, and he wanted – he got involved in the kolkhoz.
26	BL	Un vēl otrām kārtām viņš bij paredzēts čēesmit bbb čēesmit devītā gadā iz- izsūtīt, kad izsūtīj visus tur, 25. martā, vai ne, nu un bēgdams no šitās izsūtīšans, viņam bij pa-zīstam tur kād nebūt Cēsu mm tie čekas darbinieki vai bbb tie MVD, un tie viņ bij brīdinājuš, vai ne, un viņš bij panācs to, ka viņu neizsūtīj tomēr, vai ne, sakarā ar tiem MVD darbiniekiem, tie viņ bij pasargājuši, vai ne.	And, second, he was foreseen for deportation in fourty nine, when everybody was deported, on March 25th, and he flew from the deportation, he had some acquaintances at the Cēsis – among the Chekists or the MVD, and they had warned him, and he had managed not to get deported, because of these MVD officials, they had protected him.
27	BL	Nu un un un tā viņš palikās Latvijā, un baidīdamies no tā, kad viņu vēl var izsūtīt, ta viņš aizgāj vienkārš no tās mājas un šķīrās no tās ģimens.	Well and so he stayed in Latvia, and as he was afraid they still might deport him, he just left his home and parted from his family.

28	BL	Nu bet oficiāl viņš jau nebij šķīries, mēs tāpat dzīvojām kopā, kaut arī viņš oficiāl nebij šķīries.	But he wasn't divorced officially, we lived together just so, although he wasn't officially divorced.
29	MZ	*Nu un tā sieva, viņai bij kāds, tai pirmai sievai bij kāds cits vīrs?*	*Well and the first wife, did she also had another man?*
30	BL	Vēlāk.	Later.
31	MZ	*vēlāk*	*Later.*
32	BL	vēlāk, jā.	Later, yes.
33	BL	Atbrauc no Sibīrijas viņas kaimiņš, tas bij ar tuberkuloz slims, vai ne, un tas sāk pie viņas dzīvot, un ta viņ tur paši nodibināj kā ģimeni, vai ne, tā savā starpā, tur tanī, tanī	A neighbor returned from Sibiria, he suffered from tuberculosis, and he began to life with her, and so they founded a family, too, they lived together at the –
34	MZ	*Bet kā tas bij – vai tad tieši tikai tā, aiz tāda praktiska apsvēruma cilvēki izšķīrās, tur jau droši vien, nu – kaut kādas jūtas droši vien arī kaut kādu lomu spēlēj?*	*But how did it happen – did people really for such practical reason part with their spouse, certainly some emotions also did play a role?*
35	BL	Nu jāsak tā, ka tur tā lom patiesībā bij viņa sievasmātei.	As a matter of fact, it was his mother-in-law, who played that role.
36	BL	Jo tā bij ārkārtīgi ļauna sieviet, tā sievasmāt, pirmā sievasmātes vai ne.	For she was an extremely wicked women, this mother-in-law, the first mother-in-law, wasn't she.
37	BL	Ka viņa visādā veidā centās naidu celt tā vīra un tās sievas starpā.	She did her best to raise hostility between husband and wife.
38	BL	Visādi tur viņu – pazemodam to Jāni, vai ne, tā, un visādā veidā, jāsak, tur viņa nerrodama.	In every possible way – humiliating Jānis, baiting him.
39	BL	Un tā sieva bij tāda klusa gan, bet tā sievasmāte bij gan ecīga.	The wife was quiet person, but the mother-in-law was quarrelsome.
40	BL	Tāda maza, maza sieviņa bija, bet tā nu ārkārtīgi ecīga bija.	She was a very small little woman, and extremely quarelsome.
41	BL	Un tā visvairāk tamdēļ arī viņi izšķīrās, sakarā ar to kolhozu un arī tamdēļ, vai ne, ka viņ tur ļoti, ļoti tādās asās atiecībās bij tur ar to sievsmāti, un tā siev ar tur ar tā mātes pusē ar, vai ne, nu un tā tas iznāca.	So these were the main reasons why they divorced, in connection with this kolkhoz and because he was on so very, very bad terms with his mother-in-law, and his wife sided with her mother, didn't she, and so it happened.
42	BL	Nu un tā mēs nodibinājām to ģimen.	Well and so we started living as husband and wife.
43	BL	Čēesmit devītā gad oktobrī, man liekās tā iznāca – viņš atnāca pie manis dzīvot tanī manā mājā un un.	In october 1949 I think it was – he moved in at my place, in that house. And
44	BL	Un man jau, patiesīb sakot tā: Es no sākum nemaz negribēj, ĻOTI negribēj,	And the truth is, in the beginning I didn't want it, VERY MUCH didn't want it, be-

		tāpēc, ka zināj, ka viņam tak ģimen ir, vai ne, un bērni vēl, vai ne.	cause I knew that he had a family, and children.
45	BL	Un KATEgorisk viņam atteic, sak: "Neieš pie tevs", vai ne.	And I refused him CATegorically, I say: "I won't go with you", didn't I.
46	BL	Bet viņš ko dara.	But look what he does.
47	BL	Viņš atnāk pie manis uz dzīvokli, noguļās pie durvīm koridorī zemē un neiet projām, vai ne.	He comes to my appartment, slept on the floor by my door and doesn't go away.
48	BL	Un cilvēki tur iet garām, vai ne, un un nu ko, es nelikos zinis, es viņu sūtij vienmēr projām.	And people pass by, and I – well, I did not care, I always sent him away.
49	BL	Un vienreiz es aizbrauc uz Mazsalac pie sav onkuļa, un, ziniet ko viņš izdar tagad – viņš paņem aizbrauc līdz Valmierai, un Mazsalac tak no Valmiers tālu – 45 kilometri laikam, un, ziniet, tagad viņš par varēm, tur gan ir pazīstam tāds Pēterson Pauls, vēl tauts universitāts direktors, pie kur es tā kādreiz aizgāj, aizgājs pie tā Pēterson Pauļa, vai ne, un kur es esmu.	And once I went to Mazsalaca to my uncle's, and guess what he does now – he went by train to Valmiera, and Mazsalaca is quite far from Valmiera, about 45 kilometres, and, you know, now he – there was an acquaintance there, Pēterson Pauls, director of the folk-university, I had once stayed at his place, he went to this Pēterson Paul, and asks, where I am.
50	BL	Pauls saka, viņš nezin, kur es esot, pie viņa es neesm bijus, vai ne.	Pauls says, he doesn't know, where I am, that I haven't been at his place.
51	BL	Nu un viņš atkal zin, ka es esm Mazsalacā, jo es viņam skaidr un gaiš pateic – ej tu savu ceļu, ej atpakaļ pie savas ģimenes un LŪDZU, ne- ne- nesāksim to ģimens dzīv, vai ne.	Well, but he knows that I am in Mazsalaca, because I had told him clearly as daylight – you go your way, go back to your family, and PLEASE, let's not start living together.
52	BL	Nu kaut gan man tiešām bij tā ļot vientulīg, un jāsak tā – man viņš patik ar patiesībā, vai ne, tās – nu nekād lielā mīlestīb nebij, bet tāda vārdsakot jūsma bij tād, vai ne. (—)	Although, well, I really felt very lonely, and I admit – I really liked him, too, well, it wasn't big love, but simply such delight.
53	BL	Nu un ko viņš dara.	And now what does he do.
54	BL	Viņš atbrauc līdz Valmierai tagad, un tā kā tālāk nav nav transporta, viņš ar kājām.	He rides by train up to Valmiera, and as there is no further transportation, he walks.
55	BL	Viņš ar KĀJĀM nonāk 45 kilometri līdz Mazsalacai (—) un pēkšņ ir man pie durvīm, vai ne. (—)	He WALKS on foot 45 km to Mazsalaca, and suddenly he is at my doors.
56	BL	Miļo pasaulīt, es pilnīg pārbijos.	Dear me, I was completely shocked.
57	BL	Es sak: "Jān, tu es traks esi", vai ne.	I say: "Jānis, you are crazy."
58	BL	Nu bet viņš sak: "Es tak nevar bez tevis dzīvot", vai ne.	But he says: "I just can't live without you.
59	BL	"Brauc atpakaļ un nāc uz Cēsīm."	Come back, come to Cēsis."
60	BL	Onkuls ar vēl tur, un viņš brīdināj – tikai nedar Birutai pārī un tamlīdzīgi, un tā viņiem tāda saruna ļoti bij, tāda dziļa, vai ne, un tā.	My uncle, too, he warned him – just don't do Biruta wrong, and the like, they had a very serious talk.
61	BL	Nu un tā mēs arī sākām to ģimenes dzīvi kopā.	Well so we started living together.

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Emma Priedīte**
Dzim. // Born	1905
Kods // Code	NMV 71
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Māra Zirnīte, Guntra Aistare
Intervija notika // Date	10.04.1994
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Signe Siliņa

Dzīve mežā (4:29) Living in the forest

After the war, the narrator and her husband lived in the forest hiding from the Soviet authorities for several years. Famine, cold and the constant fear of being discovered made life almost unbearable. Still her memories of these years also include moments of peace and being in harmony with the surrounding nature.

Remarkably, Emma's speech flows without interruption nor hesitation, and the interviewers don't interfer, so that her telling is like a monologue.

01	Un mēs zinājām, kad čekisti ir.	And we knew when there were Chekists.
02	Kad ķekisti nebij mežā (—) buki, stirnas guļ pa dienu mēžā dziļumā, biezumā, un klusi. (—)	When the Chekists weren't in the forest, the roebucks, the roes sleep deep in the wood during the day, in the denseness, and they are quiet.
03	Un naktīs, tad viņi ceļās un aiziet uz izcirtumu ēst, jeb uz pļavu.	And in the nights, they go to the clearing to eat, or to the meadow.
04	Un viņi aiziet klus un atnāk klus.	And they quietly go and quietly return.
05	Bet ja čekisti ar suņiem, tad viņi iet un viņi rej – hē, hē, hē – tā kā suņi, ziniet, baigi tā.	But when there are Chekists with their dogs, they ((the roes)) go and bark – he, he, he – just like dogs, you know, terribly.
06	No rīta nāk atpakaļ, rej atkal.	In the morning they return, again barking.
07	Un tad mēs tūliņ zinājām (—) kad ir mežā (—) ka čeksti ir.	And then we knew at once when in the forest – that the Chekists are there.
08	Tad mēs negājām.	Then we didn't go.
09	Mēs ēdām skujas, ziemā braucījām skujas.	We ate pine-needles, we stripped needles in winter.
10	Ziemā parasti nelenca mums, tas bija retums.	In winter they usually didn't chase us.
11	Bet – kad bija sniegs nost, tad lenca.	But when the snow was away, then they chased.
12	Bet, ziniet, laimējās.	But, you know, we were lucky.
13	Cilvēki – vot, es neko nesak, viņ- bet cilvēki saka, Dieva nav, bet Dievs ir un mēs lūdzām Dievu, un mums nesaņēma.	People – well, I won't say – but people say there is no God, but God exists, and we prayed to God, and they didn't get us.
14	Un mēs gājām ārā (-) kādreiz dienā. Nu baiga –	One day we went out. Well, terrible –
15	Tur tanī mājā, kur mēs dzīvojām, mežamājā, tur mums drēbes palika.	In this house where we lived, in the woodhouse, we had left our clothes.

16	Domāj, izies. (—)	We planned to go out.
17	Noskan kaut kas.	There was a sound.
18	Mēs tā ejam gar mežmalu, vīram bij em tāltāļskatis, viņš ar to tāļskati skatās.	We walk along the edge of the forest, my husband had a field-glass, he is watching with this field-glass.
19	Es ( ): 'Jumtā ir caurumi, tur ir noteikti posteņi'. (—) Nē (—) bet mēs ejam.	I say: 'There is a whole in the roof, there certainly is a post.' No – but we went on.
20	Noskan.	A sound.
21	Mēs skatāmies, apakšā ir upe (—) tur zaldāts smeļ ar katliņu ūdeni.	We look around, there is a river below, a soldier draws water with his mess-tin.
22	Tātad posteņi apkārt mājai, nākam atpakaļ.	So there are posts around the house, we return.
23	Un MEŽĀ (-) MEŽA ZVĒRI, VILKI bij.	And in the FOREST, there were the BEASTS, there were WOLVES.
24	Viņi <<stiepti> gaudoja> pa nakti, (—) mums viņi neaiztika.	They <<drawn> howled> in the night, but they didn't touch us.
25	Tur bija tāds avotiņš, ( ) kādi trīsdesmit četrdesmit metri no to, kur mēs gulējām.	There was this small spring ( ) some thirty fourty metres from where we slept.
26	Tur bij biezas eglītes, mēs zem tām eglītēm gulējām.	There were thick fir trees, we slept under these fir trees.
27	(1.5)	
28	Bunkurs nebij nekad, tādu jau nevarēja taisīt.	There never was a bunker, well, one couldn't make such a thing.
29	Bet mēs tur izrakām bedri tādu, sabērām kartupeļus (-) pa ziemu un virsū sūns un skujas.	But we dug out such a pit, in the winter we poured potatoes in it, and moss and needles on top.
30	Un uzklāja telteni (—) un mēs tur gulējām.	We put an awning over it and there we slept.
31	Salikam mugurs kopā, lai siltum, un gulēj.	We lay with our backs together, so that it was warm, and slept.
32	Un ziniet, avotiņš mums bija tā – es saku, trīsdesmit četrdesmit metri grāvis un tur bij avotiņš, tur es gāju pēc ūdens. (—)	And you know, the spring was there – I'd say, about thirty, fourty metres a ditch and there was the spring, I went there for water.
33	Es eju, (—) tā ceļmalā – nu <<all> tā kā līdz to sien> – sēž vilks vienreiz tā un skatās uz mani.	I went there, at the edge of the path, as close as from here to the wall over there, a woolf is sitting and looking at me.
34	Es saku: <<mīļi> 'VILCIŅ, ej mājā!'>	I say <<dearly>: 'WOLFY, go home!'>
35	Es tā klusam sak.	I say that quietly.
36	'Nesēdi te, ej mājā!'	'Don't sit here, go home!'

37	Ziniet, viņš tā <<ar sajūtu> noglauž ausis, aizliek galvu>, aizgriež projam, un sēž.	You know, he flattens his ears in such a way, lowers his head and keeps sitting.
38	Tagad es iesmeļu ūdeni, nāku atpakaļ, viņš ir aizgājis.	Then I draw the water, I come back, he is gone.
39	Viņš nav.	He isn't there.
40	Un mani neaiztiek.	And he hasn't touched me.
41	Un tā vien- vienmēr.=	And so it was all the time.=
42	= Tie PUTNI tāpat, viņi dziedāja, viņi apkārt tur taisīja ligzdas, mēs bijām savējie.	= The BIRDS were the same way, they sang, they made their nests around there, we were of their kin.
43	Mums neviens nebaidījās no mums un mūs neaiztika.	No one was afraid of us nor touched us.
44	Mēs bijām savējie.	We were their kin.
45	Nu un tagad mēs tā dzīvojām. Bet vienreiz nu mum-	Well, that way we lived there. But once we-
46	Mums jau kauli un āda, mēs jau vienmēr pusbadā dzīvojām.	We were mere skin and bones, all the time we lived half-starving.
47	Nu, pavasaris ir, sniegs ir nokusis, bet mums nav ko ēst un nav kur iet.	Now it is spring, the snow has melted away, but we have nothing to eat and nowhere to go.
48	Tas bija jau tanī gadā, ka Staļins mira.	That was already in the year Stalin died.
49	Mēs tagad norunājām, mēs iesim uz Ķurbes purvu, tāds Ķurbes purvs tur pie Dundagas.	We planned to go to the Ķurbes swamp, there is this Ķurbes swamp near Dundaga.
50	Varbūt, ka tur dzērvenes ir palikušas, nav visas rudenī nolasītas.	Maybe some cranberries will be left there, not all picked off in autumn.
51	Mēs abi ejam.	We are going.
52	Tagad mums jāiet pa tādu līniju pāri, es skatos tālāk, tur kaut kas BALTS plīvo, tā kā papīrs, vai drēbe balta.	Now we have to cross this line, I look ahead, there is something WHITE fluttering, like paper or a white cloth.
53	Nu mēs ejam apkārt, var jau būt, ka tur ir atkal kāds postenis.	Well, we go around, maybe there is a post again.
54	Bet es redzu, ka tur ir papīrs un tur ir uzlikts akmens virsū.	But I see that there is a piece of paper, and a stone is put on top.
55	Es IZskrienu ārā uz to ceļa un norauju to papīru – "Cīņa", avīze.	I run OUT on the road and pull off the paper – the newspaper "Cīņa".
56	Nu, mēs apsēžamies tālāk mežā, tur ir rakstīts, ka Čehoslovakijas prezidents ir izkritis pa logu.	Well, we sit down farther in the wood, and there we read that the president of Czechoslovakia has fallen out of the window.

57	Viņš esot izgrūsts toreiz pa logu.	They said he had been pushed off the window.
58	Un, otrs, ka STAļins ir miris.	And, second, that STAlin has died.
59	Vai, mēs tik priecīgi, ka Staļins ir miris.	Oh, we are so happy that Stalin has died.
60	Nu, gan mums jāiet jāpiesakās, tad nu, varbūt mūs nu nemocīs un nesitīs nevienu.	Now we indeed have to go and give ourselves up to the authorities, now then, maybe they won't torture and beat anybody.
61	Bet mēs vēl nodzīvojām sešus mēnešus mežā, līdz rudenim.	But we lived in the forest for another six months, until autumn.

Stāstītājs // Narrator	**Anna Kalniņa (AN)**
Dzim. // Born	1916
Kods // Code	NMV 384-54
Intervētājs // Interviewer	Māra Zirnīte
Intervija notika // Date	06/1996
1. atšifrējums // 1. transcription by	Baiba Bela

Vējlukturis (1:24) The lantern

Anna is a countrywomen, who has experienced many absurdities and arbitrary acts from the Soviet rulers and their disastrous effects on the agriculture of her region. In this short passage, she gives an explanation for what has happened in her country and why things went worse. The hand-lantern is a symbol (or rather, an index) of this process.

01	Kas tai pasaulē nav jāizcieš, <<p> ko tu neizciet.>	My, how much one has to bear on this world, <<p> how much you suffer.>
02	(1.5)	(1.5)
03	Mācās dakteri, mācās cilvēki (1.7) visādas tādas – (—)	There are doctors studying, people studying, all kind of –
04	Nu ko tad – tos (-) GUdros jau visi aizmuka uz Amēriku, un visus PĀrējos aizveda uz (—) Sibīriju, nu un kas ta palika?	Well now – all the wise ones escaped to America, and all the others were sent to Sibiria, so who was there to stay?
05	(1.5)	(1.5)
06	Pat ē !VĒJ!LUKTURI (-), ko iet uz stalli govis slaukt, pat TO viņi nemācēja vairs uztaisīt tāds, kāds bij vējlukturis.	Even ehm a HAND-LANTERN, what you take when you go to the cattle-shed to milk the cows, they can't even make THAT anymore the way hand-lanterns used to be.
07	Kad iet pa durvīm ārā, nodziest uzreiz.	The moment you go outside, it burns out.
08	Man bij tādi vējlukturi, varēja iet KILOmetriem, (—) nedzisa.	I had such lanterns, one could walk several KILOmetres without them burning out.
09	<<f> Nu visi tie, kas bij tie priekšnieki un kas mācēja, un visi tie gudrie, tos visus aizsūtīja prom, nu un palika tie (-) strādnieki.>	<<f> Now all those who were superiors and who were able, all those clever people, they all were sent away, well, and only these workers remained.>
10	<<dim> Un tie tie nu taisa kā paši, kā nu iedomājās. (—)	<<dim> And they they well they did as they fancied by themselves.
11	Un tā visās vietās> – tā tās fabrīkās, tā tos kolhozos.	And it was everywhere like this>: in the factories, in the kolkhozes.
12	Visi tie ŠVAkrie cilvēciņi, tie MUĻķie palikā (—) un tie gudrie, kas varēja, tie aizbēga (-) tur (—) uz Amēriku, un pārējie visi atkal uz Sibīriju,	It was the WEAK ones who remained, the FOOls, and the clever ones, who were able, those flew away to America, and the rest again was sent to Sibiria.
13	(1.8)	(1.8)
14	kas vēl domāja.	Those who were able of thinking.

NMV 1572

MARIJA LŪSE

Interview: Rīga, Latvia, 1993 and Alsunga, Latvia, 2002
Interviewers: Māra Zirnīte, Ieva Garda, Jolanta Upeniece
Transcribed by Ieva Garda
Processed for publication by Ieva Garda
Translated from Latvian by Marianna Auliciema

When participating in the "Dzīvesstāsts Latvia – Kurzeme: *2002" field work to Alsunga, I had firmly decided not to interview any member of the* Suitu Sievas *folklore ensemble. I wanted to concentrate on less well-known interviewees, as this folk ensemble is famous and the singers have been repeatedly interviewed by both the mass media and folklorists. However, when the field work participants were organised to meet with the singers from the ensemble, interviewers quickly agreed to times and places for interviews. I stood at the side and watched, because I did not wish to interview any of the singers. However, when I noticed that one of the singers did not have an interview arranged, and she was the only one from the ensemble, I thought that I had to oblige – it would be rude for all of them to be interviewed except for one. I went up to her, asked her name and if she would like to talk to me.*

The next day I rang her doorbell. When the door opened it seemed as if I had mixed something up – there was a tiny woman who didn't correspond to the imposing impression that the Suitu *folk-costume and song had given the day before.s*

The name of the narrator is Marija Lūse, born in 1929. As could be expected, she was used to being interviewed and was skilled at leading the interview the way she wanted. Whilst speaking she would suddenly request for the recorder to be switched off, talk about something unrelated, then upon switching the recorder on again, continue from the exact place she had interrupted the story. She allowed us to record that which we needed – her life story – but did not allow us to record the part where she revealed her simple wish to have a chat about her life and at the same time to ask me about mine. The interviewee cast a spell on me with her ability to tell a story. Her story was accented with happiness and misery, love and hate. Additionally, as a folklorist I was fascinated by the way she intertwined her life story with elements from folklore. Her story would not be conceivable without these elements.

As a result, I recorded a wonderful story and spent two days together with an equally wonderful person.

The overview into Marija Lūse's life story has been developed from excerpts that characterise events she has described and her attitude to these, her general outlook and spirituality. These are influenced to a great extent by not only folk songs, but also traditional beliefs and dreams.

When transcribing the interview recording, I replicated the interviewee's style of speech, lexicon and sentence construction. To make the story more understandable, I organised the fragments in chronological order. This was easy to do, as the interviewee began and ended each part of her life as an individual story.

Places where text has been omitted are indicated with [..] The interviewers' explanations are also placed within square brackets.

Marija Lūse was first interviewed for the National Oral History collection in 1993. Fragments from both interviews have been prepared for publication. This is an opportunity to compare how the life story has changed over a period of 10 years. In the first interview, the interviewee tells more about the fate of her family and her farmstead, the second time some of this is repeated and she speaks more openly about her personal life. In the interview 10 years ago Marija refused to talk about her personal life.

Key to notations:

Use of punctuation (.,!?) according to traditional, common usage

An indent is used to indicate those questions the interviewer posed before the interviewee had finished speaking

.. – if the sentence is left incomplete

... – a pause, where the number of periods indicates the length of the pause

yes – underlined words and phrases indicate those that the interviewee particularly stressed

( ) – parentheses around the interviewee's words that explain the situation or the subject of conversation or is distinct from the rest of the sentence because of intonation or pace of speech

[ ] – brackets indicate comments regarding the interview process itself or the interviewee's intonation.

Marija Lūse 10 Years Ago

Interviewed by Māra Zirnīte

NMV interview recorded during the gathering of ethnographic folk ensembles in Riga, 1993.

I was born on 23 March 1929, at *Ejuši* ["*Walkers*"] in the Ranķi parish. My parents were farmers, our farm had 92 hectares of land, 21 cows, 12 of them were dairy cows, 7 horses; we didn't count the sheep and fowl. As far as I know, my father inherited the house from his foster parents, who are buried in the *Ejuši* graveyard. It is said that in 1700, when there was the first plague, there were three houses called *Ejuši* but after the plague no one returned to one of the houses, only to two of them. When I was born, we were two neighbours; the other house was over the road. The boundary of the land was the road. Later the houses were built away from the road. Our house was very old; a new one was built in 1937 on the foundations of the old one. Ulmanis did not approve that two houses have the same name, so our house was renamed *Mednieki* ["*Hunters*"]. Why was the name of the house *Ejuši*? [..] The ancestor who lived in the house was a messenger, but didn't have a horse, so he went everywhere on foot, and was nicknamed *ejošais* [*walker*] and so the house was named *Ejuši*. When I was seven or eight years old, we were herding the cows when we discovered the foundations for the third house, it used to be in a very beautiful place. We found a rosebush and a pile of stones on the crest of a hill. At that time we thought that it may have been the site of a bath house or threshing barn. Then I began to wonder if it was a sacred place. A small stream flowed by, today it is called the *Melnais Valks* [*Black Ravine*]. Then I tried to find out, what had been there. Our neighbour was very old, he almost reached one hundred; he said that after the plague the owners hadn't returned to that house. He remembered his father telling him. [..]

My father's ancestors came from Poland; he was a Polish musician. My mother on her father's side is Swedish. In Skrunda there used to be a glass factory, a craftsman from Sweden came to work in the factory, and that was my mother's ancestor.

When my father's father left his house to his son on his deathbed, my father was only two years old. My father's mother became the mistress of the house, but she lacked the practical skills to manage a farm, she also had a weak nervous system. When my father was ready to take over the household, then there was nothing left, only 3 hectares of land. All the rest was overgrown. On his way to Saldus, my father stopped at the Lutriņi store, where my mother was working. She had returned from being a refugee in Russia, this was in 1925. During the First World War she went with her aunt to Leningrad. Her aunt's husband was a shoe maker in a factory. My mother's brother had been enlisted in the army, and she found out that he had been injured. She went to the hospital in Riga to try to look for him, but he had already been taken to Russia on some Tsarina's train to a sanatorium, but he never got there. Later we found out that he had died and was unloaded from the train in Rēzekne. She went to Riga to look for her brother. After that it turned out that her parents were left on one side of the front line, while she was on the other side with her aunt. So, she went along with her father's sister's family, with this shoe maker, who, along with the whole

factory, was evacuated to Leningrad. At first she was a nanny for a wealthy family; then she learned the Russian language. Having seen the world, she returned and began to work in the shop.

After seeing my mother behind the counter, my father said, "She will be the mistress of my house." He was younger than my mother.

My mother did not find him appealing, but my grandmother talked her into it, "Daughter, where will you find a better life? Go and have a look at the house." They went there – the house was fairly old, the fields were neglected, but the barn was full of cattle.

Her mother said, "Daughter, what more could you want? You are both young and strong, you can work the land, you will have your own property. You won't have to worry about where to live every year. You can have a flower garden, I'll do the weeding."

At this time grandmother was renting land from a farmer; she gave her daughter two cows and a sheep for her dowry. After the wedding they arrived home, but the house was empty, because it turned out that my father had borrowed the cattle to demonstrate how many could be housed, and not to show that he owned them. So then they started life together from practically nothing. The house was very old. First they built a shed, then a cattle shed in 1930. The cattle shed was built of rammed earth. They mixed heather and chopped spruce branches with the clay. If a new farmer wanted to do the same, they would still need to know about the technology. Where five people had worked hard and rammed the earth, the walls held firm, but there were also places where the wall collapsed. In 1937 they cleared their debts, because my mother was a good housekeeper. The dwelling house was built in 1938, by 1939 it was not yet completed, still today it hasn't been set up properly. My mother's housekeeping time was short, because everything had to be abolished in 1940.

I remember that at the house, the house was very old, there was one time when a Jew arrived, one that traveled around with the rags [*selling clothes*], he came in with the whole door – the door fell off the hinges. I still remember that the apple trees were very large, as tall as the top of the window, and my mother had a very beautiful flower garden. My grandmother, when she came to visit, took a stool and went to sit amongst the wild orchids.

My sister was raised very harshly, because at that time there was great poverty, there was no way you could hire a babysitter. My sister's babysitter was the dog, Trotsky. My mother had come home a few times to see how things were going, and had left a bottle of milk. My sister had a suck and then gave it to the dog to suck. It was a rule that she was not allowed over the doorstep, and the dog wouldn't let her. If she went over, then he pulled her back by her skirt. It was a small sausage dog. When she began to stand, a post with a wooden wheel was made, the child was put into it; it went around in a circle. My sister also had a hollow stump, which had a hole in the middle, and she was put in there, because they didn't have time to hold her and teach her to walk. Things were better for me; they employed an old lady, old Trīne. She spoiled me too much. I was a cry-baby. She was the one who began to tell me ghost stories. I was easily frightened; I was scared of graveyards and of walking in the dark.

I remember the traditions we had. My mother loved to sing. In the spring we went to *"sing in"*[1] the springtime. We had another tradition – we shared a bath house with our neighbours, it was heated every second week, by either one or the other neighbour. And each of us decorated the entryroom in some way. It was particularly beautiful in the summer when the linden trees were blooming. Then there were garlands and branches, and also a wreath, it was strewn with sweet flag leaves; in winter there were chopped up pine needles in the anteroom. I can remember the fragrance of the linden blossoms when we went to the bath house. Not only the bath house smelled nice, but the linden trees as well. Whenever I smell linden blossom now, it seems to me that there should also be the scent of the bath house.

I was christened during the summer celebrations. There was a belief that the person who stays at home while the child is christened, must do things to help the development of the child – read a book, do some arithmetic, knit, work. When my sister was christened, and also when I was, my grandmother

[1] The custom to greet the spring by going out into the fields and singing especially joyous songs in a loud voice.

stayed at home. She had managed to do everything for my sister: clean all the rooms, reorganize the chest which held the clothes, sew, knit, but had forgotten to read a book. My sister was a very good housekeeper, but not very good at reading. She's very good at mathematics, though. But when I left to go to church, there had been a quarrel at home. Everyone came to the church and my grandmother just sat at home, cried and read the Bible. When I was a child, the main thing for me was books, I even secretly took books with me when herding. I wasn't allowed to read because it was thought I wouldn't keep my eye on the cattle. I always had three or four books hidden. My father had gone to school for two months, even in this time he had managed to get into a fight; as a farmer he hadn't needed any more schooling. He was very much against educated people. He thought that they were all good-for-nothing. They had intended to send me to school, as I was good at languages. I was good at school and they had planned to let me continue going. I also went to high school, but 1949 cancelled all of this. My parents were *apkulakoti* [*labelled as kulaks, taxed at a very high rate*], so I began to attend evening classes. I even worked.

The night before the deportations my mother had come to wish me a happy birthday, she had brought me some biscuits. Even then we had some idea that something was going to happen, but they had met our parish elder, who said not to worry, that we wouldn't be in that group. I don't know if that was because he wanted for us to be on the spot, so that they wouldn't have to look for us. Then at five o'clock in the morning my mother was already up, stoking the fire. My sister had a three month old daughter, she was wet. They had ripped the door open; the dog had attacked them, and they shot it dead. Then they made them all put their hands in the air. My sister told me, "I was standing by the cot and watched as a soldier with dirty hands grabbed around my naked baby." They were searching if there were hidden weapons in there.

I found out because one of our neighbours, a young man, came and told me. He then went to Skrunda to see if the train was still there, while I went home. I had decided that I would go with them. I was told that the train had left. I found a note written by my sister, "We are travelling in an unknown direction, Mare isn't with us." The only good thing was that I had the cattle – I had to work. The dog was in the corridor, I had to pull it out. Then evening came. That was the most terrible time. It seemed like all the walls were breathing. Mum had taken along her pillow and blanket. Wet nappies on the edge of the cot, and noone there. That was a terrible night. Then the same neighbour came to say that they were also looking for me. As the train had already left, I knew that I couldn't go along with them, so I ran away. First I went to his house. The most interesting thing is that I had already seen his house in a dream. I had never been there before, but as I stepped over the doorstep, I said, "I've been here before." I had dreamt that my grandmother had warned me that something bad would happen.

Then I was taken to his sister in Skrunda; I was dressed up in his sister's clothes. And there one of Niedra's people knew about it, and he informed that I had been seen there. But I was lucky again – I didn't manage to get on the first bus, because there were too many passengers and there were some who had been issued with official travel certificates; there were lines of them. I saw that there was no room, so I had decided to go to my girlfriend's place in Turlava. There was an extra bus, and I got a seat on that one. The first bus was stopped and searched at Ranķi, but the second drove straight past. That's how my wandering started, which I don't want to talk about.

My brother-in-law remained at home, my sister's husband. All of the animals were confiscated; even the chicken roosts were ripped down and taken to the kolhoz. My father had made laying boxes for the chickens – they were taken. That brother-in-law lived in the house; he stayed there a little while after my parents returned. Then they grew old, and my sister did not live there any more; she lived in Saldus, and they went to live in Saldus with my sister.

Marija Lūse, NMV 1572
Interviewer: Ieva Garda

Marija Lūse: Well, mum drove off to look for her injured brother, because she found out that he was in a hospital, but at that time the front line moved. The Bermonts [*A part of German army that fought against Latvia's independence*] were invading and she ended up staying in Riga with her relatives, because

Kurzeme was taken, and she went to Petrograd with her godmother, whose husband worked in a shoe factory. And that's how she got to Russia. In the beginning she worked in the factory as a nanny. And then, when she returned to Latvia in the 1920s, she was by then, well, she no longer seemed like a foolish girl. She began to work at a store in the parish of Lutriņi. And then my father, driving to Saldus to go shopping, forgot to buy the sugar. On his way home he went into the store where my mother was working, and bought the sugar, and he thought, "She will be my wife." Now he came courting, and he said that he had a house and land. And my grandmother, having been the wife of a servant all of her life, had her heart set on her daughter marrying this landowner. But my mother had some other boyfriend who was a simple clerk. So she went to inspect. She went there – the house was very old, but there was a barn, and the barn was full of cattle, and grandma said, "You can build yourselves a house, two young people together; you have strong arms and legs, you will work and build it. And just think, daughter, you won't be a servant and move from house to house (you won't have to move your stool to a new place every St George's day), you will be able to plant yourself a garden." So then, grandma organized a wedding, my mother's mother, you see? They were married and then around Christmas the daughter moved to her new house. Everything there was empty and quiet. He had borrowed the cattle for a short time from his neighbour [*laughs*]. Not that he had any, but, that he could fit so many animals in the barn [*laughs*].

So then! This is how they began life on my father's property. The first thing they built was a shed, after the shed they built a huge barn, a cattle-yard, a cattle shed, this was built from clay and heather – rammed together. It looked very nice, because it was white from the lime wash, it was whitewashed, but on the ends, in the so-called cart houses where the hay was stored, which were added on later; and there apparently there was no air circulation, and the wall collapsed; mum thought that the rammers could have done a better job in that part. Well and then further on, say, in 1935 I remember that a cattle-shed was built, and my grandmother died, whom I had gone to help to herd, when I was six years old, because by then she had already received the land grant for servicemen on account of her brother. And then in 1937 a dwelling house was built, but left unfinished. Then in 1939, when the times changed, we began to live. Then a part of the cattle herd was sold; there were quite a number of buildings by then.

There are some rumours that there is money in the foundations. There was a famous woman, Pipene, who had been Finks' maid and had apparently inherited his clairvoyant abilities. She said that there was money in the foundations, and in which spot and to look for it. My mother didn't try it, and now a psychic told her not to touch the money, that it is cursed, and that it is in the form of paper bank notes and worthless. So noone... We know approximately in which place it could be, because that area has a ghostly presence. It's true.

There is a similar tale about the graveyard. We have a family graveyard. About one and a half kilometers from the house in the forest. Pipene also said that there was some money hidden in a stone. The wall around the cemetery is made of stone.

And our neighbour said, "I can show you where it is."

She had always been very frightened of the graveyard, and one night she was coming home through the forest. To get to my father's house you have to walk between two graveyards and then also walk past our graveyard.

She thought, "Well, I've got through those graveyards with no problems."

Then after about a kilometer and a half there was our graveyard.

She told me, "Well I looked back," she said, "thank goodness, someone is coming along with two grey horses. When I will have to pass the next graveyard, it won't matter if he is on the road behind me or has passed me; I still won't be alone on the road."

She said, "And as he reached the graveyard, he turned straight towards the graveyard and disappeared," she said. "Well, I ran away, straight through the forest and I never walked that way again, and the place where he turned into the graveyard, I'll show you, you should search there."

Well, I told my nephews that if it's metal then they can use one of those metal detectors.

But they told me, "No, no! It will be paper bank notes that are half decayed."

I also don't go to the graveyard often, because I can smell all of the dead. I smell them. Cemeteries for me smell intensely of different, well, I want to say, odours. And there are particular flowers that I can't have in the house, that remind me of cemeteries, and one of these is the thuya. Now here in the Alsunga cemetery – as well, but maybe the problem is that in my childhood one of our neighbours was an old woman who told a lot of ghost stories especially about graveyards, and that's why today, I couldn't say I'm frightened of graveyards, but I do try to avoid them.

Let's say that the beginning of my life was very difficult. And when my sister was born, then no-one looked after her, the dog looked after her, no – Trotsky. The dog called Trotsky. I have a photograph of my sister when she was little, with Trotsky, too. It is a bit ripped, having been dragged around with me. And the dog looked after her, and the dog was told, "Don't let her go further than here, don't let her out of the gate, or near the well." And mum said that nevertheless she was worried and ran home from the fields to see.

She said, "And there is the girl is sitting on the porch with Trotsky. She takes a suck from the bottle, then puts it in Trotsky's mouth, who also has a suck."

She said, "She gets up, Trotsky takes her by the skirt and doesn't let her go."

Yes, and that's how my sister grew up, just like that, on her own. Then there was a hollow, a sawn off stump, and when they went into the cattle shed nearby to tend the cows or do some chore around there, then they placed and sat her in the hollow stump so that she couldn't wander off anywhere. And I was looked after by an old lady. The lady didn't let me onto the floor, she would only hold me in her lap, and I couldn't stand this, and cried. The other children ran away, and I cried. Still now I can remember the feeling, how awful it was to sit there and cry. As I wasn't the favourite daughter, I didn't do what my father wanted, because I had books hidden everywhere, that I had begun to read. Then things went well, because one of my friends was the daughter of a teacher at "Mucenieki" 3 km away. *"Paths of my childhood,"* those about Annele, all of those I devoured in childhood. Even *"Tom Sawyer."* It was a very big library, and she let me take them. And then, another thing that was fateful – I was a librarian already in the second grade. In the Ranķi School there was, there was a small room set up as a library. And when I was in the second grade the school principal made me the librarian.

I completed 7 grades. As we were two sisters, we had two sleeping places at school. The pallet was put down, a board between us, then the next pallet, then a board; this is how we slept on slatted platforms, off the ground. And then there was also a second level, and ladders in three places. A lamp was lit in the evening, a kerosene lamp. Then in the morning [*laughs*] the children on top sometimes had headaches, because the kerosene did stink. And as children were layered in two levels, all sorts of things happened – we were pissed on from above, and [*laughs*] thank goodness there were woollen blankets. I froze, I was very weak. Well, we lived there, we got sick, the toilet was a long way away in the field; exercises, callisthenics classes were in the same classroom, move the desks to the sides, we had ones where the table and seat were joined together, you moved them to the side, and we exercised properly right there in the classroom once a week. In the mornings there was morning prayer; in the evenings, the evening prayer. On Monday mornings there was a special prayer. The evening prayer I can still remember bits of it, but I can't remember the Monday prayer, in the mornings we just said the Lord's prayer. There were little song books, you see, it all would have been preserved if there hadn't been a war. Because of this it was all lost.

Well, I suffered like this for 7 years. And then I spent the spring of 1944/45 at home, and in the autumn of 1945 I went to school in Kuldīga. In Kuldīga I lived at 10 Strādnieku [*Workers*] Street. I was very sad, and I couldn't get used to the city. I was a country girl. And now as an old person, I can't see any beauty in the city, it's all the smell of smoke and streets and houses. I can't see it, when people say, "Isn't this a beautiful city!" For me cities aren't beautiful, the country is beautiful.

In 1948 my parents were *apkulakots* [*labelled as kulaks*]. *Apkulakots* means that they were made to pay huge taxes, and then I went to the evening high school and worked, because we just couldn't [*get by*] any more.

I finished primary school, I got one 'four', and that was for callisthenics. But at the high school, I wasn't very clever. Well, today I can say, as my children have all finished – actually my children and grandchildren all have higher education. I can boast about this, yes. And now, what more is there for me to do than boast about my children?

Well, it's like this, and then there were those deportations, everything changed. The main thing was that, as I was going home, I was... And then, when I found out, I went straight home. And then, when they were looking for me, then I wasn't in Kuldīga, I wasn't in my apartment, where I was living at the time. And that's how I stayed here.

[..] In the uproar my mother hadn't told them the address straight away, only when she was already at Skrunda, when she was being put into the train – into the train cars.

[..] My sister was taken along with her three month old daughter; she raised her hands above her head, standing by the cot. And the soldier searched the cot to see if there were weapons hidden in there.

When I arrived home the scene was like this: the dog had been shot and left lying over the stoop. And blood everywhere. The cattle were all right. We still had a herd of cattle. We had 7 dairy cows still at that time, although I was from a very big farm. We had 102 hectares of land and 20 head of cattle. My parents had 7 horses; you see, a large farm.

One of the bitches, she had been shot. The old dog, he had been left alive – well he was really old..

During the day it wasn't so bad. I tended to the cows, but as night fell, it was twilight (it was the 25 of March), then I didn't know how I could get through the night, because there was still the imprint in the pillow where my father had been sleeping, the blanket turned over. Wet nappies in the cot. In the kitchen, my mother had been stoking the fire – the kindling was alight, the stove door was open, and the house was empty and the whole time there was something breathing behind the wall. Or that's what it felt like. Well, I took the old dog indoors with me. You know what it's like in the country; there are no curtains on the windows, and then suddenly a face at the window! It's a good thing that he began to speak straight away. Someone I knew. He had heard that tomorrow they were coming to confiscate the cattle and to take me away as well, and that I should escape that night. That a train had already left from Skrunda, and that my sister had thrown a note from the window, saying that I had not been taken.

This is how my, my, shall I say – wandering – began.

[..] Well I, how shall I say, when I was told to hide.. and again fate... and the person who came to warn me took me to his parent's place. This was not far from my father's house. And then, when I entered that house, I realized that I had already seen the house in a dream. I had never been there before, but when I stepped over the stoop, I knew that I had dreamt about this house. And I had dreamt that the parents were going to be deported. I had this premonition. Because all the time, people knew, you could feel that the deportations were going to happen.When deportation was mentioned, then everything inside began to tremble.

Well then I, he – the man dressed me as his sister, in his sister's clothes, harnessed the horse and took me to Skrunda with the idea that I could go to my friend's place at Īvande. And then fate, again. We set off. He had one sister at Skrunda, and he went to buy the ticket for me to go to Kuldīga.

He came back and said, "There's a lot of passengers." And as I did not want to stand there so that I could be seen, you understand? He said, "There's no hope of getting on!" But he would go and have a look. And he ran back again. He said, "The bus left, but an extra bus was provided, and you'll get a seat on that one." And so I ran there in the last minute and sat down in the very back, and when the bus was between Skrunda and Kuldiga, the first bus was stoped at Ranka and was searched… They were looking for me… And we even saw the bus stopped on the side of the road, we drove past it, and I drove away. So for me it wasn't, it wasn't meant to be.

[..] Well, when I got to Kuldīga and alighted from the bus, where the petrol station is now, there was the brother of that person. And then I went to his house, my friend came and we organised to go to her place. I walked from Kuldīga to Īvande. So I lived with my friend's mother.

My friend's father was shot during the filtration period. There were two filtration camps in Kuldīga. One was near the transmitting station and one was further in the brick yard. He had been in the brick yard. They were a large family, and the mother was left with the children. They had five children. And one of them, the daughter, she had brought her boyfriend along with her. There were a lot of them – and now also me. And they were very poor. Simple pallets – do you know what pallets are? A sheet over the top and blankets woven from rags to cover up.

I went back to my father's house. And that friend of mine drove back to our house and told me that there was nothing left, that everything had been confiscated. So I was left like that. Well of course, my family, on departure, had taken everything with them. So I went to live in my father's house, because my brother-in-law had been left behind; we thought that we could start to farm, we also had my grandfather's sister on my mother's side; she used to prepare meals for us.

Yes, earlier it was very important to have your house blessed. Ministers would come and bless them. The newest of my father's dwelling houses, the newest one that was built in 1939 had been blessed. And now with the deportations and all that, it seemed as if there was a lot of evil in the house. And she said that the attic had to be cleansed, that there was some woman there who was the evil spirit of the house. She took the sacred candle; we had a chimney from the large oven, the bread oven. We put the candle on this, because we were afraid to burn something, and we had to recite the Lord's prayer. She said, "I can't do it. In one place I got it confused." And then she had to run downstairs to get the prayer book which used to be granddad's. And then with the help of this book she recited it. Its hard to know if it helped or not.

Well everything seemed alright, but things went from bad to worse. My brother-in-law began to make advances. And three, three times I had to fight him off. And then I saw that there was no point, and on Christmas Eve, I left my father's house wearing my tennis shoes.

We had been planning to light the candles on the Christmas tree, but I just left. When I was on the bridge I looked back, as if I was saying goodbye to the place. I came to Kuldīga, I was transported over the Venta. There I had a girlfriend waiting for me.

2 A

And on the second day at my girlfriend's, she went to deliver some firewood to her mother from the forest and managed to organise a job for me – I went to work there for the winter, helping in the forest, and there I met my husband, who was there for work experience from Ogre. He was also just as poor. His parents had left for America; he himself had fought on the front line, a legionnaire[2]. Well he seemed, it seemed good. Whether it was good or not, I fell in love. I'm not sure about him, but I was besotted. In 1950 our first son was born, on the 18th of November, but my husband was away at school, in the technical college – he hadn't yet finished his studies, he... Oh, in autumn he went back to the technical college. And I had a single mother's benefit of 50 roubles, we were both poor, we were both skint.

Well then my husband finished the technical college – in Ogre, and he was offered a job away in Latgale or Lithuania. He chose Lithuania. But then my sister returned from Siberia, because a *partorgs* [*Communist party's representative at local organizations*] they knew had written a petition. He himself went to Moscow and threw it over the wall of the Kremlin for Stalin. And his request was examined. He argued that his wife had been deported accidentally and my sister got to come home sooner. My mother lived there for seven years, but my sister was home after five. But we were already away in Lithuania. And I had gone home to my sister, who had returned, during that summer while he went to look at where we were going to live. And my sister didn't want me back, because she believed my brother-in-law when he said that I had been very lazy, and I had been bad to him, do you understand? And my sister didn't want me, I don't know if she believed it or not, but she didn't want me there.

[2] He was a soldier in the Latvian Legion. The Legion was organized in 1943 during World War II in German-occupied Latvia by the German military authorities. All Latvian youths of appropriate ages were drafted into the Latvian Legion, even though under international law such mobilization was illegal. (Ed.)

Well then, we went there, in the beginning we lived in Gaure, a very beautiful place in Lithuania, the Nemunas flowed next to it, our house was on top of a hill, we got our own room with its own kitchen, after that we moved to Dacijonai – a village. This was not far from Taurupys, right in the forest. I had no idea this was so risky, risking life and limb, because the forests were full of bandits [*Resistance figthers after the war, called bandits by the soviets*] and one Latvian, another Latvian that had been there, had been beaten unconscious by the bandits. But seeing that my husband had been a legionnaire, was not in the Party, nor in the communist youth orgamization, then. The locals did not denounce him. So we lived in Lithuania for nine years, returned home in 1960.

Ieva Garda: What were the Lithuanians like compared to Latvians?

Marija Lūse: You see, it was like this. They respected us. And I sang in the choir, I sang in an ensemble, and well, I didn't go to work, when I had found myself a job, then... my second son was born there in 1952.

Jolanta Upeniece: What was your husband's name?

Marija Lūse: Aleksandrs Lūsis. And in 1979 he left for America and never came back. In 1981 he sent the divorce papers; [*fairly angry*] – got himself a better life.

For the first time since the divorce in 1981, I am mentioning him for the first time. We have a veto on this, it is a sacred thing, no one speaks about it in my presence – they don't mention him, I don't mention him. It's dead, it's over, I almost lost my mind.

Jolanta Upeniece: Did he go to join his parents in America?

Marija Lūse: He went to his parents and stayed there, because his first wife was there. And it is, it was a shock. Suddenly, you are nothing and you are discarded like an old handbag. I couldn't go anywhere in the forest, we'd been everywhere, his footprints were everywhere, memories were everywhere. The KGB visited us, me and my eldest son. They came to investigate us [*laughs*] – at the same time it was funny – my son came to live next door, and I would visit them often, and one day I was visiting, and my granddaughter who works as a hairdresser and she had braided my hair and I had braids on the nape of my neck and each had a ribbon, and suddenly the doorbell rang. Is there any time? I opened the door – two large men standing there. "Oh, excuse me. I've just been to the hairdresser." He said, "We can see that." I've got braids here.

My son had some forest down Jūrkalne way, he had to give that up, because it was in the zone [*an area that was closed to the public, in this case, the Coast*]. He wasn't allowed to go there – he was a dangerous element, because his father... It's good that, let's say there was a change in the times, otherwise he would have been completely sunk.

If I hadn't had my grandchildren – Agnese and Marcis, you know? When I was there, then I don't know what would have happened. But I tried to imagine how the children would have felt. I have seen, what these people are like. Only that made me hold on. And then my son said, "Start again from scratch, remember the bad things, don't think about the good times." And then slowly. Well, that was it, well then thank you to the *Suitenes* [*members of the Suitu Sievas folklore ansamble*], that I began to sing with the *Suitenes*. I didn't have any more free time, and we travelled to a lot of places, and by then I didn't look too bad either.

NMV 374

ALMA DREIMENE

Interview: Jaunauce, Saldus District, Latvia, 1996
Interviewer: Baiba Bela
Transcribed by Aija Siltāne
Processed for publication by Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa
Translated from Latvian by Marianna Auliciema

Notes on the interview and transcription

"Lifestory in Latvia", an annual field work expedition of volunteer interviewers, took place for the first time in June 1996. A group of 9 interviewers in Zemgale, *near* Vadakste *(in southern Latvia near the Lithuanian border) recorded 41 life stories in one week. Alma Dreimane's story, the transcribed version offered here, is one of these stories.*

Alma Dreimane was born in 1909 in Springis *estate, near Tukums. Her life story speaks to me in a unique way – the narrators' intonation, way of speaking and approach to the world are things that so remind me of my grandmother, who also was an Alma, but born in 1907. Here it must be noted, that in listening to women's life stories of this generation, one can immediately perceive a difference from other generations. This difference is felt not only through the events that the interviewees have lived through – for example, personal experience of World War I, the short-lived Soviet government of Latvia in 1919, or the extraordinary poverty and frugal life of the "new farmers" [*jaunsaimnieki*] in the nascent Republic of Latvia. The difference is revealed primarily through the language of the narrative and in expressive form, which causes the listener to imagine times past when people told each other stories and children fairytales, rather than watching television or listening to the radio. The language of the narrative characterizes generational differences.*

In Alma Dreimane's life story the main theme is deportation to Siberia, which she experienced more than once (first deported in 1941 to 1947 and then again from 1950 to 1957). Regarding childhood, school, and life after marriage, the story is short, highlighted with detailed descriptions of individual events. The account of the arrival of the Russians, the confiscation of their house, travel to deportation and life in exile is detailed, striking, and developed. The narrative is shaped not only by events, but also by observations of people she met, the relationships between them, daily routines, and living conditions in Siberia. She tells the story of her life after returning from exile in a few sentences.

The narrative is shaped by detailed episodes, but individual phases of life are characterized in general, in a few sentences. The interviewee has a good command of language, she plays out many dialogues, speaks with great expression, short sentences. The speed of her speech and intonation change continuously, which turns the narrative into an esthetic performance.

Listening to this story now, I see serious mistakes that I made – I interfered in the narrative too much, often interrupting the interviewee by asking supplementary questions and too often expressing my interest aloud (hmm., ah! etc). Viewed in terms of biographical interviewing methodology, the interview may be an example for novice interviewers of how not to interview.

It is extremely interesting to listen to the interview, but much more difficult to reproduce this in written form. There are different approaches to the transcription of life story interviews and the formation of the written text. The main problem is that it is almost impossible to adequately reproduce the spoken word in written text. In the case of this interview, the basic principle was to transcribe the entire conversation in full – word by word, taking note of pauses, filler words (for example, hmm, eh, mm.) and in certain places the interviewee's intonation is noted. The attempt has been made to reproduce conversational speech, trying to find a compromise between traditional written text and the extremely detailed approach of narrative analysis (in which each sentence is written separately on its own line, noting the pace of speech and intonation for each and so on), the result of which the text is difficult for the reader to discern if he or she is not well versed in the specific

coding system used. Still, even in this case the text is rather difficult to read and requires the reader to immerse him/herself into the text. By doing this, however, the reader has the opportunity to observe how the life story takes shape through the mutual relationship and collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee. In addition this reveals the great extent to which the formation and understanding of concepts occurs according to principles different in conversational speech than in the written text. Unfortunately some problems remain unaddressed, such as denoting the changes in the pace of speech and the reproduction of intonation changes – the changes in the speed of speech and intonation are essential for showing the interviewee's emotions and therefore are particularly important to adequately understand what is being said. I tried to indicate the most expressive moments of the narrative with brackets and italics. Nevertheless I must admit, that this method was only partially successful because the narrative is so rich with different intonations that distinguishing between all the nuances proved to be too difficult.

I would like to express my thanks to Aija Siltane for recreating precisely the conversational language of the interview into the written text. I worked with the text to indicate in written form the different means of expression (pauses, comments regarding the interview process itself, the interviewee's intonations and stresses). I provide the result as a work-in-progress, the positive and negative aspects of which still require serious scholarly discussion.

Key to notations:

Use of punctuation (.,!?) according to traditional, common usage;

An indent is used to indicate those questions the interviewer posed before the interviewee had finished speaking;

.. – if the sentence is left incomplete;

... – a pause, where the number of periods indicates the length of the pause;

<u>yes</u> – underlined words and phrases indicate those that the interviewee particularly stressed;

( ) – parentheses around the interviewee's words that explain the situation or the subject of conversation or is distinct from the rest of the sentence because of intonation or pace of speech;

[ ] – brackets indicate comments regarding the interview process itself or the interviewee's intonation.

1A

Baiba Bela: You decide what to talk about. Because I would gladly hear about your life even from childhood, from your first memories.

Alma Dreimane: My first memories?

Baiba Bela: Yes.

Alma Dreimane:.....You know, those first memories, I can say, began rather early, because I, well, grew up in a family where my father loved to read the newspaper aloud so that Mamma could hear, and well, me too. So I, as they say, noticed everything. But a real, real memory maybe of 1919, when all those terrible things began in that Latvia.

Baiba Bela: You remember that, too, already that time then?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. I remember that <u>very</u> well. By the way, we lived (my father was a blacksmith) on the estate.

Baiba Bela: Here on the Jaunauce estate or a different one?

Alma Dreimane: I beg your pardon?

Baiba Bela: Here on Jaunauce's?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. I'm not even in Jaunauce, I am living without, how can I put this, living here with my kids without being officially registered here because my home is in Biksti in Dobele district. But then we lived, in 1919, on the Springis estate. My father was a blacksmith.

Baiba Bela: Springis estate – that is...Where is it located approximately? I have heard of it.

Alma Dreimane: You know, I think it is, maybe in Tukums...In Tukums district.

Baiba Bela: Tukums district, yes.

Alma Dreimane: Tukums district, yes, yes, yes. And then we already...Biksti was also near Tukums district, when...And then one morning – how horrible! Father comes in and says, "They took the estate master away." And the day before we had already heard, that the neighbor...there, where the manager, not the owner, has been taken, made to dig a pit, and ..m..shot or fell...

Baiba Bela: He had to dig the pit himself too?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, had to dig the pit himself. And now Father horrified came in, he says, "And our master has also been taken away." Well, and that was not the end of it..

Baiba Bela: You had a good relationship with the master?

Alma Dreimane: I beg your pardon?

Baiba Bela: You had a good relationship with the master?

Alma Dreimane: No, why would we, why would we. But he had not done anything bad. Yes, yes. How could a blacksmith have any kind of relationship with the master. Yes. And so he left... And yes – Someone was appointed (the master had no say now), a boss was appointed from those communists who had arrived. And, to keep a long story short, with that everything changed. And he, well, was taken to the headquarters, wherever those headquarters were. Taken there. And now Dad went to see him. What had he done to us? We could manage with him ourselves. We leave. And now there, in a word, some men came too and are going to fetch their master.

Baiba Bela: O!

Alma Dreimane: Yes. [*laughs*] They go there and "Well, we have come for him. We will deal with him ourselves." And.. m.. in a word, my Father is overtaken with horror, that this person will be shot and killed for nothing. Well, it's fine. Now they mumble and... m..., "We can't...m...just turn him over to you on demand. But we promise, that in three days time he will be home." Well, ok. In three days he has returned. yes. So those men, those farmhands, it must be said, saved him. I have a clear, clear memory of this.

BaibaBela: And how old were you at this time?

Alma Dreimane: I was quite a little lady – 10 years old.

Baiba Bela: O!

Alma Dreimane: I was born in 1909.

Baiba Bela: 1909, yes?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. So...Then that was somehow liquidated – the estate. And then they came to Upe estate. That is now in Bikste district. Well and now it is considered Dobele district, then it was... And so I grew up there and went to school.

Baiba Bela: Yes? Perhaps you could talk about what the living conditions were like there. Were you the only daughter in the family?

Alma Dreimane: I had a brother too, there were two of us. My brother – he died at 19 of meningitis.

Baiba Bela: That is surely tragic.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And so I was left alone.

Baiba Bela: And then on that Upe estate your father was also a blacksmith, worked as a blacksmith?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, he...he..I must say, until his death he no more..He did not go anywhere else. There he... 1920 came and, in a word, he had all during the war – World War I – all those years he had.. in a word, thus... I can say, that I am... I've skipped ahead. In 1914, when the war began, well, yes, I was five years old, when on the first day Father already left for the war to Tukums. And then that morning, that morning is still in my memory, when the sun [*diminutive*] early so (the first time, I saw the sun creeping up)... And the carter, well, who with a horse (of course people traveled with horses), and taken... yes, my father will be taken away. My brother is three years younger than I, he is in my grandmother's arms. I am woken up and I come out and my feet are cold. I had crouched down and, how can I put this, tucked my nightgown under my feet, so that I would not be cold, and I crouched, and I watched how they said

goodbye. It was hard for Dad. I just remember – he told grandma, "Go inside with that child." And.. Yes. Well and so it ended. He left, he was gone all those years, those war...

Baiba Bela: And how did you get along, when Mamma had to care for you two little ones all by herself?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know, she had a father, also a blacksmith. And he left his position, and he came to live with us. And so we lived quite normally.

Baiba Bela: With Mamma's parents?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. And they... We lived normally. And then that... in 1941 I remember that I crouched on that road and my feet were cold because in on June 14, 1941 in the morning an old man was left in the road... [*Her voice shakes, and she speaks in a very serious tone*]. And I left... So everything in life repeats itself.

Baiba Bela: Yes.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. In 1914 I crouched on that same place on the road and he stood in his leather blacksmith's apron... He was left on the road... Yes... And I left... And so little by little that childhood went by, in a word, all those school years passed by normally and...

Baiba Bela: Wouldn't you like to tell me a little bit more about the school?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know, I finished elementary school there.

Baiba Bela: *Upe* estate?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. That is Zebrene's... we had the first four grades [*diminutive*] in Upe school and... em.. the other two in Zebrene. That was further – there in Zebrene castle. And... em... then I went to Apgulde agricultural school.

Baiba Bela: And why did you go to the agricultural school?

Alma Dreimane: Well.. m.. you know, I did not feel... In a word, I wanted to be close to the land. That was what I liked. That was what I liked, and no one forced me, I went to the agricultural school.

Baiba Bela: But there was probably some kind of tuition? Then your parents could help you get this education...

Alma Dreimane: There was something like that. You know, I don't remember exactly, what it was like. I guess I had to pay something, but that I don't remember, that's not in my memory..... And then after that agricultural school... Well, Dad wanted me to still somewhere... Well, in a word, I could not yet begin life on my own.

Baiba Bela: But you yourself also wanted to continue your studies? Probably.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And so I went to Riga (I have relatives in Riga), to Miss Tilta's Arts Academy, to that arts school.. still.

Baiba Bela: What year was that?

Alma Dreimane: That was in 1927, 1928, yes.

Baiba Bela: Mh. Miss Tilta? And where was it located.

Alma Dreimane: On Krisjana Barona street. You know, I don't remember the exact address anymore. I remember the place.

Baiba Bela: The address is not so important. It seems to me, I would like to hear more about this, because I myself finished the High School of Applied Arts. So I would be interested to hear, what did you study in that arts school and how did you like it?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know, we smithed, we wove, we knitted. That .. that.. theory we did not have.

Baiba Bela: Was there also drawing?

Alma Dreimane: Drawing, yes, yes. The artist Ansis Cirulis taught us drawing. [*happily, with pride*]

Baiba Bela: And he probably also taught composition?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes.

Baiba Bela: Oh, how interesting! How do you remember him? Because I, let's say, know his work. But interesting, that you personally knew him.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. [*happily*]

Baiba Bela: What was he like as a person? Do you remember that , too?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. He was interesting. Not particularly big in size. Yes. And we wove carpets, by the way, where that, well, the King of Sweden...? Who came in 1928. There was a carpet at the station.. m... laid out – and that was our cloth. And the artist Madernieks to us... According to his patterns.. And he came to examine us, whether we... e... Is it recording?

Baiba Bela: Yes.

Alma Dreimane: Turn it off for a little bit.

Baiba Bela: You don't want to talk about it? [*The tape recorder is turned off because the interviewee does not want something recorded.*]

Alma Dreimane:... such a detail.

Baiba Bela: And did you yourselves dye the wool for the carpets?

Alma Dreimane: No. We used the already dyed.

Baiba Bela: The already dyed.

Alma Dreimane: The dyed, yes. We adjusted them. Miss Tilta provided them for us and then we according to... I forget.. well, according to estimates, how much we needed.

Baiba Bela: As you needed, right?

Alma Dreimane: As we needed it, yes, yes, that's how we used it.

Baiba Bela: And was the arts school in the evenings or during the day?

Alma Dreimane: During the day, during the day, yes, yes, yes. I don't remember, one had to pay something there too. I don't remember the fee. But it was a two-year school.

Baiba Bela: You were there both years?

Alma Dreimane:....

Baiba Bela: You completed both years of study there?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And then we... we there... there in that time we embroidered those traditional shawls. Those kinds of things we did. I'm saying, that the theoretical...

Baiba Bela: You made hand crafted art? [*speaking at the same time as the interviewee*]

Alma Dreimane: ... instruction we did not have, but only all, as they say, all practical.

Baiba Bela: Practical. But valuable. [*speaking at the same time*]

Alma Dreimane: Those artists both of them...Cirulis taught us drawing and Madernieks drew those...

Baiba Bela: Patterns...

Alma Dreimane: We to him... In a word, if he according to... a teacher, some kind of director, ...an order, I don't know. He drew those patterns. Whether they... elsewhere, well I guess elsewhere they did not, because once there was... m... the National League had displayed a window curtain in the window – a very beautiful one. And we had thought to copy it, and we were shooed away from that window. [*serious tone*]

Baiba Bela: So not just anyone was allowed!

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes! [*happily*] So there also they had their own...

Baiba Bela: Relationship...

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And so I finished there.

Baiba Bela: But you also had to make some kind of thesis project or were you simply given some kind of diploma after it? What happened?

Alma Dreimane: No. You know, they looked at what you had done. So there was nothing separate. Nothing, yes, yes, yes.

Baiba Bela: Well, that, which you had been working on the whole time.

Alma Dreimane: According to that. For example the artist Cirulis evaluated, what he... well, how we...

Baiba Bela: Drew.

Alma Dreimane: In a word, they graded, how we... they gave grades according to how each of us had done the work. And I don't remember about the weaving in detail. There there was no individual evaluation, because we in a row...

Baiba Bela: You wove together?

Alma Dreimane: In a row, yes, sitting. There 2-3, as we were assigned... And we wove. That is, we drilled. So.

Baiba Bela: And you lived in Riga with your relatives?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. I lived...

Baiba Bela: Did you have your own room?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. I lived together with my aunt, we lived together. She had 2 sons. He... that one son slept with us, the little one, still with my aunt.

Baiba Bela: In the same room?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. He slept together with my aunt, his mamma. And she would still scold him, that he is dirty, despite the fact that in the evenings she washed him, and would compare him to me, that she could go months without changing my bed linens, yes, but I must say, just rinse them out. But she had to change her own every week. But he had apparently taken it into his head to make my bed also like his. Our beds were, well, in such a small room, with the ends together.

Baiba Bela: Next to each other, or?

Alma Dreimane: No.

Baiba Bela: With the ends together?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. The room was so long, so that the beds fit like that. And so now one evening he comes to sleep with me. My aunt does not say anything either.

Baiba Bela: How old was he?

Alma Dreimane: Well, some 4, 5.

Baiba Bela: Ah! Really small.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And so now it's fine. The two of us lie down, and he comes to me. My aunt does not say anything, but smiles a little oddly. And gets undressed, and goes to bed. As soon as she turns off the light, so my fellow sleeper disappears.

Baiba Bela: Went back. [*laughs*]

Alma Dreimane: Went back to his mother, yes. [*happily*] Nothing came of that. Yes, and so I finished there, and returned home. At home during this time, well yes, the period of Latvia had begun and the land was distributed, and my father as a artisan received 2 hectares.

Baiba Bela: But also something because he had fought?

Alma Dreimane: No. You know, the details I don't... Not for the fighting, but those dwellers, estate dwellers, for example, he did not have a "new farm", but artisan's land, since he did not know much about agriculture. And so I had plenty of work...

Baiba Bela: So you on the land [*diminutive*] then....?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. I returned home. And so, when I finished, I did not look for a job anywhere. Those two hectares of my father's were enough for me.

Baiba Bela: And what was your favorite job?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know, something I liked..... to plant, weed, clear out..

Baiba Bela: You liked that you saw the fruits of your labor?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And that that is to my credit.. Yes, yes, yes! [*with pride, happily*] Well in my free time I read a great deal.

Baiba Bela: Did you have books at home or did you borrow them from the library, too?

Alma Dreimane: You know, I borrowed them from the library. At home we had books, too. But with those books we had...For example, when the war started, well, in 1914, we had many books. I learned to read very early in general, no one taught me. But I, sitting in my father's lap.... he read newspapers and I, sitting there in his lap, asked, "What is that, what is that?" And so I learned to read. No one sat with me and took...

Baiba Bela: Individually?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And so I early – I had not yet started school, when I learned to read novels. But in 1915 we had to leave our home. The Germans had set up a shooting range there.

Baiba Bela: From Springis estate?

Alma Dreimane: From Upe estate.

Baiba Bela: Ah. From Upe estate.

Alma Dreimane: Then we were already living at Upe estate. Yes. So what could we take with us?... A little bag of flour, a little bag of barley, some clothing. Who thought about those books? In a word, it did not occur to mama...

Baiba Bela: But you thought, that you would return.

Alma Dreimane: Well yes, well yes. We'd return. Yes. Yes. Only, as they say, we were forced to leave. So when we came back, there was nothing – everything was burned up, or something.

Baiba Bela: Or destroyed.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And so... yes. Yes. And so my childhood passed. And then I started to work at home.

Baiba Bela: And you had time at home to weave or do something of the hand crafts that you had learned in that arts school still a considerable amount during these years?

Alma Dreimane: Ah! Yes, yes. Well I weaved there, as they say, weaved window curtains, made them for myself. Yes. And towels, and such.

Baiba Bela: But then you tried to weave interesting patterns into those towels and curtains, yes?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Such, such patterns we had, in a word, such that I had learned, such... Yes. And so I... yes.... m... in 1928..... nearby there was an unfortunate event – there... a .... an itinerant boy killed a mother..... In a word, he had come and asked for something to eat, give him something, with the idea, that he has 5 Lats, and that he will give her the money, and she'll give him change. And so he, as they say, will get to the money. But she feeds him and does not take the money. And what exactly happened, I don't know. But so there... a farmer without... We already knew each other. And so I went there, got married... To save that person... [*serious*]

Baiba Bela: Were there also any kids?

Alma Dreimane: A grown son, older than I. One son, yes. The daughter had already married, gone to establish her own life. And so I went there and we started to farm... Sta..

Baiba Bela: And how much older was that husband than you? Was that man much older than you?

Alma Dreimane: 10 years.

Baiba Bela: 10 years.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. There were 10 years between us.

Baiba Bela: And how could he already have had a grown son?

Alma Dreimane: No, no, no. The son was the farmer.

Baiba Bela: Ah.

Alma Dreimane: The son was the farmer. He had died, the father had died. The son was the farmer. He was 10 years older than I.

Baiba Bela: And what was the wedding like? Maybe about that...?

Alma Dreimane: You know, no, the wedding was quiet, considering that such a tragedy had taken place there. No, no wedding... We just went and got registered, and.. and had dinner with our families, and that was it. Yes.

Baiba Bela: And it was not in a church?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. We went to the minster's estate... yes... The minister was even happy about it, if only there would be many weddings like it, many marriages.

Baiba Bela: In what way?

Alma Dreimane: I don't know, but he liked it.

Baiba Bela: You probably had a harmonious relationship?

Alma Dreimane: When we went just the 4 of us.

Baiba Bela: Without excessive ostentation, in a word. [*happily*]

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Without ostentation. Well yes, and so we lived.

Baiba Bela: And what was the name of your home?

Alma Dreimane: *"Jungaini"* in Zebrene district.

Baiba Bela: And how large was it?

Alma Dreimane: I'm sorry?

Baiba Bela: How large was your home?

Alma Dreimane: 50 hectares.

Baiba Bela: And how did you manage the farming?

Alma Dreimane: You know, quite well, we got along quite well. And there was, well, those... Well yes, when I went, that fall, there had been a wet summer. And we could not harvest anything. All the grain, that is, rye, wheat, everything sprouted; and now the time came to bake bread. How are you going to bake it – everyone who had already begun baking, they cried, that it could not be baked. Well, as they say, it would not turn out.

Baiba Bela: Wet.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And so my assistant, an older woman, and I start to cry, now we, too, will have to bake. "What are you worried about. Is this the first time I've baked bread?" Yes. And .. he.. how people are picky.. and there was also a man from Latgale, living there. And yes, now bake the bread. What else – it turns out the same way as for the rest of the people. The loaves [*diminutive*] are nice on top, inside it's mushy – there's no gluten. Yes. And now that man was scolding me. He says, "Why are you giving up? Can't you bake it yourself?" I say, "Oh! But she is experienced. What can I do?" – "Bake it yourself!" [*quickly and boldly*] And he taught me.

Baiba Bela: That man?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, that man. He says, "And so. In the evening make the dough and then in the morning add more water (when the dough has risen)." You probably are not familiar with this...

Baiba Bela: No, I a little... I have seen how to bake. I was in a home, where the hostess baked some bread especially for us.

Alma Dreimane: Aha, yes, yes. And in the morning add, as much as you think is necessary. And then knead, let it rise again (let it rise twice) and in the evening add the starter. And he says, "You add water as much as you need. In the morning do not add it. And in the morning add about a plate of grated potatoes." And you know, what beautiful bread! Yes. [*happily*] And so. And that's how I started, and that's how we lived until 1941. I had a son – he died. Of...

Baiba Bela: Oh, how did that happen?

Alma Dreimane: Of intestinal problems.

Baiba Bela: And how did you...? Was it not awfully difficult to experience this?

Alma Dreimane: What?

Baiba Bela: Well, when... your son's death.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. It was hard for us, it was very hard for us..... [*sighs*] But well..

Interviewee's son: Hello! [*He sees, that we are talking and leaves.*]

Baiba Bela: Hello! Oh, I scared him away with my machine, but it isn't anything bad.

Alma Dreimane: And then I had a daughter, and she grew up.

Baiba Bela: And when was your daughter born?

Alma Dreimane:.....

Baiba Bela: Now you have to think...

Alma Dreimane: Mjaa.....

Baiba Bela: Was she born in the mid or late 1930s, the daughter?

Alma Dreimane: No. In 1925.

Baiba Bela: 35.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, in 1923 my son was born and in 1925. my daughter. And... yes... then she grew.

Baiba Bela: 1925 or 1935?

Alma Dreimane: 1925. [*with certainty*]

Baiba Bela: Yes?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, 1925... She was already going to school, when I was deported. And so we lived until 1940.

[*The interviewee's son offers tea or coffee. The interviewer chooses tea.*]

Baiba Bela: But when you were pregnant with your daughter [*diminutive*], was there someone on the farm who helped you? A farm hand or someone? It was a big farm after all.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. A woman and a man.

Baiba Bela: Only during the summer or also in winter?

Alma Dreimane: All year, yes, yes..... And so..

Baiba Bela: Mh. All year. And how did you get along with them? Did you all eat together at one table?

Alma Dreimane: At one, yes. All together at one table. They had their own room. In the last years it was a married couple.

Baiba Bela: And they were with you a longer time, the married couple?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And in 1940, when the land was taken away from us, we were left with only 30...

Baiba Bela: They took it away immediately?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. They left 30 hectares, 20... Well he took just 10 hectares. Well, they had already arranged with the husband, where they measured off that piece for them. And what did we have...

Baiba Bela: But what are your memories of the entrance of the Russians in 1940?

And how...? Yes...

Alma Dreimane: They came, that is, through... From Lithuania, they came... Our house was separate. Our house was not on the way. But my father's house, it was exactly on the major road Riga-Liepaja, a big highway; exactly on the edge of the road. And so the whole queue went right by. And now there was some... My father was horrified about it, about... how they acted. For example, the tanks ran out of fuel... well, so, what is that called, a vessel drives up, which they take out, and where they pour in. They say, "Pour in one bucket, a second, a third, and they pour in about a liter, and the rest – splat – into the ditch." And that is why my father says, "That Russian has still not changed. What he's like, he's like." Now he laughs on that Midsummer's Day... We were no longer allowed to celebrate Midsummer's, but quietly.... But we brewed beer, made cheese, piragi...

Baiba Bela: Everyone had prepared, it was still Midsummer's after all.

Alma Dreimane: The piragi were baked. And now one of the tanks had falled behind (the queue had gone ahead), and this one now was driving by, driving by. So, he wants a drink. It was apparent, that they were ordered to not drink anything but water... so it's not poisoned, yes. Now he comes in and asks for a

drink. My father, of course, as an old soldier (by the way, when he was in the service, he served during the Japanese war, so this war was long for him, this... this, this yes... service period and then the war of 1914). And now, "No, no." He only... He offers him, well, piragi and beer. "No, no." Now that made my father angry. He said, "What are you thinking? I, an old soldier, am going to poison you to death. After all you are also a soldier. You...you're here to enjoy yourself? You are a soldier." Yes, and so the boy understood him and... Yes.

Baiba Bela: Your father then knew Russian well since he had served in the Russian army?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And so. So, my husband apparently thought too much.. m.. thought in Latvian. 1941 came... March. They came, and threw us out of our house.

Baiba Bela: And how did that happen? You could talk a bit more about that?

Alma Dreimane: You know, they came at the beginning of the year, and inventoried everything... animals...

Baiba Bela: They took an inventory of everything.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. They registered everything. And then in March (I don't remember the date) they came... an entire... entire commission.

Baiba Bela: In the morning, yes?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, in the morning. And now they counted everything again, if something has not disappeared and nothing has... no... no... And it's fine. And were are we to go? We'll be given a house somewhere, a place to live, I must say, not exactly thrown out on the street. But some were, some...

Baiba Bela: They said, that they were throwing you out of here?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. But some were...

Baiba Bela: And why did they... How did they say this? How did they explain this?

Alma Dreimane: That they had to set up a horse machine... they established such centers in the district – horse, farm machine centers. For example, now the new farmers – they have neither horses nor.. nor machines, nothing. They could go there and borrow some. Yes. So what. My husband says, "No, they will not take more from us. We'll go to Riga." And it's fine. What do we have. And so we go, move in with my father.

Baiba Bela: And so they allowed you to pack all those things? What happened in the move?

Alma Dreimane: No, nothing. We were given bread for three months, that is, flour, grain, and what else... The amounts I don't remember, how much. And... and in the end, well... But my now my husband says... Ah! About the rooms, about, about the furniture inside. He says, "What?! But the Stalin constitution says that when a home is nationalized, then only what is outside..., but what is inside we can keep." And the executive committee head called to Tukums, is he allowed to, is he allowed to let us take the rooms, the furniture inside. So, it turns out, that he can, that we can. And so we... what we had, inside, we could take that with us. Yes, and then it was interesting. Now I had to tell them how many linens – so how many sheets and how many... and right then I had washed the laundry. I say, "There on top of the drying house I still have clean laundry." "We already inventoried that." We already inventoried that. Fine.

Baiba Bela: And those who registered, those communists, were they local people?

Alma Dreimane: They were our own district people.

Baiba Bela: And how did you know them? From before this?

Alma Dreimane: But of course. You know, one person... Yes,... the same, those boys.

Baiba Bela: And they had been the former farmhands? So, did you know, that they had been communists before this?

Alma Dreimane: No. You know, they were boys like boys are. They were like, how should I say.... I was just surprised, when they came. They walked around in simple clothes. But now they had dressed up – with fine boots, fine coats. And so... And so now they allow us to bring what we had inside with us. And now.... Ah! Yes, about the clothing. Now, when they come in, now everthing has been taken over, and now

there is only the room, it must be surveyed. My husband's suits. "How many suits does your husband have?" I say, "The one for manure spreading, the one for sowing..." – "Well, if you list them like that, then the good ones will stay." I say, "In *"Jungaini"* one does not need a good suit. There one needs only the one for manure spreading and sowing. Good ones are not needed there." Now...

Baiba Bela: But there was also a good suit?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know, what – a uniform of the Home Guard and a suit for going out.

Baiba Bela: Ah! He was a Home Guard member.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And the laundry. I say, "I do not own anything that is storebought. I myself have woven, spun, and woven it." I say, "And in *"Jungaini"* there are linen fields, in *"Jungaini"* there are sheep. Please, sow, weave, spin, and sheer the sheep, and..." [*with much emotion*] And so, we... And then later the policeman said, that we had received it (and my husband did not say a word, he paced, with his hands in his pockets, and smiled – but that smile still makes me shiver today), and so. And now, since we had gotten so much, well, as they say, all of it – clothes, all the laundry, in a word, everything, that was in the house, and furniture, that we with our behavior...Well, I was the one who asked, he did not open his mouth. And so we left.

Baiba Bela: You packed everything into the wagon, right?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes, we were allowed..... as much as we could.... And he was so forthcoming, that executive committee boss. He said to me... m..: "And if you move from the smithy, if you go to Riga, then you let me know, and I'll give you wagons to get to the station. Well, I don't know, if from this house, but... m..."

Baiba Bela: But in general.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, but in general he'll give me some. And fine, if it is so. Now.... well... we live peacefully.

Baiba Bela: In the smithy, right?

Alma Dreimane: We should have cried, but be laughed a bit, that we don't have to do anything at all – we sit, we sleep, we read. We don't have anything to do.

Baiba Bela: That was in the winter of 1941?

Alma Dreimane: No, that was in the spring of 1941.

Baiba Bela: In the spring.

Alma Dreimane: In the spring, yes. In March we were thrown out of the house. Yes. But those who knew a bit more (maybe we won't get into that), one and another stops by secretly and scolds my husband, "What are staying here for? Do you want them to take you away some night? Leave." Well and so he left for Riga.

Baiba Bela: And you? You stayed there?

Alma Dreimane: I stayed, yes. Well what for... I thought...

Baiba Bela: Well yes. There was not real place to stay in Riga...

Alma Dreimane: I chopped branches and did whatever...

Baiba Bela: Whatever was needed.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, whatever was needed. In a word, I took care of... I helped my mother take care of herself. And bit by bit, bit by bit... But now my husband (well, I went now and then), my husband says, "Now there are empty apartments." And well it is cramped living with the relatives. My husband says, "I'll get an apartment and you'll join me." Fine. And so we left it – there was plenty of time. It was time for the big spring chores on the farm. Fine. Now June 14 came. June 14 came, and the day before my husband had relatives who lived in a house a bit away from us, and the relative comes, she says that she wants to go to Jelgava tomorrow. Couldn't I help the mothers take care of the animals and.. Yes, fine. And I go that evening, but you know, that night I can not sleep – some kind... some kind of bad thoughts overtake me, nightmares. And so in the morning... Yes, and at 3 am I go to the station – the husband was going to take his wife. And I say, "I'm going to go. Go, sleep some more." Well, I have to go to the fields to

plow. I say, "Sleep some more. I'll take her to the station." I go, come home, take care of the animals. The mothers chase me to bed, "You have not slept the entire night since 3 am. Go, get some sleep." I can't sleep. No. I'll clean the kitchen and straighten up, so they don't have to... Now someone comes...

Baiba Bela: And you were in the blacksmith's house, or at the neighbors?

Alma Dreimane: At the neighbors.

Baiba Bela: You're at the neighbors, yes, mh.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. That is there at our relatives. And now someone comes in – our farmhand is there with them, but he now he was an active worker. He says, "You have to come home. You have to go to Tukums - to sign some kind of documents," that boy tells me. Yes... And now.. Well, if I have to come, I have to come. We come. And he, according to all the rules, follows behind me, rather than next to me. [*with emphasis*]. There again at another nearby neighbor's a boy, my schoolmate, too, he is working now is plowing. He comes to the edge of the road. And he says, "Where are you going to go, Almin?" [*diminutive*] I say, "I don't know, wherever they're taking me. Either to prison or they'll shoot me dead." His arms drop down to his sides. And he says, "What are you talking about, what are you talking about," the one behind me growls. But see how I.... [*chuckles*] But most importantly that move – he follows me from behind. Yes. I see on the road – a full car is waiting. I am the last. Well, we go in, so that I the... the things.... I see there are also small children.

Baiba Bela: In the car?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. Now I... I don't understand, I don't understand... what to take, what not.

Baiba Bela: And you're told, that you're only going to Tukums to sign some documents, nothing else?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And that Russian says to me, for me to take all of my things, that Russian officer.

Baiba Bela: What does he say? He does not say, that you will be taken far away?

Alma Dreimane: That Latvian, he – no. Yes. And I now, what... Now he says, "Take it." I take a pillow, a blanket, and one sheet. He says....

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Alma Dreimane: He says, "Take all of your bedding." As if I am going to take it all. Yes. Now [*diminutive*]...

Baiba Bela: And some kind of clothing? Or nothing?

Alma Dreimane: You know, I went with that, which I had on my back.

Baiba Bela: And only that – a blanket, sheet, right? And something...

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. And now, well, now that I had moved there recently, after all I had something or another left unpacked, for example, a large basket with balls of yarn. I dug around, dug around until I finally took a little ball of wool. For what, why did I take that, I don't know to this day. Well, and now I see that there are those children there. I say, "Do I have to bring the child with me, the girl?"

Baiba Bela: How old is she?

Alma Dreimane: The Russian says, "Whatever you want to do." And you know, it occurred to me, that when we were thrown out of that house, well, they gave us bread for 3 months. And I ask for enough for three people. He says, "What do you mean for 3 people?" A woman [*diminutive*] had come for a visit. "That woman [*diminutive*] is also in your care?" I say, "No, I have a daughter." Then I thought, that he was going to crush me. [*The dialogue continues with great expression*] Step by step he comes closer to me, "You have a daughter? A daughter you have? Where is she, your daughter?" I say, "What?! During the school year in the winter she is with my mother. It is closer to her school." – "Oh, a daughter," he says, "as you like." Well, of course, I decided not to take her, to go by myself.

Baiba Bela: That was probably difficult to do – to make that decision?

Alma Dreimane: She got scarlet fever. And that's how she passed away. [*very pensive*] And one young couple... in the car there was a small child [*diminutive*], he came from there, well, he had taken some little thing... "I am bringing my most precious item – that little child." Well, both also remained there.

Baiba Bela: The couple and the...?

Alma Dreimane: No, the husband. He was taken away to a prison camp, and the little child died right there still in Krasnojarsk. And so we started to travel.

Baiba Bela: And did you also take some kind of food with you, some kind of bread [*diminutive*], or...?

Alma Dreimane: You know, just about nothing. I don't remember about the bread. You know, a little bit of smoked meat, a little piece, and I guess a slice of bread also, what else...

Baiba Bela: And what happened after than? Did that car take you to the Tukums station?

Alma Dreimane: To Tukums, with the car to Tukums. There were soldier-guards, two or so on each side with weapons, so that we...

Baiba Bela: Don't escape, yes.

Alma Dreimane: They boasted... In the begining they had begun already at 4 in the morning. That was awful – people are in bed, they go in, put a gun on the bed and make them get up and get dressed. Yes. And the village secretary had wanted to save me. When they arrived at the vill... again, well, they had to go to me, too. She had said, "She is not home. She went to Riga." The fellow, who came to get me, had said, "No. I saw her last night." Yes. And that's how it ended. And we started our travel. Yes.

Baiba Bela: Approximately how many of you were in the cattle car?

Alma Dreimane: You know [*sighs*], I don't know, but there was a big group of us. There were many of us – women with children. And then one...

Baiba Bela: And the men were separated from you immediately?

Alma Dreimane: Only to Tukums. They were in a separate... In a word, we don't know, where they went. And now...Then an old officer, who helped his wife and children carry the packages, he did not take anything for himself. Men, some older ones, the majority of them kept the things with them, because for his wife it would be difficult (those who had even taken something with them at all).

Baiba Bela: Why did they do that? Were they told, that they'd meet at the end of the trip? Why did they take the things?

Alma Dreimane: Nothing, nothing...

Baiba Bela: They did not say anything at all?

Alma Dreimane: That was our idea, that that was what would be, that he would just the families inside, and us... And when he brought the packages in, he said, "We're going to travel far." He took off his wedding ring, took out his watch, took out... well, everything, that he had – some documents, that he had in his pocket, his wallet...

Baiba Bela: And gave it away to his wife, right?

Alma Dreimane: He gave it all away to his wife, yes. He was the only one who knew. And an old policeman, a couple – also old people, he took everything, so that it would be easier for his wife, he took everything away and the entire trip the woman says to me, she says, "The 3 of us will live together. You will be my daughter. You and the old guy will work, and I will take care of us." [*expressively*] And when we arrived at the end, then, it turns out, that those, who can not work, are not given bread. Only, for example, if I have a mother, or I have children, then those get non-worker support, the bit of bread.

Baiba Bela: What about those who are alone?

Alma Dreimane: Those elderly who are all alone, they did not get anything. And so then we took on... For example, I took on that woman as my mother, and... still others took on complete strangers so... so...

Baiba Bela: So they did not starve to death.

Alma Dreimane: So that they did not starve do death, yes.

Baiba Bela: But what was it like, you were taken where with the train?

Alma Dreimane: We traveled bit by bit. We did not know that the war had started. When... We found that out only in Moscow.

Baiba Bela: About the beginning of the war?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. And how did we find out?... We arrived in Russia, and started to wait for a long time in the stations, because the army echelons, with soldiers were traveling. Well, when they were going past, we had to wait, until... that kind of system they have there. And in Moscow a completely empty echelon was waiting, and one man was walking along it... well, doing something there. And now he is standing and looking at us. Well, the doors are opened for us, we can go out. And... now he takes out a newspaper and shows us. Shows us the newspaper and folds it very small, as small as... small enough to stick into a pack [*diminutive*] of cigarettes. He sticks it into the cigarette pack [*diminutive*], still pokes around a bit and comes out. Walking across the tracks to our...

Baiba Bela: Guards?

Alma Dreimane: Throws it on the ground.

Baiba Bela: The cigarette pack?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, he throws the empty pack [*diminutive*] on the ground. Fine. Now one.. m.. a little girl, but one who already can talk and who understands. She brings her to pee on the.. Carries her to the pack [*diminutive*] and now holds her... and says, "Marit, take the little package. You see, there is a little package." And that's how we found out, that it had begun... That it had begun... We were happy – now surely soon, soon, now surely soon, soon we'll get home. Yes. And that's how we traveled to Krasnojarsk. We had not washed ourselves the entire time, water only for a drink. [*sadly*]

Baiba Bela: And what about the water? They gave it to you?

Alma Dreimane: A bucket of boiled water from the station was brought and some kind of thick porridge. In a word, a bucket of water and a bucket of the thick porridge. But we did not like it and .. e.. so. Well, some had eaten something else, what they had brought... And then in Krasnojarsk we were unloaded there by.. by some kind of barracks on pile-dwellings. At the time there was great flooding, they were acidic water floods. There was still mud. And... e... yes. And so we healthily washed ourselves in the river. And then for some days there we... Yes, and now all of a sudden one morning we are told that...there happens to be a little building, and a person with papers is sitting inside. And now we have to sign, we have to go sign, that we have <u>voluntarily</u> left for twenty years. And the thought flashes through my head, "Ah! then I will be 52 years old, when I will return home." Yes, so, traveling there, I did not even know, for how many years... And... e.. Yes, and...

Baiba Bela: And what happened? Did you sign the paper?

Alma Dreimane: No. And I had a fit, "What is this!" To those I knew I say, "On what basis may I sign, when I myself did not drive!" And they started alphabetically. The first day they <u>did not get to</u> the letter D. And with that this issue ended. On the second day no longer...

Baiba Bela: They no longer needed...

Alma Dreimane: No, no, no. [*Both she and the interviewer laugh*] They could immediately return, that's what I thought. [*they both laugh*] Yes. And now we are loaded onto barges and we start to travel down. We start to travel down and we go more than 200 km. And now we debark in some kind of "dock." That was late at night. And then right there, as well as each person could, we bundle up and sleep.

Baiba Bela: Right there at the stop? At the stop on the riverbank?

Alma Dreimane: Right on the riverbank, yes. On the riverside. And..... and we don't know, that there are such little insects, which are called *"moshkas."* Well we don't think much about it, as they say. They start to bother us – we cover ourselves and bundle up. But the little children, who were in strollers [*diminutive*], some had strollers [*diminutive*], in the morning they were no longer – their noses were full, full ears, full mouths [*diminutive*]... They had been eaten by those moshkas. In a word, they had suffocated. [*somber*]

Baiba Bela: There were many such little children?

Alma Dreimane: Those moshkas, well, horrible.

Baiba Bela: And there were a few of those children? Those infants?

Alma Dreimane: They were those, who in strollers... One had a stroller with her. But those who had kept them with them, covered them, those – no. But in the strollers, some had them. Those in the

morning... the little child had suffocated. In a word, the *moshkas*... And now began the...Those slave traders began to come. And I understood, that the *kolhozes* were told to come, labor had been brought. Fine. And now, who came first, he takes the strongest and, in a word, those with the smallest families.

Baiba Bela: A, so they looked to see whether those they chose did not have kids?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. Yes, yes. So he looks at the list and he takes such ones. And it's fine. Now I'm still sleeping, I hear, that my name is being called. I go… Yes… And well, and now that lady [*diminutive*], who said she'd take me on as a daughter, she says… mm… I say, "Well, I have been called." – "Wait, wait, she says, I'll go with you."

Baiba Bela: That was already when you knew about the old people, that they were not given bread?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. We did not know that yet.

Baiba Bela: Did not know that yet.

Alma Dreimane: Did not know that yet. She just wanted, as they say, to be with someone of her own district…

Baiba Bela: You were from the same place?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, from the same place. Now she comes and says (by the way, she spoke Russian really well, she had been there in World War I; a little child of hers laid to rest there, too, somewhere), and she scolds them, "How dare you? Taking my daughter and not me." She, too, is summoned. Well, we each have a different name. She says, "She is married." Ah! So it's ok.

Baiba Bela: It was also true, that you were married.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, he understands that and takes the woman, too. And now all those women from my district…. Yes. He says, "Relatives only!" Aha! Now we all wanted to be together. So they start coming – one was my sister, one was my sister-in-law, and so many women we were from the district [*the interviewee begins to laugh and so does the interviewer*], and we all got into the same *kolhoz*. Thank God, we were lucky. We… we joined the Ukrainians, who had been deported in 1928 in the same way. "You don't want a *kolhoz*?" they were asked when they started to establish *kolhozes*. "No, we don't want them." Oh dear, there is land, a farm. And until 1933. In 1933 without any discussion, mmmm…, it was transformed, right, into a *kolhoz*. We were fortunate. We were not called fascists, they understood us. They shared with us.

Baiba Bela: Even the bread [*diminutive*], that they had?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. If they had two potatoes and one cucumber, then he (we worked in the forest), then he split it in half, and both of us were very well fed.

Baiba Bela: You and the Ukrainian?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, in the forest we…

Baiba Bela: And what was your life like there?

Alma Dreimane: We worked in the forest. In the summer…

Baiba Bela: Doing forestry work, right?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. It was also called a *kolhoz*, but in reality the real name was Novarjabuha, but it was called Smol'iakov. There, in a word, resin was collected…. In the summer from pine trees. We cut and extracted. And in the winter we dug out stumps, and those with resin…we heated again, and put then in pots and… and on turpentine, and we extracted pitch. People came from neighboring *kolhozes* – and bought the pitch to make cart grease. And the turpentine was put to some kind of use for the army. And… [*sighs*]. And so.

Baiba Bela: And how did you do with that heavy work? Wasn't it awful? Your health?

Alma Dreimane: I had to earn my bread, I had to fulfill the quota.

Baiba Bela: And, let's say, about winter clothes. After all, you did not have anything. How did you get those?

Alma Dreimane: For example, I ripped my coat apart, and from that sewed… m… as they say, pants. And it was not so easy to walk there, even when it was hot, because you had to fasten here, fasten here, and then if somewhere in the woods something had torn, then when you returned home there was a large spot of bloody because those moshkas had crawled in. That was something horrid.

Baiba Bela: And you had them all summer long?

Alma Dreimane: All summer we worked with those… collecting that pitch. I did not do any chopping. There were some strong women, who also chopped. But I was assigned to a male chopper. And… and in winter the firewood… we women managed ourselves with that. We floated it ourselves, we…

Baiba Bela: You had to survive, right.

Alma Dreimane: We split it ourselves, we sawed it ourselves.

Baiba Bela: And where was the old woman [*diminutive*]

Alma Dreimane: She was my mother, and she was my bread [*laughs*] because she received the 200 grams of flour for non-workers. They did not bake bread there, but gave us flour.

Baiba Bela: And how did you make bread from the flour?

Alma Dreimane: We baked *lepeshkas*.

Baiba Bela: What was that like?

Alma Dreimane: Take the flour with some water, make it like a pancake, and toss it on the edge of a stove, and bake it. And if you only knew, how delicious!

Baiba Bela: Just flour and water?

Alma Dreimane: Flour and water. What else? And as soup we made *baltuhu*.

Baiba Bela: What's that?

Alma Dreimane: That is a… Oh my! A very good recipe: take that flour with a bit of water, roll out small…

Baiba Bela: Like dumplings?

Alma Dreimane: Like dumplings [*diminutive*], but then crumble those and heat them up on a pan a bit, so they are…and then drop them into boiling water. And if you add salt too—Oi! What a delicacy! Yes, that's how we lived. And, as they say, we managed, partly thanks to those, that we were in a village, where, as they say, no one swore at us, no one called us fascists… And they were…

Baiba Bela: They were mostly the deported Ukrainians?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, those in 1928. And even you know… how can I say this… such intelligent people. Here I have not such… well, I must say, I have not had such an occasion, there has not been such an occasion. Such a man, who today… then he could have been my father, well, he tells me, how the whole thing started for them and completely…

Baiba Bela: But you could perhaps talk a bit about that? [*speaking at the same time*]

Alma Dreimane: About that, yes. No. Well, I did not know Russian very well, to be able to understand the details, when… He says. "Well, it's a shame, that I don't know Latvian. Then I would tell you all about it." Yes… Well, can you understand this? "Yes, he says, shame, that I don't know Latvian." Yes, and that's how we lived. That's how we lived and now…

Baiba Bela: Let's say, you passed the first winter. But in the second summer you had already some kind of opportunity to plant a little garden…?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. So, we could plant potatoes, and we also did that. We somehow acquired… Well, in a word, some kind of potato bucket and the skins with the sprouts – we peeled them and collected them. And that was the seed for us.

Baiba Bela: Oh! That is how you got the seeds?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Because of course we had nothing with which to buy the potatoes. And when, as they say, you had bought them, you wanted to eat them. And… yes, and that's how we lived until 1947. And now – now the war has already ended in 1945. Yes. And newspapers were available only… m… in the office. And we really wanted to know…

Baiba Bela: And you went to the office to read?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. [*laughs*]

Baiba Bela: Everyone?

Alma Dreimane: Well, it sufficed if only one person went, and read it. Then he told us, how we… what really is happening. So it's fine. Those Russians were generally surprised, that we are such readers, that we, the women and the old ladies, run to read the newspapers.

Baiba Bela: And didn't they there read much themselves?

Alma Dreimane: No, no, no. One of us would laugh. She had gone and now the newspaper described that now the front has not moved. And now she says – there is a big map on the wall. She'll look, how and how far, what is happening. "What are you, *babushka,* looking at? What do you understand of it?" She says, "And then, when I started to explain…" Yes, and so. But we really want very much… after all the war has ended, we of course want to go home. Oh my goodness, how much we wanted to go home [*slowly, with great expression*]… very much want. It's fine. Now they… They, by the way… once a month they would come from the district to make sure that one of us had not disappeared. They say, "So the war has ended. We think, that you too can go." And so they gave us documents for us to go home.

Baiba Bela: The head of the *kolhoz*, right?

Alma Dreimane: No, no, the *kolhoz* authorities.

Baiba Bela: From the head offices?

Alma Dreimane: But the district offi… well, the internal affairs workers, who, in a word, kept guard over us.

Baiba Bela: Oh, how interesting!

Alma Dreimane: Yes! First the children… Mrs. Luse… you know – the one, who was sent to the prison camp.

Baiba Bela: Mm.

Alma Dreimane: So people were assigned to gather the children of the deportees, that not all can be taken home, but the children… And again we address this issue… She, as they say, who is close to our hearts. She comes and gathers our children and takes them home to Latvia, just the children. Now and after this she was sent to a prison camp for this. I don't remember the other workers, I just remember Mrs. Luse.

Baiba Bela: And who was Mrs. Luse? Where was she from?

Alma Dreimane: I don't know. From Riga she… she had been selected to go back. And then she took those children home. Yes, and… [*sighs*] it was different… One mother had three children – two sons and a daughter, and she sends them… The youngest ones left, well, all school children, and that daughter. And I say, "Well, of course. I would not have let the girl go; I would have let the boys." Then she told me with tears in her eyes: "I did not send anyone, but I said, that there you'll be able to eat as much bread as you want." And they immediately wanted to go – both of them. Until, she said, the oldest son said, "Mamma, as you'll live, so shall I." Well certainly a good student. Yes. See, so.

Baiba Bela: And the children went to Latvia and were happy?

Alma Dreimane: The children left, yes. Well and now, when we get…

Baiba Bela: The documents were arranged for you?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, and since we have documents, we are going home. And we got home nicely, too.

Baiba Bela: And how did you get back from this village?

Alma Dreimane: Well, from the village we traveled, in a word, in whatever way we could. There, for example, a truck was driving by. We…

Baiba Bela: And the village was called the same as the *kolhoz* – Smol'iakova?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes, yes. And it had the other name, yes. And… and now we cross the Yenisei, we go to the port and get on the ship and go. We arrive in Krasnojarsk, we get into the train. And… and in a word, we had worked hard to save money. We were paid, too, but there was nowhere…

Baiba Bela: Something?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. We were paid for the work [*diminutive*] and if we fulfilled the quota, too. And that's how we returned. Returned and lived. I even received a new passport here.

Baiba Bela: Ah! So you are a Soviet citizen after all?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Which, of course, later was taken away from me. And now we lived until 1950.

Baiba Bela: Until 1950..And then you were back with your parents?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Because I had nowhere else…

Baiba Bela: Where was your husband at this time?

Alma Dreimane: My husband in the German period, well, when the war had started, come home. He had come home and had gone to his home and had begun… e… to live. He had gathered together as many farm animals as there were. For example, the sheep had been distributed, sold. People had bought them, and they were ordered to return them, but it was already all mixed up-the lambs given to someone else… So there was not much left. So that's that. And……. then came…. then came our time to again…

Baiba Bela: And so he, the Russians also came in after the war, and he still stayed at home to farm?

Alma Dreimane: No. He stayed… he had become ill and had gone to Dobele Hospital. And at that moment, when they came in, at that time he was in the Dobele Hospital. Dobele Hospital. And one day… There was a familiar girl, who had run upon a mine somewhere, had become crippled. She says, "The former district men, the authorities, and they are looking to see whether there are any men from our district." None, none. So that day passed by. On the second day my husband was taken and deported. Yes.

Baiba Bela: And so no one knows anything more, where he went?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. After that I looked for… In a word, I thought, that he has been sent to some prison camp, and that he has survived, as they say, gotten to some prison camp. And so I wrote them, then we looked for him a lot. In a word, it was…

Baiba Bela: And then, when you returned from exile?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. I was still in exile, when I started… I did not know, I received word from home, that…. well, that he has been taken away. Well and so he is somewhere. And I wrote. An answer arrives, that the camps have been examined, and he is not… he is not there. Sent further to Riga to search more. Well, and very nice, isn't it. Yes, and then the death certificate arrived…….. In a word, in the words of Aleksandrs Pelecis, he was killed by the secret police. And… and yes, the illness… a weak heart.

Baiba Bela: So attributed.

Alma Dreimane: And that is a sign, so Pelecis thinks, that he was killed there. So he stayed right there at the secret police.

[*A coffee break, a short break in the interview*]

Alma Dreimane: No one bothered me until 1950.

Baiba Bela: Not even the deportations of 1949?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. Not that either… Because then I was poor, I was no longer *"bourgeois"* – then they were taking the *"bourgeois"* away. Then they did not touch the "political enemies." And so it's fine. Now, when… One day they came after me and arrested me. Yes, I had heard, that there were those, who had returned, who then were sent to prison camps. But I don't know, that was earlier. But for me it was, I don't know why,… e… I had stayed there later. So I did not get placed in a prison camp, but only in Jelgava*'s* prison for interrogation. I spent a month there or more… certainly more.

Baiba Bela: And your daughter was not touched then, right?

Alma Dreimane: I beg your pardon?

Baiba Bela: Your daughter….

Alma Dreimane: No.

Baiba Bela: And what was she doing at this time?

Alma Dreimane: Scarlet fever had already taken her. She was no more.

Baiba Bela: When you returned, you did not see her again?

Alma Dreimane: No, no, she did not anymore… I was surprised, too, when… when… Yes, and about those books, too. My parents had also had to flee their home. And the list had been drawn up. Father did not write me, that they had returned home and that there was no longer any place to sleep, no place to put food, everything, everything, as they say, looted, everything burned up. Go figure. But he wrote, "Our entire book collection has been destroyed." So that hurt him.

Baiba Bela: But he did not say anything else? Just that the books, the books had been lost forever?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. I think, that just that the books had been lost. Well, and so I spent a month (or longer) in that prison. And then… m… I was ordered to…

Baiba Bela: And what happened to you in the prison? Maybe you could talk a bit more about that?

Alma Dreimane: You know, no. I was not interrogated. There… there people… wives were called to be interrogated, they came crying. But I don't know, why I had not been involved in anything.

Baiba Bela: You just stayed there?

Alma Dreimane: I just stayed there.

Baiba Bela: And you were all in one cell – women?

Alma Dreimane: We were in a full cell. There were women of one kind and another, who were summoned. And I was with such women together. Well, I was not together in the *kolhoz*, but now I got to know in prison women like me who were deported in 1941. And there was even one who had returned and gotten married. But despite this, they took her. Yes, yes, yes. She was taken away. Then she was deported…they announced, that a child's… In a word, home… I was not told, they just sent an announcement home, to bring the child, well, this boy [*points to her son*], who was not as big then as he is now… [*laughs*] And to bring the child And now they brought the child.

Baiba Bela: A small child.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, they bring the boy. So now what – you can not put a child in a cell. But I am not let out.

Baiba Bela: You had a small child?

Alma Dreimane: Yes. A boy. And it's good. Now, these people had tried to calm him down in all sorts of ways – he screams. So finally they take me out of the cell and lock me up in the storage room together with the boy. And so in the morning we go. One mother said (she had been in the prison camp for who knows how long)… She had been brought her nine year old boy, but there was no where to put him. She had not yet been brought back from the prison camp. And then a driver felt sorry for the child and had taken him along with him, until… until she returned. And so we began to travel again.

Baiba Bela: With the boy, too?

Alma Dreimane: We all began to travel again.

Baiba Bela: And again they did not tell you where, right?

Alma Dreimane: To our former residence, because we no longer were political criminals – we were escapees. We had fled. And children, who had returned with their mothers and somehow also had returned, those whom Mrs. Luse had brought home, those, whom the relatives had adopted, they stayed, but those, who had been… they had to go back. They were brought to their mothers, and… and they went back.

Baiba Bela: And in what kind of train cars did you travel?

Alma Dreimane: No, now only in automobiles.

Baiba Bela: Automobiles?

Alma Dreimane: From one…

Baiba Bela: Wasn't that even more difficult?

Alma Dreimane: As it was, it was. Yes. With cars. And so we drove from Riga to Moscow. It was a difficult trip because the guard was… was horrible. He pushed me around. I did not get angry with him, but I though, who did something so evil to him, that he is so horrible. What has happened to him, to make

him so evil. And all the way to Moscow. The boy comes up and pokes his head through the grating. He passes us by and spits in his face. And the guard-soldier, a young fellow, he had laughed at him a bit. Him, he boxed his ears. We drove to Moscow. There he… well one and other had… I did not have anything special, but some of the others… some of the others had bags of things. I just had a suitcase.

Baiba Bela: And who gave you the suitcase, or did you go to the prison with the suitcase?

Alma Dreimane: No, no. They had given it to the boy, the boy, yes. The boy was given the suitcase, whatever was packed in it. That's all I had. And now those, who met us in Moscow, they could not drive up (the snow was very deep), and they could not drive up, as they say, to the stop…. a bit further away…. And now there was … m… was a ways to go. And now they, who met us, they say, "Oh, oh, oh! There are so many things and how will you…" – "What you can't carry, let it lie in the snow, let it stay," he yells. Now I have already carried it out and put it… No. Well yes. We went. What am I talking about? We drove to Moscow in cars. From Moscow we began to travel, that is, by train. "No, no," he says, that Muscovite, "we will not leave anything in the snow." And there are the boys, those… There were all kinds of prisoners, in a word, who had been selected for deportation, who went. They distributed to them, who had things, for them to carry. And I had the suitcase, and I have placed it outside the train. And now I climb down and reach for the train…. And he kicks the suitcase in order to… with the intention of aiming at my face. And he snarled: "You will never see the sun of Latvia again." And so we started to go. Yes. Loaded us in.

Baiba Bela: That was in the train?

Alma Dreimane: No, now that was in the car. And we were taken to Krasnoe Presnia. There the guards said: "We are not going to shove the child in, let him stay with us." With the guards. Fine. And so we went there. We were there for a while, in Krasnoe Presnia. The boy became friends with the wardens, with those girls, and they said, "We are not going to lock that cell. Please do not come out. We want the boy to run a bit along the corridor." Yes. And there we saw in the New Year. New Year's morning they had brought him, whoever came, whatever she had – a *lepeshkin*, a sugar cube. One had brought a card. [*diminutive*] It was obvious, the poor thing did not have anything. And they gave you treats there.

Interviewee's son: I was a cutie. [*The son has joined the conversation after the tea break*]

Baiba Bela: How old were you then?

Interviewee's son: About 5, 4.

Baiba Bela: No, about 6.

Interviewee's son: No, 4–5

Alma Dreimane: Right, right. Yes, yes, right. Fine. Now we start to travel again. And now we are taken… We were there a long time, in Krasnoe Presnia. And now we start to travel to our former residence. Again we traveled nicely. We were in that hut, the boy guarded us with the guard-soldiers. And every time something had been tucked into his pocket – a *zwieback* or a sugar cube.

Baiba Bela: Was it easier for him in the sense that there was not the fear….? And what were you given to eat?

Alma Dreimane: No, well, from the transfer from the prison to the transfer… Then we….

Baiba Bela: But you were given something to eat there?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes whatever they had on hand. Until we reached Kazachenska, the district town, where we had been before. Their faces fell upon seeing us. They say, "You we certainly did not expect. Well, walk around, look around for something, for some work."

"Grandmother, stop talking!" [*Says the interviewee's son and the recorder is turned off, and they have lunch. The conversation continues after lunch.*]

Alma Dreimane: And so gradually we went off. Yes, they say, "Look yourselves for some kind of work, walk around." They even us...We were like one of their own to them. Yes, yes, yes. [*Happily*] So we were already familiar. Yes. They did not assign us to anything. They say, "Walk around, look around for something."

Baiba Bela: And what did you find?

Alma Dreimane: Well, what did we find. There was...Well, we started thinking, where to go, where to... Someone comes.. Well, being a district town, they did not get new people every month... But those camp

prisoners, who had served their 10 years, they were not allowed home but there in Krasnojarsk region they were alowed to freely, as they say, walk around. And one of them from the local *kolhoz* came to the registration, as if to show himself, who he is. He sees us, we start talking – such a thing... "Oh," he says, "we need people at our *kolhoz*." And he immediately brought us to the office. And there they laugh, that now he has gathered up some girls for himself. Yes. And that's how we got to *Kazachinska*, to that *kolhoz*.

Baiba Bela: Right there in the same city?

Alma Dreimane: Near the district, at that *kolhoz*, that was at the edge of the district. So we no longer went to where we had lived before, but on the other side of the Yenisei. Yes.

Baiba Bela: And on which *kolhoz* did you end up? What was it called?

Alma Dreimane: I'll have to ask my son, what it was called.

Baiba Bela: And what was the work there like and the living conditions?

Alma Dreimane: Well, you know. Since we became a part of the village, we did have access to a farm with animals. At first I took care of the calves, and then worked as a milker. And so it was good.

Baiba Bela: Oh, they've come to interrupt us. [*The recorder is turned off. The filming group has arrived.*]

Baiba Bela: Perhaps you could talk about how you met.

Alma Dreimane: We were in the *kolhoz* together. Because I already said – they were gathering workers, no matter what their qualifications. And in that family his parents were taken and two brothers. And one of the brothers went the way of... well, there, where the men went. And the other brother was like a family member. And so we began working together, while we took care of the boy.

Baiba Bela: And how was that? Wasn't it terribly difficult there, too? After all you lived in that village practically without medicine.

Alma Dreimane: Yes. There were those Russian women [*diminutive*]. They were smarter than our physicians today. The thing was, that a boil started to develop in my leg here. And it started to be so awful, that I could not stand, nor lay down, nor anything. Dzintars's father scolded, how sensitive could a person be, when it's just a small boil, and suffer from that. And now a Latvian comes in and looks at it. She says, "Oh dear! Mrs. Dreimane, you have *erysipelas*," she recognizes. So what now. Now I'll get the same woman [*diminutive*] who caught Oskar. No, I caught Oskar myself, I caught Dzintars myself. I'm starting to confuse Oskars and Dzintars. That is my grandson. And now, yes. She comes, chants something. And you know, such a horrible pain went through my entire leg, and the pain knocked against my heel. Well and it started to heal. In a word, I no longer had the pain. Yes. And then the woman [*diminutive*]...

Baiba Bela: This woman, was she someone who treated everyone there?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. Everything, everything she... In a word, whoever had something wrong with them, he turned to her.

Baiba Bela: And later you still met....? You then went home all together or did you go back in 1947.

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes. We went – Dzintars, Dzintars' father, we went to my parents. And his grandmother and grandfather went to their home, to Kandava. They're Kandavites. Well and so they were not touched, they were not deported a second time.

Baiba Bela: And then in 1950 just you alone with your son were deported?

Alma Dreimane: Yes, yes.

Baiba Bela: And where did he stay?

Alma Dreimane: He as a free citizen, with passport in his pocket, came to us.

Baiba Bela: There, to the village in Siberia?

Alma Dreimane: There, yes, yes. But you know, really boastful....

NMV 556

PĒTERIS ANČUPĀNS

Interview: Rēzekne, Latvia, 1997
Interviewer: Māra Zirnīte
Transcribed by Māra Zirnīte
Processed for publication by Māra Zirnīte
Translated from Latvian by Marianna Auliciema

Pēteris Ančupāns has worked as a history teacher for many years; he also evaluates the events in his personal life with the precision of a historian. His education and career were inhibited due to his brothers who were subjected to political persecution. The fragment of his life story published here deals with repressions in Latgale , showing that not only the politically persecuted were the ones who suffered. "In terms of my career, I could not see any potential in the Soviet regime", said Pēteris Ančupāns. In Rezekne he was refused work with the argument: "You realise, we are surrounded by capitalists, we have to be wary!" He therefore chose the remotest, provincial school and began to work at Dagda.

His former students recommended Pēteris Ančupāns for interview.

Pēteris Ančupāns: I know my great great grandfather, Andrievs, by name. His only son was also Andrievs, born still during the period of serfdom in 1851. And then he had a lot of children – five sons and two daughters. The daughters all got married.

One of his sons went away, as was common for Letgallians, to Petrograd and worked in the Putilova factory, that was Francis, he sent money home. That was Francis, and Antons, Konstantins and Stanislavs built houses with the money. This family was fairly wealthy for Latgale , because they owned a tract of land. In a few areas in Latgale this is around 30 hectares, and then in 1928, because people lived on individual farmsteads, as they were three brothers, the youngest, Peteris, he was educated, he went to work on the railway. He tried to get more land when establishing a farmstead and got 41 hectares of land. And then the three brothers decided that only one of them should get married, so that the land would not have to be divided and they would not be poor. And my father was the lucky one, Konstantins got married, Antons and Stanislavs lived as bachelors. Our family all lived together happily – lived together, worked together. And my father Konstantins had six children during Latvian independence, so we grew up in a very large family. We often had 12 and 14 people sitting around the dinner table.

And now remembering these times, the time of Latvian independence and our big family, it seems like the good old days, the sunny years. The land was not cleared, and every year we ploughed some extra land, meliorated an extra bit. You know, even exploring the fallow land and ploughing was done by all of us, the adults and the children. Every year something was – the plough dug up something...

This has stayed in my memory: the time of Latvian independence and the constant upward climb, how with each year life went up. Of course, there was a lot of hard work, a lot of hard work. That was the way we worked back then. Well, and when in 1940, 1941 when the Soviet regime began, everything changed for us at once, like it did all over Latvia.

Firstly, my elder brother Modests, he established here a... at high school and at teacher's college... a kind of underground group. They didn't really achieve much, printed pamphlets, distributed them, brochures of a nationalistic bent. Now, everything was discovered, on the night of the 15th to 16th of May he was arrested and then later he was transported to Astrakhan from the Central prison and in November was sentenced to death. I only found out about this after the renewal of Latvia, when the Rehabilitation Department of the Supreme Court allowed me to look through a large volume with all of the documents, at the start it was written in Russian, the record *doznanija* [*record of admission*], where his classmates were interrogated, which confirmed that they had been in the underground organization and after that the

decision about the arrest, then the arrest warrant, then the record of the interrogation from *Rēzekne*, he had not been interrogated in Riga, the interrogation began again in Astrakhan, until finally there was the record of proceedings of the sitting of the Stalingrad Garrison War Tribunal.

They were four people in that group of students, but they were connected to a Latvian National Legion. They admitted that they had been in the organization, they themselves... As if the organization had begun in the Latvian army, when it was restructured into the Latvian Territorial Corps. Vilcuks describes how he was transported to Astrakhan in the same train (on St Johns night in 1941, the war had just begun) together with Grins, Julijs Lacis. In the beginning it went, it went through Daugavpils and then I think to Yaroslavl... and in Yaroslavl they were transferrred to barges and in the terrible conditions in the barges they were sent to Astrakhan, and then they found themselves in the Astrakhan Kremlin.

There were a number of prisons there. Lets say, it is written that Leonids Breikss was in prison number one, in my brother's documents number two is listed, that had been an investigative prison.

Māra Zirnīte: You have looked not only at his documents, but at many others?

Pēteris Ančupāns: Naturally, I am interested in this issue, whenever I hear something about it, I try to find out more. I sat at the Supreme Court for two days with that thick volume which had around 1000 pages, while I read and copied out the parts that referred to my brother. The file was called, in Russian, *Delo Ozolina Petra Ivanovica i drugih* [*Russ. – Dossier: Peter Ivanovic Ozolins and others*], Ozolins was a policeman in Varaklani during Latvian independence and that is, as is common for the KGB – an artificial group was formed, in which the members didn't even know each other personally, and together they were tried as members of the Latvian National Legion.

Unfortunately, I haven't found him anywhere in other sources, only in connection with my brother and in documents about my brother..

I thought that this type of organization – whether it was real or imagined, it existed, and my brother joined this organization, believing it was real. It was a very secret structure, there were only four people in one group, and only the leader of the group had contact with the next group, so that they could not be caught, and so on. My brother was born in 1922; there were six years between us. Their meetings were held right there in our house in the country, my brother said, we have to have a talk, you go away. Then he had hidden a typewriter at home for a while, and my mother had begged him with tears in her eyes to take it away, and he took it away... He used this to type leaflets.

And then the war began, and it is said that a number of deportations had been planned, maybe we would have been there as well, but we got away safely from 1941. And as I already said, later we didn't mention that brother again. We simply didn't write his name anywhere, and you know, thanks to the fact that we had good neighbours, no one wrote anything bad about us, didn't denounce us, and so we... The family agreed, we decided, that wherever I had to – apply for university, apply for a job, you remember how many application forms there were... We never mentioned him. And we agreed, that if we happened to be asked, didn't you have a brother? You know, that was so long ago, it was war time, he was lost somewhere, and we don't know where he is...

Julians Ladusans, his friend, a high school colleague, Stanislavs Vonogs, his friend from primary school, who was studying at the teachers institute... There was another high school colleague, who I don't want to name, because he was arrested one month earlier, but miraculously his surname doesn't appear once in this document, he is not mentioned anywhere, only once in the decision about the arrest it is written that it has been brought to their attention that so and so, Moriss Ancupans has... and on the basis of this and that kind of information – is to be arrested. He was mentioned, the guy who is now living abroad, on the basis of a report, and that report was disregarded....

Māra Zirnīte: Were you repressed (persecuted) on account of your brother?

Pēteris Ančupāns: Not on account of that brother – for anti-Soviet propaganda, for revolting with an armed force with the intention of overthrowing the Soviet government and to launch terror against Soviet workers. They only admitted to the anti-Soviet propaganda.

With respect to my brother's case, there is no document relating to the execution of his death sentence.

Six children: sister Victoria and youngest brother Stanislavs (*Rezekne* Machine Milking Factory), who was named after my father's brother. Eldest brother Modests, sister Veronika, brother Jazeps – one year younger than me.

He is one year younger than me, and he was a very nationalistically minded person and then, when he was called up to the Soviet army in 1948, he deserted from the Soviet army and hid for an extended period. Naturally we couldn't hide him and he always appeared as a part of my biography.

And because of this I enjoyed the status of an untrustworthy person. At university I was subjected to various repressions, well, just that I was locked out of the dormitory and I had to walk from one to the other, looking for a reason why this had happened, and of course no one told me.

When my brother took off he didn't come home, he hid with some distant relatives. At one time he was hiding in the forest, and then he escaped from the Lubana fields, until finally he announced himself ten years later, and then he was issued documents – he worked as a tractor driver under his younger brother's name until the 1960s when he was legalized again. He died in 1970, he was very nervous, his nerves were completely ruined.

I didn't see any future prospects in terms of careers under Soviet rule.

You know, we are surrounded by capitalism, you have to be vigilant. I chose the closest school and began to work at Dagda.

I am a witness to the huge inhumanity... Prisoners were driven to shovel snow, a shot rang out, a person's life was taken...

Here in Rēzekne there were people in chains, who had to dig out frozen prisoners, dig them out and burn them, a new city grew in Rēzekne behind the railway line, there was a mass grave there.

NMV 1055

AUSMA VILMA ARĀJA

Interview: Viesīte, Jēkabpils District, Latvia, 2000
Interviewer: Ināra Reine
Transcribed by Ivars Korbs
Processed for publication by Māra Zirnīte
Translated from Latvian by Astra Zemzars

The interview was conducted during the expedition "Life Story in Latvia — Sēlija 2000." Ināra Reine is an experienced interviewer who regularly travels from America to participate in the field work. She was assisted by Linda Ūzuleņa, a student of the Viesīte High School. The involvement of students and locals in field work is very important. On the one hand, they learn interviewing techniques, on the other hand, they help to select interviewees and begin discussions with them. An extra person is also useful during interviews to fill in documentation forms and to ask extra questions after completion of the interview.

The interviewee describes farm work in great detail and has a good memory for practical situations that influenced the farming lifestyle of those Latvians who had been deported to Siberia.

The fragment of life story prepared for publication reflects the progression and sequence of the interview, although the text has been slightly shortened to facilitate reading, without compromising on the lexicon and sayings of the author, which characterise the local Selija dialect interwoven with Russian language influences.

1 A

Ināra Reine: When were you born?

Ausma Arāja: In 1926.

Ināra Reine: Where?

Ausma Arāja: Varnavas parish *"Lapsas"* homestead – my father's home, Jekabpils region [*Latvia*].

Ināra Reine: What do you remember from your childhood? First childhood memories?

Ausma Arāja: The memories of my childhood are beautiful. In my childhood, there were fields, dogs, animals, and horses. I was learning to ride a horse, but on the first try the horse threw me off. When we left, there were four horses, black. I do not know how old I was – perhaps six or seven years. Let's take the horses for a ride in the fields. Let's take them to the gardens. Took them to the gardens, but we should try to ride them. The other shepherd girl wanted to try things. I sat on a horse, but he was the youngest, not one of the old ones. No saddle, nothing, just as a child likes it. He starts to run and throws me off. We never told anyone at home about this. From that time on, I learned to ride. We did not have such wheels with which to ride. The *Varnava* parish center was about a kilometer and a half away; to get to a store – riding a horse it goes fast. No saddle, nothing.

The other adventure that I had was big, in 1941, when the Germans were coming. The Russians were leaving. There was heavy bombing.

Inara Reine: Right here, in this place?

Ausma Arāja: Yes, you know it was fiery. Not exactly close by. They threw flares and here and there they bombed. My mother and stepfather left, my father was already dead, for the Zalve village to a christening. During the day, nothing happened. In the evening, they threw flares to illuminate the ground. She had ridden the horse. The horse got frightened and came home.

In the morning my neighbor said, "Your mare is home."

I said, "let her be, later I will go to the field." In the beginning, I did not think about this. I saw that she went somewhere. Then the phone rang – our children said, "You know, we have the wagon, the harness, but no horse." It was about 22 kilometers through the woods.

They said, "How will you get the horse here?"

My nature is to give to others, not to take from them. We had a neighbor.

He said, "Perhaps I should go?"

"No, no, I will, myself." I took the neighbor's saddle, but I had never ridden with a saddle. Now I remember, I wore the folk costume skirt from Zemgale [*mid-southern Latvia*], remade for a child. I was about 16 at that time. The skirt was rather full, and I had a long braid halfway down my back. I already wore a braid. Riding on the mare, I was riding slowly, it was bumpy and I could not adjust. Now I'm in the woods, down the path – not galloping, but at quite a trot. When the horse was really galloping, I could move freely up and down. My braid unraveled, my hair was flying loose. I met someone on the road who looked at me with horror and probably thought this girl was totally deranged. I don't know; those 20 kilometers I probably covered in about 30 minutes. I arrived there and everyone was surprised, but I could not get off the horse; they lifted me off. You know, my legs and all that jolting. This was my other horrifying experience with horses. Then I learned to ride horses, the mare was young, she taught me how to ride. Everything at my father's house was beautiful. My father, he died young; I did all of the farm chores.

Ināra Reine: What do you remember about your father? Where was he from? What was his name?

Ausma Arāja: Lejins, Roberts. Since I am a woman, my father is Lejins and I was born Lejina and also married my first husband as Lejina. I will tell you why. He was from Varnava, his last name was Kakenans and he was called Kakitis, because Kakenani was the name of another farm. The mother was called Kakitiene. And when we were married and living together I said, "I will not be Kakitiene! If you want, then change to Lejins." And he became Lejins. Both of my children are Lejini, my daughter is not married but she has children and she has kept her name and the children are all called Lejini. So the Lejini generation goes from my father, even though it is through the women, but Lejini are going forward. I told my granddaughter, "When you get married, if the name is Latvian then yes, if not then keep Lejini." My father was born in Varnava in Lapsas – which belonged to my grandfather, purchased from the *Varnava* lord of the manor, I don't know his name. My grandfather had 54 hectares of land.

Ināra Reine: Was this in the last century?

Ausma Arāja: Yes. My father was born in 1880 and died in 1941 – he was not yet 61 years old when he died. My mother came from Birzene. My father married her from the Birzu parish. My father had two brothers; one died during WW I in Leningrad [*then Petrograd*] from typhus, and one died in Riga, and his sister died in Riga. They did not have children. My father was the only one who had children. My brother is deceased; he also did not have a family. He died in Sigulda nine years ago. My father was an ardent beekeeper: he had a lot of bees. In the fishpond, he raised carp. Our land was very hilly; in Varnava it was clay soil. When it was hot, everything on the hill dried up and nothing grew. Especially the grain did not sprout. When it was a rainy summer – the lowlands flooded – again. It was very hard to work the hills; in the lowlands there were springs. At that time, he tried whatever was in fashion – first he had wine presses, he made wine and sold it. He had a factory with a basement. He was the kind, ready for everything. If one thing did not work, he tried something else. He even took his wine to the Viesite pubs. Printed. Everything, everything. I remember in 1936 the winery was liquidated, because printing became too expensive, just like now. The percentage charged, the taxes were so high he could not pay them so he liquidated everything. Then the bees – when he died, we had 24 beehives. Before, we had even more. We had a special home for the bees. I can teach the young ones – even though I was only 14 years old, my father took me with him. After that, he raised carp. This was going on everywhere in Latvia – wherever it was possible, fishponds were created. We had five fishponds to raise carp with *vindiki* [*fr. Russ.*], with all that. Then people made them from wood, not like now from cement. Then it was easy to do, we dug with our hands. My father did all that.

He limped a little. As a child, he had had measles and one of his legs was shorter than the other one, he limped a little. Maybe he would not have died, his heart was strong, but in 1940 when the Russians came he had two farmhands who left [..] There was a party organizer – now you have to sow. It was a rainy fall, as I remember it. I went to help him – as a schoolgirl – to plow, *pederet* [*fr. Germ. – to harrow*] with the horses – I did it all. He caught a cold. This had happened to him before when his brother was born when

his bones had become infected from a cold in his hand, but they operated and everything was all right. Now – his legs hurt, his legs hurt. Went to local doctors in Viesite – they just treated him for a nerve disorder and told him to use heat. Went to Jekabpils, they operated – it was too late, blood poisoning, which had spread throughout his blood and so he died. Mother and I were left – she married for the second time. I was against it very much, even to the point of... my children said nothing, my husband also died – we divorced, now he is dead, this is my second husband. But I was against it, I said if my mother corresponded with him, if he comes after the correspondence, I will scratch out his eyes. So evil. He had said this to the neighbors, he was a farmhand and had lived on our farm, if no then no, you can expect anything from Ausma. This was my life, my childhood. Beautiful – deep on the farm. I do not believe it is still so beautiful on the farms as it was then. Own animals, on Saturday the farmyard was swept, we received Holy Communion, at St. John's Festival, we made birch-boughs, made bonfires, went from one farm to another. At Christmas we were mummers. Even though I was a child, I went along. The adults went – I went along. Such was life [..]

Ināra Reine: Your school days – when did school begin for you?

Ausma Arāja: I was either eight or nine years old. I went to the Varnava school, and finished the sixth grade. Then the Kaucminde domestic science school during the German occupation, at that time in Saulaine. I finished the Saulaine domestic science school during the Russian occupation. Let's say I began during the German occupation and soon after the Russians came. In 1944 when the Russians came, I went to get my belongings. The Russians changed the name; it could not remain as it was. The countryside was beautiful, everything was there. I got married – I married young and my daughter was born when I was 21 years old. When my daughter was six months old, my husband was taken away; drafted into the Latvian Legion (see Footnote p. 38 – *ed.)*. My brother was in Germany, taken there, but my husband escaped when the Germans retreated, somewhere near Daudzeva. Then for a year and a half to two years he just hung around the house, lived in the woods, was afraid that the Russians would take him away, because they were deporting all who were in the Legion. Then they said they were going to leave everyone alone and he gave himself up. He gave himself up, but how long did we live together – our daughter was only six months old. She was born in January, and they took him in July. Arrested him. We were left. My mother underwent repression as a *kulak* the first time – she went to live on her husband's farm, the farm was large. The second time she could not pay the *kulak* taxes, sold what she could and fled to Vidzeme to her friends. My brother came to live with me. He was an invalid, very small stature. He made guttural sounds – problems with speech. My mother-in-law was 64 when they deported us, my brother was 16, I was 23, and my daughter was two.

Ināra Reine: When did they deport you?

Ausma Arāja: On March 25, 1949.

Ināra Reine: How did you spend the Year of Horror [*1940/1941*] here?

Ausma Arāja: We were on the farm. When the Germans retreated and the Russians came, we hid in the woods. We were about two kilometers from the big road, it was a wooded, hilly area and there was a bog, overgrown with trees. We were there. We had the two best horses and our best things. Mother remained on the farm when the Russians came. That was in 1944. So, we remained. During the first years we lived and farmed, but during the last, when they began collectivization of farms, then… We went to the woods to do our share. I remember it as today – do you think we had the clothes to wear? The young ones today holler that they do not have clothes, but we went to the woods wearing bark-sandals. Our share was that we had to cut down 30 cubic meters of wood. The horse's share was 30 cubic meters. We had to cut down 60 cubic meters. We braided the bark-sandals from rope, we learned this from the prisoners. When we walked through the snow, if there was water below, they got caught and we could not lift our feet.

In 1948 they began to organize, in Selija I think it was in 1947 or 1946. There was an example of a collective farm, but in Varnava the collective farms were begun in 1948. I was agreeable to go, but they did not take me – my husband was arrested, and he was in the Legion with his brother-in-law, the mother was a kulak and she had fled. So we farmed – we had three milking cows and three calves, and one horse.

We farmed and we had enough to eat. Today people say they are hungry, but that makes me so angry that I can hardly bear it. You have to work so you can eat – you just have to work. You don't need to earn thousands, you don't need to be a businessman – not everyone can be a businessman. But to support yourself, not to scream that we have a famine and that we have nothing to live on. You have to work. I was still young, mother was old, my brother was an invalid and I mowed enough hay for three cows, three calves. Then we had two horses, one died and we had one. We had cut enough wood and split it and we went to the woods. We had enough to eat. We raised a pig, we had eggs, meat, milk, butter, cream. We did not buy sausages, we could not afford to buy sausages. We ground our own flour and baked, we ate bread. We raised sugar beets, we got sugar from the beets. Meat – we kept pigs, sheep, calves. [*She talks about her farm.*] They did not take me on the collectivized farm. So we quietly worked and lived. We had ground flour, made dumpling soup, as they do on the farms. We made grits from the flour, made our own dumplings and cooked them, not like now, macaroni and such.

People today are spoiled. Maybe you have not experienced such a childhood as I have and you do not know. [..] I was interested in farming, I went along and my father told me and showed me things and took me along. I was my father's daughter and that is why I know all this.

So, we were eating breakfast. My daughter, Gunta, was two years old. In comes the chairman of *Varnavas* parish, with two militiamen. Another two from the army were standing outside. They didn't let us finish eating, dishes were left full of food. They told us to get ready and said, "You have to go to work in the woods. You can take along a saw, an ax, two pails, and a few other things." But the law said that each person could take along 500 kilograms. There were four of us – my daughter and I, my brother, and my mother-in-law. We could have two tons. I did not have anything to take, we didn't even take 30 kilograms. Two bundles. My mother-in-law was a feisty woman, but she read the Bible and believed in all that.

She says: "Let us not leave them anything." She takes out the blanket, and throws in everything from the storage chest and knots it shut, then the other bundle. We did not take any food, only sugar. We had just received 20 kilograms sugar for our sugar beets.

Then Kenins the chairman said, "They will take the sugar from you at the border. Leave it, don't take it, only a kilogram."

Mother said "Let them take it, but we will not leave it for you."

I said to her, "Sush!"

She, "Let them shoot me. What will they do to an old person?!" Then she took the finely ground flour, about ten kilograms, poured the flour on top of the sugar and so we had half a bag of flour and sugar. The flour was very sweet. At least we made pancakes from this. A neighbor had a pan; we made the pancakes. We did not take anything else along. We had so many peas, beans and grits we had half a bag, cream of wheat we had about 20 kilograms. The cream of wheat I put in a bag for my daughter. We did not take any dishes. Did not take pillows, only a small pillow for my daughter. If I would be taken today, I would take everything, if I would know.

Good for my mother-in-law and her pillows, but he just walks around saying, "You can't take anything! You cannot take a lot! You have already taken a lot!" They saddled our own horses. That was horrible! I had a big bitch, a wolf-dog mixture, and pups in the barn, about six months old.

They went to the barn and the militiaman comes back and says, "Go quiet your bitch – or we will shoot her!" She does not let them into the barn: they are strangers. I went and held her. They took us with our own horse. My brother and mother-in-law walked the kilometer and my daughter and I sat in the wagon. Others were already there. They kept us there until the afternoon. They were waiting for a family, or someone. We were not allowed to… we did not have any close relatives. One family's daughter had a fiance, she was not even allowed to talk to him. Then he wrote a note and one of the militiamen gave it to her. No one could come close to us. We were in the sixth freight car of the train, the echelon had just arrived.

They took us away rather quickly. Others, only the next day. Maybe we had to go a longer distance, I do not know.

We were 56 people in the freight car. There were little children - three two-year olds. There was my daughter, a boy from Sunakste, and one boy was from Varnava – he was exactly two on March 25. There was from Sunakste a seven or eight year old. We were allowed to go out of the car only once every twentyfour hours.

At the Daugava train station, away from the station there were two sheds, with little birch trees beyond them. We were let out to buy bread, whatever each could. I did not have more than 10 rubles, I think, in Russian money at that time. What was that – today only one lats. I think I bought five loaves of bread. A kiosk had arrived – there was nothing else but bread and cigarettes. We did not need cigarettes. Then we were allowed to go to the bushes. The guards were good: they did not look. I went a distance. Then I thought, no one can see me, I can flee. But then, I thought, my daughter is there alone. I thought, my brother and mother-in-law, they will survive, but my daughter. And I came back. I did not flee. They kept us there for a whole fortnight, March 25 through 26.

I think, on the night of the 26th, the train echelon left the Daugava station. These were wagons for livestock, on top of the wall were small windows and they had bars on them: bars through which you can hardly put your hand. At each end of the wagon, there was a plank-bed where four people could sleep. Below there was nothing, we sat on our bundles. In the middle was a metal stove – a cast-iron one [*a chugunkas – Russ.*]. When you fire it, it gives off tremendous heat all around it. As is customary for a cattle car, it had a big door, locked from the outside. When it is being locked the metal clangs horribly. Below the door was an open space, when the train was moving, in March the cold came in. When they let us out, we could not go anywhere except under our own car: the men at one end, the women at the other. The guards stood all around. My mother-in-law, having sat around so long, was constipated, couldn't go. Sometimes, for two or three *sutkas* [*fr. Russ. – days-and-nights*]. If you can't go, then go in the pail. When 56 people urinated – it ran all over the floor.

Once a day, when we stopped, they gave some kind of soup – for the children – a kind of grain mixture, a *kasha* [*Russ.*], 100 or 200 grams. Another time it was from a kind of rough flour, another from grits, something like that. We were not starving: we had along our bread, our rye bread. We really did not want to eat. Today I could not survive this, but then we were young and did not take it so tragically. When we were getting the soup, they let one man, guarded by a soldier, go into the station, and steal firewood from a pile somewhere. He got coal from somewhere, when he had a pail, so that we would have heat. Otherwise, we had nothing with which to make a fire. They did not give us anything. Whenever he went, he tried to steal.

It is written that there was an orderly in each car; for our whole train we did not have an orderly, no one came to look. The neighbor's child was sickly, weak, no one came to see him, or ask about him. Once in every *sutku* [*fr. Russ. – 24 hours*], the soldier walked over the roof, pounding to see if we had not escaped through the roof. And below the floor, to see if we had not escaped from there.

Then we had an incident, somewhere far, maybe in the Urals. We did not know where we were being taken. There were two high school boys from Viesite and as they had been taken directly from the school, they had along their geography and history books. They were looking through them and at the station names through the window in which direction, but otherwise, nothing. The soldiers came in, but they did not say anything. Then an officer came in, someone higher in command. While he was talking to the men in the car, the train began to move. Through the half-open door, we could see that we were traveling through the Urals, through the dark tunnels. I didn't see so well, but the men said later, "He was as white as a sheet." Thought he was going to be pushed through the door and the train would leave. No one would know anything; no one would have been there. What then could he do by himself? Yet, we were not like that; I guess Latvians are not vengeful. When we had gone through the tunnels and the train stopped at the next station after about an hour – how it was that they had not closed our door and how did the guards – we could not understand. He was shaken; maybe he had even crapped in his pants.

Then in the Sverdlovsk station in the next car an old man [*diminutive*] had died. We saw how they carried him out, put him by the side of the railroad tracks, put a sheet over him, and left. In another

wagon, they said a child had died, and they did the same with him. It was March. This was how we traveled. When we arrived in the Lubinska station, we were sorted out and sold like slaves.

As I remember, a tall, dark Russian came into the car – his parents were these Cossacks. Kalevins was his name. He asked which were the families and who were the men. He asked the men to have their families stand. Looks us over, writes down names, surnames. We only had my brother – only 10 years old, small in stature, and a child – two years old. Mother-in-law was 64, but she was much older than I, wearing a big fur coat, old lady, not too tall, gray haired. To four families they say, "We do not need a kindergarten." He was from Sargatka area, the chairman of the collective farm center. He was an important man, and he could choose which workers he wanted.

In Lipinska there was a big club where people were selected. Those whom he had chosen, he sat down along one wall of the hall, but those who were not selected from our car, sat down along the other wall. Russian people came over – I don't know if God was with me, but Russians are good, I won't say anything – came up and started to talk.

"I am a brigadier in our collective farm, the collective farm is very *bedns* [*from Russ. – poor*]: we ourselves do not have enough to eat. I don't know how you will survive, with small children – it will be very hard." The others did not speak much Russian, I spoke Russian – he spoke with me.

He said, "In that collective farm, yes. That is the area's center collective farm, they even have their own truck; it is much better there. Those that went there were happier. So, you must get there!"

I said, "But how?"

He said, "You know, I will tell you."

The militiaman had come who had registered us, he was from that region, registered us all.

The man said, "He will come – you just start talking to him." I begin to cry, I'm fearful, everyone is a stranger but over there they're from Varnava who were our neighbors in the cattle car – they are all in this collective farm. They all had husbands and grown sons, all are here. A Sunakstiesi family was here – they had four small children – one son older and the others younger – they were not chosen and then there were some other children, then a grandfather, grandmother and a mother with a child. The old ones and the child – they were also not taken. About 4–5 families.

I am crying; the militiaman comes over, a Russian, "Why are you crying?"

But he had already taught me – "You tell him this, that your brother and uncle are at the other collective farm, this is not good and the militia will have to be responsible for us and will have to feed us." I don't have to be told twice.

I tell him, "My uncle, my father's brother – all of them – they help us, what can I do with a small child? You will have to feed us."

He goes over there, looks around. There was also a family with a small child there – the same as us – four people. But their neighbors are in this collective farm. Only they don't know that this is not so good.

He asks them, "Do you agree to change?"

"Yes."

He comes over and says, "You with your things over there, but they, over here." We changed places. Then comes the truck. All night we slept. I will tell you more, there were also some younger men, one was from Sunakste an older man, he had been a farmhand, and he happened to be there and they chose him, too. Alone.

While we were sleeping in the Lubinska station, some people had diarrhea. I and my mother-in-law, we also had slight diarrhea – you know the water, two weeks we had not washed. We travelled two weeks. We couldn't change clothes; we couldn't wash and in each city, each station, you know the water. In front of the club was a small plaza, with a small Lenin monument. The men went at night as needed all around the monument. In the morning when we were taken away, the charwoman was screaming, "Such pigs!" So it was. I don't know where the bathroom facilities were, if any – we went outside, but they went in a circle around the monument.

After the Lubinska station the next stop was Omsk, but we were not taken to Omsk – that was a big city, Lubinsk was smaller, we were taken by trucks. Others had horses, who were closer. We had the collective farm car, it took us to Sargatka – about 120 kilometers away from Lubinska. Maybe 110 – but I know it was over 100 [..] That was the Sargatka region [..] They took us, but the road – there were no highways, nothing, only a country road. Black earth. When it is sunny, it is like asphalt, but when it rains then it was like our red clay – not a car not even a person can get through it. The car stands by the side of the road 3-4 hours. It stops raining, it doesn't rain much there, but the ruts are huge, in some places it's frozen. [..] How many of us were there – not all 56 – about 30 in that truck. Maybe 25 – the other half were taken to the other collective farm. Many had stomachaches, diarrhea. The truck does not stop. They do it over the side. The men hold them, bottom over the side. So my mother-in-law, two other boys, one man. So we arrived at the collective farm. I begin to really cry. I will be returned. I am registered with that militiaman and he is along because we had to be registered.

The Sargatka militiaman says, "Now, now, calm down. I can take one family with children. So what if there is a small child – he can be a shepherd." So we stayed. So my brother began as a nighttime shepherd – another Latvian from Sunakste – both were assigned to be shepherds.

Ināra Reine: What kind of animal herds were these?

Ausma Arāja: Cows. There were all kinds, speckled. In the spring four so bony – some of them were lifted with ropes. One year so many died. There was nothing to feed them. Even though there was feed, all the straw remained in the fields… they did not know how to farm. So my brother went as a day herdsman and so he at least got milk, the milkmaid gave it to him. Both were Latvians – he was Latvian, they had a herd of 67 cows. But they had to go far, in the summer they herded them all night, about 10 kilometers away. In the evening about 6:00 p. m. the cows were milked, then they slept and the cows fed until midnight or 2:00 a. m. [..] Then about 4:00 a. m. they were milked again. Then they herded them closer to the water and the milkmaids walked along. Then I was designated, maybe it was God's will, maybe something else – they called all the women together, many were Russians. We did this and that, we had to inspect the potatoes, already on the second day, I did not want it, but I was given a free day, I did not want more, there was no place to go.

We were let into a place where bulls had lived before, and after the bulls, the Germans. The stove was made with bricks – with cow dung, mixed with clay; that made yellow clay. The floor was also like that – but earlier, none of you know such floors, it had been earthen. [..] So that it would not get pockmarked, cow dung was used, diluted, and put over the earth; it hardened and was not dusty.

The Germans had lived there, deportees – there were many Volga Germans there. They were there since 1941 – they had built their own shacks. They had been told to leave them, that there were others coming. Others were placed among the Russians, but we, the four families, were placed in that shack. Well, all it had was an empty floor, nothing else. We did not have mattresses. Someone had a coat that was put on the floor.

The farm had been built with a yard for the cows. There were no boards, no one to saw them. If they sawed boards – I haven't seen it, even today – such high sawhorses, put on the tree trunk, with a saw – on one end two *ruckas* [*fr. Russ. – grips*] up, but he has slanted teeth. One is standing below under the saw horse. The tree trunk stands on top and that is how they sawed the boards.

Ināra Reine: Up and down?

Ausma Arāja: Yes, they sawed up and down, that is how the trunk was placed. He stands on top of the sawhorse and saws vertically. You could not get those, and then the other neighbors, the men – they made *koikas* [*fr. Russ. – sleeping-bunks*] from the cow enclosure poles. Sawed down four blocks, put one pole across and put the poles in this way. We sewed sheets, stuffed them with straw. In the spring, we used our winter coats as pillows. Then we still had a good collective farm and a good chairman. I will tell you – even we Latvians were good for him – yes, very good. In the neighboring collective farm he was horrible – he beat the Latvians, kicked them with his feet. Also the Russians. They ran over him with a tractor. We were sent – the farmer took seven or eight women. They were growing a plant used for oil. I don't know

what it is called in Latvian. Like linseed, those seeds were. They pressed them for oil. The cans, you know how it is with oil, when the milk cans had been used for oil – you have to scrub the can 20 times. But then the brigadier, the farmer says, "When each one of you scrubs her cans, place them separately from each other. We didn't know why, separately, OK separately. My daughter and I scrubbed three cans each, they were horrible. All we had to scrub with were ashes, no powders, nothing. Ashes and hot water. By nature, when I do something, I do it slowly, but I do it. I put down the cans; I had scrubbed all sides carefully.

He comes to look. "Whose cans are these?"

"Mine."

"Good, you will remain here to work." I didn't understand why, and when I asked him about a year later, "Why did you leave me on the farm?"

"You had the cleanest cans. You had scrubbed them most carefully. We need careful workers on the farm, not like ours." This is how I came to work with the pigs. The other was a German. The pigs had piglets, it was very good, they had good litters – we were listed in the red book. Each pig had 22 piglets. The first year they were not sick, nothing. The piglets, the little ones, when they were first born, they got a liter of milk anyway. A kind of a stove was built there, where we cooked for the pigs, one was big, but also another one. A big disk from the plow. That was the ax. The German woman says that eating is so-so, she had been there since 1941. She was first deported when the Russians came. She had a kind of a can – she cooked the milk until it became brown, like this. [..] It evaporates and becomes thick. My daughter comes – she pours some in her cup. The German woman was good – she had dried potatoes – not dried, nor fried – slices that you ate with the milk. That was for my child.

My mother-in-law became a night herder – they needed a night herder in June and she volunteered. The other herder was an old man, a Kyrghiz, or something like that. I said one cannot learn Russian – my mother-in-law did not know a single word of Russian. She's an old person – and she learned Russian. For the first month she could not communicate with the old man, used sign language – later they understood each other quite well – he told her a lot, how he had lived before, how he had lived with the Czar, how well they had lived. So they became the night herders – my brother, the day herder, my mother-in-law, the night herder, and I, with the pigs. My mother-in-law says, when they milk the cows, drink as much milk as you wish, but, of course, there was no way to take it with us.

They gave us 4 kilograms flour per month for four people. Rye flour. Later there was no rye flour, only in the spring. Then we had wheat. How many *lipyoskas* [*fr. Russ. – pieces of unleavened flat bread*] can one bake? We had brought our own flour and then we mixed *lipyoskas*. I had mittens, a lot of knitted mittens with designs. A neighbor had knitted them, an old lady. I had brought those along. For one pair of mittens I got three liters of milk. Russians. Others did not buy them, but the resident doctor, she did. My daughter was small; we could not get milk anywhere else. "Milk! Milk!" We exchanged them, we had towels; we exchanged them. We bought potatoes from the Russians. It was good that at the center we could get something. This is how we lived. Then fall arrives, we have the first harvest. They announce the harvest and I have a lot. I worked in the farm and we were paid for each piglet the same as the Russians were, as collective farmers were not paid in money, we received credit, which we signed for. We were in debt; we sold our clothes, or other things to pay the debt. We had to sign for 200, for 400 rubles. You don't remember how they had the credits. They were each person's and the state's…

1 B

Ausma Arāja: …The Latvians – why does she have so much and why do we have less? Then came the time to gather hay. Everyone went to gather the hay. But what do the milkmaids have to do? They milk the cows in the morning and the evening and they do not have to do anything else. They did not want to go and do anything else. I was with the pigs, and although we, too, were there early in the morning, the pigs were there already. In the winter we were given frozen potatoes and *othodus* [*fr. Russ. – waste or slops*], in the summer we were driven to the river. Until nine or ten when it's not the heat season, then woken again in the evening. Then you can rest, you have free time. I went along to rake the hay. When the Russian

women went, the local commissioner – he couldn't find any. They did not go, did not want to go. Those that he saw, he caught.

Then the commissioner said, "See, the Latvians do not run away." I was not called Ausma but Auhma. Not by the last name, but by my first name.

"See Auhma's family," he said, "all – be they big or small, – all of them work. They do not flee. That is why she has so much work." We had many piglets and for each piglet we were paid well – three workdays. During the first year, I had 800 workdays for my family. The Russians were very angry with the commissioner. Then as it happened – I think it was during the second year, I don't know – there was a film, "Tarzan". They showed it also here, but in Russia it was very popular. But it was, I think, in November – there was snow, a blizzard. December? We bought tickets – it was once a church, now a building for culture. There was a long hallway and a hall. We waited, but they had to go to Omsk for the film, about 120 kilometers. The blizzard buried the car and it did not come, we waited three, four hours. Then the Russians got rowdy. Out comes the commissioner, the Latvians were also there – about 7 or 10 people, the younger ones, who went. Out comes the commissioner with the manager of the club, "Come on, *latiš* [*Russian word, meaning: Latvians*], come into the hall!" We were all afraid, we thought - now what? Perhaps it was in the second or third year. A scandal was brewing – no one allowed the Russians. They bang on the door. Out comes the commissioner and says, I don't remember now, "Well, what do you want? Why are you here? You do not know how to behave – if we let you in, then we will have to clean the hall not with a broom but with a shovel. But the Latvians – whatever hall they enter, so it will remain." They bit those (Russian word, meaning: unpeeled sunflower seeds), spat, and swallowed. Then they had complained about the commissioner to the Omsk party committee – that he protects the Latvians, the deported ones, the fascists, and he can't stand the Russians. Then he had told them. We had several Latvians old men – well really only 50 or 60 years old who worked *plotnikos* [*fr. Russ. – as carpenters*] – who made the fences for the farms.

He always came up to them, "You are smart, tell me how to plant and when. You are smart, I don't go to my own [*people for advice*]."

Then they ask, "But why are you like this toward us?"

He said, "You know, the Latvians saved my life." His leg had been injured somewhere in Latgale [*eastern Latvia*], and a Latvian had taken him into a sauna and not given him up to the Germans.

He said, "That is why the Latvians are closer to me than of the Russians. They saved my life."

Later we had another commissioner, but that was in later years, but he was rather coarse. Later there was unification with the neighboring collective farm and it was horrible – they hit even the Latvians, kicked them with their feet. Also their own Russians. Once when he was quite drunk, during the harvest season, he went on horseback perhaps to the hay – the grain was being winnowed and the straw was in *koknas* [*fr. Russ. – stacks*] – he goes to sleep. The tractor driver said that he had not seen him *[the commissioner]*, but others said that he had seen him, but was angry. He drives the tractor, but he is sleeping in the *kokna*, and can't be seen. He drove over his legs. They took him away, but I don't remember whether he got well or died from his injuries. There were many kinds of people. We worked.

When we were leaving, when they freed us, there was another commissioner, but he also said, "Don't go, stay here! We will give you whatever job you want. Stay, work here!"

No, we said, "Let us go!"

"Well, if you don't like it in Latvia, come back. We will pay your way and everything, come back! We will return your homes!"

Ināra Reine: When were you freed?

Ausma Arāja: We were freed in November, 1956. Now the Russians are not leaving *[Latvia]*. I don't understand how one would not like ones homeland. All of us weren't freed at once – one family was freed before 1955, in the autumn. We were freed in 1956 in the autumn, my son was not even two years old; he was born in January, 1955. Then in the spring, some families were freed. Then came autumn, the harvest

was very good – we harvested a lot of wheat. We had worked there eight years. My husband came; he had been freed from prison. He was in Vorkuta. He was not allowed to return home, had to come here. He had documents that we had been deported. He came to where we were. He worked with the hay in the first summer – he mowed it, measured the stacks. He had finished only four grades in school, but he learned how to measure all stacks and calculate that and calculate the workdays. The following years he received the grain. He received all the grain from the tractor drivers, winnowed it and put it in the granary, or sent it where it had to go – he arranged it all. Without any schooling. He also learned Russian. When they arrested him, he could not speak it, but now he had even learned to write it. When I left, I also spoke it, but I could not write it. I wrote letters to him in Russian with Latvian alphabet. He said that when he received them, the censors did not want to give the letters to him; they asked, "What is written there?" He said, "I will read it to you." He had learned to speak Russian – and in a few months, he could write in Russian. Perhaps there was a Latvian letter somewhere, too.

I worked in receiving the milk – from the milkmaids. Took it to the dairy. Had to do all the accounting, everything. I learned to do everything. You can learn anything if you want to. But take today, if one is born and raised in Latvia and does not know the Latvian language – that is stubbornness, nothing else. One can do all that.

Then they freed the neighbors – I was so shocked, that not us. My mother had come here from Vidzeme, she had gathered up the money and had come here on her free will after three years. Even though she was on the deportee list, she was not there at the time and was not included. She did not have to go to *otmetku* [*fr. Russ. – to register*], we had to go twice a month to the police, [*to show*] that we haven't fled; and later we had to go once a month to sign in. We were not allowed to go to Omsk, or anywhere, without written permission from the police. We had a mill nearby, about 20 kilometers, but that was in the Sargatsk, our region, but even there we had to let the police know – the brigadier called and said so and so of my people will be going there. Such was the arrangement – we couldn't flee anywhere. My mother came, brought money, and we purchased a goat. When we had the goat, we were alive. We kept a pig right away, the first summer.

Then we sold it all [..]; it was planned right before the October celebration. We were called for first or second of November that we were free. But others had sold everything – they had packed everything about two weeks before, because they were leaving at the October celebration. The documents were ready. We had lots of potatoes – about three tons of potatoes that year, like no other year - and they were received at the collective farm until the freeze came. But, just now the freeze was beginning – in November. All night we quickly gathered and carried out the potatoes and took them and gave them up for almost nothing. Same with the grain – sold it. We took the wheat, in boxes, like matchboxes because we thought if we do not have anything to eat, also sugar which we purchased, and some other things. We liquidated everything in ten days – liquidated all the animals, sold the house – gave it to the collective farm cheap – since it was autumn. Life there was like a gypsy's – when you need a fur coat, you buy one. In the spring when you no longer need it, you sell it cheap. It was the same there in the autumn, when no one needed a house, no one bought one because they were not needed in the winter. So we gave it to the collective farm, I don't know who lived there then.

So, we went together with them I think it was November 10, I don't remember when we actually left there. Maybe it was November 12. Three families, in the same *polutorka* [*fr. Russ. – a 1.5-ton freight truck with no top*] that brought us there took us away. We paid the driver. The road was snow-covered, there were snow mounds. I knew that somewhere near was the *Irtysh* – about two kilometers away, the big river Irtysh. All of our fields bordered the Irtysh. The banks were straight and the car begins to slide. I close my eyes, I was up there… There was another mother with a small child, who sat in the driver's cab, she had a boy the same age. We climbed up in the back, surrounded by boxes, others sat there, too. I keep looking as the car continues to slide – I close my eyes and hug my child – my daughter was two years when we were deported, now as we return, she is ten. [..] I had a boy who was two years old when we returned home from Siberia. My daughter was two years old when we were taken to Siberia – a difference of eight years. The

truck zoomed across the ditch and somehow held on. Until we got back on the road again. The car on the road - swaying back and forth. Horrible.

Then we went to Omsk, the men were there at the station. We handed in all our baggage. We were deported for free, but we had to pay for everything on our return trip. We had to pay for the car that took us to Omsk, for the baggage, the tickets – for everything. Then we were on the train to Moscow. I don't know for how long – 2 *sutkas* [*a fortnight*]. We rode as passengers, not in the box cars for livestock. We had paid for our tickets. In Moscow we had to change to the Riga Station, or (two Russian words, meaning: the Riga Station). It was quite far. We couldn't find anyone to transfer us. It wasn't really a station, but now I suppose there is one. Then we rode to the station.

In the afternoon we left Moscow and the next morning we arrived in Krustpils [*town in eastern Latvia*]. I think it was the fast train. But the feeling – I can't describe it to you. It seemed like we had left a nightmare behind us. One can't explain it. My mother had come, since she was not a deportee, she had returned already in the summer. We had sent a telegram and she was waiting for us at the Krustpils station.

My boy was two years *[dim.]* old – he did not have pants *[dim.]* like they have now. He had socks *[dim.]*, tied up and a short fur coat *[dim.]*. My daughter had a coat *[dim.]* made from my clothing. For eight years we only sold our clothes, we never bought anything, because there was nothing to purchase. We could not get money, there was no way to get it. For each day worked at the collective farms, you received one or to pennies. We could not pay our debts, there was no money. They gave us grain, we worked, so we could eat. The last years were good, the first three years were hard. The first year was the hardest, since we had nothing. There was famine and poverty. When we were leaving – the Stepanov family were our neighbors.

There was an old man – he came over, "Don't leave!"

The oldster *[dim.]* was crying. "Why are you crying?"

"But where will I get a loan now? I will run out of tobacco *[dim.]*…" So it was with them, when they had some money, it went everywhere. But at the end of the month, there wasn't enough left to buy tobacco. They run to the Latvians for a loan.

The Stepanovs said, "See how it is; you Latvians in eight years are much better off than we are who have lived here all our lives."

Then one of my children said, "You have to work, like we worked, then you will have things. Do not be lazy." That is how we returned home.

Ināra Reine: Where – to here?

Ausma Arāja: We were not allowed anywhere. The Russian families had the apartments. There was nothing for us – we came to our home – it was a farm – don't even think about getting in there. My husband's home was partially destroyed; in the room only a column was left; no windows, doors, roof, no stove - nothing, everything had been torn out. We stayed in Viesite with an old woman; we lived there for the first year. I began to work in a gardening establishment when we arrived – we had some money, but the first thing we did – we went to the woods to cut firewood, we sawed birches like this, with saws. Nowadays those who are unemployed – you go in the woods and cut firewood! - "Phew, such work?" Nowadays with the *Druzba* [*Russ. name of a motor saw*] – with all the saws – you don't have to do anything by hand. We sawed with a handsaw. But we earned some money. We had saved some money, but we couldn't spend it all because we did not know what lay ahead.

There was a chairman Kivokins. My husband went in the summer, paid 200 rubles, that was in *cervoncos*, and he gave us a room in the big building. One room where an old man had lived. He left. The room had a kitchen all together. But we were five people – but we were in our own place, but there we had lived with the old woman, even though she was my husband's relative, nothing was good, we didn't know what to do, where to put anything. So we began to live here.

In the spring, I began to work in the gardening establishment; my husband also at the garden at the school. At that time they had a gardening establishment at the school. My brother and mother set up separate

housekeeping. My mother-in-law went to Sabile where she had a daughter. We were left, my husband and the children. My husband began to drink heavily, and we divorced. I went to live with relatives and he stayed here. Then he went to Sabile to his sisters. We could not get an apartment; it was hard to find one in Viesite. This house was the collection point for animal hides and then it was disbanded. There, where the kitchen is now, that is where they received the hides, there was no roof. Only some boards were placed where the roof was. There was no stove, only a middle wall – this is where the woman who worked here lived. She had made a small room for herself. The window ledge was broken, a cat kept coming in. She had put cardboard over it. Then the Viesite chairman said to me, "We have no apartments. If you want this, we will sell it to you for the price of firewood; otherwise we will tear it down." They'll tear it down, because it's not worth repairing.

"If you want to repair it, you do it with your own money." They had looked it over and seen that there was nothing there, and sold it to me for 75 rubles – this house then. Also noted – it was slated for demolition for firewood.

We repaired it. We put in a lot of money. We began right away, the first autumn. We spent around 4000 rubles to repair it all. The floors, the roof, wallpaper, stove – everything. Everyone who remembers, who comes in, says, "How it was then and how it is now!" We put bricks on the outside, put up a tile roof. The first year we put up a roof of wood chips, there was no slate. Next year we put up slate. Then the owner showed up in 1991. At that time, he did not need it, he owned the big house. He took that and did not need anything else. Then he went to the city council.

The secretary said, "No, this is his house, we will compensate you."

The city council said directly, "No, we had purchased this house." But he wants it.

"But there is nothing we can do, we cannot give it back, because it was theirs, they had paid for it. Go to court." Well, he was going to court. I said – live and learn. The judge told me that we had repaired it, we had the plans, that a special commission was needed, which will take it and give it back to us, that which we have repaired. I found this out when he filed a suit. The commission came, accepted it, got the documents – then told the court that it had to be done by January 1. On March 1, the commission told me this. We had had to do this three months earlier.

The judge said, "If the commission had only come by December 30." I had lived there 15 years, but did we know that we needed such a document! Live and learn. So it was taken away, we did not own this house. It belonged to the man, who owned the big house. He lives in Riga, his wife and grandchildren live here. But the judge said that he could not throw us out.

"You have repaired it, you have the documents; you are a deported pensioner – until you die." I have planted apple trees, cherry trees, berry bushes, flowers, a hedge – there had been nothing here. Nettles and mugwort all around.

"No," he said, "We cannot do this." Then he had promised that we could stay there until we died. Only we did not own it. My grandchildren cannot do anything about it. We got used to it.

We get along fine, he comes with his granddaughter; she always runs to see us. We have forgotten it all; once it was very painful.

I said, "How many houses will I lose? I lost my mother's home, my husband's home, the house that remained in Siberia – we fixed up the fourth house and that was taken away. In my lifetime, I have lost four homes." Nevertheless, thank God, we have food to eat, and we are satisfied with life.

[..] It has been four years since my son-in-law died. Their son was ten years old, daughter 14. Both children were schooled. She works in the technical school as a class manager. She was an expert, now she is a superintendent, has more free time. She keeps three animals in the winter – she had three cows in town. Now she has two, will sell one and keep one. The milk is cheap, her hands ache [..] She gives us milk, cottage cheese, cream – we do not have to buy it."

Ināra Reine: Does she live in Viesite?

Ausma Arāja: Yes, in Viesite, in the professional technical school. Her children go to school here. They work hard; they stack the hay, the beets. [..] Raise potatoes for the animals. There is everything. They used to

have pigs, now they no longer keep them, because the stable is far. You put in a lot of work with pigs. She has hens. [..] A neighbor calls her and says, "Gunta, you have a lot of chickens on the roof of the stable!"

"That can't be, none of my hens are laying."

The boy runs over, Maris, a friend of my granddaughter – and he says, "Mother, come quick!" She counted twelve – all on the roof of the stable. How did they get there?

She says, "The hen with two chickens is below, the rest on top of the stable. They are chirping so loudly." We caught them and brought them down. She had 14 chickens, they had stolen away.

"If you tell her to lay, she will never do it." It was now the second week [..] Yesterday I inquired about the chickens, and they are all healthy and well. During the day, we bring them out in a box. In the evening, they go inside. We bought a special feed. [..] Have to work. When we work, we have enough, and we are clothed. [..] The young ones want to dress up – not like in our times – we went many years in one dress. Today others dress up, so they want to also. This is my life story and this is how we live. She comes over and helps all the time.

Ināra Reine: If you could live over again, how would you want to live?

Ausma Arāja: I would live in the country, in my father's home. I would be a beekeeper, would have fishponds; cows, so we would have enough for ourselves. I do not want a big business, only like my father did, with enough for ourselves. But the wonderful life in the country, those beautiful mornings, the evenings! Now we don't see it, I do not feel it here, even though we are surrounded by pines, like in the country but it is not the same. We could do so much; the machinery is good now. But old age is here. The grandchildren are not interested. They are not used to it. My daughter was only two years old when we were taken away – she also has not had that kind of life. [..]

During the nineties, I told my daughter, "Well, what are you going to do? Your husband is unemployed. You have two small children. Take one of the cows." At that time the money changed and the collective farms changed, she bought a calf for 5 *lats*. Then she began to raise it. She learned everything, knows when to let the cow calve, knows everything about it. Her neighbor asks for help, says, "You are so enterprising." You have to work, work a lot. I cannot be without work.

Ināra Reine: How is your health?

Ausma Arāja: You know, I am harder of hearing – I can barely hear with the right ear. Only with the left. When someone speaks from this side and speaks softly, it is harder to hear. My hands and feet hurt. [..]

Ināra Reine: What have you valued in life?

Ausma Arāja: I have hardly valued anything. My father died when I was young, my mother remarried, he was an alcoholic. From childhood, I had to do all the farm chores. I learned to ride the horses, use the mowing machine. I did all that. We had some money, but we were not rich. But we had enough. We had enough to eat. What we raised, we consumed. Now we live better. Maybe we eat better. However, then we ate pure produce what we had raised – milk, butter, meat, bread. Everything was ours. Today eggs, milk, butter is our own. But we also buy this and that – chocolate, candies, which we could not afford in the past. That was around Christmas, when my father – who didn't drink or smoke then – when he went to *Viesite* to the market, then he purchased some chocolates for me and my brother. Or candies about 100–200 grams. Some better ones – we ran to meet him. Today it is commonplace. Today people do not have a feeling for celebrations. [..] That which we previously ate at celebrations, people now eat every day. Today people don't know what a celebration is. Then we baked for celebrations, – rolls, cookies. In the autumn and winter, we cooked the pork. Or we roasted hens or geese for Martin's Day celebration. Something like that. Washed the floors, baked the rolls; it was fragrant. Today there is nothing like it – no one bakes rolls – we go to the store, buy them ready made. Every day like that. [..]

Ināra Reine: Today is June 14. How will you commemorate it?

Ausma Arāja: Here it is hardly commemorated.

Ināra Reine: But other days?

Ausma Arāja: Other days, yes. March 25 is commemorated more. Perhaps more people were deported then. On June 14 there were fewer of us. From Varnava only our two families were deported.

I was not there at the time, when March 25 took place, I remember all that traveling, the Daugava station, the roads, the humiliation. I remember all that took place March 25. That morning, everything, everything. It is right before my eyes. How they came in, how they told us to dress, how they ordered us… You went away, left your mare. My dog was grown, my aunt had taken it to the country, the puppies had already been given away, she was very smart. She was howling something terrible, they gave her to the old neighbor. They had her for 3 or 4 days, but one morning she had broken the chain and run away. She was never found, alive or dead. [..] My mare was taken by a Russian to ride to Jekabpils. She was very frisky, galloped fast. He had ridden her to Jekabpils, 30 kilometers in 1.5 hours. When he had returned, she was white, not black, with foam dripping off her. She was given water and she died two days later. I no longer have my dog, nor my mare. [..] No matter how frisky my mare was, I could ride her everywhere.

When my mother was first declared a *kulak,* arrested, all her animals were taken away. She searched; her schoolmate in Jekabpils was an important person.

He said, "That is not right that they took everything from you. You had not fled."

The animals could be taken away and given to an animal trust, belonging to those who had fled with the Germans. Documents were given out, that the animals had to be returned to the owners. They had taken from her the horse, two cows, perhaps a pig, hens, and geese – whatever was there. They were left with one cow and that is all. The parish chairman, called Saulitis, his brother was a militiaman and party organizer. He had the documents to return the animals. The trust director was a Russian, immigrant. He says that we should give him our document. But we had been instructed not to let them out of our hands, because he had done this before, taken the documents and torn them up. He says he will return them. I was not there, but my mother was, she takes the animals. The turkeys had been killed, but the cow, horse and colt, no, two cows – were brought home. The next day the militiaman arrives and arrests them and says that they are partisans. They were attacked with forged documents and shot at, and all animals were taken away. My mother was sentenced to three years, her husband for five to *Vorkuta*. For six years, Saulitis in the city council was an important man. The party organizer was relieved of the document. But I had my mother retried and the higher court dismissed the charges, how a woman can attack and take away something.

Ināra Reine: What year did this happen?

Ausma Arāja: They were arrested when my daughter was six months old, in 1947. My mother was in the Daugavpils prison for about six months, until the trials. More than half a year. All winter until next spring she was there. Her husband had already been sent to Vorkuta, he was no longer here. When she was coming home, the mare had been tied in the center of the collective farm, a young mare, about three years old. When mother went from Viesite through the farm, she spoke to the mare and the mare had broken the chain and run away. Then my mother was again deprived of her farm and she went to Vidzeme, couldn't live here anymore. One can remember a lot, so much time has passed; now old age is here, almost 75 years. Mother died in 1967.

Ināra Reine: What have been your spiritual values? What is important in the life of a human being?

Ausma Arāja: Faith in yourself and faith in God. Faith in a higher power. [..] Before, when we were young, we did not understand all of this, but when I think about it, I believe that there is a higher power or God, who rules over everything, puts everything in its place and sees everything. Why is it that people who have done wrong have to eventually pay for it? They have to pay for it. I do not wish evil on anyone. Even to those who deported us, I do not wish evil upon them. There is a woman in Viesite, she signed *[deportation orders]*, she was the secretary at that time.

I met her and she said: "Oh my, you are so lucky, you were deported, now you will receive a lot of money!"

I said, "Tanya, I will give you all that money and you can go to Siberia. Horrible luck!" I said, "Go even now, I will give you the money."

That money was horrible. We were paid in rubles then, what money was that! Change it into lats – that was 9,000 rubles. What is that. If it were 9,000 lats now, that would be something. When the money was

changed, then it converted into 200 lats. Also, I can tell you that the chairman Kenins, who deported us – my mother-in-law was hellish and when we were deported, she said, "Kenin, remember my words, what it says in the Bible. We are being deported against our will, but you will run after us in bare feet."

Ināra Reine: What happened to him?

Ausma Arāja: He died very soon afterwards. After two years we received a letter and he had said, "That old lady Kakenite cursed me!" But she did not curse him, she only said, "It is written in the Bible." We all thought that the Chinese would come and rescue us.

But she said, "There will come someone with a dark sign on his forehead and he will be the one."

That was Gorbachev. He has a mark. See how it all happens, when in the Bible, I have not read it, but they had the Old Testament and they read it. She had it with her in Siberia and she read it and said,

"He will come from the opposite direction, with a sign on his forehead, and he will change everything and we will be freed from Siberia."

Well, we were freed earlier; but nevertheless, who was it that returned it all to us, who began to realize it? It was Gorbachev. There is something to it [..] The teachers tell very little to the students about those times; now they are allowed to tell, but they don't do it. Don't they themselves know – about the deported, about the punishment? No reminiscences, no commemoration in any school. I have grandchildren – they only know that which I tell them. During the years when I went to school, we had everything – November 18 celebrations [*see Comments – p. 207 – ed.*]. I still know all the songs about Latvia. Today they don't teach any of these; they don't know anything. [..] March 25 [*see Comments – p. 208 – ed.*], is not commemorated.

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AUSTRA LĀCE

Interview: Rite, Jēkabpils District, Latvia, 2000
Interviewer: Biruta Abuls
Transcribed by Ivars Korbs
Processed for publication by Māra Zirnīte
Translated from Latvian by Astra Zemzars

Rite is in Sēlija, on the border between Latvia and Lithuania. During the Soviet occupation of this area, as elsewhere in Latvia, Latvians and guest workers of many ethnicities worked in the kolkhozs *together, and thus the common, conversational language was Russian.*

Two differing experiences are reflected in this interview. The interviewer is Biruta Abuls from the USA. The story of the interviewee contains echoes of the Russian language, irrespective of the fact that the interviewer does not understand them. The text forms a monologue, in which the initiative of the interviewee is revealed as she describes an overview of her life, making her own selection of themes and life stages that she wishes to discuss. Initially, she draws a general outline, using quotations of folk songs. It seems as if she were using the didactic approach of the kindergarten teacher to conquer the unfamiliar. During the course of the interview the story becomes more concrete; the interviewee opens up and begins to discuss particular issues. One of the most expressive descriptions is that of her father who was a coffin maker, and her childhood memories.

The life story fragment published here provides an overall impression of the thematic composition of the interview in a shortened form.

1 A

Austra Lāce: What shall I begin with? I was born in Plavinas, on the banks of the Daugava River, in a very beautiful place. I think that to every person, their homeland is the most beautiful, and I think that mine is the most beautiful. If I have to say who raised me, then I have to say that it was the beautiful nature there, and folklore. My mother [*dim.*] died when I was three years old. For a short while, my grandmother [*dim.*] raised me. Grandmother was the one who taught me the folk songs. She said, "My dear girl [*dim.*], for every place or every job there is a folk song." And it is really so. I think, that is the main educator – the folk song, and nature.

If one says that today life is hard, yes, life is hard, but nevertheless I want to live, and nature is beautiful. It is beautiful in the spring, in the fall, even in winter. Perhaps I feel sad that, during that time when the communists were 'building' communism, what was the most beautiful in Latvia that was destroyed – was Staburags [*a large cliff on the left bank of the Daugava River*]. I think that I probably have some pebbles from Staburags – they are the same that were in the cliffs. That is my youth and my childhood. I grew up there and I used to go there. The Song Festival took place there; everything took place at Staburags. We crossed in boats. The Daugava River rapids, where they built the Aizkraukle hydroelectric station – they are all under water now. I think that was a very foolish thing to do. Latvia has Staburags – "Why are you crying, beautiful maiden from Staburags?" That is something historic. And when I worked in the kindergarten with the children, then the other class managers usually said, "You are the way you are because you were born and raised in such a place, a beautiful place." It can't be otherwise – the castle ruins of Koknese which now are under water, the Perse waterfall….

My parents had a house on the very bank of the Daugava, by the so-called Devil's whirlpool, or the Crazy whirlpool as it was called, – those were the largest rapids on the Daugava. They were so shallow, to the ankles – that we could cross the Daugava over these rapids. Only in one place [*dim.*] there was a way for the rafts. When the ice broke in the spring – that was something indescribable. Then came the ice from Russia. Amazing what came on that ice – haystacks, houses [*dim.*] and bathhouses [*dim.*], dogs… this ice,

when it arrived at my house, at the Crazy whirlpool, then all these things went round and round in the whirlpool. You could hear the noise kilometers away. Of course in the spring all the inhabitants of Plavinas were on the banks of the Daugava – all the children, all the old folks – at that time, people did not watch television so much, nor listen in to the radio – all gatherings took place on the banks of the Daugava. Again, in the summer when the berry-alders bloomed and the raftsmen called to each other – you cannot recreate that anymore. I have grown up in this atmosphere and I think there is nothing more beautiful in the world.

I have traveled – we had excursions abroad; I was just in Denmark, Poland. During my retirement. Today, due to poverty, there is less travel, but during the Communist years, as much as I worked in the kindergarten, and as I was the best worker, I always received free trips. The republics of the Soviet Union – for instance, the Caucasus, the Peak of Elbrus, and the Fergana Valley – it was all so beautiful. I think, that they think that their homeland is the most beautiful. For instance, the blooming desert, when the cactuses bloom. Likewise, I think that my homeland is the most beautiful. That is the way it is.

When my daughter was born, my husband brought me here. Married me and brought me here. He was also from Plavinas, but he had a job here, he was an electrical engineer. During the time of the collective farms, they needed someone especially smart here. He was a good specialist, and they hired him here and I, too, had to come here. I was born in 1938. My daughter is forty years old.

About the folklore – you know, it was my grandmother [*dim.*] introduced me to folklore. She always said, "He who works, let him work – let him work singing; he who sleeps, let him sleep – let him sleep crying." [*a well-known folk song*] If I did not want to do something, she always recited a folk song. Another time [*dim.*] she called me to help, to weed – I did not like to weed. She says, "Come, my little girl [*dim.*], help me, I can't weed all of this, I have to finish by lunchtime." She says, " Two arms [*dim.*], two legs [*dim.*] – they can't do the job; many arms [*dim.*], many legs [*dim.*] – they can do the job." You understand, she raised me with folk songs, so I began to like the folk songs. I always wanted to myself. When I was raising my daughter, I raised her like myself. I think she is also somewhat eccentric, it is very hard for her to live in today's circumstances. She has feelings that were inculcated when she was a little child [*dim.*], about three years old, and she just began to talk and I did not the have time to spend with her, so I said,

"Sit down, look at the books."

I gave her picture books, illustrated by Staraste, then, the books had very beautiful pictures.

I read her the folk song and I said, "Look how sad the little girl is, standing there. The folk song said, "She does not have her own mother [*dim.*] to place her in the sunshine [*dim.*]." She started to cry. She was only three years old, but she started to cry.

I asked her, "What happened; why are you crying?"

"Mommy, why doesn't she have her own mother [*dim.*]?"

I said, "Perhaps she has died. She does not have anyone to place her in the sunshine [*dim.*]." I always explained what the folk song meant, and she is like me. No matter how hard it gets, she always recites a folk song. [..] During the times of the collective farms, all of us had to weed the beet fields. I worked in the kindergarten. But the field is assigned to you and you have to definitely weed it.

I go to weed, and she comes with me, she was about six years old. I couldn't go on anymore, it was so hot and the beets were in clay soil.

I said, "I can't anymore, I have no more strength. Let them be."

She recites, behind me, "Mother, you can't. You have to weed. "The eyes are afraid of work, the hands do not fear work – the hands do not fear work, they know how to do it." And you know, I felt ashamed. That is how it is with the folk songs.

Perhaps it was because of the folk songs that I got a job in the kindergarten, with children. When I came here there was no other job available. Of course, the collective farm, but I thought I wasn't going there – was I going to milk cows? I worked in the town in the post office and telephone exchange. A small post office, Gostini, was located near Plavinas. It was then in a suburb, now it is Plavinas 2. That was my first job.

At first I worked as a bookkeeper in the post office, communications division, as much as I had studied bookkeeping. But I had to replace one person who was on vacation, who worked in the small division [*dim.*] where you had to do everything – receive shipments, packages, work the night shift on the telephone. They gave vacation time to a woman [*dim.*]. But I began to like working there, because I had contact with people. Bookkeeping was dry paperwork. I came here and they offered me the class manager's job at the kindergarten. It was very hard in the beginning, because there were thirty children in the group, aged one to seven, until they went to school. But then, they built a new kindergarten and divided the kids into groups [*dim.*] by age. That white house, where the school is – that was the kindergarten. But the old one – here was an old, old chicken farm [*dim.*] – that was my first place [*dim.*] of employment. So it is. But I am saying that it is not bad to have such a mixed group, the big ones learn a lot from the little ones. But it is hard to work, when you have to teach this and this. When they divided them by ages then it was better. I had to work all my life with nature and with folklore, because it was easier to handle the children and that can't be replaced. For activities we went outside. We counted the pebbles [*dim.*], placed them. Why should I teach counting indoors when I can do it in nature. It is easier to do it outdoors. And the drawing – with a stick [*dim.*] in the sand, or in the snow. Such has been my life all along.

Biruta Abuls: You have instilled the love of folk songs in all of these children?

Austra Lāce: You could say yes. I don't know how it is, how it is supposed to be. I hear that abroad children are independent at a very early age. That is what I hear, I don't know if it is so good that they can do what they want. But you know, I believe that a child should know what it can and what it cannot do. I believe in the old methods. My children grew up – my child and my grandchild. All my books were around – if I told my one-year-old that "you cannot touch it" then he has to understand this without fighting about it. I don't know how, but you have to be stern and tell them. I get very angry when mothers [*dim.*] today say, "But I can't. He is so small [*dim.*], he does not understand." That is stupid – they understand very well, but you have to be stern when you tell them to do or not to do something. But you mustn't speak in a way that they maybe have or maybe don't have to do it – children have to understand clearly. I did not have any problems, really.

I don't know, sometimes now when I go to the kindergarten, sometimes I am so angry at what I see there. [..] Today all kinds of literature is available, during those times, which we now call the times of stagnation, there was no such literature. Even about traditions. We had to suck them out of a stone. We stole old literature, whatever. Now the shelves are full, you only take and use it. But then it was very hard, you had to improvise. We tried. Take those same traditions. Easter is coming. We thought. We found something, what a grandmother [*dim.*] had told and we tried to make it more interesting. We embroidered doilies [*dim.*]. I am ashamed of myself. We embroidered tablecloths [*dim.*] with eggs [*dim.*]. [..] We made chickens [*dim.*], to make it more interesting for the children. Nowadays, you can get it all ready-made, and you do not have to hide it.

I don't know. People don't want to work. People don't want to, they ask, "What's in it for me?" But then, I only made 20 rubles a month. But I didn't ask, "What's in it for me?" I came home and I continued. Then I was younger, I had cows and a pig. My man scolded me, in the other room. "What are you doing all night?" But I was making something… Usually it was because I had to lead the parent meetings. Today they all have their own children, in school, all my charges [*dim.*] in the kindergarten. At times they look so down, that the meetings aren't very good. But I prepared a whole month for the parents meetings. I kept thinking – how I could make it more interesting for the parents. Another time we agreed to make salad [*dim.*], to serve to the mothers [*dim.*]. The children themselves – but that in itself is a job. We cut and mixed, and they, in white aprons, served their mothers. When it was Soviet Army Day, we invited the fathers. And then we thought again, what are we going to do. We had an art exhibit – the children had drawn the portraits of their fathers [*dim.*]. But then we asked the fathers to draw… they came eagerly to the parents meetings. Both the fathers and the mothers. Now they say no one comes to the meetings. But you have to arouse their interest.

Biruta Abuls: During the Communist years, did you have to follow a program set by Lenin?

Austra Lāce: Of course, you did. Now when I think about it, it is ridiculous what all I have gone through. First we had to sing – of both Lenin and Stalin…. we had to sing songs [..] children were required to know them. Then came the period of friendship among nationalities. Oh my, what folk costumes we needed – from Georgia, Armenia, Turkmenistan, flags and seals! At the performance one had to sing in Russian and then in Latvian. I can say this about the Russian language – it is not bad. It wasn't bad to know another language. You know, there were many Russians here. This is such a place, Druvas, where there were more Russians than Lithuanians. As much as the Lithuanian border was very near, there were very few Latvians.

Biruta Abuls: Did you speak Russian in the kindergarten?

Austra Lāce: I spoke both languages. I have not learned Lithuanian while living here all these years, but I speak Russian as well as I do Latvian. If someone did not know, they soon learned. Children learn languages very fast. Latvians learned Russian. It wasn't the main language, but it was right along with it. Druvas is 100 kilometers from Daugavpils and 100 kilometers from Riga. We needed laborers and they were sent from prisons, I don't know where they all came from. Perhaps they were unemployed, perhaps immigrants. They lived communally. Many got married and settled here permanently. Children appeared. In the kindergarten, I said in the morning "good morning" in Latvian, and then I translated it because many did not understand.

Biruta Abuls: Did the Russian children learn Latvian?

Austra Lāce: They learned. I can tell you that many who settled here do not want to be called Russians. They want to be called Latvians.

Biruta Abuls: Did you recite folk songs in Latvian to them?

Austra Lāce: Yes, in Latvian. I explained the thought, what it meant, but I could not translate it grammatically. Of course, they understood what it was. We also had lots of Russian literature. The Latvians studied it; it was compulsory that we subscribe to it, we couldn't be without it. [..] Perhaps today it is no longer so, there is no money and even in schools they do not subscribe to it. But in those days we had to have literature – both Russian and Latvian. We received money for subscriptions. We also had the Latvian children's magazines "*Zīlīte*" and "*Ezītis*" and all those. From the very beginning, I lived in Jaunaudzes – five kilometers from the Rite elementary school. There was a house there. There were no apartments in the village center, so we received an apartment there. Then I walked to here. A twenty minute fast walk. The road curved around the lake. I had to be at work at 8:00 a.m., I left home shortly before 7:00 a.m. and by 8:00 a.m. I was at work. I went home at 9:00 p.m. Today it is easier for class managers to work; I really, really do not like it when they go on strike, but I guess they have to do this.

Biruta Abuls: You were with the children from 8:00 a.m.?

Austra Lāce: Yes, I also slept at night with the children. Perhaps the mothers had to work on the farms and had to leave early in the morning. Some children stayed overnight and the class managers had to put them to bed at 9:00 p.m. Then you are free and then the night sitter comes and stays there until morning. We changed shifts – one week I worked from seven until two and the next week, from two until nine. Two class managers – we changed. Now it is very nice – when the school ends, the kindergarten ends. I think that we had more children in the summer than in the winter. In the summer, the mothers had to mow hay and to weed – then the kindergarten was overcrowded. Now it is good for the class managers – they receive a salary, but they live like the teachers at home. We only were counted as teachers, but we all had animals at home and we had to do it all. I do not complain; I liked it. I met with my students. Now when we talk, they say, "Aunt Austra" – they called me Aunt Austra. When the disrict officers came, they instructed us to say "Class Manager Austra". I told them, "Call me Aunt Austra." We thought it sounded friendlier, more family-like, so it seemed. I did not ask to be addressed so officially.

"Aunt Austra," they said, "we were afraid of you."

I asked, "What was it that you were afraid of?"

"When you came into the bedroom and said in a strict voice, "You have to sleep!" [..] We thought, now we have to sleep, and we were afraid of what would happen if we did not sleep."

I asked, "And the other class manager?"

"No, we were not afraid of Aunt Jana. She said, "Now sleep." I tell you, you have to show that one has to obey you. It really hurts me when mothers say today that you cannot tell a child to obey. You can make him obey."

Biruta Abuls: Do you still do something with folklore?

Austra Lāce: [..] We had a women's club, it had sprung up. In the Danish school the leaders are Lisa and Nils from Denmark. They help to keep up the school. Lisa organized a women's club. In the Sauka parish there is a private elementary school in Rigmora. We were there and one time she said, "We need to organize a club." In Rite we have retirees and also stay-at-home younger women. But somehow it did not last. Now we only go to the elementary school. The parish chairman says that someone has to be its soul. So, when we are active, we go there on Thursdays. In the winter, we go more often. We have more free time in the winter and we go there more often. Then we sit around the coffee table. [..] Then I always try... I look in the calendar - is there a Mara name day or some other day. Even though it may not be Latvian – today many other name days have been added – Valentine's Day and others. There is also an Anna Day and others. I look in the literature and make something, an appropriate card – if it's Valentine's Day a card with a heart, or if it is a Harvest Festival, then a sheaf of grain from paper [..] and I write about work in the card. "I go to help, I run to help." I write down the date and when we sit down for a cup of coffee, I give a card to each member.

Biruta Abuls: Why do you have a bright outlook on life while others are so depressed?

Austra Lāce: [..] You understand: if people do not have work, if there is no money to buy bread [*dim.*] for the children. It is terrible, when there are small children. Well, I do not have such small children. I have a daughter, grandson attending high school in Jekabpils. She needs many things and I know that she works at two jobs. She almost does not sleep, so that she can receive the 100 lats; and how much is 100 lats? You understand: I feel sorry for her. During the day, she works in the meat plant. In the kitchen there, she is a pastry-cook, a culinary specialist. That plant is falling apart. She only receives 40 lats there. She could not do more. Her child in high school needs a lot. Her husband also works, but he earns very little, his month's salary is about 50 lats. She went to bake bread at night. When a person does not sleep at night? Two nights she bakes, in the heat, by the ovens. Then she finishes and goes to the meat plant. Officially she works in the meat plant. There a lot of taxes are deducted from her. She receives altogether 100 *lats* a month. It is hard.

But she has always told me, "I do not understand it when men say that they cannot get a job. There is always work, if you want to work." Why can't you go and weed for someone? They may not be able to pay you, but they could feed you. Then there are those who can pay, but people think that the pay is too small. If one is paid only one *lat* a day - that is too little. I know that my daughter thinks that way, too. I said, "My dear girl, but how much do you receive at the meat plant? Why don't you leave it?" If other women receive 40 *lats*, she receives 30, because she has the other job where she has big taxes deducted. She says, "Mother, but 30 *lats* are still more than nothing." People do not think. Not all people think alike. It is from the Communist times. We have one man in our building; he sat at the wheel, drove a tractor. He went with the tractor to the woods, spent the day doing nothing, came home in the evening, and received the day's pay. He cannot reorient his thinking. There are many people like that. My child says, "Mother, I will never be without a job. I am not ashamed of any sort of work. If I lose this job, all the same, I will go and sweep the streets. I am not ashamed of work." She lives in Jekabpils.

Every person thinks in their own way. I think that life is so beautiful, even with all of its hardships; this is the only life that we have. I say a lot of times, "Look around!" I draw their attention; in the spring the birds return. They are in a hurry; they don't even look back. Do they see that the stork has returned to our tower? Some people do not know whether the stork has returned or not. He does not see anything similar. But a person should see. You can see something beautiful everywhere.

Take, for instance, today - it is the third Whitsuntide. On that Saturday I wash the hallway. I went to the ditch and brought back birch boughs. One of our neighbors is a young teacher. I placed the birches in

water, she says: "What, are we having a dance here?" I said, "No, today is Whitsuntide Saturday." [..] But I can't be any different. From my childhood, I know that grandmother [*dim.*] said, "My dear girl [*dim.*], hurry up, [..] soon [..] the bells [*dim.*] will ring in Whitsuntide Saturday. We have to hurry to make piragi [*dim.*] before then, and we have to sweep the yard [*dim.*]."

Then I was small, I really did not understand God, but all my life I have felt – my soul trembles when I enter a church. Everything in those surroundings works on me. My grandmother held my hand and took me to church, I was four years old. And when they lit the candles in Plavinas, my home church where I was christened, you understand, that was so beautiful! I thought that there was no other Christmas tree so beautiful. Then came a period – when I was already in school – when we were forbidden to go to church. They even sent people to observe who went to church. Those who had been raised that way, not all, each soul is different, then we learned to enter from the other side, where the minister enters.

1B

Austra Lāce: [..] I think the country has to adopt a law – teach religion. I have not learned it, but let me tell you how it is. I know what I know from my Bible and grandmother's [*dim.*], I have her Bible, but I think the country should adopt it officially, compulsory. I know that there are teachers who shrink from this. But I think you learn so much good from the Commandments. I can't say that I am a religious person. Sunday mornings there is a radio broadcast of a worship service from Riga. It is either a Lutheran, or a Baptist congregation at 9:00 a.m. I now live alone, I have no one else. I light a candle and I sit and listen to it. I really enjoy it when the ministers explain, they read from the Bible and then they explain it. They compare it to our Parliament deputies, our life, which is really extraordinary. That should be taught in school. I don't know, can't tell you, who else in Druvas listens to the worship service. I can almost from my heart and soul tell you that probably no one else does.

Biruta Abuls: Do you have anyone who thinks like you?

Austra Lāce: Here, almost no one. The women's club is no more. I had thought we could have Holy Communion. I sort of remember, it was when my grandfather was still alive, but I remember it faintly; but my father was a carpenter. And he was a famous coffin maker.

He also knew how to make furniture. His furniture was lathed and the coffins also. Throughout my life I have observed what a coffin is like. Why is it covered with cloth? I also think that it will soon fall apart, the coffin. I sat on the workbench. Seeing as I did not have a mother, then I sat on the workbench by my father as he made the coffins. Yes, he had made one for himself, and later I had a stepmother and he made oak coffins. For 23 years they were in the upstairs room. I was not afraid of coffins. The situation was such, that in the winter he occasionally also made beds, with high headboards and footboards, and since my bed was by the stove, a coffin would be put beside it to dry. At other times, my father went to the upstairs room and napped on the wood chips [*dim.*].

Then, as he became weaker, he had cows [*dim.*], goats [*dim.*], later he was the director at the hay collection point. There were hay collection points from the collective farms. Taxes had to be paid to the state. Both the private farms and the collective farms went there. That is when we had two cows [*dim.*]. Since the hay had to be mowed, he taught me to do it. I really liked it that he was strict. I was not afraid of him. But he said to me, crying,

"You are all I have in life. If I don't teach you, then life will." I had to go with him to rake the hay. I was a small child [*dim.*] and the rake was big… I got a blister.

He said, "Why do you have a blister? Because your hand goes up and down the rake handle. Keep it in one place and rake." Later, everyone was surprised how I knew how to put hay on the rack. He taught me. He put me on the bicycle [*dim.*], motorized bicycles had just become popular, we attached a motor [*dim.*] to the bicycle. He made a big seat for me. The fields that we were given were outside of Plavinas, in Jaunkalsnava, near the Veseta river. The water is stagnant and some type of barley plant grows there. The cows eat it.

My stepmother said, "Why are you taking the girl with you?"

He said, "She should learn. That is the place to learn." I hope he is in heaven, that he was so strict with me, that he taught me. I did not get lost in life. Never. I go to the cemetery and I cry. I thought, what an angry father I have. Today no parents are like that.

Biruta Abuls: You married and your husband worked here?

Austra Lāce: Yes, he worked. Our life fell apart. We came here, we were the model family. The old ones haven't all died; they remember. We bought a motorcycle, "*Izh Jupiter*" with a side seat. We were the model family when we lived in Plavinas. When we came here, my daughter was six years old. My husband knew the director, a distant relative. We came every Sunday for an outing, we did not have a car, had bicycles. A pot [*dim.*] hanging and a child seated in the box [*dim.*] on one bicycle, and on the other, all our goods, and we rode to the banks of the Aiviekste River to fish and stay overnight. At times when Sarmite was bitten by mosquitoes, my mother-in-law was angry with me when we returned home. My mother-in-law says,

"Why do you take your child with you, leave her at home, don't feed her to the mosquitoes!"

"No" he says, "we all need to be together, and that is beautiful." And then we came here and bought a motorcycle. Then we really never slept at home on Sundays – we pitched a tent or a shelter on an island, or on the big Stepel hill.

Also, in the last year before we divorced, before our life went awry, our daughter was in the sixth grade in Rite, we took our last vacation together. All three of us left home with the motorcycle for a month and a half. We gave the cow to a farmer to care for it and take the milk, and with the motorcycle and all our goods that we could take along we went to Leningrad. We pitched a tent in Leningrad near an army barracks [..] by the Pulkov observatory. And every day we drove around Leningrad. So we lived with our daughter for a month. She said,

"Mommy, I will never have such memories in life as I had with you and dad." Then one day we decided to fly from Leningrad to Moscow, to the achievement exhibit. Then for three days and nights we left everything and flew on a plane. We looked at everything. Then we returned through Estonia. So went a month and a half. Do you understand? Everyone looked at us as a model family.

But then we had a failure. He was also a musician. Sometimes I went along, but how can you go along all the time when you have a child! There was a female singer. And our family fell apart. But he did not stay with her for long, about three or four years and then he divorced her. I guess you leave a good one and look for a better one, and then look for a still better one. But it does not come out like that. Then he left her for another one. We both were born in the same year. Now he is alone and, through our daughter, I know that he wants to return to me. For about the last four years. He is again divorced and now he says, seriously, we should get together. But I no longer want to. There is too much pain…Even though I have forgiven them all. We are on good terms with all the other wives and my daughter also.

Biruta Abuls: Does he have other children?

Austra Lāce: Yes. He had children with all of them. My daughter, when his mother died, who loved us very much - she always called me her dear girl, she lived with me for a long time - and when she died at the age of 92 at her daughter's in Sigulda, my daughter arranged the funeral in Jekabpils. Here in Krievciems it is closer, Sigulda is far – she wanted to be buried in her family cemetery, and my daughter arranged the funeral. She said, "Mom, I will call the children of all the wives, because they are grandchildren to the grandmother [*dim.*]." It is not our business how the grownups got along, but she said that she is a grandmother [*dim.*] first of all. It was really beautiful –we all gathered at the cemetery and all the grandchildren [*dim.*] gathered at the grandmother's grave [*dim.*]. [..]

Biruta Abuls: What musical instruments did he play?

Austra Lāce: He played the clarinet, saxophone, and trumpet. Now we all laugh. He writes me letters and says that we should remarry.

I said, "We were married once."

He said, "This time not at the Justice of the Peace, but in a church."

That's right, I understand him - he is stiff, crooked, and lame. Old age – his back bothered him in his youth, it was injured. He and his stepfather built houses, went to the woods, dragged the logs. Worked hard and injured his back. And it is harder for a man to be alone when he gets old. What about me? I don't know. My daughter would be very happy, if her mother and father would be together.

I tell him, "There are others, you can start afresh, court them again."

He said, "Don't mention it. If I had the smarts that I have now…"

Still, we had a lot in common. Many wondered, even I did, that it happened as it did, but… There, where nature was beautiful, he also had an appreciation of it. He did not find another soul mate, which is why he divorced and divorced. But now it is a little too late.

Biruta Abuls: Don't you feel lonely?

Austra Lāce: Do you know when I feel lonely? I go out among people – there is an event, someone needs advice, someone needs something else, and I am ready to help.

The school children come from the technical school, "Aunt Austra, you probably have some materials about Druvas, we cannot find anything in the library." That's right, I had some things. I cut from the newspapers [..] for forty years; since I live here, I have a lot of clippings. Historical ones, as well as about agriculture. [..]

Biruta Abuls: Do you have an income or do you live on your pension?

Austra Lāce: I live on my pension. I have always purchased books; I wanted to read. I have to do renovations - I have purchased wallpaper; I have to do some cosmetic repairs. But then I think that I will go to my daughter; she lives in a private home, my mother-in-law's home. Twelve years ago she received a communal apartment. She went to work even while the child was small. She did not have to work, because the child was small, but she was asked to come back, because she was a needed specialist – with the imported stoves, which were installed in the meat plant. She knew and she could. They told her, "If you come to work, we will sign you up for an apartment." So she accepted. The first apartments that became free, in the territory of the Krustpils castle, were those of the army. The first officers, the higher-up ones, were the first to leave, so she received an apartment. A very good one. The apartment remained empty for a long time.

She said, "Mother, you will be getting older, it will be harder for you. Let's get rid of the cow [dim.]; you come into town and live with me."

But I said, "I like to work with the soil [*dim.*] (everything has been built up through the years) while I still can." I still keep a garden. I raise potatoes and cabbages there. I raise them for her, too. I am still holding on, and I am not leaving. Last year she said that she couldn't hold on to the apartment any longer, that it had to be privatized, someone had to live there. [She talks about the apartment.] I laugh, because the apartment is my only wealth – when I die, my daughter can sell it and have the money to bury me.

NMV 75

VALĒRIJA SIECENIECE

Interview: Rīga, Latvia, 1993
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I was introduced to Valērija Sieceniece by my father, who also took part in the interview. He became involved in the Oral History Project I had begun, because he believed that people had to leave accounts of their lives for posterity. V. Sieceniece lived in a tiny one-room apartment in Iļģuciems, until the end of her life in 1998. She looked after herself, climbed the staircase in winter and summer to buy groceries. On the first occasion, our discussion revolved around her memories of Siberia and her famous men: her noteworthy father-in-law, economist Pēteris Siecenieks; her husband, Aleksandrs; and her father, Pēteris Liepiņš, commissary of the Latvian Army. Many more discussions occurred later, which were recorded on five cassette tapes. After I got to know Valērija Sieceniece better, I discovered that she represented the pre-war Association of Academically Educated Latvian Women and was actively involved in reviving this organisation. She was wiry and small in stature and was, until the end of her life, an active archival researcher, a member of the Friends of the Riga Museum of History and Navigation, who enthusiastically told of her discoveries about the history of Rīga from archival research. She was a many-sided personality, into which the reader of her narrative can gain an insight.

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Māra Zirnīte: Today is June 10, 1993. Perhaps you could tell us your name.

Valērija Sieceniece: Valērija Sieceniece.

Māra Zirnīte: As I understood from our previous conversations, you are willing to tell us about some of the more important events in your life.

Valērija Sieceniece: I have prepared the most important event not only in my own life, but also in the life of Latvia – the time of exile. Then I've prepared some information about my husband, Aleksandrs Siecenieks. I have his biography, his rehabilitation document, and I have his death certificate. Well, how should I start?

I think that there's not really that much, but to prepare for an interview like this, particularly one that may be written down somewhere afterwards – you have to think. [..] There now, it's very hard, because it's a very large topic. Then, how do you choose and which is the most important, you see. And how then, if they have never... At first I refused, I thought, well, I will sometime; but it has been a long time... and I feel, there I feel happy – in the archives. And I can sit there for three, four hours – turning the pages, reading.

Well, and then I decided that I wanted to trace the Siecenieks family tree, and I drew it up. It is very interesting. That is, it would also be good.... I must say – there is a lot of information, but I don't have the energy any more, my capacity for work is not very great. And I can't relax when I write, then I always, my girl friend tells me, "You should write and, within every hour, have a fifteen-minute rest." I can't, I lose the thread of the story.

Last night I had a little rest and I dug around a bit; my things are in such a mess. And I found that I actually did write memoirs of my time in exile. And this was connected to the fact that, when my mother was still alive, I had to go to work, sometimes in two places, and I didn't have time to go into much depth, but after that I... became more involved with it. And this happened around 1970, in the 1970s; mum died in 1973, and around 1976 I began to write my memoirs. See, these I have, these I could read to you. Of course, I haven't worked on them; whatever I felt at the time, I just wrote down, so, what do you think, does this interest you?

My handwriting isn't very good.

In early June of 1940 my husband and I were in Tallin. My husband was a member of a cooperative and was participating in a meeting of Baltic States Cooperatives. The men worked on addressing various questions that affected cooperative societies, and we – the wives, were introduced to the work of various women's organisations. That was, I think, on June 16th. We were gathered in the rooms of a women's organisation and were listening to information about the work of this organisation. Suddenly an employee came in and called our guide outside. When he returned, he was pale, and he looked very disturbed, and quietly told us, "The Red Army has already invaded Lithuania, now they have turned toward Latvia." Well, of course we stopped everything.

A ball was also scheduled for the same day on the premises of *Estonia*, and it could not be cancelled. That was a very unusual ball: men in tails, we were in evening attire, there was music, there was dancing. And it proceeded, even though everyone already knew what had happened. Some ladies sat on the sidelines and cried. We still danced, though, and the whole hall looked very special to us, like we were watching it through a fantastic haze. We stayed there until the morning light, and my husband and I decided to walk back to our hotel. And along the way we talked. It seemed to me, I still clearly remember, that as if a grey, a grey mass was coming upon us, in which you couldn't see any faces, it was threatening us. I had a vision like this. When we got back to the hotel, it was already morning; we had to be at the station soon, and then my husband and I said good-bye, because we understood what was, was in store for us. There were a lot of young people at the station – students, most likely from the meeting of some student organisation. They were drinking and singing.

We arrived in Riga on the 17th of June. We lived in Valdemara Street. I went to the window and saw that grey mass – dusty and truly grey, with grey, expressionless, dull faces. One of them had, had flowers in his hands. They tried to smile, but they weren't convincing. During this time, my husband was swearing on the phone. The operator interrupted him to warn him that listening in on conversations had already begun.

Māra Zirnīte: Then what did he talk about after that?

Valērija Sieceniece: What was he talking about? Well, he was furious about what was happening and was explaining his view fairly flatly. It says in my husband's passport, that he has fought against Germans and Bolsheviks. At that time, Minister Berzins' wife was the leader of *Aizsardzes* [*a Home Guard organisation*]. I wasn't in the *Aizsardzes*; I have never wanted to be. I was a member of many other organisations, but at that moment, I decided that I had to join the *Aizsardzes*. I shouldn't be afraid, I needed to do the same as many other Latvian women, but Mrs. Berzina refused to let me join. Well, she must have understood what could happen. But my husband did it – joined the *Aizsargi*, the pilots. But he never could do anything there.

Back then I was working as an assistant to Professor Karklins in the Commerce and Banking Department of the Economics Department at the University. A large number of relevant books suddenly appeared in our library, the University library, our faculty library – by Lenin, Stalin, etcetera. And I read these and understood that we, two people, could not stay in a five room apartment, and that we were in danger, that, that someone would begin to live there, that the ruling powers would give it to strangers. I quickly understood... My husband's cousin was married to Professor Gartier's youngest daughter. They owned a fairly small two-story house in Pārdaugava, in Margrietas Street, and one of the flats on the second floor was for rent. On the whole, these were large apartments. And the house was divided in half: on one side there were three-room apartments, on the other side, two-room apartments. The three-room apartments had three rooms. We organised a bedroom in one, a smaller dining room in the second, and the last was the big room of the apartment: it was around 30 or 40 metres. We sent some of our furniture to our holiday house at Katrinmuiza at Jugla and arranged the rest of our furniture as best we could. My husband's Central Insurance Association was abolished, it was a cooperative society.

And now I'll tell you some completely strange things. I didn't have lectures on Fridays, either I didn't have to go in at all, or just in the afternoon. And then, my husband went to work in the morning and I

stayed in bed, and I dreamt that I was walking in a field of rye and Peteris Siecenieks was coming towards me – my father-in-law, who had died in 1930. And I happily rushed to him, ran up to him, hugged and said that I wanted to tell him what had happened to Sasha, as if I wanted to tell him something. Well, it wasn't anything particularly amazing. I woke up and at that moment I knew: something had happened to my husband; I knew it clear as day. I rang him, and noone answered. I got dressed, ran, ran and then took the tram to the city and was going down... in the centre of Riga, and right there, where my husband's new workplace was, one of his employees was coming towards me, crying.

I said, "What's happened? What's happened?"

She said, "Nothing, nothing."

I said, "Where is my husband?"

"He's right there."

I ran upstairs, ran into his little office. He came towards me with a strange look on his face, and said, "I've been fired."

I said, "That's not the biggest misfortune, there's something worse in store for us."

After that he still ... Well, everyone knew what kind of an employee he was. He was transferred to some trust.

Māra Zirnīte: Excuse me; from which workplace was he was fired?

Valērija Sieceniece: It was also an insurance agency, insurance office, but organised along lines prescribed by the Soviet Union.

Māra Zirnīte: What kind of workplace was he fired from?

Valērija Sieceniece: You see my husband, husband's father was a worker in a consumer co-operative society, my husband was in the Fire Insurance Cooperative, you could say he was the founder, the founder of the board of the cooperative... And he had worked there all of his life. He was the director of the board, not an appointed, but an elected director, as were all of the positions in the cooperative. And you see, it was abolished and he was transferred to a, I can't remember what the name of the street was, but it was already the current, meaning a Soviet, a Soviet insurance office. I can't really remember what it was called back then.[..]

Yes... He had a funny look on his face and told me, "I've been fired." He finished the things he had to do, and we went to lunch, and I still remember, we went to the "Roma" basement. We were talking about it and I said, I said, "That's not the worst thing that's happened."

He was then soon transferred to the planning section of a Light Industry Trust. His boss was this Treijs, a communist, of course. Well then, one night the doorbell rang and a group came in, showed us a search warrant. I had already… after that dream, had looked through all of our...

Māra Zirnīte: You had looked through?

Valērija Sieceniece: Already looked through, and everything, and everything that I considered... The many invitations we had from this or that person... I had destroyed them all.

Māra Zirnīte: What kind of invitations? From which offices?

Valērija Sieceniece: You know, they were invitations to balls, meetings; as for who had sent them – private individuals, or sent by the relevant organisation. There were ones from ministers, from representatives of big businesses, there was everything that, back then, that already counted as dubious correspondence; there were greeting cards.

Māra Zirnīte: So you didn't want for those names to be found among your things?

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, but it couldn't really help the situation, it didn't really matter. You see, each organisation gave a gift to the castle [*the residence of the President of Latvia during independence*]. When Ulmanis came to power. And my husband's organisation – cooperative – mutual fire insurance agency – gave a set of dining room furniture to the castle. And this dining room furniture was made – was specially made, according to a special... right at that time. And this had to be collected and sent to the castle. And who had to do this? My husband had to do this. He did it and received a letter of thanks from Ulmanis. And the letter of thanks was in his briefcase. Well, they found it. But it didn't matter any more.

One evening our doorbell rang, it was already... and my husband's boss came in, this Treijs. He wanted to speak to my husband privately, but I stayed with them. And then he offered my husband a job. He didn't tell him where the job was or what he would have to do. Every morning, a car would come and collect him, would take him there and afterwards bring him home again. I played the role of the hysterical female and said, "No, no, no, never! I won't even know where my husband is! No, no, no! Sasha, you can't, you can't do it." He wouldn't have done it anyway, and he refused.

Then it was already, it was, my husband asked Treijs one day, on a Friday, to allow him to leave, to give him a day off. He wanted to go to Katrinmuiza to organise a few things. Treijs didn't let him take the day off. And that was, I dare say, on the 12th of June. And the next night, I had gone to my parents to the Babite parish, it was a very beautiful day. I remember the beautiful day very well, the peace. Well, and our janitor had told someone that soon a lot of the apartments would be empty. I didn't pay any attention. And as it happened on the night of the 13th, the doorbell rang. And Treijs came in, who was the leader of it all, then someone who had just been let out of jail, a political prisoner, apparently, and some other people. And they read to us a memorandum that we had to leave the territory of Latvia, to go away. They reassured us, "There you will all be able to work in your own professions."

And I got very upset, I began to think about what my mother would say, how she would take the news. And I rang "Avas" – that was the name of their house – the phone was out of order. Then my husband asked for permission to ring his mother. Treijs must have felt uncomfortable, so he let him. Old Mrs. Sieceniece came to us, came with Margers, her grandson. And we began packing, and, you know, I was so confused and particularly because they said that it would be like this, that we would work in our professions. I instinctively packed my suitcases the same way that I always packed them when I went abroad. You can imagine what was in there, can't you?

Māra Zirnīte: What was in there?

Valērija Sieceniece: Well, there were, there were elegant dresses, there were elegant shoes, there was everything that I was back then. But then, Treijs felt sorry for me and told me, and then I understood a lot of things, "Well you shouldn't do that, you must pack bed clothes, winter clothes, warm underwear and that kind of thing." And then, I took a large sheet and began to throw everthing in there – ski boots, snowsuits and warm underwear, and blankets, and other things. And I tied it up, there must have been two large bundles. Well, and then they... Well, of course, Mrs. Sieceniece was crying... They called the car, a truck, because they couldn't pack it into a passenger car. And I remember that his mother had her arms outstretched to her son, calling, "Sasha! Sasha!" She never saw him again.

We went down the stairs and I saw when we went out onto the street that both Professor Gartier and his wife were standing there, they lived on the ground floor, they were standing at the window waving to us. We got into the truck; all of our bundles were packed in with us. First, we were taken to Tornakalns station; after that it turned out that either the train there, that it was full, or something. And on the way there we saw many other trucks the same as the one we were in.

Nearing the Daugava River Bridge, my husband said, "Now look back at Riga for the last time".

And I spontaneously answered, "No! This won't be the last time, I will return!" I returned, but he didn't.

And then we were taken to the shunting station. The famous red cattle cars were waiting at the shunting station – a line of them. A young militiaman in a new uniform helped lift me out, or should I say, took me on his arm and helped me to get out, and I said to him, "Latvian boys, what are you doing?"

And he said, "It's not us..."

But he was doing it. Well, we were both put into a cattle car, where there were already other people. There was also the French woman, the wife of the French ambassador, Mrs. Nuksa, with her son Andre, who was around 15 or 16 years old. There was a Jewish family. There was a young girl, a pianist, who had taken a keyboard with her to exercise her fingers. There was also an old lady, the mother of the confectioner, Pavasaris. Well, I don't remember all of them anymore; I can't list all of them. Yes, there was also a singer from the fringe theatre. There were two-story bunks along the sides, and the car had a hole chopped into the floor for a toilet.

I remained there. I settled down next to the little window and watched. It was getting darker, and I could see militiamen bringing women dressed in evening dresses – laughing, drunk women. These were bar ladies, without any luggage, and they were put into the cattle cars half naked.

The next morning... Of course, none of us had slept a wink. The next morning our car door opened and a man dressed in a uniform began to call out the men from our car according to a list.

Māra Zirnīte: Had the train already gone anywhere?

Valērija Sieceniece: No, we stood there all night. My husband... And we were told that it was happening because, you see, it wasn't appropriate for women and men to be transported together. And my husband, being a gentleman, took both bundles of warm clothes with him. I was left with my elegant suitcase, suitcases, and that was all.

The first thing... Yes, before that, as I was standing guard at the window, I saw Karlis Podnieks running by the window. And Karlis Podnieks, either he saw me, or that was the moment the car door was open, he asked, "Where is Irma?" His wife Mrs. Podnieks had tuberculosis and was in a sanatorium, and she had been given permission to come home for a couple of days, to their holiday house. She was alone, and Karlis was, Karlis was at work. And Karlis did that which many good husbands did – he said he wanted to go, too. And he ended up in the same place where my husband did.

Māra Zirnīte: You mean – he didn't end up with his wife? He said he wanted to go, in order to...?

Valērija Sieceniece: He thought that he could find his wife, because he didn't think that she would survive, as she was sick, etc.

Vilis Zirnītis: Skudra did the same thing.

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, I could tell you a few things. While I was at the window, I also saw this scene: A woman, fairly tall, with three children – a girl, about 11 or 12 years old in a wheelchair and two much younger children, – they were also loaded into a cattle car. Old people on stretchers, they were bringing old people. Our train began to move off first, and as fate had ordained it, that at that moment my husband was also at the window, and we managed to wave to each other. And that was the last time I saw him. Let's have a break now.

Of course, the mood was very glum. I was thinking about my mother and father the whole time; mostly about my mother, because, of course, I loved her very much. And then suddenly my subconscious began to work and there I remembered that once during the same period I am now telling you about, my mother had been rung up from the Babite parish and was asked how many children she had and if her children lived with them. And at that moment it hit me like a bolt of lightning, I understood why. Obviously they had also been taken. And no wonder. My father Peteris Liepins was among the founders of the Northern Army. Before that he worked in the Krasnoyarsk Regiment. He had a lot of experience right in the, in the organisation, supply, and financial aspects. Back then, we lived in, that was in 1918 and 1919, we lived in Terbata [*now Tartu, Estonia*].

I was born in Valka. And as my father was a soldier, our home was always wherever he was transferred to. Terbata was, Terbata is a very beautiful town. I spent my first school years there. There were no Latvian schools then, I attended the Pushkin High School and studied in Russian.

And then, when the battles began for the liberation of Latvia from the Bolsheviks and also the Germans, then my father also joined the founders of the Northern Army. And in our apartment ... I've gone back a bit.

Māra Zirnīte: That's alright.

Valērija Sieceniece: And at that time we were often visited by Colonel Berkis and at that time also Colonel Kalnins. Colonel Berkis was our last Minister of War. They would be discussing something, and my mother was cutting out and sewing shoulder boards from grey army… grey army blankets, and us kids put them in a pile. I won't talk about that now. I just wanted to tell you, why my father was also taken.

When Zemitans [*colonel, commander-in-chief of the Latvian Northern Army during the Latvian fight for independence in 1919–1920*] could take Riga, then also, in that summer, my father wrote to us, had us move from Terbata to Valmiera , where there was better access to food, and we had moved over there. And then, when Zemitans' army marched to Riga, then we were behind them. We travelled in cattle cars then

as well... We were in them, of course, of our own free will. My mother had already been to Terbata, had brought along all of our gear, this was with us as well, when we arrived in Riga. And we, with my father and all of his work ... My father was, he became what was then called the quartermaster for the Northern Army. He was allotted an apartment in Riga, for him and his workers. Number 9 Raina Boulevard, where later during the Soviet era, the prosecutor's office was located and today, the French embassy. It was a large, elegant apartment. The first three rooms that faced onto Raina Boulevard were very beautiful with marble fireplaces and mirrors. The dining room was large, so that when, when our parents... I had a brother, a year older than me, when my parents went out to a party or somewhere, then we would ride around the big room on our bicycles, we felt so free. After ... No, I won't tell you about the Bermont time.

Māra Zirnīte: You may as well, considering we've gone back a bit...

Valērija Sieceniece: Keep on going.

The flat was very large. My father's workers settled into the reception rooms; they were his workplace. His workers included private individuals but also colonels, captains, etcetera. Our windows looked onto the courtyard, and we occupied, oh, four rooms, also, the big room, of course. The big room was our dining room. Our furniture was lost in there, literally. And there was, also, a Janis Eiduks living there, in Valmiera, to where my father had moved us to. He was a teacher, later a very well know psychiatrist, one of the first. And my father needed some extra workers. So he employed Janis Eiduks. At that time, there was also this Mrs. Liepniek living there, an opera singer, who later married Bobkovics. She was also one of my father's employees. Those are the ones I remember well, because later we met them quite often.

Janis Eiduks took us – took us kids around Riga, showed us Riga. We, I remember him taking us to the pictures, as they were called back then... I don't remember... It was there somewhere... It doesn't matter, where... In the evenings after the pictures there were theatrical performances and there the actors were all the famous actors like Antra Klints and all of that set, they later became actors in our National Theatre Company.

Well, we lived there happily, I went to school... My father had decided that I should finish school in the language in which I had begun it, because at home our language was Latvian. So he organised for me to attend the private Lisica School, and my brother to attend Aleksandrs High School, or earlier it was called Lomonosovs High School, now I don't know which it was.

Suddenly in, it must have been October, the Bermont era began. My father came in and began a... He had received an order to evacuate to Ropazi. And now all of the workers took all of the documentation they could, and my father left us a large box of documents, and told us to burn them.

He risked it and left us there. He later said that he was hoping that we would not be in danger there, and it would have been much more dangerous to take us with him.

On the next ... Of course, we slept peacefully that night, but my mother had sat all night at the window overlooking the courtyard. And then at dawn ...

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...there was an enormous, huge bang, and my father ran out of the gate. Because back then it was different, there wasn't a door like today, there was a gate. My father was running and he ran in through the other, through the kitchen door and said, "Everyone to the basement!" Because there was also a basement for the flat and there were steps leading down from the dining room. He was afraid of gas. Well, as you know, we managed to hold fast.

Māra Zirnīte: Was there a reason for his fear? Did something happen, was there gas that time?

Valērija Sieceniece: No, there wasn't. There was never any gas.

Māra Zirnīte: There was none in Riga.

Valērija Sieceniece: At least there was none in Riga, because in this large, incredibly monumental house with thick, extremely thick walls, we counted - it was very interesting for us - fourteen bombs, but they were not the kind that there were later on, were they.

Māra Zirnīte: They were ones that...

Valērija Sieceniece: Well yes, they made more of a bang, damaged the sculptures a little, but nothing really happened.

Māra Zirnīte: They had hit the building directly, though?

Valērija Sieceniece: They hit it. There were fourteen direct hits. And the funny thing is, you see, the way we became used to it. I had to go to school, and my brother also had to go to school, and we went. Among other things, Raina Boulevard and the then Brivibas [*Freedom]*, it wasn't Brivibas then yet, it was Aleksandrs Street, this was the border where the front line began. And then, when we were crouching at our window, that looked onto the road, then we saw, I can still see it today, men marching there without uniforms on. I don't know, they practically had their sandals [*pastalas, simple footwear made of one piece of leather*] on, and we saw poorly dressed young men with guns. And back in November we saw a sled being pulled through the snow, with legs dragging along behind. This has all stayed in my memory.

Māra Zirnīte: Was the front line there for a long time, in the center of Riga?

Valērija Sieceniece: It didn't come that far, up to the Daugava; it was on the banks of the Daugava. But Riga was bombed.

Māra Zirnīte: But there, where you say the front line was, on Brivibas Street...

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, well, it was a forbidden zone, you weren't allowed to go there, and there was quite a lot of bombing. A Sister of Mercy, Ziglevica, was also apparently killed there.

Māra Zirnīte: Oh, so she was walking there...

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, she was walking right there...

Vilis Zirnītis: And Valija Vescunas-Jansone was working there.

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes. Valija Vescunas-Jansone, my friend. With whom...

Vilis Zirnītis: Who was on the banks of the Daugava.

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, she was a girl possessed, a Knight of the Order of Lacplesis. She was also given, I won't go on, her family also had a fairly tragic fate, she is no longer... alive. At the riverbank I often...

Yes, so I went to school, this was Lisina High School in Dzirnavu Street. And I can still remember, a kind of, well, child's confusion. It was a Russian school, and the principal once said to me, when it all started, she said, "Thank goodness, soon we will have a Russian government again."

And I said, "No, it's not good, my father is a Latvian."

And I have to tell you, that I finished the last grade at that same Lomonosovs High School that my brother attended, because my father had understood, and he said, "That's a school for young ladies, you won't learn anything there, go to this other one!"

Then I had to really study. I had never studied Latin. French, English, German - I had studied those, but not Latin – and I needed to. And there was so much mathematics, physics, but I had to do them. And I was the only girl in the class, all the others were boys. Well, I suppose it's not important.

Māra Zirnīte: And where was the Lomonosovs High School?

Valērija Sieceniece: It was on Raina Boulevard. Where there is, it was, a computing center, or whatever it is, it was around there.

My father returned from Ropazi with his workers, but everyone stayed, noone went home, every-one stayed there overnight. Downstairs there were a few rooms and they somehow arranged for people to spend the night there. And then, when the bombing started, then we, including the children, ran downstairs to the basement. And there one of my father's younger workers taught me to waltz.

Māra Zirnīte: Right there?

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, there. There was a pianist and an opera singer among the workers – Mrs. Liepniek. And then, when things were a bit more peaceful, we had an organ, we were also taking piano lessons, we held concerts. And we didn't really feel any real... didn't feel fear, the children didn't feel it. During that time, I don't remember anything really bad during that time...

Māra Zirnīte: On what floor was your flat?

Valērija Sieceniece: It was the ground floor.

Māra Zirnīte: And right underneath was the basement.

Valērija Sieceniece: Right underneath was the basement, it was the most elegant floor, yes.

Māra Zirnīte: And your father employed these... What kind of work did they do?

Valērija Sieceniece: Well, simply as secretaries, clerical workers.

Māra Zirnīte: For that part of the army.

Valērija Sieceniece: There, there, there in my father's office. There were a lot of administrative and economic things to organise. There were, there were documents to organise, inventory to do, etcetera. Each person found work to do; an intelligent person doesn't find it hard to learn accounting skills.

Māra Zirnīte: But it was important back then, it was also difficult to get work back then as well?

Valērija Sieceniece: You know, it wasn't hard to get work, but somewhere where it was... well, you see, at that time, where people could live, where they could find work – a pianist, some others, and a teacher, but they were all good workers.

Well, and then, after they took care of Bermonts, before that, my brother did a heroic deed, in quotation marks. He sneaked away to the banks of the Daugava and found an unexploded shell, and brought it home. Luckily there were officers working in my father's office. Luckily they were there at that time, that everything ended well. Then ...

Māra Zirnīte: And the office was located right there at home? You father's office was at home?

Valērija Sieceniece: Well, as I already told you, in the big apartment, there were three rooms at the front and on the courtyard side, I don't know, there were around five, six rooms or more, and in the basement there were also some four rooms. Everything was all together, it was one big apartment.

Well, and after that my father was promoted to the director of the Budget and Credit Department of the Ministry of Defense. We had to leave the apartment; it was no longer needed, because my father's workplace was there, in the Ministry of War, which was not yet handed over to us. We moved to Elizabetes Street then. My father had a lot of experience in the fields of management, finance, economics. And apparently he was the only one who was able to organise this Budget Credit Department.

And then my father had to be very economical, conditions were difficult, and he established an army shop in Riga. This little shop was the beginning of the Army Economy Store, and the shop was a subsidiary of the Budget Credit Department. And nowadays the army people really should insist that the store should be given to the army, because the army had a very large income from it. The army could be maintained with proceeds from the store. And the store should really be given back to the army.

Māra Zirnīte: And is that why a shop was established, so that there would be an income?

Valērija Sieceniece: Only because of this, all the profits...

Māra Zirnīte: Who worked in the shop?

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, and there were also real professionals, and we knew all of them, because they were lovely people, and my father was friends with them all.

Māra Zirnīte: And where was the Ministry of War?

Valērija Sieceniece: The Ministry of War – on the corner of Elizabete and Valdemara Streets, the entry was from Elizabetes Street.

Māra Zirnīte: Still today?

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, still today, and still today the building hasn't been handed back to us [*in 1993, the Soviet military had not yet withdrawn from Latvia*]. I used to run up to see my father there often, when I needed something... [..]

It was in 1918, or 1919, I think, there were quite a lot of refugees from Riga. And, actually, this is where my family got to know Mrs. Liepniek, as she was called back then, later Mrs. Bobkovica, because, you see, there were many refugees from the Red Army – Latvians. And a Ladies' Committee was established; my

mother was also a member [..] They established an association, and well, those ladies, you could say they adored Zemitans. Back then I wasn't particularly interested in these things, I was a child; I wasn't interested, in that, which I saw. And what his job was like. He looked after the Latvian riflemen who had switched sides. They were ragged, had lice; they were starving. They washed them, dressed them, helped them with food. And Mrs. Bobkovica, Mrs. Liepniek at that time, she organised concerts, and back then these concerts made a good profit. And a number of other similar activities, I can't remember what, I only remember those ones.

Māra Zirnīte: Had the riflemen crossed over from Russia?

Valērija Sieceniece: You see, you must know that our riflemen, the so-called red riflemen, they had switched sides there... I'm not talking about them. But a large number of them crossed over to Latvia. Well, the refugee life probably wasn't easy; you can imagine the state they were in. And, actually, it was like a social organisation, fairly popular in Terbata. And then, when Latvia was established, founded, then nevertheless it... There were these ladies, and they continued their meetings, along with their husbands...

[..] And then I'd also like to mention something else about my father. May his memory be preserved. [I was also asked to write memoirs about my father; I gave these to the Museum of War and to the Riflemen Museum]. My father retired, I think it was in 1931 or 1932. But as he was born to a farmer, and the middle son to boot - there was a farmstead called "Usini" near Smiltene, in the Bilska parish, I think it was called - and of course, he couldn't become the owner of the house, because there was an elder son, so he had to leave and make his own way in the world. And when he knew that his work was ending and he had to retire, at those times it was like this: retire, and it's all over... Yes, retirement. Because he had been a freedom fighter, he got to rent a fairly run-down house in the city – the farm "*Mazavas*", with the right to buy it, and that's what he did. And he spent his last years farming very energetically. He really loved the land; he couldn't help returning to the land. He really delved into maintaining the land and livestock farming, livestock-related things, and really loved his "*Avas*", his land. And he must have had a premonition, because he once said... It was right at that time, the early 1940s, and he said to mum, "When I die, there will be noone to give me a glass of water." And that he really wanted to be buried there – in the garden of "*Avas.*" And this happened, because he was put in jail almost immediately after, and he had fought against it. A whole row of people there had been incriminated. And after six months in jail he died, and he was rehabilitated. But even though I have requested, noone – in the documents, the rest of the documents, my husband's rehabilitation lists his cause of death - but for him it says that the cause of death is unknown. So, it is not known if anyone gave him a glass of water, or the place where he was buried, or the place where my husband is buried. Well, that's how it ended. [..]

I went to the Registry Office and I requested information about my husband. I already had some idea that he was no longer alive, because I had been told when I was in exile and I went to the Ministry of the Interior, to the department that was there to find out what had happened to my husband. Once I was told, "He is alive; he has been sentenced to ten years without the right to correspond."

I was told the same thing a number of times, and the last time they told me this, they made me sign that I had been told. That was my husband's case, but they wouldn't show me the documents, they just made me sign, that I had... that I had been notified. Later I found out from other people that that is the answer you get if the person has been shot. So that is why I went to the Registry Office, requested my husband's death certificate, and I got it. And the cause of death there was cardiosclerosis. I was told that there was no information about my father. And then I wrote to the relevant department in Moscow and then I got a certificate from some Solikamsk camp – a notification, that my father had died at a certain time. I don't remember the exact date.

Well, and back then on June 14th, 1940... Yes, I wanted to tell you, that right on the 13 of June after work we were both going home on the tram. And we were going past Peter's Park, and it was full of private cars. And we couldn't understand, why all the passenger cars... Were they all nationalised cars? And we understood the next morning, why they had all been there.

Māra Zirnīte: Why?

Valērija Sieceniece: Well, people were taken away in private cars, they [*the drivers and cars*] had been mobilised. And the main thing I wanted to say is that I sometimes forget who drove with whom... The car which arrived at "*Mazavas*" drove into the small courtyard; the driver was the husband of my mother's niece – Roberts Tone. Mum told me later, after we met in Siberia, that he was sitting at the wheel, crying. He was the person who had to take my parents to Tornakalns.

Māra Zirnīte: Your mother was transported from the Babite parish?

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes. On that day, my father always sent one of his workers, on a horse, of course, to deliver produce to the house. For example, milk or bacon, etcetera. Also then, when we... And just then the maid came in with the delivery, and she saw what was happening. In my absentmindedness, I didn't even bring any food with me. And, of course, my parents knew about this; my father also knew because he delivered his own produce to the Army Economy Store, for example - eggs, milk, cheese, St John's cheese, which my mother had learned how to make. [..]

My cousin from America visited us, whose husband was, then she told us what they all had endured, and that her husband Roberts Tone, how he had suffered because he had to do the driving, and this old lady, whom they loved very much – my mother – and that my cousin, Elma, who had spent all of her school and university life in our apartment, and that they were both terribly broken-hearted over this. There were also other cars. All transportation was...

Māra Zirnīte: So everyone who had a car, they all had to...

Valērija Sieceniece: Yes, they all had to do it one way or another. Of course, they had to do it.

Māra Zirnīte: They were, you could say, forced to do it?

Valērija Sieceniece: Only because they were forced.

Māra Zirnīte: And then, your parents were taken away?

Valērija Sieceniece: The car drove up in the afternoon of that same day. Well, and my mother was quick to catch on, she wasn't like me, she took all the food with her, she took her bed linen with her, because she was allowed to take it all with her. And the main thing was that she was in the same train as I was, only in a different cattle car. Neither she nor I knew. Mum told me that when, when they arrived, those captors, or those, I don't even know what to call them... She was happy, she said to my father, "I'm going to look for Valya." She called me Valya. And that's what she did.

Māra Zirnīte: But she didn't know that you had been deported?

Valērija Sieceniece: She nevertheless, after all, he had to tell her, had to tell her. And then she was happy – "I will go and look for my daughter, yes."

Well now, I'll continue on about that which happened travelling in the cattle car. Mrs. Nukss was born in the south of France; she read cards [*told fortunes on cards*]. All the time she was reading fortune on the cards. Among other things, she was a French citizen and her husband, her son also had citizenship. But they were not allowed to take their passports with them. She read the cards - what were we doing there? We also said, "Read our cards for us, too."

Well, she also read the cards for us. Sometimes she said something good, sometimes bad, but in the mood we were in we needed some ho... Well, of course, noone believed them, but we all somehow wanted some ray of hope.

As we approached the Latvian border near Daugavpils, it turned out that I saw the Daugavpils railroad station master, who had to give the signal for the train to set off. And his face was streaming, it was streaming with tears. He didn't know that the train also contained his daughter from Riga. She had seen him. We became friends in exile. We, those who had a pencil or some writing implement and paper, these I had taken with me, also envelopes, we wrote notes and threw them out of the window. I wrote and threw out two letters – one to my mother-in-law and the other to the farm, to my father's house. And, you know, both of them were delivered. They were good people, those people who delivered them. My mother-in-law handed this envelope in for expert examination, to find out where we were being taken to. And I still have the document from the experts, outlining their research as to where it could be. And I still have the envelope on which I hastily wrote the address, and they actually received it at "*Usini.*"

Māra Zirnīte: But who received it there?

Valērija Sieceniece: But my relatives were there – my father's brothers and their children, my cousins, they were all there and I... That was my father's family's farm.

Māra Zirnīte: Now, what was the house called?

Valērija Sieceniece: "*Usini,*"

Māra Zirnīte: Where were they?

Valērija Sieceniece: They were near Smiltene, in the Bilska parish, and you already know what a... what "*Usini*" means?[..]

Māra Zirnīte: But what does "*Usini*" mean?

Valērija Sieceniece: Read Enzelins: it's an incredibly ancient... It is the name of one of our gods from pagan times. Some say that it is the horse god, others say that it's the god of bees, and Enzelins explains it differently again. "*Usini*" – he found in it some German root word, '*Haus,*' "*Usini*" in part of '*Haus,*' because he thinks that it could also be the house, the house spirit, *Usins.* And this wasn't the only farm in Latvia that was called "*Usini*". Regarding "*Usini,*" I have copied out what he says about "*Usini.*" So I can also tell you something new.

Māra Zirnīte: All the time you are telling something new.

Valērija Sieceniece: We crossed the border in tears; it was horrible; a dreary scene opened before us. It was similar to those soldiers, those Red Army soldiers who marched in and had grey, dull, expressionless faces – this is how the whole area looked. Houses, wooden houses, that had all become black. And not a flower anywhere, not a bush near any house. Well, it was a sad sight, a hard sight. We weren't allowed out of the train; now and then the doors opened and so-called soup was shoved in, or a bag with bread in it. Back then, we still had something to eat, and I am ashamed to say it, but it's what happened – we couldn't eat the soup, we used it to wash the toilet, such as it was – in later years we would happily have eaten it. We were... Someone had donated a sheet; I didn't even have a sheet. And we used that to, well, people didn't have to publicly demonstrate their "nature's call".

An unbroken line of army equipment, soldiers were coming in the other direction, and we began to suspect something. Crossing the Urals was fairly difficult, but then at one station... I don't remember what it was called, I didn't write it down, I had already become a little stunned. We were let out, they understood that we could not escape to anywhere. There was a little pond there, so we could try to wash a bit. And we saw a sign next to one house, and only then we realised that a war had begun, only then. That was already, I can't, can't tell, a week or more had already passed, we had been on the road for three weeks. When I got out there, I was among almost the same upper class as in Riga. There was Admiral Spade, there was Nonacs, there was Jekabs Spilva; I have forgotten the rest of their names. And it was very good that Spilva saw me, because he worked with my father, and later, you know who he was. At one time he had been the price inspector in Riga and after that, the director of "*Aldaris*" [*the major brewery in Latvia*], but when he began, he started as, he was in the military and he worked for my father. He was married to the daughter of a Senator Simans, who was a friend of my parents'; that's how we got to know Spilva. They were friends of our household. I also saw Nonacs' daughter, a very beautiful girl. Mrs. Nonacs died there, in Karbesoka, it was called; it was in the Tomsk region in the Parabel district, a village that is located even more to the north than where we were settled.

Yes, and we travelled on, and now and then they allowed us out at stations... they opened the doors. Then children ran up to us, wasted away, pale, weak, they had gathered berries in the forest and offered them to us in exchange for bread, which we could not give them. But we prayed for them. The further we travelled, the sadder became Mrs. Nukss' predictions.

We arrived at our endpoint in Novosibirsk. We were told to get out of the cattle cars with all of our things. As mum told me later, because I didn't have any other clothes, I alighted in my elegant suit, stepped out in my elegant Parisian hat, snake skin shoes. Well, that's what I could, that's all I had. And I stood by my things and suddenly Spilva ran up and said, "Vallya, your mother's here."

Well, then I abandoned everything and I moved with all my strength, and I spied her small, pale. So we fell into each other's arms, hugging each other, and then I felt real drive and life energy, because in the cattle car there was a moment when I couldn't eat anything. I didn't eat; I didn't want to live anymore. And then there was a man from the Jewish family, who noticed and began to talk to me. And began to persuade me... And it helped me. And then I began to eat again. But well, the next problem arose – each of us was in a different car, and they grouped us together by car. So we could be separated again. Well, then I... My advantage was that I spoke perfect Russian, because I had studied at a Russian school. I immediately saw who the manager was. I went to him and said, "Look, the situation is this – I don't want to be parted from my mother; what should I do?"

"Write an application!"

Well, I wrote an application right away, and I had to be parted from my travelling companions, but I joined my mother's car, which was mostly full of other farmers from the Babite parish, and from the Sala parish. I moved to there, and then they made us... Some managed to get on a boat, but we had to get onto a barge, onto a massive barge which was being tugged by a launch – a steamboat. Around us was a huge expanse, it didn't look like a river, but like... well, I'll explain that a bit later. Well, mum and I got onto that barge and it turns out that Spilva was there, Jekabs Spilva, and also apparently Karlis Dzelzitis. He was the director of the *Hipoteku* [*Mortgage*] Bank, or the *Zemes* [*Land*] Bank. And Dinsbergs, he also had some high-ranking job. That was strange, because usually men were in a different train and arrived in a different way.

Māra Zirnīte: That's interesting. I wonder why they were left?

Valērija Sieceniece: The Admiral was also there. We climbed down to the hold, there it was a terrible sight, because there were others already ahead of us. There was a terrible sound, and terrible air. Children were crying, many had diarrhea, also babies had diarrhea. We had to sleep there on the floor. A mother ran to find someone who might have rice or something to save her baby. We set off and we didn't know where we were. It was no longer the Ob River, but a huge expanse of water where we could see tree tops emerging now and then, and the tops of bushes. And then we understood that they were the well-known massive spring floods of the Ob River, that had covered everything. It was very difficult for me to stay down there. My mother was dozing, and I climbed upstairs and spent the night upstairs. I didn't know how many days we had been travelling, but suddenly the order was given – everyone on deck with your belongings. And our barge stopped in this huge expanse of water, in a place where you could only see the tops of bushes sticking out nearby. And the order was given to lower the ladder: Disembark! Well, I thought to myself, this is what they have decided to do with us. But then, Dzelzitis' strong voice rang out, "Nobody move!" We didn't move. Those two soldiers standing there went quiet. Somehow with that, I'm sorry, "*gromkagavaritel*", I don't know it anymore…

Vilis Zirnītis: With a loudspeaker.

Valērija Sieceniece: With the loudspeaker, they said something to the steamboat. After that they both got in... The steamboat drew up; they got into the steamboat and drove away. I thought to myself, now our fate will be to sink with the barge to the bottom, and we waited, what would happen next. We thought that if they – the soldiers, if the soldiers returned, then we would continue on our journey, if not, then our fate was sealed. And nevertheless they returned, and we travelled on. We travelled for a very long time; I can't remember how many days. And in one place somewhere, it turned out, it was Parabel, Parabel in the Parabel district of the Tomsk region in the, the, I suppose it was called, the capital city of the region, there, our launch, our barge stopped. There a number of people disembarked. Then we travelled further, and on the way... Yes, we turned into the Parabel River, from the Ob we turned into the Parabel River, and then people began to be put ashore.

Finally, we drew near one bank and it was now our turn. I had noticed that among the people to disembark was a young, pretty woman, who had a girl sleeping in her pram, around six months old, who no longer looked alive, she was pale, her eyes were closed, a beautiful child. And this young woman, it turns out she was Mrs. Raudseps, Elfrida Raudseps, who was called Kintina, and her aunt, mother's sister,

who after giving birth... Mrs. Raudseps got thrombosis in her leg. She didn't want to leave her on her own and so had come along of her own free will.

We disembarked in Parabel in the village called Kuchi. We had to disembark there. The locals had gathered on the shore. Well, the view was too dismal. They were poorly dressed, all in faded clothes. You can imagine, there weren't any bright colours. Weak, barefoot children also ran up, big tummies, big eyes in their heads, in mum's jumper or in their father's coat. And they were all looking at these new people with deep wonderment. It had been decided... And you know, who they were? They had already lived there for 15 years; they were the so-called kulaks from Altai. When they were transported there and left in the boreal forest, and were made to dig ditches for dugouts and to cover them with those, with pine needles. They had to spend the winter there and they didn't all survive. Those who survived were given a small allowance by the government, so that they could buy a cow. And well, of course, they had to build their own houses. They were log huts and there was moss between the logs, very primitive. There were no bricks, so in place of a chimney they had a cast iron cauldron without a bottom, that's what they had. Well, those locals... But the locals said that they wanted... They felt sorry for us, they saw who we were. And they thought that we, looking like we did, would all die. They offered to board us in their houses. Perhaps there was a reason – that we had arrived with our suitcases and luggage. They could choose. My mother and I were chosen by a woman who was weak. Later she told us it was because, because she had two rooms, and in one room was the large stove and in the other room she had her six children, so she couldn't take a family with a child, so she took us two. Mrs. Raudseps and the old lady and little Maija were taken by a local villager who also lived in one small *izba.* [*from Russ. – a wooden hut*]

2 A

Māra Zirnīte: What did the room, what did the house look like?

Valerija Sieceniece: Well, I told you – it was made of logs, and of course, it also had a few windows. There was always a huge, large Russian stove. The mouth of the stove was so big, and the whole of the stove was so big, that a person could climb inside it. There was no furniture to speak of. Our little room had one bed, perhaps there was a table. And the landlady's room had that huge stove, one child's cradle, where her poor spastic son lay, and one bed, where the landlady slept. Her husband was also in prison, apparently, he had spoken his mind. And the rest of the children slept on the floor. There were no chairs, only stools. That's what it looked like.

I had already left that place; I had been further away in Siberia for quite some time, closer to the center. Well, the landlady, when we went into her room at the village of Kuchi , she allowed us, she stoked up the bath house, down a little track – there they had built a bath house. You know, a normal one like a Latvian bath house, a country bath house, yes. And right next to that there was a stream, and she allowed us, and told us to wash ourselves. Mother made a mattress from one of her sheets [..] Well, we looked at the bed with such doubts, and our worries turned out to be founded. We didn't sleep in the bed, we slept on the floor. And when we woke, in the morning light, the bed bugs were there in rows. We somehow succeeded in getting rid of them. Winter was approaching, and now we began to be organised for work. That again was a show for the locals. It was summer and we were walking around in summer dresses. We were sent to the forest, to the taiga to make brooms out of birches. But not for use in the bath house, but to feed the cows in winter. Well, we did it as best we could. Back then we still laughed.

Yes, I'd like to tell you what I haven't said up to now. I'm sounding incoherent. The people who ended up at Kuchi were the people from the same cattle car. There was a Jaunzems from the Sala parish, a farmer and his wife, there was Mrs. Baginska with her father and two sons – little Janis, the youngest, and Juris, the eldest; they were an intelligent family. There was a Jewish family; the Jews weren't wanted, when they told people they had a daughter. The parents, I think they were called the Idelsons, there was the mother, two sons and a daughter. There was also a pretty woman, Balode, very pretty, apparently from Latgale, blond and very good-looking, and a young woman and a teacher with two girls. I think I have named them all. No, also – there were still some people from Straupe… And from the Sala parish there was old Mr. Straupe with his daughter-in-law, Matilde, with his wife, daughter-in-law Matilde and two little girls,

one was only around a year old, one and a half, the second was perhaps three years old. And the little girl at that time had only just begun to recover from pneumonia – and she had still been taken. They took them, even with small children and old people, they, of course, found themselves in fairly difficult circumstances – they had to sleep on the floor. There was no medical assistance, the little girl's symptoms began to recur and she passed away. She had to be buried; they turned to me, asked me to lead the funeral. I couldn't say no, even though I had never done anything like that before in my life. And then a funeral procession was begun, organised, as is our custom, also the custom in the countryside. The locals had nailed together a little coffin. At the front were the Baginska boys carrying the little coffin, and me as the minister – in a black dress with a song book in my hand. The mother, grandfather and grandmother walked behind the coffin, of course, and all of the rest of the inhabitants, and they all still had clothes, they were dressed appropriately. Well, apparently, they had never seen a procession like this before and were standing in awe. Now and at the graveside, which had been dug by those same boys, well … I said everything, which at that moment, everything that was in my heart and which I could put into words… I read out verses from the song book, we sang, and that was the funeral.

Now take note: I stood out at this moment, and later this did not serve me well. We continued, they continued to send us to work. Even my mother was made to mix clay that was prepared in a single, huge tub, with bare feet. And my mother said, "*Tapchitye sami, ya nibudu*" [*Russ. – You stump it for yourselves; I'm not going to do it*]. And she walked away. And I can tell you completely objectively, that the locals were very sympathetic people, good people, they were helpful people. We had established good relations with them. Except the head of the *kolkhoz*, he really was a bastard. And the order was such: we all had to work, and the brigadier who was supervising, he came and… either at night or early in the morning. He came in, was there any knocking on the door? - No, he came in and to wake us, "*Na rabotu, tuda!*" [*Russ. – There is work to do, here and here!*]

Well alright, we did them, no matter what jobs they were. It was still autumn… And I don't know what you think, am I… Should I tell you, tell about it? It was something that happened to me because I stood out, and because of this I was given an offer.

Māra Zirnīte: If you are willing, it would be good if you told us.

Valerija Sieceniece: Should I? You see it was like this – we hadn't really yet, it was September, we hadn't really started to work yet, and I was sitting in my room, either in my room on that mattress, on the floor, I didn't sit on the bed, and I was reading the only book that I had brought with me, I think it was Andre Maurois about Mozart. And suddenly the door opened without a knock, with no warning. And a young man in civvies came in and calmly sat down. Yes, there must have been a chair there, he calmly sat down. Well, and I'm sitting there and waiting for what will happen next. Now he began to question me. I have forgotten it, which is a shame, I wish I had recorded the conversation the same as we are doing now. He posed a number of questions - who I am. What is my profession?

We had been asked to write our autobiographies, and I had written down all of my travels in my autobiography, because I understood that it was all already known by everyone and then I couldn't be accused of lying; no one would be able to be suspicious of me, because everyone at that time was paranoid about the foreign spies. I wrote everything down. It is possible that my biography also played a role. And now he began to ask me all sorts of questions, I can't remember much of that. By the way, I answered him fairly playfully with the intention that if… and suddenly he ripped the book from my hands. He looked at it. He didn't understand anything, and as he couldn't understand it, then he gave it back to me, but didn't ask what the book was about. Then he began to pose a number of questions - where had I studied. Had I ever been involved in politics.

Well, I told him – "I've never been in any political party, but I was involved in the women's movement." So therefore I had been involved in politics. Then I remember another question, "Tell me, which state system do you think is the best for your people?" The Lord really helped me that evening, because I answered him thus, "The system under which the people suffer the least." Well answered; I had answered the question, but not told him anything. And then he went away.

Now it was already evening; mum and I were already indoors. Our food was almost all gone. [..] I also forgot to tell you another very important event before this visitor.

Mrs. Baginska's youngest son Juris came to see me, he often came to visit me. He was an intelligent boy, he had read a lot, he knew a lot about music, we had a lot to talk about. He arrived, came to me one morning or evening, it doesn't matter, and was crying. And told me, yes, that must have happened the day before, and was crying and told me that he had been summoned and was threatened that his mother would perish and his grandfather and others, and then they gave him these biscuits and promised him all sorts of things.

And I asked him, "Juris, did you really sign it?"

He was crying and said, "Yes, I signed it."

And I said, "And so you know, that this will tie you for the rest of your life?" And then, when the man came in the next day, I understood immediately, who he was.

Māra Zirnīte: What did he looks like?

Valerija Sieceniece: You know, a normal person, his clothes were not like a suit, but nevertheless they were black clothes, they were good clothes. And fairly, well, fairly intelligent. And then after our conversation he went away. And late at night, fairly late at night, the landlady suddenly invited us to eat at her table. I thought, "why?" Well, she told us; a *tovarisch* [*Russ. – comrade*] had got hold of some cream, and she had boiled some potatoes, for us all to eat dinner. Together. Aha, a *tovarishks* got some cream! I thought about what I should do – to go, or not to go? But my mother was hungry and I was also hungry. And I though to myself – why can't I have a meal? So we went along. Yes, he's sitting right there. We already have whipped cream poured in our glasses, and a beautiful bowl of steaming potatoes. What does he do? Grabs the bottle of vodka, there were little glasses there, and begins to pour swiftly. I put my hand on it and say, "I don't want any." When he turns to my mother, I say, "Mum isn't allowed." I don't let her. But he still manages to pour some for me. Not in that glass, no, not in the separate glass, but onto the cream. Well, it was such a shame, I wanted to eat it. I thought to myself that I had read that fat neutralised the effect of alcohol. So I'll be fine. I calmly ate the potatoes and drank the cream. I didn't let mum drink it. Well, and we went to bed. I hadn't yet fallen asleep, it was night time, when a boy ran in and said *"V kantoru!"* [*Russ. – To the office!*]

Now I understood that I was going to face the same thing that happened to Juris. I dressed up, well actually I couldn't not get dressed up, because I only had good clothes with me. But I added a few… And calmly went to the office and flirtatiously sat down in front of him. Well, and he began to talk. And I said, "Well, what are we going to talk about?" He said, "We are interested, we would like to, for you to tell us what people are saying around here." I say, "I can tell you that straight away. Why wait? For example this family is living in these kinds of conditions, and so on and so forth." "We aren't interested in complaining women. We are interested in the men." I said, "I'm also very interested in men, but there are only old men and boys here."

And then he began to tell me what I would get in return, "Well, you see, in a few years time you will be able to go, after a few years we might be sitting together with your husband at the table drinking tea. We could have you transferred straight away to Riga, to Latvia."

I said, "Oh, Lord, oh, Lord! I'm so frightened, when I see the gun, I feel faint, no, no, no! May God protect me from that." And then he said, "You know, I am a little bit of a psychologist."

And I thought to myself, "You think you'll coerce a flirtatious Riga woman!? No, you won't." And he didn't succeed. He said,

"We would like you to work for us."

"And for which organisation is that?"

"The Interior Ministry."

"Yes, I could. I can do stenography, I can type, and so on."

"No!" He said.

Basically, he refused to acknowledge me. He began to get angry. The conversation continued until he said, "Write your biography." He gave me a paper and pencil. And I saw straight away, that he was also writing something. Now I knew what he was writing, Juris had already told me. You know, I couldn't handle it, I jumped up and yelled at him,

"S*hto vi pishete?*" [*Russ. – What are you writing?*]

And I ripped it up and threw it down. And he said to me,

"*Idite von!*" [*Russ. – Out!*]

I walked slowly and thought – now I'm in trouble. I went out, and he followed me, I continued my game. And I was walking deliberately – well, perhaps it wasn't deliberate, because my shoes had high heels. You can imagine what the road was like. I was just very unstable, I could trip. He caught my elbow; I looked up at the sky and said,

"V *dvajom ittyi kuda lekche chem adnoi* [*Russ. – Walking as a couple is much more pleasant than walking alone*]." And so I was happy about the fact that I got away; but I hadn't got away. And he accompanied me to my, to my *izba* [*hut*]. And he left, I thought that he left. But I couldn't go indoors, I was too agitated. I knew that mum would ask me, I knew I couldn't say anything. Back then I still smoked. I sat down on the little stool, sat and smoked. Suddenly he returned. And said, "Why are you here, why aren't you going to bed?" And God helped me again. I said, "You know, I was thinking: Should I go in or should I go straight to the Parabel?" That was the name of the river.

"Why? Why do you say that?"

I said, "Because, what is awaiting me here? I don't have any work; I have lost everything, what is ahead of me here?"

Now he began to try to calm me down. And I wondered how long I would sit there. And so I got up and went away. And then I continued. I don't know what he said, I don't remember, but then I remembered, I had been at a Russian school, then I remembered, I told him, "*Za kazhdiy chudniy mig, za kazhdoye preksrasnoye mgnavenye slezami i taskoi zapltish ti sudbe!*" [*Russ. – For every wonderful moment, for every beautiful instant, you will pay fate with tears and sadness.*]

And I left in this theatrical way. And this is how our first acquaintance ended, our first encounter. I went quietly into my room; undoubtedly, the whole village knew what had happened, right? I couldn't say anything, I lay down next to my mother and whispered, "I won't say a word; I will tell you everything tomorrow. Don't worry, everything is alright."

In the morning we went to the forest, where no one else was around. The forest was right next to us. Cedars, a beautiful forest, only I did not see the beauty of nature there. And I told my mother everything that had happened. And I told her not to tell anybody. I knew that she wouldn't tell anyone.

Well, some time passed, nothing particularly significant happened. And suddenly, it was already September or perhaps even later, when I was delivered a summons. I was summoned to, as we called it back then, to the four letters NKVD [*The Soviet security organ underwent various name changes, finally KGB* – ed.] (the Interior Ministry). Now I understood everything – that it wasn't all over. I didn't like it at all. And it was at a fairly late hour. Late after lunch, perhaps in the evening. Well, mum came along with me, all of those 25 kilometres. We were told where we could spend the night. It was in a place where the political deportees were sent, the people were very sympathetic. You could practically go into any of the houses and ask to spend the night there. So we were told where we could go. I took my suitcase with me, as if I had read about what you should take along in these instances. I took along soap, a change of underwear, a towel. I don't know what else I took with me. And I dressed up again, so that I would look good. We walked and talked along the way. I explained everything to my mother, she understood.

I said, "Mum, if I do it, we will never see Latvia again. And I don't want you to talk me into it or cry; then it will be very difficult for me to fight in there. And you have to promise me that."

She promised and kept her word. She was very quiet and serious. I accompanied her to the house where she was staying, and I went to that office building. I had to go to the second floor, I was made to wait. I waited

for a long time and I thought, "If it's the same man as last time, I will get by. But if it will be someone else, brutal, harsh, then I will probably end up yelling everything that I think; then let it happen."

And so I waited to see what would happen. I can say that I have never been an actress, but that time, God himself must have helped me. I was invited into the room, and I saw that he was sitting at the table in a uniform. And do you know what I did? It was all unrehearsed. I ran towards the table, held him with both hands and said, "How happy I am to meet you again?!"

He was taken aback, he became very serious. And I sat down on the couch, crossed my legs. I took out a cigarette, lit it, and looked at him flirtatiously. Well, I don't know how it all began – threats, lots of other things.

"Your mother, we will split you up. And your mother will soon die." And I said,

"Well, she is quite old, perhaps it's time. And she won't live until spring, anyway."

"We will send you to a place where you, too, will quickly perish."

Well, I got up, there was a large door there; I was holding the cigarette. I looked at the beautiful moonlight.

"Will you also visit me there, to see how I am quickly perishing?"

He didn't react to this. [..] Now you know I can't remember what else we talked about, but finally he became angry. I continued on in the same silly way. A little bit flirtatious, like that. He called me to the table, he was writing something.

"Sign this!"

Well, I thought, I carefully read everything from the beginning to the end, and it said that I had been warned, that if I talk about our conversation, that I would be betraying state secrets. Well, that I was prepared to sign. So I signed it, and he said,

"You are a fool!"

"How so!? My Goodness!?"

And I left. And it was all over. But then, when I went outside it was dark, and I haven't forgotten it. And the telephone lines were humming. And I remember it. And I had lost all my strength, I could hardly walk. I walked slowly, slowly, slowly. It was night time and I walked back to that house. And my mummy was sitting on a stool there waiting for me. And I told her, I reassured her, that everything was over. And we huddled together on that one bench, waited for light and walked back home.

AMERICAN LATVIAN ASSOCIATION'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT "EXILE LIFE NARRATIVES"

Maija Hinkle

Toward the end of World War II as the Soviet Army was again advancing into Latvia, about 180,000 Latvian inhabitants fled or were forcibly transported to the West[3]. From the 100,000 who survived the journey, the largest number, about 40,000, eventually found refuge in the United States[4], where they formed still active national and local institutions and communities, particularly in the bigger cities in the Northeast, Midwest and Western states. In the 1989 United States census slightly more than 100,000 inhabitants considered themselves Latvian-Americans.[5]

Who were these former Latvian inhabitants, who still consider themselves Latvians, even 50 years after leaving the country? What had they experienced during this stormy century, leaving their homes and Latvia during a war, fighting sometimes even in several armies, creating a new life in the United States in a very different context? Why and how did they retain their Latvian heritage and identity in the multicultural, polyglot world of the United States? How did they raise the next generation? What kind of moral and spiritual values did they bring with them, which values and strategies did they have to change? Who are they now, when Latvia is again an independent, functioning country? What kind of role have they played in the life of Latvia and the United States throughout these years, and what is their role now? Their experiences are a part of Latvian history, just as they form a part of the multiethnic mosaic of the United States.

In order to document and study the experiences and lives of Latvian-Americans and their descendents the Cultural Division of the American Latvian Association (ALA) started an oral history project (ALA-OH) in 1997. The goal of the project is not only to record life histories from as many diverse people as possible, but also to process them, make them available to researchers and other professionals and to popularize them in the society at large in both Latvia and the United States.

Methods:

Even though we accept written autobiographies, by far most of the life narratives are obtained in an oral history, interview format. Most narratives are recorded on audio tapes, a few on video. The methods of the project are very similar to those of the field work project in Latvia, since we not only use the same documentation forms, but also our first interviewers were "graduates" of the field work project and all our results have been incorporated into the Latvian National Oral History (NOH) Collection.

Almost all of the interviewing, organizational and outreach work in the project is done by trained volunteers, who after a joint training program work relatively independently each in his or her own community.

Training can be obtained in one of three ways: 1) in oral history workshops in the week-long cultural immersion camps called "3x3"; 2) in day-long training seminars; and 3) in the Latvian field work project "Life Stories in Latvia". The cultural immersion camps have proven to be most successful,

[3] A. Plakans, *The Latvians, A Short History*, The Hoover Institution, 1995, p. 158. Some 30,000 were soldiers in the Latvian Legion (ibid. p. 152.)

[4] Inta Gale Carpenter, "Festival as Reconciliation: Latvian Exile Homecoming in 1990", *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 33. no. 2. 1996. p. 93

[5] *ibid*. p. 119.

because they allow enough time for lectures, practice and feedback. Whenever possible we also use an apprentice system. In addition, we have published an *"ALA Oral History Manual"*[6] and developed questions and themes which each interview should try to cover.[7]

To date we have trained 165 participants and potential volunteers in fourteen 3x3 camps,[8] six one-day training seminars,[9] and seven week-long field work expeditions in Latvia.[10] Thirty four of the trainees have participated in or recorded an interview, some one interview, others, very many.[11] We are very grateful to all who have worked in the project, since each successful interview demands much time and creative energy.

What kind of narrators and stories are we interested in? – Even though we allow each interviewer to choose the narrators, we do have lists of potential narrators that we have obtained in various forums. We also have guidelines for choosing narrators. We recommend that interviewers start with older people, who are good storytellers, people who have significant knowledge of or participation in historical events, people who have contributed to their community or culture, and people who have an evaluative, reflective view of their life and events. Consequently many of the narrators in our collection have been very active, contributing members to their society, their work or their culture.

Characterization of the collection:

We have recorded about 200 life narratives from 1 – 20 hours in length for a total of about 480 hours. Most are from 1 – 2 hours long, one is 17, another 20, and a few from 4-8 hours. Each interview is usually finished in one session and involves only the author and the interviewer.

98% of the interviews are with World War II refugees or their descendents, who came to the United States from DP camps in Germany between 1949 and 1951. The rest are with Jews and one American, who is married to a Latvian. Two interviews are in English, one in German, the rest in Latvian. Two thirds of the authors are men, many former Latvian legionnaires. Some have fought consecutively in several armies: Latvian, Nazi, Soviet and American. Two thirds are 70 – 90 years old; 2 are over 100. Sixty three percent have attended or graduated from a university; many have higher degrees. Most are professionals, creative artists or community activists, many working in both their profession and community activities.[12]

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6 The manual is based on the *Cleveland Ethnic Heritage Project* and is authored by project participants.

7 The original complex of questions came from Inta Gāle Carpenter. As the project developed further the themes and questions have been extensively reworked by Maija Hinkle.

8 Workshop leaders: Maija Hinkle, Biruta Abuls, Inta Gāle Carpenter, Rūta Eichenfelds, Māra Zirnīte, Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa, Ginta Elksne.

9 All by Maija Hinkle.

10 Directors: Augusts Milts, Māra Zirnīte, Maija Hinkle, prof. Paulis Lazda, Māra Lazda. The program was described in: Maija Hinkle, *Spogulis*, 2001, pg. 18-33.

11 Interviewers: Biruta Abula, Guna Asone, Ausma Briede, Ints Dzelzgalvis, Rūta un Helmūts Eichenfeldi, Zane Elksnīte, Arnolds Golds, Maija Grendze, Gunta Harvija, Maija Hinkle, Edīte Irbe, Astrīda Jansone, Lauris Kalniņš, Inta Kārpentere, Francis Krečko, Miervaldis Lazdiņš, Jānis Liepiņš, Māra Lipace, Boris Mangolds, Maija Medne, Dagnija Neimane, Maija Neimane, Rita Petričeka, Astrida Ramrath, Ināra Reine, Alvils Rumpēteris, Aina Serdāne, Līga Stamm, Inta Šrādere, Ruta Straumane, Ansis Uibo, Zigfrids Zadvinskis, Dzidra Ziedone.

12 For example: writers, journalists – Jānis Klīdzējs, Nikolajs Kalniņš, Laima Kalniņa, Jānis Širmanis, Valija Ruņģe, Olģerts Cakars, Arturs Rubenis, Ojārs Rubenis (Latvia); pastors – Eduards Putniņš, Gunars Kņezkņezinskis, Aleksandrs Veinbergs; politicians, lawyers – Gunārs Meierovics, Jānis Priedkalns, Jānis Jurjāns; professors and teachers – Jānis Petričeks, Vallija Priedīte; artists, musicians, crafts people – Andrejs Jansons, Ilmārs Rumpēters, Kļaviņu Juris, Maija Neimane, Saša Pariņš, Arnolds Sildegs; businessmen, financiers – Oskars Hercs, Miervaldis Janšēvics; community leaders and activists - Kārlis Ķuzulis, Maija Medne, Ingrīda Jansons, Krista Liepiņa, Lidija Bālēna, Izabella Osīte, Staņislavs Dulevskis, Valfrīds Spuntelis, Vilis Miķelsons, Francis Krečko, Voldemārs Sproģeris, Teodors (Tedis) Zieriņš

Processing, archiving, availability of interviews

Documentation for all interviews contains basic information about the author and the interview, which consists of an abstract, list of main topics, the time frame, a list of the people and geographical locations mentioned in the story, and the author's special expertise.

Many interviews have been transcribed, but only a few have been edited and proofread. Several interviews are accompanied by written remembrances by the author. About a third of the interviews have an index, almost all have photographs.

Copies of all ALA-OH interviews and their documentation have been deposited in and are available from the LNOH Collection at the Latvian Science Academy, Philosophy and Sociology Institute in Riga. Originals will be deposited in the Immigration History Documentation Center at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN, USA. Copies are supplied to the author.

Information and addresses for the projects, and two summaries of ALA-OH interviews are available on the internet on the LNOH home page, www.dzivesstasts.lv

Content of interviews – themes and examples:

Events mentioned in the interviews cover a time frame from the 18th century to present events, while geographically the authors' experiences almost span the globe. Authors have not only lived in many areas of Latvia, Germany, Russia and the United States, but spent significant parts of their lives in such unusual places as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Brazil, Australia, and Korea as well as in England or Canada.

Some narratives are especially rich in information and detail that could be of interest to historians or social scientists, while others present more personal stories and reactions, as remembered by ordinary people during extraordinary events.

The themes in the narratives can be divided into two broad categories: themes that are similar in the Latvian and Latvian-American stories, and those that are specific for the latter.

The first category includes memories of events that occured before World War II and during the first two occupations (1940–1945), as well as those aspects of the stories that reflect the author's values, world view, and often also creative endeavors.

Some authors describe well-known personalites in prewar Latvia. For example, Gunars Meierovics describes his father, Zigfrids Anna Meierovics, the first Foreign Minister of prewar Latvia, while Irene Celtniece draws vivid character sketches of her professors at the University of Latvia. Several authors emphasize the central role of spiritual values in their life. In Karina Burda's and Ieva Calitis's narratives the dominant role is played by Christian faith, while Kļaviņu Juris analyzes the tenents of "*dievturi*", a religion based on Latvian *Dainas* [*folk songs*] and ancient mythology.

The America-specific themes in Latvian-American narratives cover a wide range of topics. Arranged approximately chronologically they are: 1) war experiences of soldiers, the Latvian Legion, prisoner-of-war camps; 2) civilian flight from Latvia: motivation, emotions, war and post-war experiences; 3) life in refugee camps (Displaced Persons – DP camps) in Germany; 4) immigration to the USA: first experiences, coping strategies, education; 5) formation and subsequent activities of Latvian organizations: churches, national and local organizations, community activists, the press; 6) Latvian-American cultural life, creative artists, writers; 7) the next generation: families, schools, camps; 8) involvement with American society: work, socially, culturally; 9) relationship to Latvia and Latvian identity and how it has changed with Latvia's independence in 1991;[13] 10) stories from those Latvian-Americans who have returned to live in Latvia since independence; 11) interviews with members of other ethnic groups, either former Latvian citizens or relatives.

[13] The results are described in the following papers: Maija Hinkle, *Konferences "Trimda, kultūra, identitāte" Referātu krājums*, Nordik, Rīga, 2004, pg. 510; Maija Hinkle, *The Oral History Review*, 2004, and in a series of articles in *Laiks*, Sept. – Nov., 2004.

In order to give a glimpse into the variety and content of the narratives, I have chosen six interviews or interview excerpts, each of which represents one or more of the above-mentioned themes.

The first four excerpts illustrate specific topics in the Latvian-American narratives. Each excerpt represents only a small part of the total narrative and is edited. In the introduction to each interview I have summarized that part of the interview that is not in the featured fragments.

The section from Kļaviņu Juris is excerpted from 17 hours of narrative. I have chosen those parts of his story in which he deals with: 1) war as the soldier lives it and what it does to his world view, and 2) the art of jewelry making and the Latvian world view. Kļaviņu Juris' war narrative is personal, detailed and gripping, allowing the reader a glimpse of the horror, the excitement and the "craziness", as the author says, of the front lines. The rest of the excerpts deal with one of the important themes in our study: spiritual and cultural values. What have been the deeper spiritual values in the author's life? What is sacred to him?

The excerpts from Māra Lipacis and Irēne Celtniece dramatically illustrate the experiences of civilians during World War II, as they were fleeing the second Soviet occupation during the war. Māra Lipacis is one of the relatively few survivors of the sinking by Soviet torpedos of the refugee ship *Wilhelm Gustloff* in January, 1945, in the Baltic Sea.[14] Irēne Celtniece gave birth to her fourth child in an isolated forest house in East Germany shortly after the Soviet Army overran the region.

The excerpt from Oskars Hercs' narrative illustrates an immigrant's success story in the United States, in which the author describes how, with persistence, hard work and education, he rose from the most menial jobs to being Executive Vice President in a large firm, in charge of projects all over the world and business in millions of dollars.

The last two narratives are presented in their entirety with some editing.

Elizārs Rabinovičs is a 101 year old Latvian Jew, who emigrated to the United States at age 91. His story represents the rather large proportion of Latvia's population who belong to other ethnic groups, and includes wisdom gleaned during 100 years of living in one of the most dramatic periods in history.

The last narrative, that of Kārlis Ķuzulis, is especially rich in specific information and detail. I chose his story because Mr. Ķuzulis has been in leadership positions in several major exile organizations, and his community activities during various periods in his life represent in detail several of the themes in Latvian-American narratives: experiences in the Latvian Legion, the postwar period and soldier's camps in Germany, the formation and the charitable and cultural activities of the veteran's organization *Daugavas Vanagi*, Latvian theater in Germany and the USA, political activities of exile Latvian central organizations (ALA[15] and PBLA[16]) especially during the crucial years when Latvia regained its independence, politics and government of newly independent Latvia, and the work of the press, particularly of the Voice of America. The author evaluates the activities of some exile organizations, the changing relationship between Latvian Latvians and the exile community and other topics of interest.

To illustrate the type of documentation that comes with each interview I have included that for Kārlis Ķuzulis' interview. About 20% of ALA-OH interviews also have a detailed index.

The interviews in this anthology were carried out by Gunta Harvey, Maija Hinkle, Rita Petričeks, Ināra Reine, and Dzidra Ziedonis. The translators were Aija Celtnieks Blitte, Aigars Brants, Edīte Irbe, Māra Lazda, and Inta Šrāders. We are very grateful for their contributions and dedication.

[14] In the introduction to the English translation of the novel by Guenter Grass, *Crabwalk*, 2002, Harcourt, Inc., it is stated that this was "the deadliest maritime disaster of all time".

[15] American Latvian Association, founded in 1951 in Washington, DC.

[16] The Latvian acronym for the World Federation of Free Latvians, which is an umbrella organization for all the national Latvian political organizations outside Latvia.

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NMV 786

MĀRA LIPACIS

Interview: in the Catskills, NY USA, 1998
Interviewers: Dzidra Ziedonis and Gunta Harvey
Transcribed by Aija Siltāne
Processed for publication with comments by Maija Hinkle
Translated from Latvian by Inta Šrāders

Māra Lipacis was born in 1938, in Riga, into a well-to-do family. Her father had a degree in engineering from the University of Latvia, and during the German occupation he was the director of the "Aldaris" *factory; her mother was a teacher. Māra has a brother four years her senior. Until 1944 the family lived in the* "Aldaris" *company housing.*

In 1944, as World Ward II was drawing to a close, Māra's mother, brother, and 6 year old Māra joined refugees fleeing Latvia to Germany, where in January, 1945, they experienced the "deadliest maritime disaster of all time,"[17] *the sinking of the refugee ship* "Wilhelm Gustloff" *by Russian torpedoes.*

The following excerpt dramatically illustrats the dangers facing refugees during wartime. The excerpts have been edited and some sequences rearranged.

Māra Lipacis: We left Latvia in '44. My father stayed behind because of his job. Because he feared that the Russians would return once the war ended, he arranged for us – mom, my brother and me, to get out of Latvia and stay with some distant relatives of his in Gottenhafen. We lived there until January, 1945. My father left Latvia just ahead of the Russian advance and went to some place in Germany where he had found a job.

When the Russian front neared Danzig and Gottenhafen, it was time for us to flee also because we did not want to remain with the Russians. At that time, the winter of 1945, there were masses of people, including many refugees, in the Danzig region. The war was coming to an end. The Germans were running out of war materiel and transportation equipmment. Since the area was surrounded by Russians, anyone – residents and refugees alike who wanted to leave, had to go by ship. The idea was to leave Danzig and go along the Baltic coast of Germany to a safer haven. One of the ships used for this purpose was the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. I will tell you about our experience on this ship.

Wilhelm Gustloff had been refitted to transport refugees. I, my brother who was ten years old (I was six) and my mom got tickets to go on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. Because I had just recovered from the measles, mom put me on a sled to pull me to the harbor to board the ship. This was at the end of January, 1945. On the ship we found room in a large hall on an upper deck and settled on some mattresses.

The ship was loaded with many refugees. It also held wounded soldiers, and some members of German submarine crews. I have read that approximately 6000 persons had bought reserved tickets. Within a couple of days everyone had boarded and the ship was loaded and readied. Everything happened in great chaos.

We departed in the afternoon of January 30, 1945. When the ship was out in the open sea, it was joined by another, smaller ship with refugees and more refugees were put aboard the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. It is thought, though not accurately known, that altogether some 8000 people were on the ship.[18] Availabale information confirms that 6000 were on board.

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[17] Introduction to Guenter Grass, *Crabwalk*, 2002, Harcourt, Inc.

[18] Peter Schneider in his article "The Germans are Breaking an Old Taboo", *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 2003, mentions on page B8 that the ship held more than 9000 passengers, mostly women/sea auxiliary and children, while researchers using computer modeling methods concluded that some 10 600 people died. The latter results were presented on a *Discovery TV channel program* on May 21, 2003. (MH)

The ship was not accompanied by the usual security – boats, such as torpedo seeking boats. It was accompanied by just one little transport boat. Because the ship had no one to defend it from torpedoes, the crew were said to have considered the best course of action: should they go as fast as possible or zig-zag to escape the torpedoes? There were said to have been disagreements about the course of action.

I remember that it was snowing and already very cold in the afternoon. We were on the mattresses in the big room. That evening, a couple of hours later, the ship was torpedoed by three Russian submarines.

Two books have been written in English about this event. One is called *The Cruelest Night* by Christopher Dobson. The other is *The Damned don't Drown*.[19]

Gunta Harvey: Did the Russian submarines not know that you were a ship of refugees, or did they know?

Māra Lipacis: I don't know for sure what the Russian submarine captain thought when he saw our ship. I don't know what he thought. Afterwards, it was debated whether he had followed the rules of war, whether he should have done it. As far as I know, he was not punished because the ship did carry submarine personnel, not just refugees and wounded people.

After the torpedoes hit the ship, it very quickly listed to one side. Since we were on one of the upper decks, we were in a very good place, much luckier than those deeper down in the ship. I remember my mom taking my hand and walking, in a crush of people, through a corridor to the upper deck where the lifeboats were. Since the ship was so overloaded with people and had been readied in such a short time, there were not enough lifeboats, by no means. Many of the expected lifeboats were missing.

I remember that we stood amidst a throng of people. The ship had already listed very steeply. Then I remember that we lost my brother. My brother was no longer with us. We were just my mom and I. She held my hand.

I myself do not remember any of the awful things that happened there, even though I have read that people shot each other because they knew that there was no way to survive.

But what I do remember is that my mom and I, both of us were standing in that throng of people and that after a while the throng was no longer there. I don't know what happened to the people. I remember that my mother picked me up and handed me to a man who put me in a lifeboat. My brother had already disappeared from us. I remember that my mom stood there, and that she stayed there. That is the last time I saw my mom.

I remember that I sat in the boat and that many other people were also there. As the boat was lowered, it bumped against the ship. Water came in from both sides but not enough to sink the boat. Our boat bumped against the ship, but then we somehow slid away from it. I don't remember whether the boat was rowed or whether it had a motor. All I remember are very big waves and how the boat rode up and down. I sat between two people and hung unto the seat. But I don't remember being very frightened. I also don't remember that I was terribly cold. But I do remember that we were going by boat and that I was watching the big waves pass by on both sides of the boat.

The next thing I remember (and my memory isn't so clear about all this because I was six years old) is seeing the ship turn and sink in the far distance. The ship had lights. It went down in 70 minutes from the time it was hit by the torpedoes. That is all it took for the ship to sink.

Then, what I remember is that we rode the waves and a torpedo boat arrived. It dropped nets overboard and tried to take on people in the dark. We came alongside. A rope was tied around me and I hung unto it as I was hoised into the ship. I sat in the torpedo boat on a barrel. My feet were wet. My socks were taken off, even though I was in good shape. I just remember that I was wet. Then I remember that there was a big blow to the boat so the boat sort of turned. They were putting some kind of bomb exploders into the boat and that is what made the big blow I heard. That is all that I personally remember about the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*.

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[19] Recently Guenter Grass published a novel in German *Im Krebsgang* (*Crab walk*) dealing with the event. The Egnlish translation came out in 2002, *Crabwalk*, 2002, Harcourt, Inc. (MH)

As far as I know, the torpedo boat took on just a couple hundred people from the 8000 that may have been on board. Another boat appeared and took on some 250 people more. Some smaller boats are said to have taken on smaller groups. Collected information indicates that almost a thousand people may have been saved.

After that, the torpedo boat took us to Sasnez where there was another ship, reserved for the wounded or the sick – sort of like a Red Cross ship. I was put on it with the other children.

My next memory is of my standing in line several days later while we were being told that we would be sent to an orphanage. I don't remember being very upset. I am just standing in line and my brother passes me! He is ten years old [*laughs*]. That is how we found each other. He, too, was alive and he had our father's address. Until then we had had no contact with Papa. But my brother was already quite capable and there were aid agencies there, so that somehow, I don't know exactly how, he had arranged for us to leave to go to our Papa. But, because the war was going on and the front line was again approaching, we didn't get to where our Papa was.

Gunta Harvey: Were you being taken by yourselves?

Māra Lipacis: We were the two of us. Somehow we had obtained tickets and we were on our way.

Gunta Harvey: Just by yourself? Didn't anybody accompany you?

Māra Lipacis: It was somehow through the organizations that were active in Germany. But we didn't get to where we were supposed to go.

We stayed with a German family who took us in. I spoke German. The German family was very good to us, though my main memory of that time is of always being hungry. I sat on the steps of the house and waited for the time when there would be potatoes to eat. I thought about eating all the time; I always wanted to eat.

My brother wrote to my father; father did receive the letter and so we were again in contact. I think it happened within a month.

After a while father came for us and took us to be with him. We walked about the city (I no longer know its name); there were ruins everywhere. My father held my hand and we both walked around the city. And I felt very safe because I didn't have to fear anything since my father was there and would protect me from anything that will happen. That is how we met again.

Father took us to my mother's sister. The war had ended by then. We got into a refugee camp. But we never heard anything from my mom again. Mom perished with the ship.

Gunta Harvey: Didn't she try to save herself? Or did she say something about having children? Save me?

Māra Lipacis: It wasn't possible.

Gunta Harvey: But they did take the children.

Māra Lipacis: I remember that she handed me over to a man. Everybody wore a life vest. If you think about it – given the number of people there, very few had the chance to survive.

Gunta Harvey: And wasn't there, so to say, a stampede?

Māra Lipacis: There was. If you read the books, there was a stampede. That is how it was. People did run to the decks. Sailors with guns tried to stop people from taking over the lifeboats. There were horrible incidents, but I personally didn't see that and don't remember. All I remember is that we were going along a corridor, that there were people all around us and that somehow we were borne forward until we got to where the lifeboats were and that there was a great throng of people. But I didn't see any violence, even though, if you read everything, a lot happened there. Many people simply couldn't get out of the lower level – it was very overcrowded. It was impossible for them to get to the lifeboats and, even if they had, there would have been no lifeboats. The people who jumped in the water couldn't survive long because it was one of the coldest times and the water was very cold. They froze and drowned.

Gunta Harvey: How long were you in the lifeboat? Did those two boats get there in a short time?

Māra Lipacis: The ship sank in 70 minutes. We were taken into a torpedo boat, one of the German boats that came to help. That was the first and, actually, the only one that could take more people.

Gunta Harvey: So the people in the other boats couldn't have gotten very far.

Māra Lipacis: They couldn't get there because the ship that came with the torpedo boat couldn't stay long since the crew had seen on their radar that the Russian submarines were still nearby. They had to decide: stay and wait and run the risk that they, too, could be torpedoed, or leave while it was still possible.

Gunta Harvey: But there were several boats, no? You were taken into two boats, no?

Māra Lipacis: Statistically, it is a miracle that I had this chance [*laughs*]. And my brother, too. Even though he wasn't with me, he, too, was saved.

Gunta Harvey: Did you register somewhere that you were among the survivors? For instance, did any of the authors contact you?

Māra Lipacis: Not me. But journalists have explored the whole event, collected the facts and written the books.

Gunta Harvey: So they haven't tried to interview everyone, right?

Māra Lipacis: No, not me. But there are overviews and information about the event because the ship's captain saved himself. Many people have written about this event.

Gunta Harvey: Was this awfully traumatic for you?

Māra Lipacis: I can't say that right then, when I was going through it, I felt that it was very traumatic. It was just a fact. But it changed our life a lot, because I grew up without a mother. The war ended and we were in the camps. We were with mother's relatives and then we went to my father's relatives. And in 1949, when I was 11, we came to America.

Gunta Harvey: You never tried to write up or document your experience in the ship's tragedy?

Māra Lipacis: No, I didn't do that. Neither have I dwelt on or thought a lot about this event in my life. I'm remembering it more now because we are all talking about the *Titanic* and other events. Actually, a lot more people perished in this catastrophe than on the *Titanic*. So, I think it is worth mentioning. The stories and books that have been published about it are very dramatic and describe it more richly that I can tell about it, because my memories about it are very limited.

Gunta Harvey: We would like to clarify something about your brother. When you met this summer, what did he tell you?

Māra Lipacis: We discussed the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. I asked him how he came to leave us, to disappear from us. And he told me that he saw the crowd of people and that we just stood there and were not getting anywhere. He thought that he had to get off the ship because it was listing very badly to one side. He had a chance to get into a lifeboat and he simply left us and was able to get into the boat. I asked what he remembered from the time he was in the boat. He said that he had been sitting in the boat and had been very scared that he might drown and that he had prayed to God not to let him drown. He had been very, very worried and scared.

Gunta Harvey: But you didn't think about God then? You didn't seek contact?

Māra Lipacis: I don't remember being very alarmed. I remember sitting in the boat and hanging unto the sides.

Gunta Harvey: Did that boat have mainly children or adults?

Māra Lipacis: There were no children. I remember mainly adults. My brother also said that he doesn't remember people swimming around in the water. He remembers seeing boats and rafts.

Gunta Harvey: But that was at night?

Māra Lipacis: That was at night, but he didn't see individual people in the water.

In 1949, Māra and the remainder of her family received the sponsor necessary for entrance into the United States. She grew up near Albany in New York State, in the family of relatives who were physicians. Māra became a pharmacist and worked in her profession with great enthusiasm all her life. She married a Latvian-American and raised two sons, both of whom eventually married girls of Latvian descent.

Māra's father worked as a draftsman; he committed suicide at age 60.

Her brother received a degree in aeronautical engineering and worked at Boeing Aircraft Company all his life. He was married twice and is the father of three children. He has retired now, travels and manages his investments.

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IRENE CELTNIECE

Interview: Washington, D.C., 1991
Interviewer: Maija Hinkle
Transcribed by Aija Siltāne
Processed for publication with comments by Maija Hinkle
Translated from Latvian by Aija Celtnieks–Blitte

Irene Celtniece was born in 1915 in Tallinn, Estonia. At age three, she and her family moved to Latvia. Her father was a Latvian-Estonian. Her mother, who grew up in Estonia, was of German and Italian descent. Her father was one of the leading foresters in Latvia. As director of the Vecumnieki forest district he started a research nursery and brought electricity to the region. The forestry district was often visited by Latvian and foreign heads of state.

Up to the fifth grade, Irene Celtniece was schooled at home by private tutors. Afterwards she, her brother and mother moved to Riga, where she finished Elementary and High School with high honors. In 1933, she entered the Department of Linguistics at the University of Latvia in Riga and joined the first Latvian sorority, "Daugaviete". *With humor and in great, colorful detail she describes her surroundings, other people, her professors – Endzelins, Straubergs, Dale, Gulbis and others, the entrance exams, and University life.*

While still an undergraduate, she married an architecture student, and a year later had her first child, a daughter, Aija. She continued her studies for a Master's Degree, and wrote her dissertation amid three small children, still breast-feeding the third one.

In the interview she describes the tragic events of June 14, 1941, how they impacted her family, and how she and her family survived the German occupation. In 1944 her husband was mobilized by the Nazi regime into the Latvian Legion.

In the following excerpt the author describes how she, her three small children (aged 6, 3 and 1 1/2) and her parents fled Latvia in September, 1944, near the end of the Second World War, while she was expecting her fourth child. The child was born in the middle of a forest in Pomerania *in March, 1945, shortly after the Russians had occupied the area. The author recalls life immediately after the war, in the Polish-occupied part of East Germany, and the subsequent complicated journey to West Germany. The excerpt illustrates the difficulties women with children had to face during the war and the flight from Latvia, at a time when their husbands were in the military. The author's situation was alleviated a bit by the fact that she was "travelling" together with her parents.*

The excerpt was edited and combined with sections from her written remembrances.

Irēne Celtniece: My husband was drafed in August of 1944. At that time we lived in Baldone. Once in a while, Russian planes flew over our property at night. Then we would gather in the basement, but in reality it was almost a joke, because the planes never did any harm. Nothing happened. They would circle, but, of course, we never knew what they had in mind. If a bomb was dropped, and this normally happened at night, nothing was hit.

But on September 14, we witnessed aerial combat. My oldest son, Ega, was sick with a high fever. Udis, my youngest son, was sitting on my father's lap. The day was beautiful – the sun was shining, the sky was a very clear blue. Suddenly we heard a Russian airplane, and my father said, "Look, look! I think I see a parachute or something!"

A bomb dropped right next to our house. My father immediately pulled himself and the child away from the window. I thank God that we had not gone into the basement that time because the glass from the basement window had shattered. It was everywhere, and all of us could have been badly cut. One side of the other house on our property, the house right next to ours, was pretty badly damaged; all the trees

were burned and had fallen down. There was a huge hole where the bomb had hit. In the house where we lived, half of the windows were shattered – one window was whole, the rest were broken, with glass all over the place. This really scared us. On the following day we fled Baldone.

Next day was Saturday, September 15, the day when the men who worked in town came to visit their families in Baldone. They came by bus from Riga, a trip that normally took about 40 minutes. This time the bus was not going to be able to return to Riga by the same route. My mother told me, "Leave immediately with the children. Somehow we will meet you there later."

I took the children – Aija was 6 years old, Ega was 3, and Udis was 1 ½ years old. I was expecting my fourth. I grabbed my briefcase, thinking that it contained our food ration cards, but later I found that the briefcase that I had grabbed in such haste held only candles and a garterbelt. That was all. All we had with us that day was what we wore on our backs. Fortunately we had put warm coats on the children.

We wanted to board the bus to Riga immediately, but the bus driver said, "You don't have tickets; you can't come." After my mother gave him half a pint of alcohol, he relented and we were driven to Riga. The 40 minute trip took more than 2 hours. We drove past Salaspils and heard gunshots.

When we arrived in Riga, we headed straight for my father-in-law's house on Valmiera Street. My father-in-law took us in and gave us something to eat. Immediately the air raid sirens went off and all of us ran into the basement.

I was waiting for my parents to arrive from Baldone. They had said that they would take horses and a cart, load it up with some things, and meet us in Riga. I waited and waited but they did not arrive. I could not sleep that night. Early next morning, at 3:30 they finally arrived. They had had to travel on some smaller roads in the forest, where they had seen Russian tanks. The Russians apparently had thought that they were not important enough to be stopped and had left them alone. That is how they arrived in Riga.

At the end of September, I can't remember the exact date, we left for Germany. Refugee ships were leaving Riga at the time, but we did not go by ship. I think that we left on the first of the last two trains to leave Riga for the West. Quite a few things happened on that trip, too.

Maija Hinkle: Did you board the train with your father-in-law or with your children and your parents?

Irēne Celtniece: My children and I left with my parents. My father-in-law remained in Riga; he left later. One of my husband's sisters had married the owner of a bicycle factory by the name of Erenpreiss, who had some connections. My father-in-law, the Erenpreiss family, and some other people had finally left Riga by car. I don't know the details.

We traveled by train. When we reached Pomerania, we got in touch with a man who had been the Pastor in the Vecumnieki congregation. He was a Baltic German. He was very popular and quite a character, a man who loved to drink and to dance. After he got divorced from his first wife, he married his maid-servant, whom he called "cubulite" [hard to translate, but a cute nickname]. He had a good heart and was very popular. He had left Latvia in the thirties, at a time when there had been no real reason to leave the country. He had become Pastor of Cerkvic, a small town in Pomerania.

Maija Hinkle: What was the Pastor's name?

Irēne Celtniece: His name was Pretners. My father had corresponded with him and Pretners had told him that he could come to Cerkvic at any time, that we would have a place to stay in Germany. Unfortunately, our stay there was not very comfortable, because the house was in very bad shape. Let me tell you: the Pastor and his wife had already lived there for about twenty years, but it looked as if they had just moved in yesterday. None of their things were unpacked. And where did my father sleep? He slept under the grand piano. Many years later during the 50th anniversary celebration of my sorority *"Daugaviete,"* we sat at the same table with Pastor Vedzelis. We started reminiscing. It turned out that Pastor Vedzelis and another pastor had slept under the same piano. On the floor, under the piano. That's the way things were.

Then I started to look for a place to stay. My husband was in the army. There had to be a place for mothers and their children. We were put in a room – I, my mother and my three children – a room that

had no chairs, only two beds. We slept in beds that had been in use for a very long time, the deep indentations in the mattresses almost touching the floor. That is how we slept.

Maija Hinkle: Was that at the Pretners' house, or somewhere else?

Irēne Celtniece: No. It was very near the Pretners, but in another house. That was the only place I could find. We stayed there for a while. Then we went to a place called Dolcigerbruck. From there my father went to Berlin to ask for a job, just so that he would have something to do. He was promised a job as a forester. We were given a house right in the middle of a forest. It was there that we first met some Russians.

Maija Hinkle: How did that happen?

Irēne Celtniece: Well, that is one of the stories I have written. I can read it to you.

Maija Hinkle: Did you write this story when you had just been through the whole experience? OK, please read it to me. I would especially like to hear how you gave birth to your forth child under those circumstances and at that particular time.

Irēne Celtniece: [*laughs*] Well, I call it "The First Meeting."

[*She reads from a prepared page.*]

We lived in the middle of a deep forest, in a house that had not been inhabited for the last five years. We arrived there while we were refugees, in the autumn of 1944. The building was quite large, old-fashioned, without electricity and other amenities. The water-pump was in the kitchen. We slept on straw mats. We went there because my father had been promised a job by the German government. My father, who was a district forester by profession, was also a very active person and could not imagine living without a job, even while in exile. Earlier, while we had been living near Berlin, he had gone to all the agencies in Berlin and had succeeded in getting a promise of a job. The only trouble was that this job was further East, the same East from which we had been fleeing.

As I mentioned, our house was in the middle of a forest, in Pomerania. The nearest house was approximately 1 ½ kilometers way; the nearest grocery store, 3 kilometers. I pushed my baby carriage to the grocery store once a week to exchange our food coupons for whatever provisions were available.

There were three families in the house. [*In our group were*] my parents, my three children and I. We lived together in two rooms with a kitchen. The second group was the former forester Katlaps and his wife; they were true peasants, short and heavy. They were very worried about their only son, who had been drafted into the Latvian Legion and from whom they had had no news. I had the same worries as the Katlaps', because my husband was also in the Latvian Legion. The third family was called Pilsatnieki, a mother and her daughter. The daughter had worked in the offices of a forestry district. She was about 40 years old.

We had just finished celebrating Christmas. We had a small tree, a few candles and a few gifts for the children, gifts we had made from matchboxes and cardboard. We were in the midst of a heavy winter. The fir trees were covered with thick snow, and, while we were living in this deeply quiet, snowy forest, it was hard to imagine that our motherland and all of Eastern Europe was on fire, was at war, and that to the West of us cities were being bombed. But the newspapers said so, even though you had to read between the lines to find that information. The retreat of the German army was described as "the straightening of the front." And, as usual in times of war, all kinds of rumors circulated. My father had not as yet received any word about a possible forestry job. He was waiting for written confirmation of his appointment from the Forestry Administration, but never did receive anything from them.

By the middle of January we started thinking about moving West again, but in order to move, we needed permits. When I went to obtain the permits from the head of the local township, he told me that I and the children could get such a permit, but not my father who was in "government service." I decided that it would be impossible to leave by myself with three small children and the fourth expected in less than three months.

And then, suddenly, the serenity of the woods became less quiet. We heard airplanes overhead, saw refugees passing the house. My father and I went again to try to get a travel permit, since it was already the end of January, but we received the same answer.

And so January 30th arrived. The day before my father had finally received the necessary permits for all of us to leave Dolcigerbruck. He went to the train station to find out when the train was to leave. Impatiently we waited for him to come back home. We realized that we couldn't wait any longer. My father returned that afternoon. When we saw him, we knew that the news was not good – he had learned at the station that no more trains were leaving for the West…

Have any of you in your young lives ever felt such desperation that you thought that everything in you, all of your feelings, your thoughts, had become completely numb? That's how all of us felt. We knew that the thing from which we were trying to flee, to escape, the thing that had made us leave our homeland, our homes, everything, everything, was, in the end, going to get us! And, strange as it may seem, none of us cried, nobody showed much emotion. All I remember is that my knees started to shake. We put the children to bed and tried to sleep ourselves, but sleep evaded us. We looked out a small window at the white, snow-covered forest. And then – it must have been about three or four in the morning – we heard them – we heard the Russian tanks driving by on the road! They were going to *Kustrin*, one of the large battlegrounds. As we carefully left the house and went into the front yard, we could see the tanks through the trees, rolling on towards the West. Fate had spared us this time, because the heavy snow had covered all the paths to the house.

During the day planes flew over the house constantly. We did not light a fire; we tried to live quietly, to make sure that we were not discovered by the Russians. During the nights my father and I, tripping and falling on the frozen surface of the bog, went in search of milk and any food we could locate at the local mill. When we arrived at the mill, we saw that the Russians had behaved abominably with everyone and everything the first few nights after their arrival in the area. The inhabitants of the house had fled, leaving their animals, their livelihood and everything else behind. The house was now occupied by German refugees from the East, who had also been chased from their homes.

We woke up with the dawn, with daylight, and went to sleep when evening arrived. We had to save the gasoline ration we had for special occasions, like the birth of my child. And so we lived for two weeks under a heavy blanket of snow, unnoticed by the Russians.

And then we saw them! It was a sunny winter's day when we heard a racket – two Russians, playing the harmonica, singing and yelling loudly, drove into our yard in a hansom. My mother ran to the kitchen door, opened the bolt, making sure that the Russians would not break the door. The door sprang open, and on the other side stood a Russian, aiming his revolver at my mother.

"Put the gun away," my mother told him calmly in Russian.

"What are you – a Russian?" The Russian had almost lost his speech, he was so surprised.

"No, I'm a Latvian," she answered.

Then he began questioning her: how did we get here, where was my husband, etc. The husband had stayed behind, she said. The Germans had forcibly made us come this far from our fatherland. We want to go home and we are just waiting for the trains to start running to the East again.

These fairy-tales did not satisfy the second soldier. "Where is your gun? Give it to me! Hurry up, you old bastard!" he yelled in my father's face.

"Here are some chickens, cook them for us," said the first soldier.

"If you don't hand over your gun, we'll stand you up against a wall and shoot you!" said the other one. My father answered that he did not have a gun.

"You are lying, old man! I need you to produce your gun in five minutes or you are dead!"

My mother tried to help my father by saying that we had no firearms. By this time we were desperate. Finally my mother started begging the first soldier, who at the beginning had seemed a bit kinder, to calm the other one down.

"Hey, old bastard! Give me a shave!" the angry soldier suddenly ordered. He sat down, while my father lathered up some soap in a small dish, and, for the first time in his life, made like a barber. He tried to do the best he could. Later on he admitted that he had had a hard time controlling the razor – it would have been so easy to sink the razor into the soldier's throat…. [*the author tries to stifle a giggle*]. Apparently the angry soldier had also suddenly realized the precariousness of his situation, because he had sweated profusely while being shaved. In the end, maybe because he felt better after the shave, or for who knows what reason, the angry soldier stopped asking for the non-existent gun.

The other soldier tried to strike up a conversation with me, but it was tough going, since I speak almost no Russian. My knees were completely weak. Nevertheless, I stood as straight as I could so that he would see that I was pregnant. I was barely 30 years old at the time! The Russian was telling me how beautiful Russia was, how rich everyone was, how Stalin took care of his soldiers, how he ordered his soldiers to bring gourmet food from Russia to the front for them. "Look at this honey," he told me. "Stalin sent it to me. This is for you and your children," he said, while giving me three glass jars. Suddenly both Russians, after inquiring whether my mother knew where they could find some young Russian girls (my mother, of course, knew nothing), ran out the door without waiting for their roast chicken, got into the hansom and drove off, yelling and singing loudly.

We breathed a sigh of relief. We had gotten through this episode with only a scare. I picked up one of the jars of honey and saw the label, "*Echter deutscher Bienenhonig,*" [*laughs*] which means "real German honey."

This was our first meeting with the Russians.

[*Here the prepared reading ends. The following continues as an interview.*]

This went on every day. The Russians came in, sat down in the kitchen and cleaned their guns. Some talked, some said nothing. They went through all of our things, hoping to find something that they could steal from us. Aija had a small suitcase, the kind used by small children, and inside it was a pocket-watch with a missing hand and, of course, it did not work. One of the Russians yelled at us, saying that Stalin had told them that all watches had to be handed over to the Russians. Mother said that it did not work. "That's OK." He took the watch anyway.

My mother thought that one of the Russians looked like a serious criminal. He arrived every morning and searched everything over and over. He repeatedly looked at the contents of Aija's little piece of luggage where she had placed some colored pencils. Aija said, "He's looking for German watches." [*laughs*]

This was a daily occurrence. We were living in constant fear. After a while, German refugees started arriving. Next to the house were large barns. These were, of course, empty. The weather was wet, sleeting. We saw many women, some pushing baby carriages, some with many children. They arrived bent over, tired, hungry. The barns were full of Germans. The Russians arrived and raped all of the women. We couldn't stand it any more. I was saved by my mother because she knew how to stand up to the Russians. In her youth she had lived in deepest Russia and knew how to talk to them. Even though she might have been scared to death of them, she kept yelling at them and this seemed to work; it impressed the Russians. They left me alone. Even though I was pregnant, it normally would not have mattered to them. This was our daily life.

There was absolutely no order to our life; everything was in total disarray. In came one Russian and ordered us to do something. Then came the next one and the next one and ordered us to do something else. All of them called themselves "commander"; one, a commander of this, the other one, a commander of that. Sometimes it could be quite funny.

A tank unit moved into the house. Our family was literally squeezed into two small rooms. The Russians cooked and baked. The cook, originally from Uzbekistan, was a very kind man. Because we had hardly anything to eat, except for potatoes, he made soups and always brought us some, too.

On March 12, I gave birth to my third son, Imants. Two weeks before the date, when the barns were completely full, another group of refugees arrived, this time from Prussia. Among those refugees was a

midwife. She immediately saw what was going on with me. I believe that she was really sent by God to help me. My mother had already reserved a place for me at a local hospital, but it was impossible for us to get there. Even if we had been able to do so, I would never have been able to return to my family. The midwife looked me over right away, but, of course, she had absolutely nothing to work with – her bag with medicines had been emptied out and thrown away by the Russians. All she had was her empty, but experienced hands; that was it.

The midwife had told me that my child was going to be born on March 12. On the morning of the 12th, my labor pains started, but, because the yard was full of Russians who were making a lot of noise and shooting in the air, my pains subsided. The midwife came and told me to wait until the evening; that would be when the child would arrive. She said, "You are just like a chicken who sits on an egg, all comfortable and warm. [*laughter*] Don't worry; your baby will arrive this evening." That evening she came to spend the night with us. Up to then she had slept in the barn. I don't know how we all slept in that small room, but she got one of the beds next to mine. My bed was filled with straw and covered by a sheet. Then, and I don't know exactly at what time since we had no watches, my labor pains started again. I immediately looked for something to hold on to and got hold of the ropes that had been placed there for that reason. Once you have had three children, you pretty much know what to expect. I grabbed hold of the ropes and, after quite a hard time, gave birth to my son. Thank God there was nothing physically wrong with him. Everything happened without any complications.

The Russians stormed in the next morning, shouting,

"Everyone out! You must leave immediately, all Germans – out! Everyone!" This, of course, included the midwife. My mother said,

"Sorry, but my daughter can't move!" and the Russian shot back,

"Why not?"

"She gave birth to her baby last night, that's why," but the Russian just replied,

"Well, that's no reason to lie in bed!" But there was no way that I could possibly have walked in all that snow and mud and everything. My child would not have survived, and neither would I. In the end everyone left and we were able to stay where we were.

Maija Hinkle: Just your family, without the midwife?

Irēne Celtniece: Yes. All of the German women, who had lived in the barns up to then, all of them had been driven out. They had continued to go West on foot in the "care" of the Russians. We, of course, were left in quite a dangerous situation, because anyone could have come in and done anything they wanted to us and no one would have been the wiser.

[*The following is from Irene Celtniece's written notes*]*:*

Soon we found out what our situation was. On that same day, March 13, the door to the room where I was sleeping opened and in stepped a huge Russian "commander," as he called himself. He looked like Stalin, with a large moustache and a red Kazak hat on his head. He stationed himself at the foot of my bed and asked my mother who I was. Mother said that I was her daughter. Why was I in bed – he'd asked. Well, she gave birth last night. That was no reason to be in bed! I could not possibly be her daughter, as I did not speak Russian. My mother was probably hiding a German (me). I was so petrified that I almost fainted. Mother was arguing with him and trying to convince him, but I could see that she was afraid, that she thought that she would have a difficult time saving me. The Russian kept insisting that I was German. Why did I not speak Russian? Finally, my mother lost her temper and yelled at him,

"Why don't you speak German? Why don't you speak Latvian?" To our surprise, that shut the Russian up, and after hanging around a few moments, he left, saying,

"What the heck, it really is not my business whether she is German or not!" I was saved!

After a few days the house and barns were taken over by a Russian tank division. I had to stay in bed so that I could say that I was ill, even though there was nothing wrong with me. The door opened and in stepped a short and ugly but very kind Uzbek field nurse. She asked what was wrong with me. My mother

answered that she did not know, but that, after the birth of my child, something seemed to be wrong with me.

"Do not worry," she said, "I will examine you." And so, without washing her dirty hands, she gave me a gynecological examination. The nurse said that she could really not tell what was wrong with me, but that something was not right and that I should definitely stay in bed! Much later, while we were in a Displaced Person's camp in Germany, I told this story to Dr. Gailitis, who was flabbergasted and said that I could have easily died from such an "examination," very possibly from blood poisoning.

We were virtual prisoners in our room. We stayed that way for at least one week until the Russians decided that civilians are not allowed to live in the same house as soldiers. What were our plans? We, of course, said that we wanted to go back to Latvia by train. The Russians said,

"No. You can't do that at this moment, not yet. But when the trains start running again, we will take you to the station." For now they would take us to a nearby village where there were lots of places for us to stay.

The next day they put us in an army van and took us to Schoenow, a small town. We were again being moved further East, rather than the West where we wanted to go. This was the first ride in an open truck for my little baby. While on the road, we saw the devastation that surrounded us. The roadsides were littered with broken carts, strewn-about things, and bodies covered with white sheets.

When we got to Schoenow, we were dropped off in front of an empty house. We were now on our own. There was a sign posted on the door in Russian that said "warning – typhoid." We could find no water anywhere. But there was a pond not too far from the house. My father found a wheelbarrow, barrels, and took off to get us some water. The inside of the house was in total disarray, which was usual after the Russians had left. The furniture in this house was very nice, unusually nice for a farmer's house, but now all of the drawers had been pulled out and the contents [*photos, papers*] strewn all over the floor. We had to work quite hard to put some order into the place.

After we had fixed up the house, we heard a gentle knock on the door. We said,

"Come in." We opened the door and found a middle aged woman, standing shyly by the door. When my mother asked her what she wanted, the woman quietly told her that this was her house. Mother asked whether we should move out. She replied – no, no – she just wanted to know whether it would be OK if she and her sister-in-law and their children moved into the attic. And so we lived in the main part of the owner's house, while she herself lived in the attic.

The owner of the house was a very nice and honest person. Her husband and her brother were in the German army. We became good friends. Quite often my mother saved her and her sister-in-law. When we saw Russian soldiers approaching, both German women ran upstairs and hid in the attic, saying, "Mrs. Kuks will take care of the Russians!"

Mrs. Duevel (that was the name of the owner of the house) loved to bake. She always baked pumpernickel bread for me, made from partially germinated rye. I loved this bread.

[*The following comes from the interview.*]

Across the road from this house was a farm where we were able to get some lettuce and some other things. Now imagine this scenario: at that time money had absolutely no value, yet the woman who owned the farm always charged us money for the lettuce. This was typical of the German stinginess that we often encountered during those years. When the apples were ripe, Russian soldiers guarded the garden to make sure that nobody stole any apples. The Russians themselves were not really interested in the apples; they bit into one and threw it away. They did not like fruit and vegetables. All they wanted to eat was something that was fattening.

Every morning Russian soldiers yelled, "To work, to work!" as they passed through the village. They did this because they wanted the women to come out of their houses. But all of the women hid in the outhouses. [*laughs*] As soon as the Russians left, they crawled out of their hiding places. The Duevel women hid in the attic, and therefore nobody found them.

[*The following is again from the author's written notes.*]

For a while we lived a relatively normal life. After some time, the Russians gave Pomerania to Poland. We expected many Poles to arrive from Russia and to take over the German houses. The Germans were expelled from their homes and forced to go West. This law did not touch us, because we were living there as Latvians, but we did witness some horrible moments when the *Cheka* (NKVD) interrogated Germans. My father had to be the translator from and into German and Russian. It was terrible! The interrogators from the *Cheka* led parades just past our windows and we thought – Oh, God! They would consider us criminals, too, if we were discovered. We lived in constant fear.

When the Poles arrived, Polish flags were displayed in front of homes. The Poles also evacuated the owner of our house, her relative and their families. It was tragic to see the evacuation of the Germans. They were not allowed to take much with them. In some homes half-cooked meals were left uneaten on the stoves. I later saw villages, where the houses were very well kept, curtains in front of windows, but not a soul in sight. It was an eerie feeling. I never ventured into any of these houses, but once in a while I looked through a window. Everything was clean and in order, but there was no sign of life anywhere.

All of this changed when the Poles from Russia arrived. They seemed quite primitive. The children wore no underwear; the women were wrapped in heavy shawls. They looked at everyone with hatred in their eyes.

Pomerania is home to many distilleries. That is why they grew potatoes. One could see many abandoned potato fields. We dug up a lot of potatoes for our own use and for the cows.

When many of the houses were occupied by the Poles, we were thrown out of the Duevel home, because it was clean and in good order. We were assigned a house on the outskirts of Schoenow. We cleaned this house, too, and made it livable.

Either my mother or I would dig potatoes from a field that was just across the road from our house. The occupant of the house across the road was Polish and one day she cursed at me and ran me off the field. My father went to the commander, who was a Russian. He allotted us a large potato field, about half a kilometer from where we lived. That was when my father and I decided to dig up as many potatoes as we could for us and the cows for the coming winter. This was really hard work. Every morning my father pushed the wheelbarrow to the field, and dug for the potatoes with a hoe. It was up to me to glean the potatoes with my bare hands and to put them in bags. It was late autumn. The ground was cold and wet. My hands were freezing and swollen. In the evening we returned home with many bags of potatoes in the wheelbarrow. We worked this way for about two weeks and filled exactly 100 bags with potatoes. We hoped that this would last us the winter.

But we were never able to use those potatoes, because we were moved again, this time to Grosslatzkow, where we lived in the home of the head of a large Estate. The castle of the owner of the Estate was right next door to us. It had been totally trashed. Antique rugs had been tossed in the mud. Russian tanks had run right over the rugs. The castle library had held a large number of old books, first editions of some famous works, all of which were either torn or the Russians had literally gone to the bathroom on them.

We settled down in Grosslatzkow on November 3, 1945. It was a very sad and dreary place. The only good thing about the place was that we met some other Latvian families there. Among them were the poet Andrievs Niedra's daughters-in-law Olga, Jozeja and Anna, with their children. Their husbands had been imprisoned in Germany and then deported. [*Here the author describes Andrievs Niedra's family.*] With the possible exception of one of the daughters-in-law, all of these families were deported back to Latvia. But by that time were had already left Grosslatzkow.

Besides the Niedra family, we got to know the family of the broadcast official Mazers – his wife, two small daughters and his sister. His sister took care of the family because Mrs. Mazers was ill and incapacitated. She did not know what had happened to her husband. Later we learned that he had been badly injured in a bombing raid on a train and had died from his injuries.

Other families were the Tomins family with two sons, two Saldavs families and the Bulle family with children. I think that there probably were some others, but I don't remember them well. We were

a cohesive little group. Some made it to the West, others were taken back, supposedly to Latvia. One never knows.

My father was finally given a sort of overseer job. Besides this, he also worked in an office where all the work was conducted either in Polish or Russian. He got this second job through a very questionable middle-aged guy. He was everyone's friend – his girlfriends were either Germans or Polish women, his friends were Poles and Russians in whose company he did a lot of drinking. He considered himself a Latvian. His last name was Backels. Backels spoke Latvian with a "guttersnipe" accent associated with a certain part of lower-class Riga. His Russian was also not so good; he mangled his German and even tried to speak Polish. But even though he was able to adapt to any situation and did somehow get through life, his one problem was that he could not write Russian. He was, though, able to sign his name in Latvian. Somehow Backelis had gotten to know my father, who had finished a Russian High School and the Russian Forestry Institute. And so my father began working in the office. In that office my father was able to get his hands on any official seal or stamp. That is where my father made out the birth certificate for my youngest son, Imants. Later he produced some other documents that we needed.

Because my father was, actually, the only Latvian man in our group (except for Katlaps, who was not at all enterprising and was quite cowardly), our home became a gathering place for the Latvians, a place where you could unload your troubles. Father tried to help everyone. Mother and I did not have to go to work, since I was still breast-feeding my child and we had enough to do – four children!

All workers were paid in kind – at first with flour and later, when the alcohol manufacturing plant began functioning again, with alcohol. Now, after a very long time, we were able to eat bread again, which I baked myself. When we got some sugar-beets, mother cooked syrup for us. Christmas was coming. We baked gingerbread cookies. We thought that all of us should celebrate Christmas together. There was enough room for everyone in the house where we lived. We got a Christmas tree; father asked the Russians for permission, which they gave us with the caveat that two Russians would also be present, just to keep an eye on us…. We had to agree. Thank God that they left very soon after arriving, because there was no alcohol, nobody danced Russian dances, and there was no one there but children and overworked women.

We had decided to celebrate that Christmas as well as possible. I wanted my father to say a few words of greeting for Christmas, but he refused and asked me to do the honors. I wrote a short "sermon" and memorized it. All of the Latvians from our little colony arrived. I don't remember whether there were candles on the tree or not, even though I stood right next to it when I delivered my little "sermon". We sang Christmas carols and ate gingerbread cookies. Our Christmas celebration turned out well.

Here in Grosslatzkow we lived through a terrifying night.

At that time we still had the cow that had wandered up to our house. We had been keeping it in the shed that was close to the house. The door to the shed was locked with a very heavy, old-fashioned lock. On a certain night, we heard that someone was trying to break into the shed. We quickly checked all our locks, because we were afraid that the robbers – Russians (of that we were sure, they had to be Russians) – would be trying to break into our house next. It was a very dark night. Even the house was in total darkness. We were all desperate. We did not know what to do, because losing the cow would be a very serious thing for us because of the children. The nearest house was about ½ kilometer away, we had no firearms – how could we protect ourselves against the robbers? And then my father opened a window and started yelling for help in Russian at the top of his lungs. He screamed as loud as he could. But the robbers did not stop and kept on trying to open the shed door. We had no idea how many there were, because it was too dark to see anything. We just heard them rattling the closed door. Father tried to yell even louder. Suddenly the noises stopped. It became very quiet, and the robbers ran off. Next morning my father's voice was completely hoarse. He went to the office and complained to the Russians about the attack last night. The Russians had told him that they had heard nothing, although my father was positive that those same Russians, his "office-mates", had been the "guests" of the previous night. At that time there were not that many Russians left. There were only a few and those had been left there to keep an eye on the Poles.

After that scare we were very happy to be transferred to Fuerstensee on January 12, 1946. Both Estates, Grosslatzkow and Fuerstensee, were connected.

Again we were settled into a house immediately across from a castle. This particular castle reminded me of the old-fashioned Latvian Estates that consisted of one floor, long and low. Inside the castle we found many old paintings and valuable old books. In the beginning the manager of the Estate was an older Polish gentleman, who had apparently been working there for a long time. He seemed very educated, spoke German well because he had studied in a German university. Our house was directly in front of the entrance to the castle. Every morning I could see how he expedited his workers. I imagined that this is the way that people had been treated in the many years of serfdom in Latvia. All of the workers stood in a long line. My father had a list of the workers, most of whom were Latvian women. Some were German. Each worker was called and told where she would be working that day. This is where my father's knowledge of languages really came in handy, because a number of the women spoke very little German or Russian and they needed a translator.

The Poles governed both Estates. Sometimes it seemed to me as if the Poles were completely drunk with the idea that they could govern themselves and that they were free. They tried to give the younger generation a chance to govern. The older Polish gentleman, who had been the manager of our Estate, was released from his job. The new manager was a young Polish student, about 22 years old, who did not have much of an idea how to administer an Estate. He had also studied in German schools and had gone to a German university. From there the Germans had transported him to work in the mines. He had had to wear a large letter "P" on his clothing, just like the Jews had to wear the Star of David. While he had worked in the mines, his hands had been severely damaged by chemicals, his skin had shriveled. His hands looked like those of a very old man. The manager was a young man, a happy man, friendly towards everyone. He came to chat with us very often. He introduced us to his fiancee, whom he characterized as "nothing special." The fiancee was a healthy young woman with dark hair and pink cheeks. Her father was a shoemaker.

And then, suddenly, everything changed! I received a letter from my husband, a letter that he had written on February 20, 1946. (This was one of the approximately 60 letters that he had written to me during that time.) We had decided that if we lost track of each other, we would write to Weimar where his father was to have settled for the time being.

My husband had been taken prisoner by the Russians on Peninsula, together with a lot of other Latvian soldiers. He had wanted to celebrate my name-day, May 13, 1945, properly, by trying to escape from Hela Peninsula together with two other soldiers. They walked only at night, because during daytime they had to hide from the Russians. When he started looking for us, both of his companions decided to go their own way. My husband walked to Dolzigerbruck and Weimar, where he could not find his father anymore – he had left. My husband worked there for a while in a garden shop, because the owner of the shop had been a friend of my father-in-law's. Soon he took off again – this time towards the South-East, walking by night, sleeping by day. The road towards us was long and hard. Often all he had to eat were berries he picked in the forest. When, after walking for some months, he finally arrived in the West, he was so thin that an old friend who saw him said, "Is that really you?" He finally got into one of the Displaced Persons' camps in Southern Germany from where he transferred to Lubeck where one of his fraternity brothers, a *Talavus*, worked in the camp's administration. Throughout this time he had been writing me letters and mailing them to places where we no longer lived.

When we lived in Schoenow, across the street from us was the Betke nursery and garden. Mrs. Betke had a beautiful daughter, whom she had hidden from the Russians in sheds and attics. But when the Russians began driving the Germans out of their homes, she must have thought that one had to be practical, and the result was that her daughter started seeing a new friend, a Russian commander. Mrs. Betke requested that the commander transfer her, her daughter and all of their possessions to Berlin, which he promised to do. I asked her to please drop a letter I had written to my husband in Weimar in a mailbox anywhere in the West. I remember that she placed this letter in a large hope-chest full of her

things. I really did not believe that this letter would ever reach my husband. And – surprise! – that was the only letter my husband received from me! I wrote this letter on October 22, 1945 and he received it on January 19, 1946.

We started thinking about reaching Lubeck. It looked as if this would be very difficult to do. We did not even know where the Eastern zone ended and the Western zone began, because nobody read the newspapers – there were none. We spoke to the administrator about our situation. He said that he would help us. He had some relatives and friends in Stettin. Apparently he also knew a Polish officer in the Russian army, who arranged the transport of Germans to the Western zone. Of course, we would have to pay him for this service. The officer would transport us as if we were Latvian emigrants. We decided to risk it. We sold everything extra that we had and especially, we sold the cow, so that we had a bit of money, even though by that time money had lost almost all of its value. My father got to know the Polish officer, who promised him that he would make sure we had seats on the train, together with a group of German emigrants. We were to travel as Latvians. The trains ran from Stettin to Lubeck. That is how we made it to Stettin, on probably the first train that, after a very long time, actually ran to the West.

When we arrived in Stettin, we went to the home of the administrator's relatives. There were quite a few people in the apartment, and they did not receive us very kindly. We thought that we could probably stay there for a day or so, and maybe we would be leaving for Lubeck the very next day. Next day, when the officer notified us that we might have to wait a few more days, the woman, who owned the apartment where we were staying, accused us of stealing her husband's gold pocket watch and told my mother that she would call the police. That's when we decided to leave this inhospitable place.

Where should we go? We were told to just settle into any empty German house from which the inhabitants had fled. Stettin was full of these kinds of houses. We picked one in the middle of an apple orchard. It seemed as if all of the houses in Stettin had been built in the middle of orchards and gardens, at least in the area where we found ourselves. Stettin reminded me of a garden city – the houses were pretty, surrounded by trees and shrubs.

"Our" house was completely empty – there were no chairs, no tables, no beds, not even a cup for coffee. We had to sleep on the bare floor. We found two bricks and some dried twigs. Thus we built our "stove" and from then on we did our cooking in the garden. I had a brought a cooking pot with me from Latvia; and that is what we used. I had also brought two spoons, knives and forks with me for each family member (I still have them). I left the sixth set of knife, fork and spoon in Riga for my husband, in case he returned to our house there and had nothing to eat with.

Stettin seemed to me to be a beautiful and modern city. One of the streets near "our" house reminded me of our Freedom Boulevard in Riga, because linden trees had been planted on both sides of the boulevard.

I loved walking with the children to the port on the River Oder. I admired its quiet majesty. There was water as far as the eye could see. I saw many huge cranes. It was very quiet and the air seemed motionless, as if a magician had cast a spell on it. We saw this rather majestic port decorated with huge lanterns and sculptures of centaurs. I have forgotten the name of the famous (in Hitler's time) sculptor, who sculpted in the classical style. I imagined how it must have been when the ships docked there: when the huge lanterns were lit and well-dressed people disembarked…

But now everything was quiet. Not one soul, except for me and my children. Did this frozen might depress me? No! Perhaps what it did do was to awaken in me feelings about the vastness of the world, and perhaps it gave me hope that one day the cranes would be working again, that ships would be docking and that the arriving passengers would again pass by the sculptures of the centaurs….

Father had paid the officer and went to see him daily to find out when the train was to leave for the West. The answer was always "in a few days". Or the officer tried to wiggle out of giving my father a direct answer. Finally my father was unable to find our "benefactor" – he had disappeared. We had been swindled!

For about two weeks we had slept next to each other on the floor, like "herring in a barrel"; we had cooked our meals on two bricks in the yard. And our money was running out. Throughout this time trains filled with Germans were going West. Finally we decided that we had to follow in the footsteps of the Germans. If we wanted to go West with the Germans, we had to forget that we were Latvians; we had to become Germans.

I accompanied my father to the office that was to register us for our "trip" to the West, where we were to find out how and when we were to register and what types of papers we were supposed to bring with us. My father had a certificate that mentioned that my husband was living in Lubeck with his exact address. That same paper also requested help for his family. We showed it at the registration desk. From that point on we were the "Zeltnick" family and our luggage was labelled with that name.

When we finally stood in a long line waiting for our exit forms, we were very nervous. We saw that, besides us, there were some others who were the same kind of "Germans" as we were, some who could barely speak German or spoke with a heavy accent. I thought that they were either Poles or half-Poles. Our seven-person family did not have any problems being included in the list of those leaving Stettin. It seemed as if the Poles were very happy to get rid of their enemies, the Germans. Then we found out that we were not going to the actual transit camp, but would have to live for a while in another camp. This camp consisted of some empty "block" buildings. From here we were to be transferred to the actual transit camp and from that camp, to the train. And again the waiting started. Once more we had to live in a completely empty room. We could not leave the camp, because if we did and our names were called, we could be taken off the transfer list. Life was not easy here.

One morning, as she had done every morning, my mother had boiled some water for tea or coffee and had placed the hot kettle on the floor (there was nowhere else to put it). My youngest son, then about 1½ years old, stuck his hand in the hot water. Of course, he screamed. I grabbed him and ran across the street to find a doctor. A Polish doctor took care of him. Because of this accident, we were finally transferred to the "real camp." It was here that I finally realized what it means to be hungry. The children did get some powdered milk and once in a while something else to eat, but the grownups received coffee that looked like tea, and in the evenings some uncooked barley gruel. The barley was so hard that it could not be eaten. We all longed for the potatoes that had saved us from hunger so many times! Sometimes mother and I sneaked through the barbed wire that surrounded the camp and tried to find something, anything at all to eat.

There was another problem in this camp, besides the hunger. The Germans watched us with hostility. Everyone had to speak German. My daughter could speak the language, but both of my older sons spoke Latvian among themselves. When a German girl asked Aija what the language was that her brothers were speaking, she answered, "It's a language they made up!" When I told my middle son "Go wash yourself – Geh, wasch dich," he answered me, half in Latvian, half in German, "I already washened myself." [*es jau izvashenejos*]

Every day I went to the doctor and asked that she write a note for my youngest son which would say that he needed to be hospitalized and therefore we should be put on the next train to the West. And finally it happened – we got on that list. The camp was on an incline; the train was at the bottom of a hill. We had to hurry, because we were being watched by the Poles who were just waiting for us to drop some of our belongings so that they could take off with them.

It was warm. We all had two layers of clothing on, two coats, for example, and two of everything else. My father was lugging the larger pieces of luggage, so were my mother and I. The thing that saved us was that I had brought a pram with me from Latvia. In the bottom of this pram I had sewn two of my husband's suits, his fraternity colors and cap, and three photo albums. And, of course, on top of all this sat my youngest son. The guards tried to hurry us on. Breathless and sweaty, we finally made it aboard the train where we were greeted by hostile Germans. We were surprised that we had lost none of our luggage. This elicited some hatred from the Germans, who called us "hamsters." Of course, nobody thought of what the needs of a family of seven were. On the train we again got almost nothing to eat, even though the

Americans had sent trainloads of foodstuffs for everyone. These food filled train cars were never opened in Lubeck by the Poles who kept them locked, took them back to Stettin and then sold everything, keeping the money for themselves.

Before we arrived in Lubeck, we had to go through a last document checkpoint. This was manned by Russians. My mother told my father to act as if he did not understand Russian and to sit in a corner, otherwise he might be too conspicuous because of his height. Father did as she suggested, and we got through this checkpoint. We arrived in Lubeck, but found that only people who were sick were allowed to disembark there. The rest of us were taken down towards the South of Germany. I was not even able to see my husband. No matter what I said, we were not allowed to leave the train in Lubeck. We were taken to a place called "*Liederhausen.*" Here we were placed in a farmhouse called "*Niederrengsee.*" The farmer had to take us in. We arrived there on September 6. This is where my desperate husband finally found us and from there took us to Lubeck.

From this point on we were Latvians again. On September 10, 1946, we registered in the Displaced Persons Camp in Lubeck. It was called "*Artilleriekaserne.*" There began our years in the DP camp.

After five years in the Displaced Persons Camp in Germany, the author and her family finally arrived in the United States, in Washington, D. C. The author worked as a bookkeeper in one of the major department stores until she retired. All four children finished the University, get married; there are eight grandchildren and a number of great-grandchildren.

With great dedication and love the author "raised" many pledges in her Latvian sorority "Daugaviete" *and participated in Latvian cultural life in Washington. She liked to analyze literature, write about literary subjects and write short vignettes about her life in Latvia.*

The author passed away on May 28, 1997.

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KĻAVIŅU JURIS

Interview: in the 3x3 camp[20] in the Catskills, NY USA, 1998
Interviewer: Maija Hinkle
Recorded on video by Edīte Irbe
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Translated from Latvian by Māra Lazda

Klavinu Juris is a unique storyteller, humorist, youth leader, athlete, a disabled veteran, who served in three armies, silver-and goldsmith, and a member of the Latvian religion dievturiba *which is based on Latvian traditions and beliefs, rooted in traditional Latvian folksongs, known as* dainas.

Juris was born in Russia in 1917 and was raised in a very patriotic, nationally aware family, which consisted of his father, mother, sister, and an older brother, whom the Soviet regime tried and executed in 1941 in the Astrahan *prison for anti-Soviet activity. His mother passed away when Juris was 13 years old.*

Juris was first educated to be a land surveyor, then a physical education teacher. All life long, he worked passionately and skillfully with young people first in Latvia, then in Germany, and finally, for most of his life, in America, teaching silver smithing, Latvian values and life skills to American Latvian youth, "to those, whose eyes sparkle."

As a young man, he was drafted into the Latvian army as a field engineer, where he witnessed the takeover of Latvia by Soviet troops. He continued his military service in the Red Army, escaped, hid in the woods until the beginning of the war. During the Nazi occupation he worked as a teacher in a technical school and as a sports administrator. In 1943 he was drafted into the Latvian Legion and fought in Soviet Russia. In 1944, after he was shot in the leg in an artery, gangrene set in, and his leg had to be amputated above the knee. After recovering, he had to find his place in the world as an invalid. In the refugee camps he trained to be a silver smith and make jewelry, which determined the course of the rest of his life. He joined the Latvian religion dievturiba *and has spent the last five years serving as the leader of* dievturi *in the United States.*

Klavinu Juris told his story over an entire week, for a total of approximately 17 hours, which was recorded on twelve audiocassettes and two video tapes. His story is very lively, full of colorful, meaningful details and anecdotes, as well as with values and wisdom acquired during his rich long life. It reads like a good book you can not put down. The main themes are: time spent in the army and war, sports, patriotism and love of Latvia, smithery and art, events in American-Latvian cultural life, especially schools and 2x 2 and 3x3 summer camps, dievturiba *and spiritual and Latvian values.*

With the following excerpts I want to illustrate two themes in Klavinu Juris' life story: 1) army and war experiences and 2) silver smithery and Latvian values. From the war experiences I have selected episodes of particular significance or drama, which also show the author's evaluation of the general situation and his life values. The passages about silver smithing and jewelry making were chosen to show the principles and ethics of the old masters in Juris' life, as well as his perception of specifically Latvian characteristics in smithery and characteristically Latvian spiritual values.

The excerpts are taken from different cassettes and sometimes their sequence has been rearranged. They have been edited and shortened in order to avoid repetition.

In the first excerpt Juris describes how he deserted from the Red Army in June, 1941, as he and his army companion were traveling on assignment to Cēsis.

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[20] "3 x 3" are annual cultural immersion camps for all generations.

No one chased after us. We fled further. It was already getting toward morning, around 3 or 4 a.m., and he says, "See here, this here is starting to look familiar to me. Now you keep your eyes open for when there is no car close to us, neither in front nor behind us; then tell me. I will slow down, and you jump out. Then I will turn the wheel, so the car will keep going; I will jump out, and the car will go into the ditch." Sounds good. Right then we're in a small valley. I look - up ahead a car disappears behind a hill, and behind us – nothing. The perfect moment. I say,

"Now, Mārtiņš." And then we did it.

We jump out, and run into the woods. And then there was a moment that I remember very well. Perhaps at that moment we should have felt like forest animals, hiding from the hunt. There was absolutely no law to protect us. We should have been scared. But we ran. Under my uniform I wore a T-shirt, a soccer shirt, with a red maple leaf. I tear off my [*army*] shirt, push it a bit under the soil. My friend tears off all of his stars and insignia. Now we are free. There is no way back. We made our own choices, no one told us to do this. We chose our path, we chose freedom. At this moment, if we had had a Latvian flag, we would have raised it to the top of a spruce tree. We were on such a high; it is difficult to describe it. It did not last long – some 10-15 minutes. Then came the purely practical questions: where to go? What to do? What is happening?

On that trip in the empty cab, *Laima*,[21] the sower of all life, was with us and guided us through. At this moment she, the invisible – yet somehow I sensed her – *Laima* touched us, she placed her hand on my shoulder. A Christian would say: God touched you; God placed his hand on your shoulder. And that is why we had that wonderful feeling; some kind of divine power was present. Almost simultaneously, 10-15 minutes, your five senses sharpen: your ear picks up the smallest noises, your eye focuses suddenly more sharply... You immediately become a creature of the woods. Smell, which is so poorly developed in humans, compared to an animal in the forest, that, too, is sharper – you feel that the forest has a scent, the earth has a scent.

And so we ran through the bushes, through the pastures, through the woods until we got to my father's house. We told them, that we have escaped. There was a small, swampy forest nearby. We let them know that for the time being we would be in the marsh, that we would live there. We did not do anything heroic there; the two of us just lived in that marsh and survived.

On being drafted into the Latvian Legion:

I have read somewhere that someone wrote about being drafted, "We were drafted illegally, it was against the law." That all is true, it was against the law, and many did not want to go. I was boiling inside, as many were.

We went because we were Latvians, because we loved Latvia and our nation, but to a great degree we also wanted revenge. This is not the right word, it is a dumb word, and one should guard against it. You stop thinking clearly, and the thought of revenge takes you over. But that's how we felt at that time, especially the young people.

During the year of communist occupation[22], as I said, I lost my brother. Only after the war I found out that my best friend from the physical education institute, 15 years older than I, Kārlis Pinka, was arrested on the street in Valmiera. Three, four days later the Reds left Valmiera, the Germans had come in, but the Reds had already managed to shoot and kill Pinka. One arm was broken. He was lying in a pit.

That is one aspect – the purely personal pain. On the other hand, there was also shame, dishonor. We were young; we should have protected our Latvia! Fine. No such order came; supposedly we were partly to blame for all this. Not only the shooting and the killing, but all that mocking of all that was sacred to us – our flag, our coat of arms, our heroes. And you had to somehow grit your teeth and take it all. And again, an ugly word, and absurd word, and dumb word, but it can explain it all, and that is how we felt - to get revenge!

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[21] The goddess of fate in Latvian mythology

[22] The first communist occupation of Latvia right before World War II, June 17, 1940 – July 5, 1941.

There were police battalions, and I was almost ready to join them, because of that feeling of vengeance. But I did not go. I received the official draft order and that was that.

Then for quite a while I was sent back and forth between various offices and such. At first I was sent to an infantry regiment. Training began. The 15th Division was being formed – a field engineer regiment; they were looking for the experienced engineers, and I was sent there. German field engineering is a little different, and we had to learn it quickly. We were sent to training courses somewhere in Pērnava. When I completed those, I was sent to officer training in Bolderāja, and spent a few months there. Then to southern Poland to some kind of training fields for the Waffen SS. They were driving tanks, shooting, and again training. So I finished those, stopped by home again. Then when I really, truly went to war, my father just shrugged his shoulders and said, "Surely you'll return again."

The following excerpt describes how Juris lost his leg, what this meant to him, and how he dealt with it.

The Russian was on the offensive, there was shooting. The next day the Russian was on the offensive again, and I was on a small hill not in the very front lines, but so that I had a bit of an overview. I have two platoons, my forty men are split in two, but it is a meager row of soldiers. I see, the Russian comes through our row, hunched over. I have a machine gun. I shoot with the machine gun, but the repetitive fire is jammed with sand; it catches, fires individual shots, but does not shoot a round.

Suddenly I became crazy, nuts. Such an attack, and that fascinates you, overwhelms you. You become crazy. I fire and fire, but I can't really see. I have fallen to my knees, but get up again. Suddenly behind me, "Fool! Standing up on your feet!"

I stood up in front of a bush. I should have crawled behind that bush and watched. Russians are coming and at that moment I felt something hit my leg. It seemed that there was even a cloud of smoke a bit further, not too far. A Russian has crawled behind a hill to take a shot.

The shot does not hurt. Apparently, I was shot. But at first, see, another crazy moment – all kinds of absurd thoughts come over you. I was hurt in the leg, and then I guess I looked behind me, hell, if I was shot, couldn't I get that bullet as a souvenir! That thought lasted for just a second, of course. After that I knew that the first aid station is not far behind. The Russians are coming. I thought – I am now shot in the leg; I will run to our medical station and assemble some back-up, as many as I can, and then we'll come and try to stop those Russians, so they don't get in here so easily. Later I found out that one of our automatic guns was shot out of formation during the Russian offensive, with a grenade thrower or something. There were gaps. A space opened up, and through this space they had begun to crawl toward us.

First I sent a messenger, asking for First Platoon Commanding Officer Luste to come take over the command from me. Actually, in infantry battles he was smarter than I, because he had served as an infantry officer. He would continue the battle at least as well as I, if not even better.

Then I started to run at a trot to the medical station. And another thing. A soldier is supposed to have here, sewn in his shirt something like a pocket, the so-called first aid pack, which contains a bandage, a splint and some other things. When these packs arrived at the company, they didn't have enough for everyone. I distributed them to the soldiers and I was left without one. Just my code of ethics or something - that I have to take care of them before me.

I'd thought, surely, the medical orderly will be close by with his big bag, should something happen. But it happened just when the orderly was nowhere nearby; he was lying somewhere and also firing somewhere with his large bag with him and all. I was hit in the leg, and as it is – there is your sock, there is your pantleg, and your pantleg is tucked inside the sock, and to take my boot off and look to see where exactly I was shot, I had no time for this. I'll just rush over there, and then everything will be fine.

I started walking and, apparently, an artery was broken, which later also turned out to be the case. I started to walk, at first at a gallop, to the medical station. Then such fatigue started to take over, and I could feel a sloshing in my boot. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining like it is now. It was dry, but the inside of my boot was wet, as if I had waded through water. I felt that I was really bleeding a lot. Already then the thought entered my head, damn, if only an artery has not split open. Well, can't do anything

about it, just move more quickly in that direction. But if you are bleeding profusely, you lose strength horribly quickly, which I did not know at that time. I could no longer run; I started to walk, and those legs become so heavy, that you deliberately have to think - raise your right foot, now raise your left foot.

At this moment I understood that I have made a great mistake when I did not put a tourniquet on. Had I looked and seen that that artery was pulsing out blood, I would have put on a tourniquet, a simple thing to do; at least it would have stopped that blood. But now it was too late; I do not have the strength to raise my leg; I sense that I no longer have the strength to pull a tourniquet tightly enough, there is no point to it. Somehow, instinctively or stupidly, now the medical station is not far; I see it already, but I have little strength; at moments everything turns gray, I see green circles spinning, then again it becomes clear, and so I dragged myself to the medical station, and then again the gray, again those green circles, losing more and more strength, becoming limp.

Then for a moment I can't breathe, I gasp for air, somehow feel like I'm suffocating, that I lack air. I have gone to school, studied anatomy, of course I understand, there is plenty of air, the lung sucks in as much as it can. You have so few red cells left, that there are not any left that connect to the oxygen and carry it through the body, and the body is signaling – give me oxygen! That is why there is a sense of suffocating, when there are no red cells, which will carry the oxygen everywhere, where it is needed.

The main thing is that the brain needs to receive oxygen, so it can function. It was clear that the brain was thinking, because there was no panic. Then when I had that feeling that I can't breathe, I am gasping for air, somehow it was rather strange, that I had no panic. The thought entered my mind – aha, so that's what the end will be like, you'll be gasping for air, won't get it, and, as the soldiers say, the film will break mid-show, you'll lose consciousness and you're through.

And just at that moment, when I was still dragging myself along, dragging my feet, two soldiers came by, and they saw that I am barely moving; they grabbed me, and began to carry me. I told them, "Put a tourniquet on my leg."

They did not say anything, looked a bit startled, shrugged somehow, probably wondering what I needed. They grab the gun in their hand, lift me upon it; I put my arms around their necks and they start to drag me. Only later I realized that since I could no longer walk, maybe my voice didn't work either. I thought that I was telling them to put on a tourniquet, and maybe some kind of wheeze came out, and they did not understand what I wanted from them.

I clung on to them around their necks, and they with small steps made their way to the medical station. Another detail. I am somehow sinking back, losing my strength, I had just a bit left, and I dug my fingers into their collars. You know, it's like a small child, who can not yet stand on his feet, but his fingers are strong. The first source of strength appears in the fingers, and the last bit of strength is in the fingers. I hold on to the soldiers' collars; I'm pressing on their throats. These two – they're puffing, almost choking, but they struggle on. We were some 50 steps away from the medical buildings, when the film broke, I lost consciousness.

After a bit I regain consciousness. My leg is wrapped, tied up. I am lying in a Red Cross transport car, next to me lays someone else. A warm blanket covered me, and an unpleasant white leg, yellowish, like a mummy, was sticking out. I thought, oh, that one has already died, the one lying next to me. No, actually, he's a jolly fellow, chewing on a piece of smoked sausage.

I move one foot, move the other foot, hey, that's my foot, that unpleasant white one! My face probably looked the same, from the loss of blood.

I was brought to the so-called division medical station, where they had doctors. At the company medical station there was nothing; there was only a surgical assistant, who replaces bandages, replaces dressings. At the division's medical station they had a doctor. He is covered with blood like some kind of a butcher, who can not even be bothered to put on a clean coat or a white apron, if he even has one.

We are laid down there; the doctor comes, points to me, "This one first." I guess my face gave it away. "And then that one, and that one, and then we'll see."

He puts me on the table, examines me, gives the nurse instructions, and pats me on the shoulder, "You lucked out, my friend! You're going to go to Riga, flirt with the girls, and we'll see each other in a few weeks."

He kept going like at an assembly belt. I was very happy at that moment - I'm going to get to Riga, I'll enjoy myself for a few weeks, I'll play the hero. But then sleep overcame me; I still hadn't really slept, because the night before we laid mines or something. I was put to sleep in some kind of barn.

At night I woke up, the pain in my leg was hell - burning, scorching pain. I felt a fever was shaking me. Something is not good. I call out, an orderly came by, and I say, "Brother, something is not good, the fever is making me shake, my leg hurts like hell, and yesterday it didn't hurt."

"I can't do anything, I am just an assistant," he says. "The doctor saw you a few hours ago, what else can I say?"

The only work he could do was to dispatch the injured to nearby hospitals.

"I'll try to send you somewhere first thing in the morning in one of the first cars."

The night passed, the morning came; there was no transportation first thing in the morning. Around midday they load me into a car and take me to Lizumi. Lizumi was not far from Cesvaine. It is in Vidzeme. I was taken there, we, the injured, were unloaded, they lay us down in the shade of the current bushes. I guess it was the old estate castle, where the hospital was set up. I am thirsty, I want a drink. A nurse comes by and I say, "nurse, give me one cup of water!"

No one gave me a drink; I guess my face again showed that things are really bad with me.

Then the doctor laid me on the table, called another doctor, moved my leg up, down, and mumbled something in German. They thrust two needles into me, to calm me down. They injected some kind of combination of something with the letters *s* and *j*, who the hell knows what that means, what that was, some kind of an abbreviation. And they start to talk to me. One question, another, a third, nothing important. The last question was: "Aren't you getting sleepy?"

I say sure, "I couldn't sleep the night before." I start to explain, that last night I couldn't sleep because of the pain, and the night before because I had to lay the mines.

"Just go to sleep," the guy smiles. "We'll do a bit of work here."

If they were going to do something out of the ordinary, they would have placed a mask over my nose when they gave me anesthesia, and I would've started to think, "This is something bigger." But well, two shots; I calmed down and fell asleep for about an hour.

And again – they're bright people. If they would have made me count, I would have been suspicious, that I was supposed to be out for a long time; or if a person is conscious, they ask for his consent. I was not asked, but, if they had asked, I would have definitely said no. I would have said, that yesterday a Latvian doctor told me that I had been lucky, that I could go have fun, and that I will talk to that same doctor. And that was good, because every hour wasted could have brought me closer to the other world.

That was after midnight; I awoke around 4 a.m. Somehow I could not really feel one foot with the other, there was some kind of cage placed on the bed, and a blanket over the cage. But you know; it was night, dark, quiet, my head was still a bit fuzzy; the thought entered my head: see, you were shot in the leg, and now you are dreaming that you don't have a leg, sleep, and soon your leg will be fine. That kind of a thought – half dreaming, half awake.

But in the morning the leg still really wasn't there. I guess the doctor had ordered, that as soon as I wake up, to call him. He comes and starts explaining what happened, which at that point I still didn't understand, "Buddy, you had *gasbrands*; I think it is called gas gangrene in Latvian. It is a serious infection, when an infection gets into your body and goes to work. The limb becomes bluish gray, and gas-like bubbles are created between muscle tissues. That is why we were squeezing your leg, because we could feel that those bubbles were there, the muscle was crackling. You can feel how far it has gone."

Apparently they had to amputate my leg here above the knee because the gangrene was moving ahead quickly, especially in such hot weather. We had already lost a day. If it had gotten to my upper body, then nothing could have been done.

But despite all of this, there was kind of a peace that morning. Why? An amazing peace. Ok, so I don't have a leg. Thank you, that it was amputated in time. There was no bitterness, which surprised me. Two things, either there was still some anesthesia in my body, it was a result of the anesthesia, or from the loss of blood. My brain had not gotten enough blood, and it had become sleepy.

Those first days I was very peaceful, some two days. Then I got furious at the whole world, God included. I wrote an enraged letter to the doctor of my battalion; he was a good doctor. Again madness on my part. My doctor could not have done anything differently from what he did on that first day, patting me on the shoulder, because he had not known about the infection then.

After the war another doctor said, "Some units of penicillin, and everything would've been fine."

Now I'll jump ahead a bit. The Germans did not have penicillin. If they had had some, it would have been my misfortune. Because of what happened to me [*and because the Germans did not have penicillin*], the war had ended for me, and I left for Germany. That is the next story; but after the war ended, I found out that on August 12th our company of field engineers was transferred to Germany to join our division. They fought in a heavy battle, specifically my company. January, winter, snowstorms, and the Russian is heavy on the attack. Precisely my company had stayed in a little town called Nakele, surrounded by Russians. They held their ground against the Russians some two days, firing, having lost all communication. Still to this day I do not know if any one from my company survived. It is said that one messenger got out before total encirclement, when he still could send a message, signals, to send aid.

I am no fatalist really, but you know, let me make a small comment, that does not apply to my life specifically, but in general. As a *dievturis* I say that God determines everything. God said that Klavinu Juris must live. Let somebody else figure it out how this should happen, God himself does not have time. That was the bullet guided by *Laima.*

In the army there is a certain move – to thrust, not gently pull, but thrust the barrel of the gun downward. I say that *Laima* grabbed his hand and pushed the barrel down, so that I was shot in the leg, and my leg was shot off. And since my entire company, all my friends, had to stay in Nakele forever, it would not be right that I would get out without a scratch. So I, too, [*had to get hurt*], so I do not forget all of this.

Why me, exactly? Why did I survive? Now I'll brag a bit. Maybe because I have a big mouth, because I will tell people how it is and what is happening. Sometimes we say – everyone forges his own fortune. Superb motto and proverb. In this instance, if I could have determined my fate, if I had to be shot, I would say, "Ok, shoot, but shoot me so that later on I can be repaired. I have to teach soccer and basketball; I have to teach physical education to the boys at the technical school; I have to go skiing; oh, how I need that leg! Shoot me to pieces, but so that I can later be put together in one piece and I am ready." I would have ordained that fate for myself, but with that I would have added just six months to my life until the Nakele encirclement and there I would have stayed. *Laima* had something else in mind. God had said that Juris must live, and let her take care of it. But this is childish talk.

After my leg surgery I was put on a train and we were taken to Dresden, then to a neurological hospital, and there, fortunately shortly before the Dresden bombing, we were put on a train and taken to Badnauheim, about 20 kilometers north of Frankfurt.

While there one day airplane squadrons flew over, tens, hundreds in one day.

Again it was a nice day, and a guy on crutches, he says,

"*Mein Gott*![23] I counted them. I counted some 2000 [*planes*] fly over and then I lost count, but they are still coming."

We see that it was something horrible; where are they going? They were going to Dresden, so much we could see. That day they bombed out and burned out Dresden. And again I had the fool's luck to stay alive.

If I had been home that night when my brother was arrested, when the *chekists* [*NKVD, the Soviet Secret Police – ed.*] had the order to arrest me, I probably would not have seen the light of day; I don't think

[23] My God! [*Ger.*] – ed.

that I would be alive. At that moment when I was bleeding profusely, if those men had come only ten minutes later, there I would have stayed. If we had not been transferred from Dresden, who the heck knows, who would have been left. In that sense I have been lucky, and that leads me to think about some kind of higher power.

Once Janis [*Briģis – ed.*] and I were talking at "*Rota*"[24]. One night the two of us were drinking tea, just the two of us, and I say, "You know, Jāni, my injury compared to yours is nothing; it's like I have a cut on my finger. [*Both of Janis Briģis's hands were amputated, one up to his elbow, the second past his elbow – ed.*] After something like that, do you still believe in God?"

Janis looked at me very seriously, "And how." And then he said, "You can imagine – I'm sure that this has happened to you after the war, too – that sometimes black despair comes over you, that you don't want to live anymore, but you can't hang yourself; you can't even hammer a nail into the wall and throw a noose over your neck. At that moment you feel ashamed to be among other people. I went over there, in the camp by some bushes, and there on my knees I prayed to God, and then I could live a bit longer again, and it became easier."

Maija Hinkle: But you, too, have had difficult moments because of the leg?

Juris Kļaviņš: Oh, yes. There was one time my character was not strong enough.

I was a good basketball player, an elite league basketball player. In Ravensburg, a small town, the French garrison was there; there was an open air basketball court. A basketball game was arranged between the Latvians and the French army. They played basketball in France, too. Our side has two good players, two completely useless, do not really play at all, and a couple of average players. I, of course, watched. And I can't, I really want to – want to beat those French, I want to be on the court and play with them, and boy, did they need me! Those dummies – look! He's open, pass! You're open, go, take a shot!

There was a break after the first half, some ten minutes. I could not stand it, I left. It's better not to watch, not to see, how others play basketball.

Here the author relates other instances, when the lack of his leg presented particularly painful moments.

The first thing that helped was that I learned how to be a silver and goldsmith. It was an unpleasant feeling to have to depend on the goodwill of others, when the government pays you a little stipend, the Red Cross; your fellow nationals collect some donations. Thank you, but every donation stabbed me like a knife in the chest - yes, I am a cripple.

I learned how to make jewelry, and then I became independent, I did not have to beg for support. I make one piece, another. Someone comes along, "You know, my daughter is getting confirmed. Could you make something?"

"But you know, I don't have any *lats*[25] with me. Would you have some silver?"

"Well, somewhere we must have something. We'll look."

In short, I am no longer asking, but I can help others who ask. It's a nice feeling.

Then I got married, and then life was really good. It's not just me, but I also have to provide for my wife, and I'll have a family. I have two sons and a daughter. You are a complete person. That black despair overcomes you, and then at one point there's enlightenment – what are you sad about, what are you sniveling for. You know people who live their entire lives with a wooden head; you have a head on your shoulders, and just your leg is wooden. That was the breaking point; I cured myself with a bit of humor. There are people, who are dumber than you, and they go on living; I just have one leg.

Fine, I lost my leg, but, thank God, I still have joy. I can enjoy nature, flowers, paintings, the world, people. I like my little jokes.

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[24] Disabled veterans' home in the Catskills, Elka Park, NY, USA – ed.

[25] Latvian silver coin – ed.

If today after my long life someone would ask me – what would be better, to keep the leg, but lose joy, to become like Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol," for your whole life, or to lose your leg, and keep the joy, I would say, "You know, I am already used to my artificial leg. Keep your leg and leave me joy."

This is followed by an account of Juris's life as a silver and goldsmith, about learning, and teaching, about a smith's principles and ethics, about what he tries to create through his jewelry, what he considers to be the specifically Latvian characteristics in jewelry and in life, what could be called a Latvian approach to life, philosophy.

The first and most important professional schooling he received was in smiths' workshops in refugee camps in Germany: working with the smiths Grencions, Vīksne and most extensively with Bētiņš. These excerpts are a small part of Juris's complete description of jewelry making, Latvian approach/knowledge of life, and the Latvian religion dievturiba.

I have never had any formal training in silver and gold smithing, any kind of jeweler's school or art school or anything like that. First I studied with some masters, mostly with Bētiņš, and after that I continued to study at a vocational school, by doing it myself, and from experience.

We smiths are all good friends. Up to now we have never hidden anything from each other, "Aha, now I know this trick, and I'll make some money off this." Learning from each other, that's how we get ahead.

My first jewelry teacher was my friend Grencions. He also gave me a good piece of advice, which he had thought of himself. He said, "Now that you have begun working with ornaments, make only those based on Latvian traditions, do not try to create your own. Then, when you will have absorbed all the Latvian traditions – like a sponge when it has absorbed so much water that it can not absorb any more, when you pour on just a little bit and it goes through and drips to the floor - then, when you will be so full of the Latvian designs, then you can start to create your own. Then the Latvian aspect will flow out of you naturally, and you will not have to force it out. Otherwise you'll stray off course."

That's how you spend a lifetime gathering wisdom; you cannot describe it all in just one week.

About the lessons in master Bētiņš's workshop he says:

Bētiņš arrived in the morning, greeted us by the door, and we returned his greeting. Then he passed by all the tables. We were sitting there, some 12–14 people, and working very hard, hour by hour, day by day. He observed us all. If you were making something simple – a *Namejs* ring, a *Saules* [*sun*] ring, that he knows, you are capable of that. If you have begun making something new, something you designed yourself, that catches his interest. He would talk to you.

I have a bracelet, one that goes around your arm and consists of about three *Saules* rings. On the ends I have drawn a *skujiņa* [*criss-cross*] design. The ends are straightened, but the criss-cross design is not a simple criss-cross, but it crosses once, and then those ends continue to cross, and so it becomes thicker and prettier. He studied this.

"Come over to my table. What do you intend to make here?"

"I will just cut it out and solder it on."

"I will show you something."

He takes an engraving tool (he has a Masters degree in engraving). He pokes a little with it, pokes through one way, pokes through the other way, and makes it look as when monograms are stitched together.

"Won't that look better?"

Of course, it would look better that way.

"I will show you how to make it that way."

I still protested a bit, "But see, Mr. Bētiņš, I arranged to make that bracelet for 800 Marks. You already showed me how to make another piece differently, and it will take me a few more additional hours. Now this engraving, this will take me about another day. Then that will cost me 1000 Marks."

He looked at me, "Mr. Kļaviņš, no person is perfect. The mind imagines something, and sometimes the eye does not see what the mind has conceived, and this applies to everything. The hand can't quite do what the eye sees; it shakes a little. I am not saying anything about that mistake; the hand will practice, it will become more certain; the lines will become straighter, will follow the eye better. But, if you will intentionally make something more poorly than you are capable of, then I will have nothing more to say to you."

I carved it like Bētiņš told me to. About the price he said, "If there has been a deal, you will have to make it for the amount you settled on."

There was nothing I could do about it; I worked a day overtime. I gained knowledge, and all of our old masters have this knowledge. ...

When it is a matter of work, then he [*the master*] is the boss, we do not protest; but when there is a celebration or a moment of mourning, then we are all together, one unit, both the master and apprentice, everyone together.

Juris arrived in the United States in 1951 and worked in jeweler's workshops as a gold and silversmith until retirement. At the same time he worked in his own basement workshop on Latvian jewelry and travelled to many camps and schools teaching smithery to Latvian young people in North America and Europe.

Our company, it was a big company, about 100 employees, 60 of whom were just repair workers, jewelers, who sat at the table and filed and worked. We had our own designers, an Italian, a graduate of an Art School in Pittsburgh, a young guy. My specialty is men's rings.

In order to get out of this monotony, I built my own workshop at home in the basement, and there I could make my own. Very good, that is a challenge, and I learn. Kucers is a professional; he also has his own workshop in his basement.

For the first years I was in America, I helped a bit with sports, and then those *2 x 2 camps*[26] got started; that was long ago, some 30 years. But that was also interesting, to work with those young people, whose eyes sparkle.

In the beginning there was no smithing at the *2 x 2 camps*. I just held lectures about ornaments, showed photographs that I had brought with me, which grew in number year by year. Another topic was leading summer camps, which I had led in Germany.

That really made me happy, and I have done this in *Kursa*,[27] and elsewhere. Juris Kļaviņš has given lectures on ornaments and has taught people in the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Germany, Sweden, and England. Such international fame, not to be sneezed at [*laughs*]. He has also taught almost everywhere, *2 x 2 camps* and *3 x 3 camps*[28] that I attended, mostly in Germany. I lived some 5-6 months in Muenster, in *Kursa* also some six weeks. They usually don't pay any kind of salary. I was paid in Muenster, but the pay was laughable, some 100 DM a month, $30.00. In Muenster I could get by like that only because the Germans deposited a disability allowance in the bank, and I got it. But I enjoyed the whole experience, and I thought that I could relate well to young people; I like to joke around myself.

Why was I invited [*to all these places*]? I am older; it came time for me to retire, and I like to go to all these *2 x 2 camps*. I even retired a little early, at 62 years I think, three years early. I lost some portion of the pension I could have had, but those three years were worth it. Now my hands were free, now I could travel around to these camps, *Kursa* and the like, as much as I wanted; before that, I could go only when I had vacation time, or if I took a week of unpaid vacation.

The main thing that we teach in silver and gold smithing is not to file or solder, or to saw, any American or German is capable of filing or soldering exactly the same way. The most important thing is what are they going to make? Before they get to work, we have a pile of books with us, and they look through them.

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[26] Week-long cultural immersion camps for youths, ages 15 – 35. – ed.

[27] A Latvian camp in Washington state, USA. – ed.

[28] Week-long cultural immersion camps for all generations. – ed.

"I'm going to make this."

"No, that is too difficult for you. That is a Kurzeme brooch [*sakta*] from the medieval period."

So, without even intending to, as they say in the army, you put cotton in his ears, and somewhere a bit of this lesson stays with him. That was a responsibility, and I liked it. I did it for quite a few years. I even received two certificates of recognition from the Cultural Foundation. [*Gives me an article about himself* – int.]

Only recently I've started to feel that I've had enough. Eighty-one years, you know, and if you have spend 30-40 years with beginners, and done the same thing over and over – make a round circle, place the saw this way, you'll get a round form, you can take this file here – this for forty years, it is the job of a teacher. He also teaches the little kids about 3 plus 8 every year from the beginning. I think it's not so easy for him either.

I haven't worn a tie for a long time. One time I noticed that a real man's *sakta* suits my face, and I now wear that instead of a tie. I also made my own folk costume, not to wear in order to sing in the choir, but to wear when I go to Latvian celebrations, to November 18th,[29] to cultural activities. In the beginning others looked at me with surprise.

I was a bit reluctant to wear the *sakta* to American events, but Americans were more relaxed about it than Latvians. They would see it, compliment me - what a nice *sakta.* Where did I get it? I made it myself? They compliment me again and that's that. Now the folk costume - that they had to get used to.

As I said before, I retired from work at 62. After that for the first few years I worked hard in the basement. I was happy. I did not work less than in my real job; I worked more in my basement, did what I wanted. There have been all kinds of nice moments, all kinds of awards won in exhibits, I don't even know, where they are and how many. Such awards are nice. Two American Latvian Association awards. One is the Krišjāņa Barons prize that was quite a while ago, one is a certificate of recognition.

I have met many friends. That makes me happy. You see, according to fairytales or stories the magician can not die before he has not given his magic away to someone else, and it seems to me, I have given my magic away to quite a few people, so there is no real purpose for me to hang around the world needlessly. In total I have taught around 300 people, but of them some 5 or 7 have really "sunken their teeth into it."

Maija Hinkle: What has been your favorite piece from all that you have made?

Juris Kļaviņš: That's hard to say. Osvalds Grīns – an old, good smith, a good engraver, Grīns, for example, never left an open space on his pieces. Everything is carved, engraved; he'll even carve something on individual pendants. He likes to make his own designs. Sometimes people argue, whether Grīns's work is Latvian. His work is Grīns-ish, very unique.

I stay more with the simple, I play around more with form, and then I sometimes add a bit more to the design, but I really try to shape the form, so that it reflects light. There was a time when I designed my own pieces so that someone who is not a real specialist – if I put my piece alongside 5 or 6 that were derived exactly from ancient designs – he could not tell the difference [*between mine and the ancient piece*]. But mine would be my own creation. That's how I worked.

Which is the best or favorite? That's hard to say; there have been several. On what occasions are they usually created? A friend, who knows me, knows my work, he calls, "You know, the wife and I are going to celebrate our anniversary, our silver anniversary. I have to give her something made of silver. Could you make something?"

I have to make something for my friend. My hands are free, to make whatever I want. He won't argue about the price. I can think about it, I am usually given plenty of time, and I can make it really however I want; in the end I'll calculate the price. Friends know, I won't cheat them, whatever it will be, will be. Those are the best pieces, and sometimes they are successes. A good piece is one that when it is finished, I am sorry to sell it, no matter what the price, and then I want to talk the person out of it.

Then sometimes I feel like a Judas, who has sold his own child. Then I, and I don't drink much, but I take a bottle of something strong, and out of anger I take a drink.

[29] Latvian independence day – ed.

When I have made something really good, then I lay it on some kind of fabric. Working in the basement I do not drink, not even one glass of beer. I have tried it on a hot day, maybe one can, but then you get careless, you can make a mistake. But when the work is finished – a bigger project, not every ring, then I would be giddy all the time - the big project is done, you lay it down, enjoy it, look at it. You know that tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, you are going to give it away and you won't have it anymore. Many of those good jobs have left me without being photographed, and then you drink a glass.

It happened that once two of my pieces were photographed. When I had not yet participated in any exhibit on the West coast, I received an invitation to participate. I was working at *Kursa*, and the West coast started to get to know me. I promised to participate.

I make a necklace with some pendants hanging from it, a rather simple necklace. But it's pretty good. I'll send it to the exhibit. I send a description, silver necklace, Juris Kļaviņš's original design with pendants, so they can put it in the catalog.

Meanwhile the New York Latvian Cultural Festival arrives in January in the *Daugavas Vanagi* House. The organizer called me, asked me to provide something for the exhibit, pleads, and in the end persuades me. I grab a few things and bring the necklace, too.

In the past I have found it annoying to read "Not for sale" on a piece at an exhibit. I don't like it. This time, so that does not happen with my piece, I write an outrageous price on that necklace, so no one will buy it for that price. I place it and some other things in the exhibit. I went off to a few lectures. That's usual at the Cultural Festivals; you can hear all kinds of wisdom there.

The lecture was over, another lecture. When I get back to the exhibit hall, the woman, who was supervising the exhibit, smiles,

"Mr. Kļaviņš, I sold your necklace!"

Fine, I have the money, but I have cheated the organizers of the West Coast exhibit. I went home and got to work.

It is a matter of principle for me and the old masters to never remake the same major piece. If someone has paid a lot of money, it's only right that it is unique. I made something similar, also a necklace, with pendants, but it was a bit different.

There have also been failures.

Once I was making a gold *Daugmales* ring, nothing too complicated, but still gold is not cheap, and somehow I melted it, and a small piece of something melted into it, some kind of little wire, which got in, a little bit of carelessness. I wanted to redo it, but then I remembered that in a few weeks I'm going to a *2 x 2 camp*, to work with young people. I brought it with me. There in the workshop a young guy was working. He makes one mistake, another, a third, he is exasperated,

"I'll never be able to make anything!"

"See, I have this in my drawer. I have been working at this for 35 years, and see what happened to me a month ago. That is gold."

He looks. Maybe it's not so bad, he'll keep trying, if Kļaviņš, too, still makes mistakes. God made sure, that the old masters do not get too cocky.

Maija Hinkle: What are you most proud of?

Juris Kļaviņš: I would say of the fact that I have apprentices. I have Lilita [*Spure* – ed], who now teaches others, and teaches them well. I have Andris Gobiņš, a nice guy, who got attached to me in Muenster; proud as a peacock, but now he's a bit more mature. Really, the fact that I have apprentices, because I was really more or less forced into smithing. I have liked doing it. I have dug into old books and tried to reproduce what I find, and have been happy when I succeed.

There was one piece, I am sorry that I don't have my slides with me, there aren't any books with a drawing here either. Actually that drawing was in a Lithuanian folk art book. The ornament is from Žagare, from about the 11th or 12th century. Žagare is right on the border, a small town, today maybe it is even a Lithuanian city. In those times the *zemgaļi* [*south-central Latvians*] lived a bit further. We all

know, when the Livonian order was finally defeated, dispersed, Zemgale was practically empty, and then Mindaugs took half of Zemgale. The order did not want to fight for such destroyed land, and it was left to Lithuania.

Since then Žagare was in Zemgale, it is a Zemgale ornament, and I reproduced it. But to reproduce something well is no easier than making something new. It was commissioned by the Grand Rapids museum. I made them three pieces – that one, then one bracelet, and one bronze *sakta* [brooch] with silver setting.

Those are called cross pins: three crosses and the fourth on the bottom forms a pin, you pin the shawl of the folk costume on each shoulder with those pins, and then in front you have a chain, everything of bronze, and then some pendants, some batons, something like little axes or moons. Then the cross pin has some circles, they are bronze with silver setting around them, then little lines, blue stones on top. I have to show you a picture, to really show you.

Then, when I made that necklace, the reproduction, I put it on a dark blue piece of fabric, poured myself some cognac for a job well done, which I had earned, and for a moment I felt sorry for myself. I said to myself, "So Juri, can you ever make something better than this? You'll make good pieces, different, but will they be better than this?"

Nothing is missing, nothing is superfluous; it was calm, it was peaceful, it was elaborate, wonderful. That sounds like babbling, but that's about how it was.

That master had never attended an art academy, nor had any critics given him advice. A lucky master, one can not always pull out the best work from the past. That was something good, and I carefully reproduced it from a book, and it really made me happy.

Many things have made me happy. There was that master work, my thesis work, for which I got a master's diploma; that was still in Germany. That was a reproduction of a *sēļu* [*an area of Latvia – ed.*] necklace, a neck ornament. It was rather popular in the early iron age, discovered in Sēlija in the 2nd-4th centuries, in Sauka*s* district in the Strazdbuku home.

Necklaces from that period are rather simple: the neck hoop is formed, and a square wire is twisted around itself on its axis. It is an elegant necklace. It has six slightly gothic little pendants attached like the windows of a church, each is beautifully carved out, with pretty little spear and moon-like forms, hanging from the bottom.

Bētiņš had a picture of it taken at the museum through the glass. The original photograph itself was fuzzy, with a few pieces torn off. Bētiņš said that one lady wanted a necklace like this, and I could make something like it. For a master's work one is supposed to design an original piece, but since the photograph was fuzzy, with the corners of it torn off, he told me to examine it and to draw it precisely and well. He approved of the drawing, and I had to smith it. I have a photograph of this also. Even then [*early in my career*] it was a very fine piece.

It is hard to say, fathers and mothers love all their children equally. There are more simple pieces, perhaps a ring, but even with that even the smallest detail is important.

What am I trying to create in my jewelry? In 1985 I heard a lecture. Live and learn all life long. Valda Dreimane, a poet, the soul of *Piektvakars*, a wonderful person, was at a *"2 x 2" camp*, and gave a lecture on the subject of "Components of Latvian Style in Literature." I could not quite imagine what that was. In my jewelry pieces I can approximately imagine what that is, but to define it, I could not – what is, what is not.

Valda Dreimane's definition was something like this:

"Let us look in our *dainas* [*Latvian traditional folksongs – ed*]. The first characteristic is peace, reserve, tranquility:

> My mamma [*diminutive*] has died,
> The flame [*diminutive*] has gone out,
> I'll be able to rekindle the flame [*dim*],
> But I won't be able to wake mamma [*dim*].

You see, it is probably most painful for the daughter. Up to this point in her life she has lived with her mother, her father, her brothers. There have been all kinds of setbacks, but not her mother's death. Some one else wails, my mother has died, my sun is beginning to go out. It is just as painful for the girl in the song as for those who are more emotional, but she expresses [*her pain*] almost apologetically, that she is burdening you by sharing her sorrow with you, so reserved, so calm, so peaceful.

Another example – a girl is in love; she tells the entire world, but she does that, too, with reserve, shyly.

A second characteristic – assigning soul to everything in one's surroundings. Getting along with everything and everyone. This approach is not one in which when I have a nice, strong horse, I sell the horse at the market and get a certain amount of money; that the colt is just a mode of transportation to me. No, it is his colt [*dim*]; the young man can sense him; he loves him.

Ashes, maples, oak trees [*diminutive*],
The brothers [*dim*] of the forester.

He gets along with them as though they were brothers.

A girl goes to cut a branch for a broom and she has a conversation with the birch trees:

The birch tree [*dim*] asked me.

The birch tree himself invites her; he has so many small branches.

Cut the branches, the lower branches [*dim*],
But don't cut the top [*dim*],
Leave the top [*dim*],
So the birds have a place to land.

He gives the birch tree a soul. The birch tree will feel pain, if the top is cut, take the branches. Why will it hurt? Not because of greed, material needs, but the birch's heart will ache and what will the tree look like without a top. A Latvian wants to live in such a world, wants to see such a world.

The third characteristic is that he pays as much attention to a small detail as to the eternal sun, the vast sea, and the thick oak trees. There is a *daina* about the the spider's web, or the popular *daina*:

Oh, dear father land [*diminutive*],
Your beauty.
A blade of grass [*dim*] bloomed
With blossoms [*dim*] of silver.
Eat, cows, the green grass,
Don't trample over it with your feet [*dim*].
The grass weeps bitter tears,
Being trampled by feet [*dim*].

Just think how many millions of blades of grass there are in the world! Who would feel sorry for them? Trample it, eat it, pull it out, pour asphalt over it. But here is a Latvian; he takes pity on the grass, so that it is not trampled by feet. It is possible to meet a holy person, who has talked to birds. But to be able to hear the weeping of grass - one has to be born a Latvian.

All these characteristics. Then I also look at my jewelry making. The same characteristics fit rather well here, too – peace, reserve, tranquility. Not the way that we did it in Germany when we were dumb and did not grasp anything. We thought that the more you add to it, the nicer it will be, the more you work at it. Completely wrong, at least to a Latvian eye. That I learned.

I happened to meet professor Burkarts Dzenis, because when I lived in Ohio, in Greenville, he lived in that famous place Gettysburg, 12 miles away from our home. You could take a bus. One day I got up the courage to go see Prof. Dzenis. Respect and love - that is the professor, a poet, the former Chancellor of the Latvian Academy of Art.

I went. He was home alone; his daughter, son were living somewhere else, and he's living just with his wife. I knock at the door.

"May I come in?"

"A Latvian, come on in."

And such a calm, simple, and friendly person. The really great ones are simple. The half-greats, those who still lack a certain something, they are the ones who puff out their chests so big. But not Dzenis. We talked so simply. We met for the first time in our lives; the gentleman made tea; we drank tea; we had such a heart-to-heart conversation that I missed my bus back to Greenville.

The second time I brought some of my work to show the old gentleman, to let him take a look. One little bracelet, a present that I had planned to make for one Christmas, and finished it by the next. A *Saules* [*sun*] bracelet. I placed some sun rings into the bracelet, kind of golden, for I wanted it to be very beautiful. Dzenis said, "Oh my! From all the material that has been layered onto this, one could make at least three bracelets."

"It's my own composition."

"Composition? I wouldn't say that it is a new composition. I would say that it is a new combination, ornaments combined in a different way. An interesting combination, yes, but I would not call it a composition."

That immediately gave me a reason to look closer at the meaning of composition. Don't use big words, if you don't know what they mean. Eventually I figured out the difference between composition and combination.

Dzenis continued, "How is this piece made?"

"First, that one, and then that, and then I soldered that together and then again all together."

"Soldered together, brazed. If it had been made all from one piece, then it would be worth something." He had smithed jewelry, too; there were even those Dzenis' brooches, something Latvian, but not copied, an original Dzenis. But that was in the beginning, in his youth. Then he had started working with large pieces, with metals, casting, but he is no stranger to jewelry.

"But Professor, this bracelet costs some $200 (that was an enormous sum then, when we had just arrived in America, and earned $50.00 a week). If I had picked this out of one piece, how much would that have cost?"

"Never mind the cost, but then it would have been worth something."

Again, an artist's credo – die of starvation, but create something that is worth it.

My family - there was one boy and another child on the way. Dzenis, he is a cheerful gentleman, a nice gentleman. He showed me the awards he had received; he had brought his tuxedo from Germany and laughed, that that was for a Dzenis of a different size. He showed me all his awards, including those awarded outside Latvia, as the Chancellor of the Latvian Academy of Art and one of our most accomplished sculptors.

Another thing typical about Dzenis. He works at the Peterson Incubator Factory, and one of his responsibilities is to plane the boards and make doors for the incubators, where little chicks walk in and out. He was the Chancellor of an academy and an accomplished sculptor, but you have to earn a living, and so he planes the doors.

They found out that they have a pretty famous sculptor working for them. Old Peterson, who was the original factory founder, now is an old man, just like I am now. Now everything - the factories and congregation and bank - his son now runs everything.

He arranged to see Dzenis, to see whether he can make a bust of old Peterson.

"Take your time, as much as you need; we'll pay you the same as you earn now."

The same pay for an artist's work, as for making little chicken coop doors!

Dzenis is Dzenis. Peterson comes, and sits for him once, twice.

Peterson's face is old, wrinkled, bags under his eyes, his cheeks sagging, but there's still something in his face and expression, that old energy, that old powerful man, that old pioneer, who came to America just like us, with empty pockets, and today an entire little city, Gettsyburg, depends on him. About half of the city works in his incubator factory and the other half, in his bank.

Dzenis tries to put in that tenacity, that intensity, but also to show that today Peterson is old, his time has passed; he will not build anything new. Dzenis takes this work seriously. The young Peterson came once to take a look. Dzenis takes off the wet cover; young Peterson sees - there is a likeness; but couldn't he polish up the old guy a little, so that he looks younger, more dashing?

Dzenis places the cover back over it. "I can not do that. If you don't like it, I'll go plane some more doors, because what I see is what I create." It did not matter that you will no longer be paid, but you will have remained true to yourself.

His son says no, to finish it, he did not mean it that way; it looked nice. Dzenis is an artist to the core. Again he taught me something. That's how you collect knowledge in life. That is, as Linards said, the "people's college," where you learn from people, from your surroundings, and from yourself.

It seems to me that I have succeeded in getting the Latvian spirit in my pieces, the peace, tranquility; not always, but maybe sometimes a bit better than some of my colleagues. Even though some have better technique.

We, the old masters, critique each other rather harshly among ourselves. In public, if the master himself is not present, then we refrain from criticism.

One more principle – at least we, the old masters, we will not imitate the work of someone else, an original design that he created. That is an unwritten understanding among us. It is below me to copy Kucers' work. I can draw a design myself. If you do not like my work, go to Grīns, go to Kucers. That is our custom.

During the last part of the interview (cassettes 11 and 12) Juris spent several hours talking about the Latvian religion, dievturiba*, what it means to him, and what are the* dievturi *beliefs. He compared the wisdom found in the Bible with that espoused by Latvian* dainas*. In summary he said:*

Dievturi (believers in *dievturiba*) also search for the sources from which Latvian culture takes its strength. *Dievturi* are not descreasing in number; someone leaves, someone else joins us, and so we remain as we are. When we talk about *dievturiba*, I end with the following advice:

"Read the Bible seriously, carefully, and critically. Read the *dainas* just as seriously, carefully, and critically. Be honest with yourself, do not try to fool yourself, and choose that way in your life, which is closest to your heart and clearest to your mind. If that is the way of the Bible, then godspeed to you – millions of people have lived good lives, having chosen the way of the Bible. If it is the way of the *dainas*, then godspeed – thousands of people have lived good lives, having chosen the way of the *dainas*. And, if you spend your entire life searching for your path and vacillate, and don't quite know, if it is your way, then search for your path, and godspeed even more, because that is the best. When you are a Christian, contribute to your congregation, go to church three times a year, show your face – how much good does that do you? When you have dressed in your folk costume, gone to a celebration, and are a *dievturis*, yet your *dievturiba* faith ends with that – that does not do much good for you either. But when you are searching for your own way, when you are active, when you think, then godspeed. That is all I can say."

And in the end the way of the *dainas* was closer to my heart and clearer to my mind and I think that it has helped me to live just as good a life as the Christian faith.

Kļaviņu Juris passed away in December, 2002.

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OSKARS HERCS

Interview: in Los Altos, CA USA, 1999
Interviewer: Rita Petričeks from Shelton, WA USA
Transcribed by Ivars Korbs
Prepared for publication with comments by Maija Hinkle
Translated from Latvian by Inta Šrāders

Oskars Hercs was born in 1922, in Valgunde County in a farming family. He describes his years in elementary school in Valgunde and Kalnciems with humor. He studied hard and successfully, fell in love, got into fights and avidly pursued extra-curricular activities. After graduation in 1936, he attended the Jelgava *Teachers' Institute and graduated and was certified in 1943. During the Russian occupation he was active in the Institute's resistance group; he describes their activities in June 1941 when the Russian occupation changed to German occupation.*

In 1943, he started work at the Tukums support branch of the Latvian Political Office which he describes as follows: "The Latvian section, under the leadership of Karlis Metra, was directly subordinate to the German security service. It mainly investigated events of the Year of Terror, infiltrated the Communist underground, and battled the red guerillas." At the end of July, he was detailed to the security police of the Latvian Political Office in Riga. From August 23 until October 16, he served in the Tukums' counterintelligence service and took part in organizing the so-called "forest cats."

In October he was evacuated to Germany. Initially he was assigned to guard munitions factories, but later worked as a paymaster. On February 22, 1945, rather early, he received his discharge documents and was able to join civilian refugees at Gistrov and later go to "Sidrabene" camp in Luebeck where he became the camp administrator. He describes his part in legalizing 25 legionnaires, as well as life in the camp, including patriotic activities. He was forced to seek refuge in a camp in Wurzach, in the French Occupation Zone, after he discovered that some colleagues were stealing. There he married and found a good job as the administrator at the Hinterzarten children's home in Donaueschingen. In Wurzach he also participated in various organizations, and took part or assumed leadership in patriotic or anti-Soviet activities.

In 1950, he arrived in America, in California. The following is the author's story about how he gained new education in America and went from a laborer to being Executive Vice President of a large company with million dollar contracts all over the world.

Oskars Hercs[30]: In Donaueschingen we worked until August 28, 1950, when, having received the guarantee necessary for entering the USA from Rita's cousin Valeska and her husband Hugo Bergs, we left for the emigration transit camp at Grohn near Bremerhaven to board a ship and start a new life. When we left, we did not know that it would take us some 17 – 18 years in America before we would reach the standard of living that we had enjoyed during our last year in Donaueschingen.

On September 2, 1950, we left Bremerhaven on the Liberty class transport ship *General W. C. Langfitt* and stopped in New York on our way to New Orleans. We disembarked in New Orleans on September 19, 1950, and took the train to San Francisco, arriving there on September 21. We were met by Valeska Bergs, who took us to nearby Petaluma where Hugo worked on a dairy farm milking cows and she earned money cleaning houses. They had arrived in America the previous year.

Claiming I was a skilled carpenter, I got my first job building single family homes in Santa Rosa. Since I had said that my tools were still on their way from New Orleans and that I had to get used to local measurements and such, they let me work as a laborer earning $1.42 an hour. This career lasted for a

[30] The author had already prepared this part of the interview and we recorded it.

couple of months until Valeska and I got jobs at the restaurant of the New Hotel Petalum – he as a chef, I as a maitre d'Hotel. We were well fed, but business was slow because of the rainy season, and we ended up with no cash earnings. Rita worked for a while plucking chickens, but then got a job cleaning houses, which paid her $1.00 an hour.

In early 1951, I worked at the Petaluma box factory for about three months. In April, I heard that 60 miles away in Ukiah they were hiring lumberjacks for piecework – cutting down and processing redwoods. The American entrepreneur let himself be persuaded that my partner, Andrejs Arajs, and I had worked in forests before and had a lot of experience. We had to confess, however, that the biggest tree we had cut down was 1.5 feet in diameter, while a respectable redwood averages 10 feet across. But he must have seen that we were ready for serious work and learning and he hired us.

Initially, either he or his assistant felled the trees and we sawed and split the logs, depending on the quality of the grain, into roofing shingles, vineyard posts, four-by-fours, or fencing rails.

Later, in order to earn more, we bought our own tools – a chain saw and an old 1936 car to take us to and from the job site. We lived in a cabin in the woods, worked from sun up until sun down, and did our own cooking. The menu consisted mainly of boiled potatoes and canned meat (Spam, corned beef), canned peas or carrots and great quantities of very sweet cocoa.

We stayed in the woods for two to three weeks at a time, and then shaved and washed in a stream and otherwise dressed up like bridegrooms before we went home. Only our hands were impossible to get clean. They were black from the tannin in redwood sap. Work went well, and the long hours gave us good earnings. Many other Latvians, hearing about the good pay, came and tried it, but quickly disappeared.

On January 22, 1952, Daris was born in Santa Rosa, where we had moved from Petaluma in the summer of 1950. It was time for me to think about a steady job near home, one that would last through the rainy season. So, in the summer of 1952, we cut our last tree and moved to Richmond, a factory town, to get better jobs. I got a temporary job at the International Harvester warehouse. When that ended, the most unpleasant period of my life began - doing electrical welding like an automaton on the assembly line at the Ford plant. I worked there for two years, until September 1954. I was the only one of some 400 workers at the plant who didn't own a car and commuted by bicycle, rain or shine.

In the fall of 1954, I passed the required exams and entered the University of California at Berkeley to study economics and business management. By then I had completed night classes in bookkeeping and real estate at a Richmond high school, as well as passed two courses through the university extension program.

Rita managed several apartment houses for which we got an apartment rent-free.

On June 25, 1955, Daris's sister Irisa arrived. On January 10, 1956, we became full-fledged American citizens.

While attending the university, I worked the night shift at a warehouse and later, as a metal worker in a factory. I finished my studies in January 1957 and received a BS degree in business administration at the June graduation. My grades placed me on the Dean's list. In 1955, upon receiving an Associate of Arts degree, I was inducted into honorary fraternities Delta Alpha Psi (accounting) and Delta Gamma Sigma (business administration). I also belonged to the professional fraternity Delta Sigma Pi. I received a small stipend from the Merrill Lynch Foundation.

I began to look for a job. The Dean of the school recommended me to the statistics department of the university's Livermore Research Laboratory. But, because members of my family were living in Soviet Latvia, I could not get the needed security clearance. I also had a chance to work for the Internal Revenue Service, but felt that advancement opportunities would be better in the private sector. So in January 1957, I began work as a junior accountant in the telephone equipment plant of the Lenkurt Electric Company, San Carlos California. When I left there in April of 1961, I was a budget analyst. I took a higher paying job at the nearby electronics factory Eitel McCullogh.

In November of the same year, I got the opportunity to work as chief bookkeeper in a small radio and hi-fi antennae manufacturing plant. I worked there for 24 years, until January 1986. Over the years, as

the company's business and income grew, I gradually gained experience in finances, administration, contract negotiations and project management. In 1964, I was elected the company's Controller and became its Treasurer in 1970. I became Vice President for Finances in 1973, and in 1979, Executive Vice President.

During the sixties, the largest part of our business consisted of US government orders for military telecommunications. Out of necessity, I learned the laws and regulations applicable to government contracts, participated in contract negotiations and was responsible for necessary reporting during the duration of the contract. In later years, international contracts dominated the work with sizeable projects in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, the Philippines, India, Brazil and elsewhere.

To lessen the commercial and credit risks, I had to familiarize myself with international conventions about documentary credits, bank practices in granting credit and the documentation required, as well as each country's rules about transit insurance, taxes and possible restrictions on currency. The work was demanding, rich in opportunities and interesting, but it required frequent and sometimes extended travel. I established good contacts with the market finance divisions of banks in both San Francisco and on the East Coast. That helped in offering advantageous long-term loans to buyers in the international markets. Before beginning talks with a potential buyer, be it a private business, state ministry or agency, I consulted with the commercial attachė of the American Embassy in almost every country, to gain information about competition, credits, etc.

Beginning right after college graduation, I started giving tax advice to private clients and small businesses in my free time. Over the years, this practice grew until, by the end of the 70's, I was serving 300 clients. I had to quit doing this in 1979, because of growing responsibilities in my "day job," frequent travel and a declining need for extra income.

In 1982, I became Managing Director of Granger Associates' operations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and India. This necessitated our moving to England where the company had a manufacturing branch near London with appropriate technical, administrative and sales staff. I lived in a big house, in the garden district in Surrey, about 20 miles from London. Our objective at this time was winning a $30 million contract from the Saudi Arabian Telephone Ministry that we would manage. The contract required us to provide the royal household with private, stable, satellite-based radio network throughout the world for telephone traffic and, later, for TV, regardless of when or in which corner of the desert the king decided to stop his caravan and set up camp for the night. We were responsible just for the ground-based radio system, not the satellites.

I had gained good experience and skill in negotiating contracts and knowledge about registering patents and licensing technical know-how in countries and markets where the competition for the company's products was too great or the market was completely protected for local producers. Earlier I had negotiated such contracts in Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brazil. At this time we were dealing with India, South Africa and Egypt.

In the spring of 1984, I returned from England to California. Shortly after that, DSC from Texas bought our company through stock trades. In this new situation I stayed on as staff of the DSC branch, primarily to lead the suit against Iran, begun in 1979, in the International Tribunal in Hague for $1 million losses suffered when Iran broke a contract during the 1979 revolution. There were also other ad-hoc projects to be finished.

Since I had prepared and documented the case in 1979 when I was the Granger Associates chief financial officer and because other knowledgeable employees had left, I was in a favorable position to dictate the price of my collaboration in preparing the case for trial, for getting additional documentation, testimony of witnesses and coordinating the work of attorneys.

In 1985, I signed a consulting contract with DSC, which conditionally gave me the right to a share in any eventual payment resulting from the suit. After several unsuccessful attempts to reach an agreement with the Iranian representatives, first in Vienna and later in the Hague, the case was finally heard at the Hague tribunal in August of 1987.

The trial found for our side and awarded DSC a considerable sum from the assets frozen in America. I represented the company, assisted by two attorneys, a couple of technical experts and several witnesses who testified about conditions in Iran during the revolution of 1978–1979. Winning the lawsuit was gratifying for the work put into it, the good documentation and organization of the arguments, and the professional level I had reached. I remember with pride the celebrations in both the Hague and London, as well as the considerable fee I received based on our contract.

In January of 1986 I signed a contract to work part-time as an executive assistant for administration, finances and international marketing to the president of Silicon General, Inc. of Santa Clara, CA. I had retained the right to continue consulting DSC and other businesses not competing with Silicon General. Foreign assignments continued, but they were not as frequent or long. I managed to sign licensing contracts with sizeable enterprises in South Korea and Thailand.

My contract with Silicon General ended in May of 1994 and during 1995 I ended all consulting jobs so I could put a "Gone fishing" sign on my desk.

Speaking about values and morals important to him, the author formulates and describes his style and his approach to life.

Rita Petričeks: What can you say about what you gained from your parents and what you have wanted to pass on to your children?

Oskars Hercs: As I mentioned before, I especially remember the scolding that I got when my mother was called to my school because I had not been careful enough not to get caught reading "Old Waverly" under my desk. My father asked me then whether I wanted to stay in *Valgunde* and be a snake killer or go to school and amount to something. It was up to me to choose what I wanted to do. That has stayed with me for the rest of my life.

From life's wisdom you should choose not only **where** to go, but also set a timeline to that goal against which you can measure your progress. You need to know whether you are approaching your goal, have forgotten it, or whether the goal is receding faster than you can reach it. I have always used that in my life. I never thought that I would be executive director of my company. My initial intent was to be a good accountant, to become the senior accountant or director of accounting. After that, my goal was maybe, to get to be the controller, after that, to be the treasurer and, finally, I was elected vice president for finance and so on. This happened step by step until it was occurring by itself. It took work, patience and a goal – knowing where you wanted to go. I have tried to tell this or pass this wisdom to my children, especially to my son.

Rita Petričeks: Could you tell us if and how your life changed once you retired?

Oskars Hercs: It changed, and how! I was used to rising before seven. I had a list of tasks for the day. A long list, which I usually added to while shaving in the bathroom so I wouldn't forget what had come to mind. Having been active all your life, you now find yourself in a situation when you don't have much to put on the list. Except, perhaps, what book to order, sometimes a planned fishing trip, a bit of travel, but that isn't what was there before, what Americans understand with the word "challenge." I didn't have that any more. Of course, I do manage my investments. But maybe also there, where I had been aggressive in the stock market and allowed myself certain risks within my means, I now have become an investor instead of a risk taker. You don't know if you will have the time to regain under better market conditions what you lose today, because you don't know how long you will live.

Even though in the beginning the author was busy with obtaining an education and the duties of his job, in 1960 he began to participate in the cultural activities of America, as well as in Latvian-American activities. He took on various duties and positions at both his local church and at bigger events, such as a Song Festival. In the following excerpt the author discusses his relationship with present-day Latvia.

Rita Petričeks: Would you tell us a bit about your relationship with Latvia? Have you been there, what relatives live there, and so forth?

Oskars Hercs: I was back in Latvia in 1990 for the first time since the war. Before then I didn't go to countries under Soviet control, because I didn't want to compromise my top-secret clearance from the Government. Since 1990, I have been in Latvia eight times. The last time was in 1997. For several years I went twice a year to take care of my sister Zenta's hospitalization and consultations with specialists. She had cancer and passed away in 1995. As regards contacts and ties with organizations in Latvia, on my first trip in the 90's I contacted the Minister of Culture, Raimonds Pauls, and presented him with a check for $5,000 to support the 1993 Song Festival. Subsequently, I received a receipt and note that it had been forwarded to the proper authorities. Likewise, I have donated sizeable sums for the renovation of the National Opera and I have two chairs there with Rita's and my name on them. When in Riga, we can see a performance from our own chairs, if we make a timely request. I have also supported the National Opera through the fund established in New York, where I have been a long time member.

Rita Petričeks: Are your sister's children your only relatives in Latvia? Do you stay in touch?

Oskars Hercs: Oh, yes. We were sending packages already in the 80's and even earlier. Before then, we didn't use our own names so as not to cause trouble for the family because of my, as the Russians would call it, "criminal" past. I think I have helped my family in the amount of about $25,000–$35,000 by building a new house and outbuildings. Even today, I send four to five packages two to three times a year with things easily obtained here but difficult to find in Riga.

Rita Petričeks: Have you sent books and money to some school or library?

Oskars Hercs: Oh, yes. A couple of years ago I sent more than a 1000 books published in exile to my Kalnciems School. That took several mailings over two years. I have again collected books, but right now I don't have the energy to pack them. The next shipment is on June 12 of this year, that is in a couple of days. Probably the shipping this time will have to be postponed until the next time.

Rita Petričeks: Do you have Latvian citizenship?

Oskars Hercs: Oh, I never lost it. I and my family, my children, have the new Latvian passports, even though I had a Latvian passport which I had obtained from the Latvian embassy in 1948 or 1949 before coming to America, because I didn't want to follow the instructions issued by the Russian regime occupying Latvia.

Rita Petričeks: Do you participate in Latvian elections?

Oskars Hercs: As much as possible.

Rita Petričeks: You have seen the situation in Latvia now - would you want to live there again, now?

Oskars Hercs: That is a difficult question. In my present situation that is impossible. For health reasons I have a firm answer - it can't be done. But even before - I'm thinking of the early 90's when I visited Latvia and my school mates organized a dinner and asked, "So, then, when are you coming, moving to Latvia since you were already a 'nationalist' (that's what they called me) while in school?" I had to say, "I probably won't move here. My career won't play a big role since it is more or less over. But my children have taken root in their professions in the American job market, so that it would be almost impossible for them to re-orient themselves." It didn't seem the best approach for Rita and me to move and leave our children here. Later, after reading and hearing about political processes in Latvia, I got a little sad, because it seems that no responsible official has any ideals or accountability to the voters. The justice system is not functioning, none of the bigger trials have been completed, and nobody has been found guilty because everyone claims innocence even though state property is being squandered left and right. If I were younger and had the energy I no longer possess, I could tell myself, "Why don't you go back and try to do something?" But I no longer have the energy nor the time, so my answer to this question is that I have to stay here. End of debate.

Rita Petričeks: Could you tell me where you feel at home?

Oskars Hercs: Feel at home? The whole time I have felt at home in Latvia.

Rita Petričeks: If you feel at home in Latvia then you obviously feel Latvian. Do you think being Latvian in America has been a plus, a minus, or neutral?

Oskars Hercs: I have to ask – compared to what? In America we are subjected to greater assimilation than we would be, for example, in Australia or Canada. The threat of assimilation is greater here, and sooner or later our organizations – be it the church or secular organizations – will loose our Latvian language and will have to reconsider continuing their existence.

Lastly, the author talks about his relationship with Americans and his assessment of America. Even though he entered America as an adult, he was able to be successful and to establish relationships with both Latvians and the broader American surroundings.

Rita Petričeks: Just a couple more questions about life in America. You are an American citizen, you vote?

Oskars Hercs: Yes, since January 10, 1956.

Rita Petričeks: Would you want to tell me your views about American politics?

Oskars Hercs: I hcave been a registered Democrat ever since I became a citizen and gained the right to vote. I must say, though, that I am a fiscal conservative, but in social matters I am quite liberal. Uniting both of these, I discovered that I am closer to the Democratic Party than the Republicans.

Rita Petričeks: What can you say about your expectations coming to America, and how has that worked out over the years?

Oskars Hercs: When we came to America, we thought everybody in America was a millionaire. Some, who continued to believe that even after getting here, were not only disappointed but, if they did not want to return, did not get very far. They kept expecting the church, or the relatives who had sponsored them, to support them the way we were supported in the camps in Germany. As for those who wished to get on their own feet as soon as possible, once they had overcame the initial hardships, they found their place in the job market, opportunities to either continue their careers or to get an education. So, step-by-step they slowly established themselves and found security for their families.

Rita Petričeks: So you think that America provided opportunities…?

Oskars Hercs: Everyone makes his own happiness.

Rita Petričeks: What do you tell Americans about Latvia? Did your colleagues know that you were Latvian?

Oskars Hercs: Oh, yes. I often had to have dinners and conferences for my colleagues in my house and garden. They had even learned to speak Latvian to our dog, because we spoke to the dog in Latvian and *Pucite* understood only Latvian. My American friends had learned to say: "*Pucit nac surp*!" [Pucit, come here.] They had also learned to recognize Latvian *piragi* [bacon rolls] and other products of Latvian culinary arts.

Rita Petričeks: Such as?

Oskars Hercs: We had St. John's cheese on St. John's Day. We didn't brew our own beer but bought it instead. On certain holidays in the fall we never lacked sauerkraut and pork roast.

Rita Petričeks: *Piparkukas* [gingerbread cookies]?

Oskars Hercs: Oh, yes. I would have forgotten those. At Christmastime I brought them to work and shared, gave them to the secretaries and others to gain, not so much their love [*laughs*], but so that they would keep me in mind during the next year and would not talk back so much.

Rita Petričeks: How do you think Americans view Latvians in comparison with other peoples, such as Poles, Germans, the Spanish?

Oskars Hercs: I feel that this is a difficult question to answer. Never in my 49 years in America have I felt any discrimination or, as Americans would say, "adverse comment" about being a Latvian. Seems to me that part of the explanation lies in the fact that Latvians, being a small nation, did not get the notoriety that was given, perhaps undeservedly, to such peoples as Italians, Poles, and others.

Rita Petričeks: How would you characterize yourself—are you a Latvian, *letins* [slang term], a DP [displaced person], or an exile?

Oskars Hercs: Taking the last designation first—an exile in my mind is a person forced to live outside his homeland to which he cannot return. None of my compatriots can call themselves exiles since, beginning in 1991, it is now possible to return without any kind of political repression. In any case, the time when we called ourselves DP's has passed. As to *letins*, that is a slang word useful with a glass of beer. At any rate, I have never been afraid to speak in meetings because of my accent or been ashamed that I could not shed the sound of Latvian in my speech. I have always asked to be forgiven for my "cute Latvian accent." [*laughs*]. I have never feared being Latvian.

A few weeks after this interview the author passed away.

NMV 803

ELIZAR RABINOVICH

Interview: CA USA, 2000
Other interview participant: author's daughter Riva Gavartin
Interviewer: Ināra Reine
Transcribed by Ilona Grūbe
Processed for publication with comments by Maija Hinkle
Translated from Latvian by Aigars Brants

Elizar Rabinovich is a 101 year old Latvian Jew who emigrated to the United States in 1991.

He summarized his life and world view for an article in the California press. "My whole life has been about change. I was born in the outskirts of czarist Russia, witnessed the Russian Revolution. I fought Nazis and struggled under the Soviet regime. I lived to see my native Latvia independent again. I saw three empires fall and freedom triumph. And I was strong enough to come to America at the age of 91 and become a US citizen at 97."

"I saw a lot of evil during the last 100 years and have learned that, no matter how long it may take, evil will be defeated, and good will prevail."

The secret of longevity? "I have never hurt anybody. There is no place in my heart for anger or envy. I've been surrounded by people who loved me and respected me. I've eaten whatever I liked. It's what's in your heart and in your head that matters, not in your stomach."[31]

The interview is edited to facilitate reading and presented in its entirety.

Ināra Reine: When were you born?

Elizar Rabinovich: On December 24th, 1898, in Jelgava. My father was a tailor, my mother, a milliner. Both were Jewish. My grandfather on my father's side was a musician. He played at Jewish weddings and at celebrations on barons' estates. He died young. My grandfather on my mother's side came from Zagare, a town on the border with Lithuania. He was a cobbler and read the Bible at the synagogue on Saturdays. I spent my childhood right in the city. We went to a school where we were taught the Bible from a young age. Later I attended a Jewish school. For a few years I had a chance to run throughout the city, to play on the streets, to climb roofs, and to fight. There were Latvian kids, German kids and Russian kids. In those days we spoke Yiddish in our family, but on the streets we spoke Latvian to Latvians, German to Germans, and Yiddish among Jews. I went to a Jewish school where they taught Russian, German and the Bible… What was it called?

Ināra Reine: Talmud?

Elizar Rabinovich: Talmud…Yes. Bible. The first part of the Bible. The same Bible that was taught to you as well, the translation of the Old Testament into Hebrew. When I got older, I wanted to study at a commercial school. In Jelgava there were German and Russian gymnasiums; I don't remember if Latvians had one. Science high schools were almost the same as a gymnasium, only their graduates became engineers, not lawyers or actors. I can not recall any Latvian school similar to an elementary gymnasium though.

Ināra Reine: How old were you when you started elementary school?

Elizar Rabinovich: I don't remember anymore. I think I was 7 or 8 years old, it was probably in 1907, or maybe in 1906. I did not attend the gymnasium, could not be accepted there because of a set percentage for Jewish students, what was it, no more than 24%? In order to get accepted, parents had to have money. I wanted to study at the commercial school. I was supposed to start there the following year, but

[31] Article by Nora Villagran *San Jose Mercury News*, San Jose, CA, on December 26, 2000.

first I started working, and then the next year World War I broke out and we, Jews, were evacuated to Russia. In Russia I took a bookkeeping course. I worked in the factory during the day and studied at night.

Ināra Reine: You were in elementary school in Jelgava when the Revolution took place. Do you remember that?

Elizar Rabinovich: I remember the gymnasium; I remember the Japanese war. There was nothing going on in Latvia.

Ināra Reine: But there was a Revolution in Latvia in 1905.

Elizar Rabinovich: We lived on Maria Street. There was a brewery near by. At one point we saw the brewery workers jumping over the fence and running away. My father told us that there was an uprising in the brewery. Cossacks were called in. They whipped the workers, so the workers jumped over the fence. I remember a meeting in Strelnieku (Riflemen) Garden. I went with my father. Someone gave a speech. People paraded down the streets carrying the flag and at the Dobele gates two groups met and yelled out something. But in 1905 I was very young, not yet in school.

I remember that a girl from Zagare, where my mother came from, came to my Mom to learn how to make hats. But she did not have permission to live in Kurzeme. At that time Jews who were not permanent residents, who had not lived there for a long time, but were from Lithuania or anywhere else, had no right to live there. We had a small house. When the local policeman came to investigate who she was, the girl crawled under the bed. But he was standing right there, he saw it all. She was pretty silly. She was maybe 12 or 13 years old. He said, "OK, come on out, come on out…" The policeman was told that she had come earlier that day and will leave in the evening. One was allowed to come for a day, but not to stay overnight. He recorded this in his notebook and told me to come to the police station the next morning at 9 o'clock to finish the paperwork.

The policeman left and went on to the end of our street, to a bar that sold food and beer, but no strong liquor. There were two men sitting there. They seemed suspicious to him, so he asked for their passports. At that one of the men took out a gun from his pocket, shot the policeman, and ran away. My father was called to the police station, because the murdered policeman's notebook was found in the bar with an entry stating that Sima Rabinovich has to come to the police station. He went. Later we asked him, "Why were you summoned?" He said, "The street was not clean enough, that's why I was summoned." [*laughs*] We sent that girl back home.

Ināra Reine: How did the evacuation of Jews proceed during World War I?

Elizar Rabinovich: In 1915, around April, war was going on. The Germans occupied Kurzeme, the city of Liepaja. Tsar Nicolas Nicolayevich – Riva, sit down, help me out if I have trouble coming up with Latvian words – said that Jews might help the Germans. He did not care that the barons, the land owners and most city governors in Kurzeme were Germans. But Jewish traders and craftsman – they might be traitors! So they evacuated the Jews. The evacuation wasn't bad. We got an apartment in Russia; the Russians received us quite well. All of us went to work, to earn money. I ended up in Marshansk, in the Tambova region. I studied to become a locksmith. Since there was a shortage of workers, we had to do everything. After a while I left for another factory. I had a better life there. I studied at night, improved my Russian and learned bookkeeping. When I finished the courses, I got a job as a bookkeeper and worked there until 1922. Then we left for Latvia, our whole family together.

Ināra Reine: Did you return to your own house in Jelgava?

Elizar Rabinovich: No, we sold the house before the war. What could I do? Not everyone needed a bookkeeper; everyone also had to know Latvian well. I could speak it, but not so as to work as a bookkeeper. I started to work at a store in Jelgava. Then I got married. We opened our own little store. Our children were born.

Ināra Reine: What ethnicity was your wife?

Elizar Rabinovich: Jewish. And so we lived until the beginning of the Second World War. Our store was located on the market square.

Ināra Reine: How many children did you have?

Elizar Rabinovich: Four. I still have them, they live all over. The kids went to a Jewish school. They were not taught Russian. Jelgava had very few Russians. Few people spoke Russian, most spoke Latvian.

Ināra Reine: What was the main language in the Jewish school?

Riva Gavartin: In my school it was Yiddish, in my brother's school it was German. At the beginning it was German, but when Hitler came to power, it seemed somewhat… unnecessary, and we switched to Hebrew.

Elizar Rabinovich: They studied Latvian in earnest. Their teacher was a Latvian. He loved the kids that he taught. When the Russians occupied Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, it was a surprise.

Ināra Reine: What did you sell in your store?

Elizar Rabinovich: Clothing. Mostly for workers. We always had a lot of customers.

Ināra Reine: Where did you get the clothing? In Latvia?

Elizar Rabinovich: Yes, yes, in Latvia. We bought the fabrics in Riga and contracted seamstresses to make them into clothing. I and my wife were the salespeople. It was like this until September 1, 1939. After that the war broke out. Germans occupied Poland and then it was occupied by Russians, the communists. The Communists set up military bases in Latvia in October. They demanded bases from Latvia. Latvia allowed the bases, but not in Riga. The troops were not visible, but they were inside the bases, inside with the tanks, but that's about it – they were just sitting there, motionless.

But in 1940 the Russians sent in more troops; their bases inside Latvia became active and they occupied Latvia. I was in Dobele that day because my daughter was taking part in a fair there. Since we had a lot of regular customers there, I was also at the fair. Suddenly we heard a big noise somewhere in the air in the middle of the Dobele marketplace. Everyone looked up into the sky. Suddenly a large airplane appeared. We had never seen one like that. Latvia had airplanes, but not big ones like this, only small ones. It was in the morning. And in the afternoon there was more commotion on the road; it turned out that tanks were moving out of their bases towards Jelgava. The bases were located somewhere in Saldus. When we went home, they were already in Jelgava; they were all over Latvia.

Later rumors spread that worried us, because some citizens, Latvians (not all, but a large percentage) said that Jews were responsible, that Jews, that is, I, a well-known cobbler, some others like us, that we had asked Stalin to occupy Latvia! There was a rumor that Jews asked for that [*laughs*]! There was no such delegation…

Riva Gavartin: There was a delegation, but that was Kirhensteins, it consisted mostly of Latvians.

Elizar Rabinovich: When the Russians came, our President Ulmanis was arrested in four days and was replaced by the darling of the nation, that famous Latvian writer. I also loved to read his books… What was his name?

Riva Gavartin: Vilis Lacis.

Elizar Rabinovich: He was a good writer. But he was the boss now. And Kirhensteins was the chairman and the speaker of the Parliament, and there was a party… Wait, wait… What party was there? How these years… my memory…

Ināra Reine: And after that, what was life like in Jelgava?

Elizar Rabinovich: Wait, wait… What was his name, the name of the party leader? Kalnberzins! They were the main ones from very beginning. What did Jews have to do with this? What do they want from Jews? But there were rumors like that.

When the war started in 1941, many said openly that when the Germans come, they will beat communists and Jews. Rumors like that. We did not know what to do. One of our neighbors was a Latvian, a teacher; he talked to me on June 27th. He said, "Don't worry, they won't touch you." Many went to the train station seeking to escape, some traveled to Riga on foot. He asked me, "Where will you go?" Then someone told me that there is a train and many people are leaving. We went to the railway station. There were two trains that took refugees. I thought that we would go to Riga where we had relatives, and there we

would decide what to do next. But once we were on the train, we could not get out, since the train started to maneuver and took us to Russia.

Ināra Reine: How did you spend the beginning of the Russian occupation, the year 1940? Could you continue your business?

Elizar Rabinovich: Yes, I could. They sent commissars to the large stores to protect them...

Riva Gavartin: Well, those were nationalized.

Elizar Rabinovich: Wait! But small stores, they did not touch those, we could still operate. We had sold almost everything by the beginning of the war; we decreased our operations so much that there was almost nothing to do. There was no place to work.

Ināra Reine: What did you experience during the deportations of June 14th?

Riva Gavartin: They did not touch us.

Ināra Reine: But what happened?

Elizar Rabinovich: Well, a lot of people were deported from Latvia. I just read in the newspaper that a week before the war 20,000 people were deported - 14,000 of them were Latvians, 5 thousand were Jews, and 2.5 thousand from other ethnic groups.

Ināra Reine: Did you know any of them?

Elizar Rabinovich: Yes, I did. A lot of rich people were deported from Riga, but our relatives were not really rich. They did not deport any Jews from Jelgava.

Riva Gavartin: Unfortunately, I have to say…

Elizar Rabinovich: Unfortunately. If they would have deported a few hundred, half of them might have returned. Out of those 20,000 deportees, women were separated from men. They were sent to work. We met one lawyer after the war who had been deported. His wife said, "When we arrived in Siberia, I and my son, who was very young, just one year old, were separated." And the men - Latvian, Jewish - they were imprisoned. Then the women were told, "You have to work, or you will die from starvation." She went to work on a collective farm and sent dried bread to her husband. Jews from Jelgava were not deported.

Ināra Reine: So you went to Russia with that train that you boarded?

Elizar Rabinovich: Yes, to Russia. And all the Jews who remained in Jelgava, about 3 thousand, they were killed as soon as the Germans arrived. They were shot not by Germans, but by Latvians, by local people.[32]

Ināra Reine: How did it happen that your train went to Russia?

Elizar Rabinovich: When the Germans entered Jelgava, the train was already in Estonia.

Ināra Reine: Where did your train go in Russia?

Elizar Rabinovich: We ended up in the Kirov region, almost in the Urals. People were sent to different villages and cities. They asked us, who does not have many belongings. When we put all our things together, we got one half-empty suitcase. We had nothing; we bought some things on the way. They brought us to a large village that was 100 kilometers from a railway station. There were people there, who had never seen a train, or a city. But it was kind of interesting that the person who picked us up at the station and brought us to the settlement location looked at one elderly Jew and asked, "Where are you from?"

He answered, "From *Mitava*" [*it was the German name for* Jelgava].

"Are you a tailor?"

"Yes."

"Did you live on Constantin Street?"

"Yes."

[32] The historian Andrew Ezergailis argues in his book, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941–1945*, (1996, The Historical Institute of Latvia and The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., p. 161-162) that the extermination of the Jews of Jelgava was organized and carried out by the German occupying forces, but also urges more study of the correspondence between Vagulāns and von Medem.

"I was serving in the 144. Battalion." He had been in the military under the Tsar; he was about 55 years old. He said, "I served in *Mikhailovskaya* barracks." Those barracks were across the street from the house where that tailor used to live.

Ināra Reine: How was life in Russia?

Elizar Rabinovich: I and a man from Riga were sent to work in a restaurant. We worked for forty days. Then we were drafted into the army and sent to Kirov. The Latvian communist government was located there, the government of Kalnberzins and Kirhensteins. They brought us there; then sent us to a training camp. We went to war in December, 1941.

Ināra Reine: Did all of your family go to Russia on that train?

Elizar Rabinovich: From Jelgava? – The whole family.

Riva Gavartin: What do you mean – the whole family? Iza was not with us. He went alone. That's why we left as well. Mom started crying – how can he go alone… As a young guy, he had joined up with someone and left. Mom was crying that he will be the one to perish, not us.

Elizar Rabinovich: We did not know… Yes, he was in Riga then…

Riva Gavartin: No, he just stopped by and said that he is leaving.

Elizar Rabinovich: He was in Riga…

Riva Gavartin: No, he was in Jelgava. You don't remember anything anymore.

Ināra Reine: What happened to your family while you were in Russia?

Elizar Rabinovich: They stayed in that village. Only I was drafted.

Riva Gavartin: Iza was also drafted after 6 months.

Elizar Rabinovich: I left; my oldest son was drafted half a year later. No, it was a year later! I was stationed near Moscow as of December. Germans were suffering losses by then. That's where the war began for me. We went. The Latvian division went from Moscow towards Latvia. I was wounded in 1942 at Staraya Russa. I served as a nurse. When I recovered from my wounds, I met my son. From then on we fought together in the same battalion. A lot of acquaintances from Jelgava were there, too. We arrived in Latvia in June, 1944, at Skaune, in Latgale. From Skaune we went towards Riga. My son was wounded. On October 13th, not far from Riga, I got wounded the second time. I recovered in Rezekne. Two to three months later, I returned to the front lines. We were brought to Jelgava by train. Jelgava was burned down. We did not stay in Jelgava for long; we went to Dobele, towards Tukums. I met only two Russians, acquaintances from Jelgava. Otherwise I didn't see anybody I knew. I took part in the battle at Blidene…

Riva Gavartin: Battle! You were not even fighting! [*laughs*]

Elizar Rabinovich: I was an army nurse.

Riva Gavartin: Did you even know how to shoot? [*laughs*]

Elizar Rabinovich: I was in the army until the end of the war. The last thing that I remember is that early on the morning of May 9th I watched a column of German officers pass by – they were being marched to prison, and their column was lead by our officer Amdurs, a Jew, Captain Amdurs. A Jew was bringing German officers to prison [*laughs*]!

Ināra Reine: When the war was over, could you return to Jelgava?

Elizar Rabinovich: We could. Our family arrived in Riga in December, 1944. There was nothing to return to in Jelgava, nowhere to live – it was destroyed, burned down. We went to Riga. My family received an apartment. I was at the camp in Baltezers, 15 kilometers from Riga.

Ināra Reine: How did you go back to normal life? Was Riga and the rest of Latvia destroyed as well?

Elizar Rabinovich: Latvia? - No. We were in a small town in Latgale that was burned down, but further on – no. During the entire trip we saw only one small town that was burned down. Only Jelgava was burned down.

Tape 1, Side B

Ināra Reine: How was life after the war in Riga?

Elizar Rabinovich: I started looking for a job, and found one. From then on I worked as a stock manager. The salary was low at the beginning, but later it improved. We survived. It was not like it is now for me. There were long lines. Collective farmers brought their goods to the market and sold them for higher prices. But we survived. We did not have meat every day. My wife was a good cook; she could manage with almost nothing. Food was cheap, too. State prices were very low, but they didn't have enough goods; we had to buy goods in the farmer's market, where they were more expensive. But we were not hungry. Potatoes were 10 kopeks per kilogram – that was the government price. We always had plenty of potatoes. They cost 50 kopeks per kilogram in the farmer's market, those were good potatoes, but we bought them in the government store. Those who were better off ate better, tastier. We had a lot of fish, cheap fish. My wife bought a type of cod.

Riva Gavartin: There is no such fish in America. What was it called? – Poor man's salmon.

Elizar Rabinovich: Salmon was expensive. Those who had a business on the side, illegal business, had money; but nobody liked them, they were punished. I never did anything illegal.

Ināra Reine: Where did you live in Riga?

Elizar Rabinovich: On Kr. Barona Street, in the center of the city.

Ināra Reine: Why did you leave Latvia then?

Elizar Rabinovich: It happened at the end of the 1980s. My grandchildren left first. My grandchildren got married and decided that they will not have a future there. Latvians started to have demonstrations at the Freedom Monument. They decided that it is time to leave and left. After they left, my daughter wanted to be with them, too. How could we stay alone then?

Riva Gavartin: We were afraid that there might be another war.

Elizar Rabinovich: We thought that there will be a war – Russians brought tanks into the streets. They let us go then.

Ināra Reine: When did you leave?

Elizar Rabinovich: I left at the beginning of 1991; during the Gorbachov era…

Riva Gavartin: A few weeks before the barricades.

Elizar Rabinovich: It was not safe; I was worried that shooting might start again. We did not want to stay.

Ināra Reine: Where did you arrive in America? Did you come directly to America?

Elizar Rabinovich: We came directly to America. We got on the plane in Leningrad and came straight to America. Our son was in San Francisco, and grandchildren, too.

Ināra Reine: Where is your wife?

Elizar Rabinovich: My wife died in 1980 in Latvia and is buried in a Riga Cemetery. Jews began leaving at the end of the 1960s. We did not want to leave back then, but then the unrest began. The grandchildren left, and we did not have any choice but to leave as well. My daughter, son-in-law and I arrived last. I did not want to go, but I did not have a choice.

Ināra Reine: What kind of values do you cherish?

Elizar Rabinovich: Honesty. During the Russian times, whoever wanted to live somewhat better, not eat borsch every day, got arrested. I lived like this - I spent what I earned; I had no conflicts with the State; and I had no headaches. I think that that's why I have lived so long. When I was 70 years old, one young Latvian doctor told me that I have a very strong heart and that it will serve me for many years to come. It is still serving me today. Of course, I have some heart problems now, but that's OK; I am alive.

Ināra Reine: Do you have any religious beliefs?

Elizar Rabinovich: No, I do not. When I can, I attend a synagogue. I went to a synagogue in Latvia, during communist times. After I retired, I kept attending the synagogue – nobody could tell me otherwise. I like it this way. I respect everyone who is religious.

Ināra Reine: If you could start your life over again, would you change anything?

Elizar Rabinovich: You know, I can not answer that question. Life was hard, but at the same time we had our joys and our sorrows, big sorrows.

Ināra Reine: What do you think about the future?

Elizar Rabinovich: What can I think! [*laughs*]. My life is almost over. What do I have left – a year, two, maybe three.

Ināra Reine: Are you already 101 years old now?

Elizar Rabinovich: Yes. I am glad that I can walk on my own two feet, that I do not need any help. I am just afraid that one day it could get worse. I want to die on my feet, not in my bed. My hearing is good, but my vision is bad. If I had better vision, I would learn English even if I am 100 years old. But now, if anyone approaches me on the street I can just tell them, "I do not speak English."

Ināra Reine: When did you lose your vision?

Elizar Rabinovich: In 1988.

Ināra Reine: What happened? What went wrong?

Elizar Rabinovich: Old age. I had eye surgery here in America, but it did not improve my vision.

Elizar Rabinovich died on June 27, 2002. He was 103 years old.

NMV 815

KĀRLIS ĶUZULIS

Interview: in Washington, DC USA, 2000
Interviewer: Maija Hinkle
Transcribed by Aija Siltāne
Processed for publication with comments by Maija Hinkle
Translated from Latvian by Edīte Irbe

The narrative by Kārlis Ķuzulis is especially rich in specific information and detail. I chose his story because Mr. Ķuzulis has been in leadership positions in several major exile organizations, and his community activities during various periods in his life represent in detail several of the themes in Latvian-American narratives: 1) experiences in the Latvian Legion, 2) the postwar period and soldier's camps in Germany, 3) the formation and the charitable and cultural activities of the veteran's organization Daugavas Vanagi, 4) Latvian theater in Germany and the USA, 5) political activities of exile Latvian central organizations (ALA and PBLA) especially during the crucial years when Latvia regained its independence, 6) politics and government of newly independent Latvia, and 7) the work of the press, particularly of the Voice of America. The author evaluates the activities of some exile organizations, the changing relationship between Latvians in Latvia and the exile community and other topics of interest.

The story is presented in its entirety, edited primarily to make it more readable in written format. To illustrate the type of documentation that is attached to all interviews and to further outline the content of the interview, I have included the basic documentation. Some 20% of the ALA-OH interviews also have a detailed index.

Interview documentation – KĀRLIS ĶUZULIS

Birth date and place: May 30, 1923, *"Pūces"*, Smiltene parish, Valka County, Latvia

Nationality: Latvian

Religious affiliation: Lutheran, Washington Latvian Ev.-Luth. Congregation

Education: Smiltene Elementary School, 1937

Profession: radio journalist

Employment (dates): Store manager (various); construction worker in USA (1951–1956); journalist and producer at the Voice of America (1956–1988), as Director of European Division (1982–1988)

Community activities, clubs, organizations (dates): *Daugavas Vanagi* (from 1946); ALA executive board; PBLA executive board; Latvian government (as assistant to Gunars Meierovics); American Latvian Theater (ALT) (1959–1985); DV NY Chorus; Smiltene Chorus and theater.

Marrital status: Married to Broņislava Lukšāne, 1949

Interview duration & number of cassettes: 4 audiotapes, 220 minutes

Interview participants: author and interviewer

Interviewers' comment about the interview (conditions, contact, reliability, candor, etc): Upon the author's recommendation, the interview took place in the comfortable library of the Washington Latvian parish building. The author spoke easily, candidly, with many lively facial expressions and eye contact. He smiled often when talking about funny incidents. He became very emotional and teared up when talking about emotional issues, such as the death of his father, about his commanding officer Janums in the Latvian Legion and about Latvian support for *"Bērzaine"*. He refused to talk about his war injury because of it. In the second session he had trouble with his voice.

Time frame of narrative: from the 1920's to present

Geography of narrative – in Latvia: Smiltene, Vaiņode, Jelgava, Straupe

Geography of narrative – outside Latvia: Refugee camps in Germany (Giften, Saarstadt, Blomberg, Augsburg), USA (New York City, Washington, DC)

Author's special experience/expertise: Author has been in leadership positions in the following organizations: *Daugavas Vanagi* (DV) USA, DV Washington, DC branch, ALT in Washington DC, ALA executive board, PBLA executive board, the Voice of America, Latvian government (1995–1996). Service in the Latvian Legion. Soldier's refugee camps in Germany.

Main topics in interview: 1) Latvian exile cultural and political life and events in which he has participated: theater; ALT in Waghington, DC; journalism in USA, Voice of America and Latvia; political activities in ALA, PBLA, Latvia; *Daugavas Vanagi.* 2) War time, regufee camps and post war soldier's life. 3) Childhood, growing up. 4) Evaluation of Latvia, some Latvian organizations, national characteristics, and the evolving post-independence relationship between Latvian and exile Latvians.

Summary of interview contents (inclusiveness, personal vs. conceptual approach, chronology, accents, language): The author covers his whole life, beginning with his family. At first the emphasis is on personal life, whereas starting with early adulthood the focus shifts to descriptions of community and work activities and the context for these activities. The author describes the content and context of his activities in great detail, presents the possibilities of the time, and evaluates the results. The style is lively, full of concrete examples but also evaluations that place the events into a larger context. Good humor. Author often mentions other people with whom he has worked. He has an amazingly detailed memory.

People mentioned or described in the narrative: (in approximately the order in which they occur in the narrative) Jānis Verners, Pēteris Lūsis, Edgars Dambe, colonel Janums and his family, Kolušs, Roberts Kukainis, Herberts Zāgers, Alberts Švalbe, Pēteris Aigars, Jānis Šāberts, Aleksandrs Liepa, Milda Zīlava, Jēkabs Zaķis, Osvalds Uršteins, Hilda Prince, Anda Uršteins, Kārlis Baltpurviņš, Olģerts Parņickis, Ēvalds Dajevskis, Viliberts Štāls, Jānis Zariņš, Viesturs Kundziņš, Helga Gobzine, Vilis Hāzners, Ancāns, Bruno Skulte, V. Mednieks, Viesturs Timrots, Kārlis Ritums, Gunārs Meierovics, Valdis Pavlovskis, Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Olģerts Pavlovskis, Māra Zālīte, Andrejs Krastiņš, Valdis Birkavs, Viktors Hausmanis.

Overall evaluation of interview: This is a valuable, information-rich narrative from a person, who has participated in the events, often in leadership positions. Well thought out, clear, interesting, at first chronological, then by topics. Many facts, descriptions, but also evaluations and explanations. An honest appraisal of his own contributions and role. Very valuable descriptions of several spheres of activities in the exile Latvian community and the exile/Latvian interactions.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: My name is Kārlis Ķuzulis. Originally the name was written as "Ķūzu-lis," but over time, as I have resided in various countries, the longmark was dropped. I was born on May 3rd, 1923, in *"Pūces,"*[33] in the parish of Smiltene; not in the bathhouse as was customary, but in the *"klētiņa,"*[34] where people used to sleep during the summer, as it was cooler there. Later my parents rented the farm, *"Jaungrestes,"* and moved there. Tragically, my father soon died – in 1931. My mother was left with two small children – I was 8-1/2, and my sister was 4 years old [*short pause – author emotional*]. My father died on December 16th; my sister turned 4 years old on the 17th – her birthday was a very sad one.

My parents were married by Dean Kārlis Kundziņš, who also baptized me. I have been told, that I had bawled loudly throughout the ceremony, and as my parents were carrying me out of the church, the members of the congregation had said, "Here comes the loudmouth." Although I did not become a singer, I have been active in various other arts. The year my father died, I entered the Mēris parish grade school. By the time I graduated, it was called the Birzuļi parish school, since during President Ulmanis' administration Mēris became the Birzuļi parish.

Maija Hinkle: How did your life change after the death of your father?

[33] The name of a farm – tr.

[34] a farm storage building – tr.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: My life changed drastically. By nature, my father was a very kind man, and he had vouched for loans to several friends and relatives. After my father died, these people refused to pay their debts. I remember very clearly, as if it was happening today, that on a cold winter morning everything we owned was put on public auction. We lost everything, save for one cow. After this, we went to live with my mother's brother in *"Līčupi"* in Mēris parish. This farm was only a 15-minute walk from the Mēris grade school, and we lived there until I graduated. My mother worked in my uncle's household, and he, for his part, helped her raise and educate her children. After my graduation at the age of 14, we moved to Smiltene to live with my father's brother, who rented half of the estate of Smiltene's rectory. Due to our material circumstances, I could not afford to attend high school, and I took a job.

That summer I worked in Smiltene, loading lumber – support beams to be used in coal mines – into freight trains. All summer I tried to earn as much money as possible, because I had not abandoned hope to continue my education. But when I became ill with a severe case of diphteria, this became impossible. After recovery, I took a job in Smiltene, in a large business *"Jānis Pētersons,"* which consisted of two large stores – one for ready-made clothing and dry goods and the other, a shoe and leather store. In the fall at the age of 14-1/2, I started work there as a sales apprentice. My sister entered Smiltene's 6-year grade school.

Maija Hinkle: How did you feel being the family's main provider?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, I was now responsible for my family. I believe that in a way it is good for a person to have responsibilities early in life.

Maija Hinkle: Did you enjoy any teenage activities?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, it was not possible. On the one hand, it may have been a difficult childhood, but on the other, I am grateful for it.

Maija Hinkle: Was there anyone at that time whom you regarded as a role model?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: In every stage of my life my best and closest friends have been 7–10 years older than I was. They were my role models, because they had already realized some of their goals, and I thought that I to get where they are. As a child, I was very impressed with the threshing machine, and I wanted to be a threshing machine operator when I grew up. By my last year in grade school, my goal was to become a doctor – a very lofty goal. Of course, this did not happen, but there are many other things, which I did not even imagine then, that have come to pass. At my job in the store, all my co-workers and friends were older than I. My goal then was to earn qualifications in this profession to be a senior salesperson. At that time in Latvia there was a school called the *"Kooperācija"* school,[35] that offered correspondence courses. I started to take these courses in all the necessary subjects, such as accounting, and others. Besides, as was the custom in Europe, in order to learn a trade one had to serve a certain number of years as an apprentice; then one would receive a diploma that certified one to be a *"Geschaeftsmann"* – a full-fledged salesperson. Thus I became a salesman.

Then the Soviet occupation started, the first time around - 1940/1941. It is hard to talk about that. I think that everyone has similar memories of that time.

Maija Hinkle: What were the conditions like in Smiltene?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Smiltene was similar to many other places. For example, many competent and efficient people were simply fired from their jobs. The mayor of Smiltene, Jānis Veners, who had been very highly regarded, was fired and replaced by a person who was hardly literate. Even in our small store a commisar was installed as an overseer to watch us, the 8 persons working there, and to make sure we were not causing trouble.

Maija Hinkle: Even you had a commisar?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, she was there simply as a political watchdog. Thus we struggled through the first year. When the Russians left, they robbed all the stores in Smiltene, leaving behind complete desolation. Everything was either stolen or destroyed. Smiltene looked like an abandoned battlefield. Afterwards,

[35] coopertive trade – tr.

during the German occupation, we had to try to clean up all of this and put everything back in order as much as possible.

Maija Hinkle: What did the people of Smiltene think about Russians before the Soviet occupation?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: About Russians? Smiltene was a very Latvian-oriented city, very. Nobody believed that this could have ever happened. Most people, like everywhere else in Latvia, basically said that if they had to choose between two evils – the Germans or the Russians – they would rather have the Russians. Well, when the Russians had arrived, everybody said, "God help us!" These were dismal, gloomy months. Eventually, this period passed; the economy recovered somewhat.

During the German occupation, I advanced a step in my career – I was appointed manager of the Smiltene Cooperative, and I worked there from 1941 to the fall of 1943. Then I was drafted into the Latvian legion; and with that I started a new period in my life.

However, I would like to spend a few more moments on my activities in Smiltene. As I said before, I had "vocalized" loudly during my baptismal ceremony. Later, as a youg man, I was interested in participating in social activities. In the first place Smiltene had the "*Smiltene's Music and Choral Society*" choir. The conductor was Mr. Baumanis and twice a week, like clockwork, we had rehearsals. Then one fine day we seemed to have lost the person who copies the music. I took up the job and provided the choir with sheet music. We had no computers then, but we had other means for copying. That was one of my leisure-time activities. Another activity was with the Smiltene *'s* men's choir, a very powerful, good choir, conducted by Edgars Dambis. All through this period the choir carried on vigorously, and I sang in it until I had to leave for the legion.

Maija Hinkle: Did you have any contact with music before singing in these choirs?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, but that interest I had ever since my school days, since we had had classes in music then. But the basics, the notes, all that stuff - all that attracted me. So I thought, why not try it.

Maija Hinkle: Were you paid for this work?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, no. I have never received compensation for my work in any community activities; never in my life. That has always been a labor of love. Besides music, I had an even greater interest in the theater.

In Smiltene, the "*Aizsargi*"[36] and "*Aizsardzes*"[37] were very active. Their leader was the wife of Dr. Edgars Mačulāns – Līvija Mačulāne. As part of her group of "*Aizsardzes,*" she had established an amateur theatrical group, which was allowed to receive help from the Ministry of Social Affairs, which, in our case, consisted of directors from the professional theaters in Latvia. The first director to come to Smiltene was none other than the famous director, Pēteris Lūcis. He staged the play "*Skroderdienas Silmačos*" – a very large production. This is where my association with the theater started. At the same time I gained a genial, idealistic person, almost a paragon of a man, as a friend - Pēteris Lūcis. He was at least 20 years older than I. He staged several plays; and he instilled in me the love for the theater. I was the manager of the group, and my job was to see that everything ran as planned. Even though my participation wasn't long, only a few years, these 4-5 years were very helpful for me in this area.

Maija Hinkle: Were you an actor, too? What did you do as an actor?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes. I acted as well. In "*Skroderdienas Silmačos*" I was one of the "people" – one of those who are listed on the playbill as "and others." In "*Studentu vasara*" I had a speaking part, and in still another play I had the leading role as one of two lovers. I played Jānis in the play "*Ķīnas vāze.*" I cannot remember all the plays where I took part in one way or another. That was the Smiltene period of my life. It ended when I entered the legion in October 1943. I reported to Vaiņode,[38] to the 33rd regiment.

Maija Hinkle: Were you drafted, or did you join because of your convictions?

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[36] Home Guard – tr.

[37] their female counterpart – tr.

[38] city in Latvia – tr.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I was drafted. The first draft commissions were held after the legion was established, I believe in February 1943. Since I was employed as a store manager and the work was deemed necessary for the war effort, I was exempted from the draft for 6 months. In October 1943, when the fortunes of war had changed against the Germans, no more exemptions were given. I had to leave for the legion.

I was sent to Vaiņode to join the 33rd regiment; its commander was colonel Vilis Janums. And I have to say that once more in my life, God was with me; I lucked out again with colonel Janums. Of all the commanders in the Latvian legion, colonel Janums was the most concerned and caring towards his men, he called them all "my sons."

In late November 1943, we left Vaiņode for the Russian front.[39] We celebrated Christmas 1943 on the Russian front. It was the first Christmas in circumstances starkly different from those that we had been used to having for Christmas celebrations. It is hard to talk about that time, because everything kept changing so fast, and one never new what would happen from one day to the next. In January I was granted a two-week furlough to go home to Smiltene and visit my mother and sister. About two days before the end of the furlough, I woke up in the morning and my mother exclaimed, "How strange you look!"

I said, "What? What do I look like?"

"You are completely yellow!"

"I am fine," I said. "It is nothing".

As it turned out, I had yellow fever. But I had to go back. I said, "I have to go to Rīga. I have to report to the office, from where soldiers are returned to their regiments." It is called *"Leittelle"*.[40]

While on the train from Smiltene to Rīga – the trains were irregular, this being wartime – I got a middle-ear infection. So, of course, I was not sent anywhere, but admitted to a soldiers' infirmary in Sarkandaugava. After two days there, I was loaded onto an infirmary train, on which I spent almost two weeks. The whole train was sent to Zārzeme[41] to a small city called Nansi[42], a pretty little place at the foot of the Vogeza mountain. There I recuperated until the middle of April. As luck would have it, there were eight of us fellow sufferers from the legion, and we had our own partitioned Latvian section in the hospital.

When all of us were well enough to be released, we went back to Rīga, where we were given a 2-week sick-leave; again I could visit my family in Smiltene. By then it was late April 1944. After the sick-leave we were to report to Jelgava, to join the co-called health companies for recuperated soldiers. From there we were reassigned to various places. There was also an opportunity here to be trained for special jobs. I chose transportation, in order to learn to drive. I figured that a driver always has it easier than those who have to walk. I could ride a motorcycle, though, since a friend in Smiltene had taught me. I was transferred from the health company to the drivers' school and its regiment. The Jelgava's period lasted until the middle of July.

When the Russian front broke through at Šauļi[43] and advanced to Kurzeme[44] we were sent to Eleja, i.e., Meitene[45] to engage in the defense of Jelgava. Our forces were obviously too small; we were defeated and scattered, and we ended up back in Rīga.

In Rīga, I learned the location of my 33rd regiment. Due to a general and widespread retreat from Russia, it was now located in Straupe[46] and I decided that it was time I returned to my original regiment. By a lucky coincidence, the return papers, which I had received at the company's office, had blank spaces

[39] It was the Soviet Union at that time – tr.
[40] German – Leitstelle – tr.
[41] Saarland, a region in West Germany, now belonging to France – tr.
[42] Nancy – tr.
[43] Šiauliai in Lithuania – tr.
[44] region in western Latvia – tr.
[45] location in Kurzeme – tr.
[46] city in Latvia – tr.

to be filled in; also, one of the Germans had given permission to the company commander to use his signature, *"Unterrift,"*[47] if the official seal was not available. I took it upon myself to sign in the commander's place. I signed his name and with these somewhat forged papers started out for Straupe. On the way there, I figured that I might as well go through Smiltene, and see my mother, since it was unlikely that I would get away any time soon after returning to the regiment. As I drove into Smiltene from the Vidzeme's highway, I saw gendarmes standing at the crossroads; two houses down the road was the commander's office. Well, this is all I need! I actually had forged travel documents. The gendarme asked me, "Where are you going?" I said, "I am looking for my unit, the 33rd regiment." He told me to go to the office. It was a Sunday morning.

Tape 1, Side B

I drove up, turned my motorcycle around, and hung around a while in front of the building. I went inside – dreadful silence, not a soul in sight. There was a hallway. I thought that I would stand there for a little while, and if someone came, then I would have to leave. So I stood there, and I stood there – about five minutes, I think – a long time. Then I just went outside, got on my motorcycle and drove away. The gendarme had seen that I had been inside; he saluted, and all was well. My mother lived on the other side of Smiltene, beyond the cemetery, so I drove through Smiltene, got there, parked my motorcycle in the woodshed and said, "I have one more night here, tomorrow I have to leave." Things had worked out pretty well. That evening I saw my mother, but did not get to see my sister – she was away in the country helping with the harvest, which all the high school students were supposed to do then.

Maija Hinkle: How did you have the nerve to pull off a trick like this?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: You know, when you are young, you do not think a lot about the consequences; you just charge ahead - whatever will be, will be. Of course, today I would never do that – it could have ended very badly. The front lines were very close; there would have been a court marshal, and that would have been the end of me. I believe, and have always said, "Everything in life happens the way it is supposed to happen.There is someone, somewhere, who oversees it." Next day, I went to Straupe. I arrived in Straupe and Stalbe, where the 33rd regiment was located and rejoined my regiment. I felt as if I had come back home.

Maija Hinkle: Very often, especially now, there are questions about the Latvian legion and the reasons and motivation for it. Why did Latvians fight in the German army? What did they fight for? How did you feel about it?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: It was absolutely clear to me that we were fighting to keep the Russians from getting back into Latvia. And I wasn't alone in believing this. Altogether, for those who were in the legion, there was no other possibility, none at all. For everyone who fought in the Latvian legion, this was the only thought, the only idea about why we were there - that we can not stay home, that we have to go. Because that, which happened in 1940, 1941[48] – noone wanted to have to experience that again. That was totally clear, absolutely clear.

What is being said now – that we could have acted differently – those are completely unreal ideas, pulled out of thin air and have nothing to do with the facts; not a grain of truth in them. None.

Take, for example, the Lithuanians. They did it. When the Lithuanian legion was to be set up, the Lithuanians escaped into the woods, and a legion for the Lithuanains was not established. There was a legion for Latvians and one for Estonians. But are the Lithuanians better off today than Latvians? No, they are not. Considering the extent to which people were persecuted after the war, I think that the Lithuanians probably were even more persecuted than others. What happened was that the Lithuanians remained in the military police units, but military police units could be blamed for many different things. The front is only the front, where two powers fight each other, each side trying to win; it is a clean fight, like a sport, to put it bluntly. This was the case with the units of the Latvian legion.

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[47] German-Unterschrift – tr.

[48] first period of Soviet occupation – tr.

However, a very large number of people were inducted into the Latvian legion, and I can not state that no one had different ideas. There is no such society, where everyone thinks alike. In every organization we have people with different opinions. This is normal.

Maija Hinkle: A little more about this subject. Did you or your friends know about *"kurelieši,"*[49] about the national partisans and about the possibility to escape into the woods?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, yes, yes – we knew. It was each individual's free choice if he wanted to do that. I, for example, had the opportunity. When the wedge of Russian front advanced into Kurzeme from Šauļi, my troop leader, leutenant Blumbergs said to me, "I have enough of the war, I am going to Sweden; come with me."

I replied, "No, I will not go with you. I can not do it, because my mother and sister are here. If I desert … I simply can not do it." So I did not take advantage of this opportunity.

He did get to Sweden and afterwards, as a member of our *(USA)* intelligence services, in the 50's was sent to Latvia. He was caught and deported to Siberia, where he perished. I am glad that I did not go with him.

Returning to my experiences in the war – a week after my return to Straupe and Stalbe, where our regiment was stationed, we were ordered to be transferred to Germany to supplement the 15th division. During the retreat all three regiments had suffered very heavy losses and their rank and file were not what they had been before. On August 23, 1944, we were transported from Rīga to Gottenhafen[50] and from there further distributed in East Prussia. I arrived in the Polish corridor. The regiment's command point was in Sofienwald. Here the new recruits, who had not been at the front yet, were drilled in the arts of war. Soon the Russians were advancing on us, and at the end of January, 1945, we were thrown into the front lines.

On February 3rd I was gravely wounded at the siege of Landek[51] – I was shot through the lungs. Thus began my time in the military hospital in Helmstadt, where, as the war was nearing its end, there were very, very lengthy discussions and guessing about who will come to possess Helmstadt, because on one side the city was encircled by the Russians, while on the other side were the English. There were long discussions whether the city will fall to the Allies or to the Russians. This was a city of military hospitals. We were in a very precarious position, since we could wake up one morning and find ourselves under the Russians. Fortunately, that did not happen. I could not have escaped anyway, since I had had surgery and my ribs were broken.

My hospital stay lasted from the middle of February until about a week before *"Jāņi,"* June 24th, when we were told that we were well enough to be transported out, but nobody said where we would be sent. By the way, we were many Latvians there – over one hundred. And now they tell us that tomorrow morning we will be transported out! Now, we are thinking – what shall we do? It could be that they simply take us and hand us over to the Russians, with a "here they are!"

But the most interesting part was that there were no guards at the hospital, neither British nor anyone else. We could walk around freely. So, early the next morning, about 30 of us Latvians gather and decide that we will go to Braunschweig, because someone had learned that there is a Latvian camp there. So, the only place to go is to Braunschweig! We all gather that morning, in whatever garb we have on from the hospital. We are all still wounded as well. My surgery wound is still open. In such a shape we set out for Braunschweig and arrive at the Latvian camp committee.

The head of the Latvian committee there was an exceptional man of honor, the former mayor of *Ludza*[52] by the name of Kolušs. He provided all 30-plus of us, former soldiers from the Latvian legion, with some sort of DP[53] identity cards, since we didn't have any official release documents from the army,

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[49] An independent national partisan army which swore allegiance only to the Latvian government and included many deserters from the legion, with commander Jānis Kurelis – tr.

[50] in Germany – tr.

[51] Landecke – tr.

[52] a city in Latvia – tr.

[53] displaced persons – tr.

and to live without them would be pretty risky. We had simply decided to go, and let's worry about the papers later. Mr. Kolušs received us all like his sons and even found a large hall for us with over 30 beds. There all of us found shelter.

Then we started to look around for a more permanent place to stay, since Braunschweig was close to the border, and it did not feel safe. We scattered to different places. Together with three others from Braunschweig, I ended up in a camp in Giften, which was near Hannover – between Hannover and Hildesheim. There we were in a civilian camp, even though we were still considered illegal. The war had just ended and the controls were lax. There we got our rations, and therefore were far from desperate. However, we needed to legalize our discharge from the army, particularly since all the units of the legion had been sent to the prisoner-of-war camp at Cedelgheim.

The camp commandant at Giften was Roberts Kukainis.

Maija Hinkle: Was he related to the chairman of ALA?[54]

Kārlis Ķuzulis: His father. Roberts Kukainis had been a professor at the University of Latvia. He was the director of the camp. His command of English was elegant and perfect. He contacted the officials of the British army and explained the situation to them.

The Allied forces had already been informed about the Latvian legion; it wasn't that they did not know what it was. The director's office arranged for us to get our discharge papers. They sent us to a prisoner-of-war camp close by near Saltau, which was on the road to Hannover, close to Hamburg. We spent some three weeks there living in metal barracks. Then we got our official discharge documents stating that we were demobilized from the Latvian legion. Every little detail was described there, our wounds, etc. That's how we obtained official status as former soldiers of the Latvian legion; so to say, properly released. This took place in April, 1946, exactly at the same time as the release of all 12,000 Latvian soldiers from the prisoner-of-war camp at Cedelgheim; it happened exactly at the same time.

Now, however, none of these discharged soldiers were allowed to stay at the civilian refugee camps. We could not stay at the Giften DP camp. A separate camp was set up for us, the former soldiers, which was neither under UNRRA[55] nor IRO[56] , but was maintained by the British military administration. Thus the Saarstadt soldier's camp came into being.

Saarstadt was a small city, about one-and-a-half kilometers from Giften. It had factories, named *"Wosswerke,"* which used to manufacture war materials, and there were barracks built for foreign laborers. The camp was set up in these barracks. We, about 60 men, who had been released from the camp at *Saltau*, ended up there, plus about 250 men from Cedelgheim. By the way, the men's choir *"Dziedonis"* was active there, with choir director Roberts Balodis. It was the basis of activities.

The military administration appointed Herberts Zāgars as camp commander. He had had the rank of leutenant in the legion; he had been a company commander and had also been gravely wounded. He lived in the Nordschtemmen camp, which was abount a kilometer from Giften and where the military administrative staff was stationed. They probably knew him. He, by the way, was the brother of the former director-general Voldemārs Zāgars and of Oļģerts Zāgars of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Zāgars, in turn, had to appoint the administrative staff of the camp. Since colonel Janums had just returned from Cedelgheim, Zāgars went to ask him for recommendations. Colonel Janums had recommended me.

Here I will go back to an event which took place in November 1945. We were en route from Giften to Goslar to pay an Independence Day visit to Latvian soldiers recuperating in hospitals there. The trip included Mrs. Janums, her daughter Velta and Mrs. Ercums (captain Ercums was also from the 33rd regiment). My friend Alberts Švalbe and I accompanied them to help with the packages. We were on the express train, which ran from Hannover to Frankfurt. In the stretch between Barnten, where we and Mrs.

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[54] American Latvian Associaton – tr.
[55] United Nations Refugee Relief Organization – ed.
[56] International Relief Organizaion – ed.

Janums lived, and the station of Hildesheim, our train collided with a freight train. Our train was completely destroyed, and we were buried in the wreckage.

Again, a fateful coincidence. I and my friend somehow crawled out of the wreckage, and wondered what had happened to our ladies. As the trains then were totally overcrowded, Velta Janums had been standing somewhat in front of me. I saw Mrs. Janums and Mrs. Ercums, and they both were fine, but Velta's left leg was hanging by just a couple of tendons. I put a tourniquet on her leg to stop the bleeding. As this had happpened near the train station, I figured I better not wait for help. I just picked up Velta and simply carried her to the station. Ambulances were already waiting; I put her into an ambulance, and she got to the hospital before the others. Maybe that is why she is still alive. The leg was amputated, and now she walks with a prothesis. To this day she introduces me as, "This is the man who saved my life." Yes, that was a very tragic episode. Actually, I had been wounded, too – my knee cap had been splintered, but in the excitement of the moment I hadn't felt any of it. Only later, at the hospital, I felt the pain and noticed that my leg did not move quite right. So – this was another in-between episode.

In any case, colonel Janums had told Zāgars that he knew a Kārlis Ķuzulis from his regiment, saying, "He will be a good manager for you." So I became the assistant manager in the Saarstadt camp. Herberts Zāgars and I started our work. We were very happy when Balodis' men's choir arrived at our camp, since this created an active cultural atmosphere. The choir performed in the camp, as well as went on tours; they were very, very active. All of the people there were also the kind, who like to keep active, and not "hang around" in corners or look for some *"ļerga."*[57] Sports were popular – there were volleyball and basketball teams; tournaments were held. The camp had a very lively cultural and social life.

Maija Hinkle: Were all of you there former legionnaires?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Only former legionnaires, nobody else. No ladies, only men. *Hallendorf* and *Grossenbrod* were two other such camps in the British zone. No ladies were allowed in these camps, which were supervised by the British military administration. The camps functioned until 1947, when the Brits closed them, because they figured that they could put these people to work in England. Through a campaign called "Westward-Ho," most of the men from the demilitarized legionnaires' camps in Germany, as well as civilians, left for England, while most of the remaining men joined guard units, organized by the British. In the American zone the former soldiers joined American guard units. Many of the men, who did not want to be associated with the military any more, left for England through the Westward-Ho campaign to work as civilians. As a result, camp life subsided. It was my duty to supervise the closing of the camp, since the commandant of our camp, Herberts Zāgars, had contracted tuberculosis and had been admitted to a sanatorium. I was in charge of the emigration proceedings, and the liquidation of the camp at Saarstadt.

Maija Hinkle: What was involved in being the camp administrator? What were your duties in this capacity?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I had to make sure that everything was in order; that everyone was fed, had clothing, a bed – the whole works. The paperwork was done by the office manager, but everything else was my responsibility. Leutenant Bruno Dombrovskis was the office manager; his assistant was Zigurds Zāmuels. My assistant was Žano Mūsiņš, who now lives in England. Bruno Dombrovskis went to England, but now lives in Vancouver, Canada.

By the way, I remained in Germany and did not emigrate to England, because I felt that I would be unable to work there because of my war injuries, since the work was mostly in coal mines. Since I had decided to stay in Germany, I was the one to close the camp. Of all the 300 men who were in this camp, only ten of us stayed in Germany at that time. Of these about seven later decided to return to Latvia because they had left families with small children there. They said they're going back to Latvia, come what may.

Maija Hinkle: Did you have any contact with your relatives in Latvia?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I was wary of writing to my family, so already in 1946 I wrote to to Pēteris Lūcis, hoping that he was in a better situation than my family. Luckily, he had received my letter, and notified

[57] home-made alcohol – tr.

my mother and sister that I was alive and well in Germany. In 1947 I wrote to my family directly for the first time. They had received my letter and replied to it. After that we had no contact for several years. We started to correspond more regularly after I came to the United States, but that is another chapter in my life.

After the Saarstadt camp was closed, I returned to Giften, which was still open. For some reason, maybe because I had been a store manager in Latvia, I was appointed as the camp manager again. As such, I was now an "employed displaced person" working in the German economy. Again, as it turned out, in 1949 the Giften camp was closed. Part of it was transferred to the Emden camp, near Emden. Several of us, some 5-6 men, decided to go to the Blomberg camp, for which we had received permission from the British UNRRA.

Tape 2, Side A

Maija Hinkle: Wasn't almost the full cast of the Meerbeck theatre there in Blomberg?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: The complete cast was there. In was there that we became better acquainted. How did we meet? The author Pēteris Aigars lived in Giften. During the closing of Saarstadt, we lived in the same building. After our transfer back to Giften, I was assigned a room in the same civilian house and on the same floor as Pēteris Aigars. We became friends, and our friendship continued the rest of our lives – as long as he lived. Also, I should add, that in Giften I met my life's companion and we got married there. Pēteris Aigars was one of our wedding quests.

Maija Hinkle: How did you meet your wife?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: We met at a party after one of the games in Giften in which the Saarstadt team participated. At that time I was officially the team manager, chosen probably because of friendship, because sports have never been my strongest interest, nor my strong suit, but all my friends were athletes. They said, "No. You must come with us, too. You will be our team manager." I said, "Well, alright. If it must be, so be it. I will be your team manager."

After the game there was a party. Atis, the son of professor Burkhards Dzenis, had brought with him two nice, pretty girls. One of those girls was Broņislava Lupšāne. We met in the fall of 1946, and in the spring of 1949 we committed ourselves to each other for life, we got married. At any rate, this was the beginning, and it has lasted now – let's see – 51, 52 years.

After the camp in Giften was closed, we went to Blomberg. There Pēteris Aigars introduced me to actor Jānis Šāberts, the star of the Meerbeck theater. Since I loved the theatre, I began a close association with the Meerbeck theater company. While we were still in Giften and Saarstadt, Viliberts Štāls came from the Meerbeck camp to stage plays for our amateur group. At that time, I already formed contacts with other actors through him. I met Parņickis and, of course, Šāberts, the Ģērmanis', Baltpurviņš, the Dajevskis' as well as the rest of them. This started my association with these theater people. Our stay in Blomberg was short, since Blomberg was closed in the summer of 1949, and we were transferred to Augustdorf. The Meerbeck theatre continued its work there, even though the directors Osvalds Uršteins and Jēkabs Zaķis had already left. Jānis Zariņš had left for England earlier.

Kārlis Baltpurviņš produced the play *"Tvans"* by Mārtiņš Zīverts, and he gave me a very large part, the young artist Mīlītis. With *"Tvans"* we travelled all over Germany – we gave more than twenty performances in all the remaining Latvian centers. This was my collaboration with the theater in Germany. There I met all the stars of the Latvian theater – Milda Zīlava, Kārlis Lagzdiņš, etc., who were professional actors.

Maija Hinkle: And you?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Lots of nerve. Thank God, I had had some background in Latvia with Pēteris Lūcis; I had worked with him some four years.

Maija Hinkle: Did you ever study acting?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, the schooling is still in the future – it started when I attended the theater school in New York. But in Germany – well, I just wanted to do it and they needed someone for the part. They tested me whether I could act or not, and Baltpurviņš said, "Yes." If I may say so, according to the reviews, I did not disgrace myself. That's how it was.

At the same time I also had a job. There were several stores in the camp; one of them was Danilevskis' grocery store. Again, they looked me up as a former salesman, and I worked as the store manager there from summer of 1950 to May 1951 – until we emigrated to the USA.

My wife was a nurse; she escorted the emigrant transport ships that travelled back and forth from Bremenhaven to New York. In New York she had found a sponsor for us for our own immigration to the USA. Eventually we were able to come here, although not without difficulties.

We were summoned to the transit camp in Wentdorf for the first time in November 1950. We went to Wentdorf. At that time, the American administration happened to have a campaign going to keep any possible undesirables out of the United States. We got as far as the last hurdle – the consul, who was to decide: yes or no. Since I was a former soldier, which I had never denied, he said, "No, you may not go to the United States, because you have fought against the USA. You will never see America like you'll never see your own ears." That was it. We went back to the camp.

I continued to work in the store; I had my job, my pay. I began establishing contacts with German firms. They saw that I was not ignorant in the business field and offered me a job as store manager in a company in Duesseldorf. Because we had other plans, I declined and said that I would stay where I was; we were waiting for the final settlement regarding the status of former soldiers. Thanks to the efforts of the then Latvian ambassador to the United States, Jūlijs Feldmanis, and I think, ambassador Skrēbers in Geneva, the Congress of the United States passed a resolution that the former members of the Latvian legion were not to be regarded as hostile to the USA; and that they had fought only against communism. Fortunately, the McCarthy era had started just at that time, too, when the communists had shown their "better" side by creating the cold war. As a result the door opened for us, too.

At the beginning of May 1951 we were summoned to Wentdorf again, and now things proceeded very quickly. It was not the same man who told me,"You will not see America in your lifetime." Not even looking up at us, he stamped our papers. The journalist Aleksandrs Liepa was a bird of the same feather – and he got the same treatment.

So, on June 1st we arrived in the famous New York. I was here for the first time, but for my wife this was the the fifth or the sixth time as escort of the emigrant transports. Mr. and Mrs. Šāberts met us at the pier and took us with them to Brooklyn. For the first time in my life I was on a subway, which, I think, was the express train. The noise in the tunnel was so horrendous, that I thought something is going to go haywire for sure. But we survived [*laughs*].

We arrived in Brooklyn and for the first couple of weeks we stayed with the Šāberts family – until we found a small place with an older American lady, who rented part of her apartment to us. My wife found work as a nurses' aide in a Brooklyn hospital. Soon we were seeing old friends, meeting new people and making new friends and acquaintances.

Maija Hinkle: What kind of job did you yourself have?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I was planning to start work in construction, because everybody said, "Construction work – that's the best." We had been in New York for 2 weeks. Here I want to tell you the most interesting part about our search for work. In Germany it was simple – you walked most everywhere. There is a hospital in Brooklyn; we planned to walk there. We didn't know that it was 5-6 kilometers away. Soon it dawned on us that here you didn't get very far on foot [*laughs*].

My wife got a job in the hospital first. When I met several construction workers in our church, they said, "That's the place to work!", that I should go to work there, too. But I didn't have a clue about construction work! In Long Island there was a contractor named Kiršteins. Mr. Stemme, Dagnija Krēsliņš' father worked there as a foreman; he would arrange everything. I would just have to take the subway to Jamaica; he would pick me up from there, take me to the site and drive me back at the end of the day. On Monday I arrived in Jamaica, as agreed. He picked me up, took me there and dropped me off at the building site. The site was an empty lot – nothing but odds and ends of wood. Then he told me to start nailing "tūbaifors" [*two-by-four*]. I must say that my English left a lot to be desired then, and I was

thinking – "tūbaifor," to nail "tūbaifor" – what kind of an animal is that? Finally, I found out what it was, and nailed the "tūbaifors" all day, made the what-do-you-call-it - "hedders" [*headers*] and everything else.

The funniest thing happened at the end of the day when we got back to Jamaica and I was let out at the subway station – I realized that during the day, somehow, somewhere, I had lost my money. I had no way to get home. I was in Jamaica, but I lived in Brooklyn – two whole worlds away from each other [*laughs*]; I didn't even have money for a telephone call. How to get home? Crazy business – actually I was quite scared. I thought – I'll go see the conductor at the entry booth. So I go in, in my work clothes, just as I am. I go in and tell him that I have lost my valet; that I am coming from work and have to get home to Brooklyn; that I have no money and cannot even make a phone call. I must have looked honest, because he believed me. He let me go on the train for free, and I got home. And I thought that America really is a good place where people trust each other. This was my first positive impression here. I thought, too, that if I had gone and said that I had no money and had to get home somewhere else in the world whether they wouldn't been so helpful. They'd think I was crazy.

So I worked there for perhaps some 2-3 weeks, and began to realize that I was not making any money. The pay was some 75 cents per hour, and with the expense of the commute, I figured, I was spending almost more than I made; this made no sense. I looked up the help wanted ads and went to a company warehouse in Manhattan, on 10th Avenue and 54th Street; they mailed various journals all over the world. It so happened that the owner spoke good German which was great for me, because I also spoke German. I told him who I was. "Oh, that's good," he said and hired me. My first pay was $40.00 per week, which seemed a large salary to me. We paid $14.00 a week for our apartment. My wife made $25.00/week and with my $40.00 it came to $65.00. "Wow, that much money!" We felt rich. But that wasn't so [*laughs*]. I worked there until the summer of 1952. By that time I was getting restless again, thinking I could make more somewhere else. Also, with all those publications the work area was extremely dusty and I had developed a serious allergy to dust.

And then there was another thing. I was beginning to be actively involved with *"vanagi"*[58]. I had already worked with them in Germany, and immediately upon arriving in America, I joined their activities. I also participated in some choral groups and the theater. Thus I found myself up to my neck in various additional responsibilities.

Maija Hinkle: Let us talk about your *"vanagi"* activities first. How did it all start in Germany?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: The official *Daugavas Vanagi (DV)* organization was founded in Cedelgheim[59]. After the soldiers were released from there, and had gone to various camps or formed new camps, *DV* chapters were formed in all these places. Giften had a chapter; I was the head of it, and colonel Janums was a member.

The first *DV* chapter in New York was founded on January 5, 1950, just as immigration began. Since it was the first chapter founded in America, the *"vanagi"* could observe their 50th anninversary in the USA this year. When I arrived in the USA in 1951, they already knew I was here. Arvīds Līdacis, the head of the New York chapter, had corresponded with the colonel, who had told him that Ķuzulis was in New York, and to recruit me into their work. Immediately, Līdacis looked me up and recruited me into the *DV USA* executive board for some appointed, some elected duties. In the 1952 elections I was elected to the *DV USA* executive board and thus also to the executive board of the *DV* New York chapter.

I served as the *DV ASV* comptroller. At that time the *DV* started a fund drive to buy the property *"Bērzaine"* in Germany. This was probably the first fund drive for such a huge project. It had the slogan, "Even if just one dollar!" And, you know, at that time everyone was still quite poor, and the donations really were just one or two dollars. Five, ten or twenty dollars were rare. The total amount collected was $30,000.00, so you can imagine the huge number of donations that came in – and all came from people who had no money! [*tears up*] In addition, a special exchange rate had been arranged with Germany,

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[58] Daugavas Vanagi – an organization for former Latvian WWII soldiers – tr.

[59] A prisoner-of-war camp after WWII for former soldiers in the German army.

which gave DM6.00 (Deutsche Marks) per dollar. Thus we had collected the enormous sum of DM180,000.00! This was sufficient not only to buy *"Bērzaine"* but even to furnish it. This was my first large job for the *DV* organization in New York.

Maija Hinkle: Tell me what is *"Bērzaine."*

Kārlis Ķuzulis: *"Bērzaine"* is a property located near the city of Freiburg in Southern Germany. It was chosen by representatives of disabled Latvian war veterans to serve as residence for disabled war veterans. It consisted of 20 acres of land on a mountainside and a large building, suitable for living quarters after renovations and adjustments. I am not sure how large the living area was, but probably enough for a couple of dozen men.The property is located in a beautiful scenic area.

I must add, however, that the people who selected this property (they were major Vilis Hāzners and leutenant Ancāns) must have forgotten the difficulties that the disabled have in moving around. As beautiful as the place looked in its natural setting, it was completely unsuitable for the disabled. For example, it was almost impossible to get there in a wheelchair; it was, in this sense, an inappropriate choice. We in the USA, naturallly, did not know it and believed that everything was fine, and in a way it was, because the property is very beautiful. It still being used today, but not in the way it was intended – for housing many disabled veterans. That did not happen.

There is another reason for that, too. The problem is that Latvians, who have suffered a similar fate, do not like to stay together, especially the very badly injured. When you're alone, you do not notice your own disability as much, but seeing a number or others – 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 15 - who are without an arm or a leg or have other scars, like only one eye, etc., creates a depressing atmosphere. They are willing to go there to spend a week or two, maybe a month, but not to live there permanently. The wonderful idea, that all of the disabled would be well taken care of there, simply did not work. The property is being used another ways – as a rest or vacation home for them, but not as a permanent residence. Additional dwellings have been built there since, and the property is used in various other ways also. It still belongs to the *DV* organization, but now it is under a German executive board.

Each country has its own *DV* executive board, and each has its own properties, such as in England, USA, Canada, Germany, Australia, etc., but *"Bērzaine"* was a gift of all Latvians in the free world to our disabled veterans. It was a huge undertaking and a stunning achievement to have done something of this magnitude, to have collected all that money in such a short time in order to be able to purchase this place. In 1952 and 1953 it was almost unbelievable that people, who had just immigrated here, could do something like this.

Maija Hinkle: What will be the future of *"Bērzaine"*?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: That is difficult to predict, because the economy and people change. Most of the disabled, for whom this center was provided, have passed away, and soon there will be none left. It is possible that the property will be sold, but that has to be decided. There is no such resolution yet; it is functional and causes no deficit. In any case, its value, I can not guess how much, has multiplied manifold; the property may be worth millions of DM. At this time there is no need to sell it, the money is not needed. The property is there and is being kept in good repair. Many different seminars and conferences are held there. People from Latvia, as well as from here go there and use it as a tourist hostel. I believe that all in all *"Bērzaine"* was a positive undertaking and achievement. So much about my *"vanagi"* ativities in New York.

In New York I also participated in the *Daugavas Vanagi* men's choir [*short pause*]. The choir, with its conductor Bruno Skulte and administrator Arvīds Līdacis, played a very important role in the *"vanagi"* as well as in the social life of all of New York Latvians' during that time. The choir was up to 45 men strong and had developed into an extremely active group. We gave many concerts in New York as well as in Boston, Connecticut, Washington, where we went to perform on special occasions. Bruno Skulte was an extraordinarily dynamic musician, conductor and composer. He composed many new songs especially for choirs. This was a wonderful period, especially because Latvian song was being cherished and brought to audiences.

Tape 2, Side B

who were starved for Latvian culture – we were warmly received wherever we went.

Bruno Skulte was an especially popular and beloved conductor. I remember the first Song Festivals in America. Both choirs from New York – the mens' choir as well as the mixed choir took part in the first Song Festival in Chicago in 1953. For a time I also sang in the mixed choir, which I later quit because of too many other duties, and because my heart was more with the mens' choir.

I remember that no matter whether in Chicago, or in the 1958 General Song Festival in New York, or the festival in Cleveland, there are always several choral conductors, but there is usually one who is the favorite, depending on how he "tortures" the singers during rehearsals. At the Song Festivals all the singers always awaited Bruno [*claps hands*]; all will be well when Bruno comes. When he appeared, it was as if everyone had been given a shot of adrenaline [*laughs*] – everyone perked up. He had a way of capturing the audiences as well as the singers. In the beginning there were about 1200 to 1500 singers at the Song Festivals; all at once they all seemed to wake up. Not that the other conductors were not good also. Arnolds Kalnājs was fantastic. But somehow they did not have that "something" which Bruno Skulte projected, even though in rehearsals he could be quite nasty. If things did not go right, he gave us a good thrashing in really strong language, not mincing any words. All of us respected and loved him. It was a terrible shock when he passed away so young. This was a horrendous, basic loss to the Latvian music world in America. But the New York choir remained active for a long time.

I moved to Washington in 1956 to work for the Voice of America. Consequently, my activities in the *"vanagi"* organization now became concentrated here; even though I had been involved in many projects in New York. As we arrived in Washington, I said to my wife, "Now I am not getting involved, I want to rest a while. Nobody knows me here; I will be able to take it easy." The plan did not work. People found out that I was in Washington.

Maija Hinkle: Before we start talking about Washington, I would like to hear more about the choir. How often did you rehearse?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: The choir? We rehearsed twice a week, evenings after work. People spent an hour driving from Long Island, but everyone was always there. It did not seem to be a problem to spend an hour each way to be at the rehearsal. I lived in Jamaica; by car, the time depended on the traffic. Rehearsals took place in Brooklyn, in the downstairs hall of the parish building. Reverend Zariņš lived in that building. All of us got there twice a week like a shot. If there was no concert scheduled, sometimes we met once a week; but with a concert coming up – twice.

Maija Hinkle: How many concerts a year did you give?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: At least 5 major concerts; maybe 5-10 a year; in Boston, Willimantic, New York, Philadelphia, Washington. In New York we often sang at church services. We also rehearsed cantatas. Besides, the choir gave their own, independent concert, so we were always rehearsing for something. Of course, we were free for a short time in the summer when rehearsals were not held; probably July and August. In September we started up again. This was an extremely active time. But, you know, all of us were young then – it did not seem difficult; we did not need much sleep then.

Maija Hinkle: What part do you sing?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I'm a bass-baritone. I always complain that the tenors have it much better. They sing the beautiful melodies [*laughs*], while we, at the low end, very seldom have that – there are only a few songs for us that have a beautiful melody.

In Washington, there was no choir. However, I was soon contacted and drawn into the work of the Washington *DV* chapter. Voldemārs Mednieks was chairman. I was appointed to the board and was very smoothly, quickly given the duties of the social administrator. I must say that this was a pleasant duty. I loved doing it, as it brought me into contact with the arts – concerts, plays, art exhibitions. During my former activities I had met various artists, painters, etc., with whom I already had had personal contact. This helped me to get positive replies from them for performances, since they found it harder to decline [*laughs*].

Thus the cultural life in Washington developed into a very active one. Many large performances were organized. On three different occasions we invited *"Saules josta"*[60] from Australia, which had about 50 members, to perform here. Several times the *Daugavas Vanadzes'* choir *"Zīle,"* led by director Arvīds Purvs, came from Canada. The Long Island parish choir came from New York, with director Roberts Balodis. We organized numerous theater performances, art exhibitions, etc. We had a very friendly relationship with the management of the Rockville Civic Center. They let us have rent-free space in a professonal art gallery for our art exhibitions, with the only condition that each exhibit had to remain there for a month. Thus a number of Latvian artists had a chance to show their work, and it did not cost a single cent for either them or the *"vanagi."* So this was the way we worked. When Mr. Mednieks wanted to resign his post as chairman, claiming that it was time for him to retire after 22 years in this work, the job fell into my lap. I remained chairman, if I remember correctly, for some 13 years. However, I have not left work in *"vanagi"* and probably won't leave it as long as I live – this is an organization for life.

Maija Hinkle: From the period when you were the chairman of the *DV* Washington chapter, what accomplishments make you most proud?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I believe that they were the events in our cultural activities, especially the large, significant concerts, the performances of *"Saules josta,"* the really exellent painting exhibitions. After the church was built here, the activities could take place in its facilities, and this greatly enhanced our work.

Also, I must add, we benefitted from the excellent cooperation with the parish leadership. I regard this period in my *"vanagi"* work as very positive. We had excellent cooperation among board members as well; every one was ready to do their job without protests or excuses. No matter how early in the morning or how late at night, whatever had to be done, was done.

Also we, the *"vanagi"* in Washington, have organized significant conferences for the organization – the *DV ASV* 15-year anniversary; then the 25 years, 40 years; and just this year we celebrated the 50th anninversary of the organization. All these USA-wide anniversaries were entrusted to the Washington *DV* chapter to organize; evidently all members had recognized the ability of the Washington *"vanagi"* to accomplish this.

We have gained valuable younger members, such as Viesturs Timrots, who came from Rochester as a young man. First he worked with us as vice chairman. When I left my post, he took over the chairmanship and served for several years. We have enjoyed a good relationship with the younger generation as well, for which I am especially glad. We had a successful sports section – the women's volleyball team was the Latvian-American champion several times. All this was the positive result of our work; consequently we gained the recognition and trust of the society as a whole.

Maija Hinkle: What would you judge to have been the negatives in the *DV* work in Washington? Are there any instances where you would have liked to have things turn out differently?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I don't know. I find it difficult to see anything negative in our work; especially having been so totally involved with it – it is very, very hard, even though now I have not been with the leadership for some time.

Maija Hinkle: Actually, I did not mean it so much in the negative sense, but rather if there could have been anything where somewhat other, different, or better results could've been achieved?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Doing more is always desirable, but within a small, limited society the accomplishments are dependent on joint effort. Considering the present nucleus of Latvians here, not everything is possible on a desirably large scale; you have to recognize certain limitations. One may decide to do this, that or the other – but end up doing nothing. In choosing a certain project, I have always followed the principle to first consider its viability. It is easy to say, "We will do this," and in the end not to accomplish anything. All my life I have held to the belief that if I promise someone that we will do a certain thing, then that thing must be done. If you promise something, you must do it. One may not give promises lightly.

[60] folk dance group fom Australia – tr.

And that is what we have always tried to practice here in the *"vanagi"* organization; whether with better or lesser results, but never with a failure.

Throughout all the time that I worked on the Washington chapter board, we have never suffered a financial loss on any of the projects we organized – not for a single one. Whatever the size of the profit, it was always positive; and the size usually depended on the amount of effort that we put into it.

An especially large contribution has been made by the *"vanadzes"* in cooperation with *"vanagi"*. Their fairs and bake sales featuring Latvian delicacies etc., supplemented our funds a lot; this income enabled us to provide scholarships for students, for example, or support many other projects. In my personal opinion, the Washington *"vanagi"* can be pleased with their accomplishments; and I think this is still continuing today. Today the chapter is chaired by Voldemārs Sproģeris, who conducts and organizes the work with a generous spirit.

Maija Hinkle: Many communities seem to have some difficulty in attracting the younger generation to Latvian activities. What is your experience?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: We had very good results, especially when the sports section was very active. It still functions, but it is less active than before. When it was active, we attracted young people, and thank God for that. It is not the case everywhere, but here in Washington we were very lucky. It also helped that Viesturs, who was from the younger generation, was already working with us. We also had Ēriks Plato and Raimonds Pavlovskis – it is easier to attract young people, if you already have some working with us, not only old folks telling them what to do.

Furthermore, I believe that if the older members are sufficiently tolerant and understanding, young people will respond. I know that there are some *"vanagi,"* even in our group, who are intolerant of views other than their own, and if someone does not agree with their opinions, then "they are not a good Latvian." Thank God, this has never happened in our group in Washington. Here members of various ages have worked on the Washington *DV* board – Arvīds Zāģeris, Mr. Čapants, and others. We have been very eager and ready to cooperate and promote collaboration with the younger members – and this has helped in our chapter's work.

Maija Hinkle: *Daugavas Vanagi* was founded as an aid organization for a specific group of people – the former soldiers. Their participation will eventually come to an end. Do you believe the organization has to change in order to continue to exist?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: It has already changed. It was founded in December 1945, and already reorganized in 1951/52, when instead of being an organization for men only, it decided to admit women – relatives of the *"vanagi."* This organization ceased to be like *"strēlnieki"*[61] or *"kalpakieši."*[62] Since the Cold War made it clear that our return to Latvia will be delayed, they realized that this was a patriotic organization that should include anyone willing to follow the goals and policies of the *Daugavas Vanagi* and their oath to serve Latvia and the Latvian people. This adjustment made possible the work of *"vanadzes."*[63] Thus *Daugavas Vanagi* changed from an organization for aiding disabled Latvian WWII veterans to a relief organization for all Latvians in need of help, either here, in Latvia or in Siberia. The work has thus been expanded. No more changes are needed, and as such it will exist and continue to exist as long as necessary, or as long as we will be able to do the work. In 55 years it has proven that it is able to exist. I believe that it is still very, very necessary.

I am just saddened that today there are two *Daugavas Vanagi* organizations in Latvia, who compete with each other and can not find common ground. That is very regrettable. This situation has two main causes; one is purely material, and the other is intolerance of the political beliefs of others. A large organization, such as *Daugavas Vanagi*, I think, should not have just a single point of view. "This is my truth and therefore it must be everybody's truth." It should not promote 10 different viewpoints, but

[61] Latvian army units and their soldiers within the Russian army, in WWI,1915–1918 – tr.
[62] soldiers of the National Latvian army under colonel Oskars Kalpaks, WWI, 1919 – tr.
[63] the female counterpart of *vanagi* – tr.

there may very well exist 10 different opinions among the membership, I think. However, the goal is one and the same, and we all serve the same idea. The various additional beliefs could be disregarded for this – I may be a social democrat, or this or that, but if I am with my organization, then I am for it. If this was better understood in Latvia, there would be no problem in merging the two organizations; the resulting organization would be strong, able and impressive. That work still needs to be done; it has to be taken care of. We can not help them from here; they have to do it themselves. Nobody can tell them, "You have to do this and that." Well, I think, I have said all about *"vanagi."*

Maija Hinkle: Just tell me what years were you the chairman?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I know it was 13 years. But when I left, I was elected ... [*Author asks to turn off the recorder*].

Maija Hinkle: So, from 1976 to 1990?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, in 1990 we had the 40th anniversary, and then Viesturs Timrots took over. So I was chairman for 14 years; 14, not 13 [*laughs*].

Interview continued on September 12, 2000, in the Washington Latvian parish hall:

Kārlis Ķuzulis: To add to the activities of the *Daugavas Vanagi*, I would like to mention that in 1964 I founded the *Daugavas Vanagi* Art Agency as a division of the *DV USA* executive board. At the time all the Latvian cultural activities were at a peak; there were many artists, lecturers, plays and shows to be engaged. All this needed planning, etc., as well as financial backing. So I thought that it would be worth while to have a *Daugavas Vanagi* Art Agency to promote and organize these tours and to engage the artists. This was realized in 1964 and the Art Agency started work under the board of the *DV USA*. I think that it was a very valuable undertaking. For example, we organized art exhibitions for such artists as Anna Dārziņa, Jānis Cielava, Ansis Cepure, Ēvalds Dajevskis and many more. Concert tours were organized for artists from Europe, such as Atis Teihmanis together with the Estonian musician Kokere, Maija Lielause, a flutist from England. These tours were scheduled to go from coast to coast. If I am not mistaken, Atis Teihmanis gave 30 concerts on his tour. There was also Renāte Gūtmane from the Stuttgart[64] opera, and Ludmilla Sepe-Eše. A contralto, Antonīna Vaivode from Cleveland did a coast-to-coast tour as well. Lecture tours were organized for Ādolfs Šilde from Germany, the literary critic Jānis Rudzītis from Sweden, and for colonel Aleksandrs Plensners from Sweden.

The Agency was started in 1964 and existed as one branch under the *DV USA* executive board. I was in charge of it for 3 years; after that Bruno Igals in New York took over. Later, when the Latvian cultural activities in exile decreased, the Agency's work subsided. It had reached its culmination while most of the Latvian society here consisted of people who had left Latvia recently, and who wanted to enjoy Latvian artists, whom they knew from Latvia. In time, this interest subsided as new people came in, and as it happens in such activities, things changed when local organizations started to choose for themselves what they wanted most. The Agency was active with good results for about 10 years. In my opinion it was a very worthwhile addition to the cultural life of Latvians in exile.

In regard to *"vanagi,"* I also would like to mention that I have had the pleasure to participate in the compiling and preparing of the USA *Daugavas Vanagi*' 40th anniversary publication; a book. This year I just completed the compilation and editing of the 50th anniversary book. It will be published at the end of this month. These were my activities in the *Daugavas Vanagi* organization, that I also wanted to mention.

Maija Hinkle: A little more about the Art Agency. Did you have tours also for painters, or were their shows held in one place only?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, tours. There were tours; some with 7 exhibits, some with 10. That was an extremely difficult undertaking – there are many problems in transporting paintings. The artists were very happy that they did not have to package and transport them. They just sent their works to us, and from the

[64] Germany – tr.

last point of the tour their paintings were sent back to them; they had no worries about them. In a way, we provided support for the artists. This also gave people the opportunity to see and hear artists who lived in Europe, and whom it would not have been possible to engage for a single Latvian colony here. On such tours we were able to hear famous artists, such as Atis Teihmanis and Renāte Gūtmane, from coast to coast. So much for this period.

What now – what should I tell you next? Maybe about my activities in the theater in America? At the beginning I already told you about my connection with the theater in Latvia; also about the time in Germany, when I was with the Meerbeck theater for a while. Upon arriving in New York, my path to the theater immediately opened up. The producer Osvalds Uršteins looked me up, because he was starting to stage the play *"Maija un Paija"* in New York and he had many minor roles to fill. The people and actors with whom I had worked in Germany – actress Helga Gobzine and artist Ēvalds Dajevskis (who had painted the scenery for the play *"Tvans"*) – they had suggested to him that there was someone in New York, who was interested in the theater – a Kārlis Ķuzulis. So I was immediately drawn in, and I toiled in *"Maija and Paija,"* playing various gremlins and crawling around the stage in this fairy tale play. With this my theater life in America had begun.

Simultaneously, I needed to learn more about the craft of acting. Osvalds Uršteins opened a theater school for Latvians in New York. The classes took place in the famous Carnegie building, where Osvalds Uršteins had rented a studio.

Tape 3, Side A

The studio in the Carnegie building functioned for about two years, at first with 8 students, later with 6. The studio would have continued, but it so happened that Mr. Uršteins was transferred by the Voice of America, where he worked, to Washington. When the scope of the Voice of America widened, he was again transferred to its branch in Muenchen,[65] Germany, and the studio closed. Soon I, too, moved to Washington. Since two employees of the Voice of America had been transferred to Muenchen, they needed new employees in Washington. I was lucky to be offered the position in Washington and I started work there in l956.

Maija Hinkle: What are the years that the studio functioned?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: It started in the fall of 1952 and was active until the fall of 1954; that is when the Voice of America was transferred to Washington. Mr. Uršteins had to go with it to Washington, and the studio had to be closed. But during the two years we worked very intensively – about 3 hours twice a week.

Maija Hinkle: How much did it cost?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: We only had to pay the rent. I don't remember now, but it was not very much. The sum was small, which we shared. Mr. Uršteins did this as a labor of love, without compensation.

Maija Hinkle: Were there unions or something like that?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, no, none. The lessons were very valuable to us, because Mr. Uršteins had vast knowledge and much experience in the theater. It was a great advantage, which, of course, helped me enormously in the work for Voice of America in Washington – the art of speaking and everything else. This was a very good period.

But to continue with New York and the theater - at that time the cultural activities in the Latvian communities (plays and concerts) increased not only at the local level, but covered most of America, or rather the northern part of America, including the East coast and Midwest, where most of the Latvian immigrants had settled. Initiated by some very active people, the Association of Latvian Theater Friends was founded, headed by Mr. Krēsliņš, a former pharmacist from Rūjiena[66]. He is the father of Kaspars Krēsliņš and Jānis Krēsliņš. The Association of Latvian Theater Friends staged *"Indīgā efeja,"* a play by Voldemārs Kārkliņš, in which I, too, had a role. I played the invalid Ķelpšs, a former legionnaire, and a

[65] Munich – tr.
[66] Latvia – tr.

recent immigrant in the USA. The play portrayed the way the legionnaires started their life in America; there were many former Latvian soldiers who came here, once they had received the permission to immigrate. I also became the administrator of this tour.

We gave, if I'm not mistaken, some 34 or 35 performances, from the East coast to the Midwest, including Canada. It was a very interesting tour. The actors were Jānis Šāberts, Kārlis Lagzdiņš, Austra Šteinberga, Skaidrīte Pence and Viesturs Kundziņš. Both I and Viesturs Kundziņš came from Uršteins' studio – the so-called *"jaunie turki"*[67] [*laughs*]. This was an especially great experience in the theater arts for Viesturs and me. To work with such excellent actors from the Latvian theater was a great adventure.

Maija Hinkle: How did it work in practice?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: In practice it worked out, that at first we had to organize the tour by corresponding with the 35 places, so that we did not have to make unnecessary trips. The tour took us away from home for 3 months; it was arranged as an opportunity for the actors to earn their living in the theater. Since it took place in winter, we couldn't work much in construction anyway, and we were glad to use this time to go and "make art." The response of the public everywhere was extraordinarily great and positive. But primarily, this tour gave the older Latvian actors the opportunity to earn their living with their art – and this theater was meant just for this purpose. For me and Viesturs it was different – we did this as a hobby, using our free time.

Maija Hinkle: Did you rent cars for the travel?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, yes – we had rented a car; later on the theater troupe bought a car, a station wagon. We also had a driver, and we took the stage scenery with us. The play itself was chosen so as to have as little scenery as possible. It was a unique adventure in my life.

Maija Hinkle: Did you actually earn anything?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes. As I remember it, there was about a $5,000.00 surplus for the Association. In 1954–1955 it was a lot of money. After this the Association of Latvian Theater Friends continued its activities; however, I had many other things to do and I did not participate any more. I did take part in some plays staged by the American Latvian Theater ensemble in New York, but when they rehearsed for plays in the summer, I had to work at my construction job. I also had the theater school. Therefore I quit my activities with the Association of Latvian Theater Friends.

Maija Hinkle: Did Osvalds Uršteins participate in any way in the tour?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, no. He did not. He worked as the director of Latvian broadcasting at the Voice of America, and he was very busy there – he could not do it. Actually, my getting the role was also a coincidence. The part was meant for Oļģerts Parņickis, but he, too, worked for the Voice of America, and he also had to move to Washington; the theater was desperately looking for a substitute. Osvalds Uršteins had recommended me to the producer of *"Indīgā efeja,"* Jēkabs Zaķis. That's the way I got the role, and with it the wonderful adventure to travel over almost all of America.

Maija Hinkle: Also to California?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, not to California. The farthest point where we performed was Lincoln, Nebraska, Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Omaha, Nebraska – in the Midwest. Also in Minneapolis, Chicago, Milwaukee – you know, it is difficult now to remember and name all 35 different places [*laughs*]. In any case, it was an interesting adventure as well as an education, and a way to see America and Canada.

When I moved to Washington in 1956, began my work in The Voice of America, and left behind my "career" as a construction worker, I transferred all of my other activities to the Washington Latvian society as well. In 1958, when Osvalds Uršteins was transferred back to Washington from Muenchen, we established the Washington ensemble of the American Latvian Theater. At that time the American Latvian Theater already existed, with one group in New York and another one in Boston, which was headed by Jānis Lejiņš and Reinis Birzgalis – mainly the professionals who had worked in the Esslingen Theater in

[67] young turks – tr.

Germany. In New York there were mostly those actors who had been with the Meerbeck Theater in Germany. When Osvalds Uršteins returned from Germany, there was a nucleus for an ensemble in Washington as well: Osvalds Uršteins, his wife Hilda Prince, and Oļģerts Parņickis. We had three actors from the theater in Latvia, plus I from the studio, and we decided that we could establish a theater, so the Washington Theater ensemble was founded.

Toward the end of 1959 we started rehearsals for a play by Mārtiņš Zīverts *"Klauns Fiasko."* Again, we went on a tour along the East coast, including Canada, for some 15 to 20 performances. The work continued. The next play was *"Omartija kundze,"* by Anšlavs Eglītis. With this play the Washington Theater ensemble toured from coast to coast – with performances also on the West coast – in Denver, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver. In a word, it was a huge undertaking. We always asked the New York actors to supplement our group, because once Osvalds Uršteins had left New York, their group wasn't as active, since nobody there had as much drive for staging plays as Uršteins did. But in Washington we worked with a passion. During the existence of the Washington ensemble, from 1959 to 1985, we staged about 20 different productions – plays, poetry readings, etc. We gave a total of 300 performances, with a total audience of about 200,000 people; this is a really remarkable achievement for the Latvian-American cultural scene.

In addition, the Washington ensemble staged some large-scale productions such as the play "*Ugunī*" by Rūdolfs Blaumanis for the Song Festival in Cleveland in 1968. This was a magnificently grandiose production, where the audience for one performance numbered 3,000. The play was specially produced to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Latvia[68]. The Washington ensemble staged performances in other Song Festivals as well – in Europe in Koeln[69] and on the West coast in the USA. In Visby, Gottland, and in Koeln we put on *"Bezkaunīgie veči"* by Anšlavs Eglītis, a play that was very popular also in Latvia in the 1990's. It stayed in our repertoire for about 4-5 years, I think. For the Song Days in Visby, in 1979, organized by *PBLA*[70], we staged a very large show, Rainis' Daugava. Thus we have tried to reach the public on all continents and all places, wherever possible. This was another interesting part of my life, which I always remember with great pleasure.

Maija Hinkle: Yes, it certainly was essential for the public, that such performances took place. Several of these plays were really very popular.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes. Now that we live in Latvia part time and attend their theater, I think that quite a few of the Washington Theater productions could compete favorably with theirs – either in the National Theater or the Dailes Theater.

Maija Hinkle: *"Bezkaunīgie veči"* was certainly wonderful.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes. And I think that *"Ugunī"* was also a magnificent show. We did all we could. So this is approximately the part of my life that involved the theater.

Maija Hinkle: Did you act as the administrator of the ensemble at any time?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I was the administrator of the American Latvian Theater group in Washington the whole time it was active here. I was in charge of finances and administration, while Mr. Uršteins was the artistic director.

Maija Hinkle: But you were also an actor?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, yes, but that does not exclude playing any roles.

Maija Hinkle: What was the economic situation like?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I must say again that fortunately none of the productions, none of the performances caused us a deficit – we always stayed in the black. The ensemble was founded to be self-sufficient. We did not seek any help or financial support from anyone, but managed with whatever we made. That covered all expenses of production and all travel.

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[68] Latvia's declaration of independence in 1918 – tr.

[69] Germany – tr.

[70] World Federation of Free Latvians – tr.

At first we travelled like the Association of Latvian Theater Friends – in a small station wagon with a trailer. Later on, starting in 1968, we rented a bus, because we realized that it was more comfortable to travel this way, and that it was easier to transport the scenery. The time on the road was our time to rest, since the tours were extremely intense. We had a performance every evening and sometimes even twice a day. For example, in Toronto we gave a performance at 2:00 p.m. and again at 7:00 p.m.; after this, we drove back to Washington – and went to work the next morning. The drawback to this was that we had no vacations. While other people lounged around in the sun on the beach, we worked, rehearsed, or were on tour. This was how we spent our vacation time.

Yes, this was based on commercial principles. One way or another, we always earned our living. Regardless of our destinations, and regardles of how we got there, we never had to dig into our own pockets to cover a deficit. Our hotels, meals, all our expenses were always covered.

Maija Hinkle: Did you receive some support from any organization?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No. This was a private enterprise. We knew that this was the best way to operate – without obligations to anyone, with no need to give account to anyone. We could choose our repertoire and go wherever and whenever we wanted; perform when we chose. That was a great advantage, I must say, and it worked very well.

Maija Hinkle: Why did this stop?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: First of all, it ended because in 1980, shortly after his 70th birthday, Osvalds Uršteins passed away. With him gone, we lost our artistic stimulus, our artistic leader. We staged one more play *"Sarkanvīns"* by Voldemārs Kārkliņš, which was directed by his daughter Anda Uršteins-Juberts. *"Sarkanvīns"* was very successful. Unfortunately, Andiņa[71], too, soon passed away, and the work stopped automatically.

Maija Hinkle: The soul had left.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, Regrettably …. Such things happen in life.

Maija Hinkle: You would still have had audiences.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: O, yes! In many places there would have been audiences – and they were there when we toured with *"Sarkanvīns"* in 1985. Andiņa had prepared still one more show – *"Šī Tava diena, Latvija,"* a celebration of Latvia in song and poetry. We presented this show for two years at Latvian Independence Day celebrations on November 18 in many places – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Priedaine.[72] We had been invited to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, but, sadly, everything stopped when Anda died. With that the career of the Washington ensemble came to an end. I must say that as the years went by, the generation of actors who had worked in Latvia had aged, and many had died. We had to stop our rather intense work. Consquently, my activities in the theater were also at an end; this was another completed period.

Maija Hinkle: Don't you miss it?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: In a way, yes, but my participation and increased activities in the field of national politics helped to replace it. In 1986 I was elected to the executive board of the *American Latvian Association* (*ALA*)[73], where I was chosen to head the Social Services Division. This was a very interesting job and, I must say, very much to my liking, since I had already acted in a related capacity in the *Daugavas Vanagi* organization. It opened a large field of activity – caring for older Latvian-Americans; the work was very interesting. Also, I happened to have several very good assistants – consultants. Kārlis Ritums had worked for the Social Security department until his retirement; he had extensive and versatile information on all kinds of help available for seniors from various American government programs. Also Mr. Bārbiņš from Cleveland, who had experience with senior nursing homes.

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[71] diminutive of Anda – tr.

[72] Latvian property in eastern New Jersey – tr.

[73] The central organization serving all Latvian-Americans, founded in 1951 by World War II refugees. It sponsors and coordinates political, cultural and social activities.

Another one was Ilgonis Priedulājs from Chicago, who represented the Daugavas *Vanagi* organization. We worked together very well and got a lot done.

The time had come when many Latvians, who had arrived in America after World War II, had reached retirement age. Many had already retired. Probably it is in the Latvian character that whenever 3 Latvians come together, they have to form an association; where there are 3 retirees, they form an association. By then there were at least 15–16 Latvian-American retiree associations, some of them were large and influential, as, for example, the one in Chicago. Our division in *ALA* organized meetings of these groups. We tried to find ways to help these old people feel less lonely, as well as to help with advice on additional sources of income besides their Social Security – such as the local municipalities, etc. We wanted to hear their ideas on how Latvian-American institutions could be of assistance to them; how to make them feel included. Again, this was a very, very interesting period in my volunteer activities.

I spent all of the seven years that I was on the *ALA* board in this capacity. At the beginning I was just a member of the board. In 1990 I was elected Vice Chairman, and in 1992, when the then Chairman of *ALA,* Valdis Pavlovskis, assumed the post of Latvia's Deputy Secretary of Defense, the chairmanship of *ALA* itself fell into my lap. In 1992 I had one year left to serve, since its statutes place a seven-year limit for anyone on the board. At the *ALA* Congress in 1992 I was nominated for the chairmanship, but I declined to run. I continued in my post as Vice Chair-man, while Ints Rupners was elected Chairman.

Along with the work for seniors, the Social Services Division was also charged with managing the Scholarship Fund and with evaluating candidates. So many Latvian young people wanted to get higher education, that we granted relatively large sums in scholarships – about $30,000.00 per year. This was a lot.

Maija Hinkle: Did you grant scholarships to students from Latvia, too?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Not at the beginning. Later, when Latvia declared independence, and it was possible for them to request scholarships, I was no longer in charge of the scholarship committee. *ALA* had been restructured and the scholarship fund was placed in the Cultural Division; this, I think, was much more sensible. Konstantīns Sventeckis was in charge of this Division. During his tenure very many scholarships were granted to students from Latvia; this still continues today.

Tape 3, Side B

As an elected *ALA* Vice Chairman, I was automatically also a member of the executive board of *Pasaules Brīvo Latviešu Apvienība (PBLA)*[74]. I was active there from 1990 to the end of 1994. This led to my close association with Gunārs Meierovics, the chairman at the time. Again, there was a curious coincidence. In 1993, elections were held *[in Latvia]* for the 5th *Saeima*[75] and a large number of our local Latvian-Americans political activists ran for office there. Many of the émigré candidates, 18 deputies altogether, if I remember correctly, were elected, including Gunārs Meierovics and Valdis Pavlovskis. Consequently, I became the acting chairman of *PBLA*. I held this post until the end of 1993, when elections were scheduled to select a new chairman. I, certainly, had no desire to run for the position, because I believed I still had work to do as a member of the board. Vaira Paegle was elected chairwoman of *PBLA* in 1993.

The time that I was active in *PBLA* and in *ALA* was an extremely exciting period, because it was the era when Latvia regained her independence. Not very many people had the good fortune to be involved in this process exactly at this time. For example, in 1991 for the first time ever, the *PBLA* meeting took place in the Presidential Palace in Riga, in the White Assembly hall. It had been scheduled to be held during the November 18 celebration. It was a wonderful experience to be there. The whole Council of Ministers[76] was in attendance. At that time it was not yet called a Cabinet; and the *Saeima* was then called the Supreme Council. All the important men came to our meeting, including the Chairman of the

[74] World Federation of Free Latvians, the umbrella organization of Latvian associations from different countries
[75] The Parliament of Latvia – ed.
[76] of Latvia – ed.

Supreme Council, Mr. Gorbunovs, and the Prime Minister Mr. Godmanis. My relative – my brother-in-law, who came to listen to the meeting – had overheard a cloak-room employees' conversation while checking his coat. Kristīne had said to her co-worker, "This I understand. See, how the high lords have to come to present their reports. There is a *PBLA* meeting now, and our high officials have to give them an accounting." [*laughs*]

Maija Hinkle: Yes, to report to this large world-wide organization.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Later on, my brother-in-law chuckled, "you don't know what powerful authorities you are." [*laughs*]

Maija Hinkle: Did they actually give an accounting to you?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Absolutely yes. Absolutely. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Education and the Prime Minister. This was really very impressive. It was such a fascinating occasion; the whole period of time was like that – each day brought something new.

I will say this – that maybe the people of Latvia expected from the people living in the West, those who were involved in either politics or the church, or whatever else, they expected more than the Westerners and their organizations were capable of giving. Even though we always had said that we need a free Latvia, that we have to free it, and that we have to work for it, we were, nevertheless, terribly surprised when it happened so suddenly. Here is Latvia, please, take it! In a way we were confused. We had claimed to be ready to walk barefoot to Latvia if only we had the chance to return to our homeland. But when the moment came, and we were asked for three people to work in the Council of Ministers, we could find only one man, and that man was Valdis Pavlovskis. He was willing to leave his job in America and go to Latvia to work. This proved that it is easy to talk, but not so easy to do. My hat off to Valdis Pavlovskis, because he actually did it – this can not be valued highly enough. Excuses can always be found why something happened the way it did and not differently. People had careers and other committments. I think that the time in exile had simply been too long to maintain the great fervor and love. When the moment came – that now is the time, now we can return – many people said, "O! No. I can not return because I have children here, I have grandchildren." All of this is understandable.

Still there are many who have returned and work there. I say this with great respect for the younger generation, because they are mostly the ones who went, basically those who had not yet started their careers here. They went back - Vita Tērauda, Gertnere, Ēriks Plato, Mārtiņš Parņickis, here from Washington. Many, many have found careers there. Roberts Grava is an excellent example – he holds an important position in the Bank of Latvia. Even so, to my mind, there could be more, there should have been more.

Maija Hinkle: In your opinion, was there something damaged, something gone wrong at that first moment?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, I believe that the situation was damaged at the beginning. The reason was that the Latvians from the West did not meet the expectations of the Latvians in Latvia. They had hoped that the election of the Western Latvians to the *Saeima* would bring a solution. I need to add here that in Estonia only one deputy from abroad was elected, and in Lithuania, none or maybe one. In Latvia, there were 18 deputies out of 100 – almost 20% – from abroad! The problem was that before independence, when Latvia didn't have its own *Saeima*, there was no need to separate into parties. As soon as Latvia regained independence, political parties started to form, too. We, the Latvians in exile, had just been united in regard to Latvia, as if we belonged to the same "exile party"; we all had the same goal, even though our inner thoughts might have differed. Suddenly we had the opportunity to join some 5 to 6 different parties. Thus the group of people, who had been working together in exile, broke up. There were some in the Farmers' Union; some in the Christian Democrats; Latvia's Way had quite a few, as well as several in the Latvian National Independence Movement. These people distributed themselves among some 5 different parties. We no longer had 18 deputies, who could promote one idea, one ideology. Now each of them had to speak in their own party's interests. Consequently, this large bloc of delegates, that could have had

considerable influence in Latvia's politics, did not justify the hopes placed in them. As a result, only 6 or 7 deputies from the West were elected to the 6th *Saeima*, not 18. That was the result. Maybe it is easy to talk now, in hindsight. I think that the various parties could have used the opportunity to have all of them elected to the *Saeima*. Specifically, that was proven in the 6th *Saeima*, when the elected deputies moved back and forth between one party or fraction and another. Those 18 Western deputees could have formed their own fraction in the 5th *Saeima*, and it could have played an important role. I think that this was a missed opportunity. Regrettably.

Maija Hinkle: Was there any attempt to do that?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: We, the *PBLA*, made an attempt outside the limits of the *Saeima*. Every two weeks we organized a meeting in the *PBLA* offices for all the Latvian deputies from the West. We discussed ways that they might work in the *Saeima*, hoping that they would come together and reach some cooperation. This did not happen, and we stopped the meetings with the 6th *Saeima*, but we had tried with the 5th *Saeima*. We had thought that in neutral surroundings they might find common ground, form a viable fraction that was able to function together. Unfortunately this did not work out, and the idea was not realized. This happened during the time I served as Deputy Chairman.

Maija Hinkle: Who was most involved in working on this?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: The *PBLA*, the executive board of *PBLA*. We asked them,"Please come and we'll talk to see whether there is something we can do." We tried, but without success. All of them remained faithful to their parties. I think that it was a mistake. But nothing can be done by pressure. In a free society you have to accept the opinions of others. However, the idea was very good. It was enthusiastically supported by Tālivaldis Kronbergs, the chairman of the *Latvian National Association of Canada*. The board members of *PBLA* in Australia also supported it. However, those who had to come to an agreement did not do it, and the moment was lost. We have to live with it now.

Maija Hinkle: How do you feel personally about returning or not returning to Latvia?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Personally, I, too, am one of those who live in two places, but I feel more at home in Latvia. I feel that my home is there. Right now I am with one leg in Latvia, one, in America. I have an apartment there, and an apartment here. There will come a time when I will have to decide whether to live here or there; our age will demand it. Even now the travelling is not easy. I think that eventually we will stay there; our roots as well as our relatives are there; that is our home. That's how I feel. But I think that as long we we can still travel back and forth, this is the most interesting life for retirees, I must say. Part of the time you live here, part there.

But returning to the *PBLA* – there was an important fund associated with the *PBLA*, the *Latvian Freedom Fund*; the *PBLA* executive board also serves on the *Freedom Fund* management board. This fund has contributed a lot towards the recovery process in Latvia. For example, I remember that at the meeting in Rīga in 1991, they granted half a million dollars for various projects in Latvia. There were 250 applications asking for some 3 to 4 million, but we had only ½ million. The payment of grants has continued, but they involve smaller amounts of money. The first grants were outright grants and did not have to be repaid. Later on, realizing the way this support worked out in Latvia, we decided that it would be more productive to help them with interest-free or low interest loans. This way we have continued giving grants all these years, with the amounts varying from year to year. Since these sums are being repaid, our capital grows and we can extend even more help; this way the *Freedom Fund* is able to do really beneficial work. I remember that the Red Cross hospital in Smiltene needed money to buy certain diagnostic apparatus. If I remember correctly, they were given a loan of $40,000.00 for five years. They have repaid the loan; they have their instruments, and the *PBLA* has done good work. I believe that these organizations have been of very great benefit and support to Latvia.

Maija Hinkle: Do the people of Latvia know this and do they appreciate it?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, they know. I think that they know it and appreciate it. You know, there are ebbs and flows in everything. There was a time when they had huge expectations and when we, all of us who lived here and visited there, were held in high esteem. That was so, no question. And then, suddenly,

something happened. I think that it was all the political intrigue and the bureaucracy, that it couldn't be overcome. When the 18 Western delegates to the *Saeima* did not provide that which was expected of them, the enthusiasm about Latvians from here evaporated. "You're just like the politicians here, you don't do anything either."

Ever since that attitude of "we" and "you" arose, we have tried to bridge it, to erase it, but it is still there, the "we" and "you." Maybe it is fading again, but for a while the rejection was very acute. – "What do you know!" – And "we." I have noticed another mindset that existed in Latvia, "We know how to do it ourselves. Don't stick your nose in our business." We did not mean any harm – we meant well, but somehow they seemed to feel defensive. "Well, yes. But we don't have the means that you do. We do what we can with what we have and with our work." I saw this as a childish attitude; nobody went there to take away anybody's work or position.

Today there is this feeling of competition already, especially among young people, who want to make sure that the best jobs do not go to someone from here, or from Australia, Germany or England. The younger generation has lived in a free country for 10 years now; they have had a chance for a good education, including education abroad. They are able to do many things themselves; and they do not want the best jobs to be taken by some immigrant from the West. That is understandable, I completely understand that. On the other hand those, like myself, who move there, who are retired, are harmless, because we will not deprive anyone. By living and spending there we can only help the Latvian economy. That is the situation, unfortunately, and there is nothing that can be done.

Maija Hinkle: Do you see resistance also in the govermnment of Latvia to the ideas from the West? I mean it not only in economical, but also in cultural, etc. sense.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I think that the situation is best in the cultural area. As I have observed, there is no jealousy; that is an area where very close and good cooperation exists between the Latvians in Latvia and Latvians here; it seems to be on the right track. One might definitely wish for much better cooperation in the political area, where several of our people could give some valuable advice. Those ideas, however, are not appreciated there. When the *Saeima* had been elected and the new Cabinet formed, I thought that we had to work for better cooperation between the *PBLA* executive board (since it represents all of the Latvians in the West) and the government of Latvia. Since that was my job, I met with the then Prime Minister Birkavs, and we discussed ways that the *PBLA* and other Latvian organizations in the Western world could cooperate with the government of Latvia. We suggested that they appoint a liaison officer with whom we could always be in contact. In the Latvian government we already had Gunārs Meierovics, Oļģerts Pavlovskis, Jānis Ritenis, also Brūveris for a while, from the West. Birkavs promised to discuss it, appoint someone and let us know who the official was, but it was never done. In a meeting with the Secretary of State Andrejevs I repeated this possibility – that it would enable us to have a closer relationship. This did not go anywhere either, as Andrejevs left his post as Secretary of State – he was forced to resign. When later Vaira Paegle was the chairwoman of the *PBLA* board, she tried to revive and continue to pursue this idea about the liaison officer from the government – nothing was done. Evidently there was some inner opposition; they wanted our relationships to stay the way they were.

Maija Hinkle: What are your activities in politics today? Do you have any role in politics in Latvia?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: For a while I still functioned as a consultant to the board of the *Daugavas Vanagi* Central agency there, but I have not committed myself anywhere since then. After I left the *PBLA* board, I served as assistant to Gunārs Meierovics, when he was Vice Minister in the Latvian State Department, serving as liaison for the Baltic States and the Northern European countries. From 1994 to 1995 I worked as his press agent. This again was a very interesting period, because it involved the development of cooperation between the Baltic States and the countries of Northern Europe. The program culminated in the first Baltic and Northern European Song Festival in Rīga, Latvia. It was the first such occasion, when about 7000 choral singers from the three Baltic countries, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland gathered together. The next festival took place in Visby, Gotland; this summer it was held in Norway. It will take place sequentially in the other countries, and then come back to the Baltic countries.

Maija Hinkle: Was your office the main organizer?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes. It was done in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, but our Ministry, chaired by Gunārs Meierovics, coordinated everything. Oļģerts Pavlovskis was the Minister for European Affairs, but Gunārs Meierovics chaired the outreach specifically to Northern Europe. His father had been active in promoting cooperation between the Baltic States, when he was the Secretary of State in the first Latvian government[77] and Gunārs continued his work now with great success. Regrettably, when the government changed again, the new deputies of the 6th *Saeima* did not pay much attention to this idea of Northern European and Baltic unity, and it continues to be somewhat neglected, but, thank God, it hasn't perished. To my mind, the world sees the Baltic States as a unit. Nobody here will say, "Latvia, Estonia or Lithuania," but the "'Baltics," the "Baltic region." Their cooperation could be much closer, without each of them losing their independence, their identity.

Maija Hinkle: Maybe before starting to cooperate, they have to fully enjoy complete independence – like a child learning to walk.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Maybe, maybe that is it. Now that was about my activities in politics.

There is still one area left – my career as a journalist in the Voice of America, which has been my life's longest endeavor, since I began work in the Latvian branch in 1956. This, too was a very exciting period in its own way, because it was exactly the time when the Hungarians tried to break free, but were brutally suppressed. I remember that we received special news flashes about every 10 minutes so that we could report on the latest developments. I remember very clearly that we were in the studio when the Hungarian resistance was crushed, stamped out. It was about 4:00 a.m. when we broadcast the news to Latvia that the revolt in Hungary had been suppressed. It was a grim, very grim, very sad feeling.

This was also a very enriching time in my life, since I had the opportunity to attend the university in the evenings.

Tape 4, Side A

The Voice of America offered courses at George Washington University so we could increase our knowledge in politics, as well as in journalism. For me this was a totally new field. Never in my life had I dreamed that I would be a journalist! But that's life – all kinds of unforeseen things can happen [*laughs*].

And I have to say that this was a beautiful and rewarding period. Precisely during this politically complicated period to work in that capacity and in that institution – I always remember it as a great, tremendous privilege – that we, just 10 people, the Latvian employees of the Voice of America, had the opportunity to talk to the people in Latvia and tell them what was happening in the world and what the world thinks about the system under which they live. It was always an emotional experience, although we were not allowed to show our emotions in the broadcasts. The most basic requirement was to present the news objectively and only as news,"This has happened today and this is how it is." No emotions could come with the broadcast, you couldn't show that, "Oh, I am so happy that the Russians are doing badly."

This job gave me the opportunity to meet a very large section of Latvian society in America, because I had to travel to many places, interview people from all walks of life, write broadcast segments, gather materials. Wherever anything bigger happened, be it Song Festivals, Congresses or whatever, our people where there. I was lucky in that around the end of the 60's I became the producer of the Latvian section, and my presentations mainly involved events in the Latvian exile community. I had to see that the broadcast was well done and interesting. We have been present at all exile Song Festivals and have done a vast amount of reporting.

It was interesting that when I went to Latvia for the first time since the war, in 1989, after I had retired, we stayed at the hotel *"Latvija,"* and I had arranged a meeting with the author Māra Zālīte, who is a relative by marriage – she is married to my second cousin, which I did not know it before. Her name is Māra Zālīte-Ķuzule. We took a taxi to her place. The taxi driver says,"You speak exceptionally good Latvian."

[77] 1918–1925 – tr.

"That's no surprise. Do you ever listen to the Voice of America?"

"Who doesn't listen to the Voice of America in Latvia!"

I said,"Well, I am Kārlis Smiltnieks."

"Kārlis Smiltnieks!" [*excited exclamation*] he said.

I said, "Yes." [*laughs*] It was a pleasant surprise to me that I was not an unknown there. Kārlis Smiltnieks was the name I used in my broadcasts to Latvia.

I worked as the producer, reporter and writer for the Latvian section of the Latvian branch until 1982. In 1982 I was promoted to Executive Producer of the European Division. That was a new job for me, a purely administrative position. My job was to evaluate the boradcast quality of all 15 of the European branches and follow up on their production. This was a rather stressful job – there were 250 employees and 15 different languages; but it was also a really, really interesting time. I worked at the Voice of America for 32 years until 1988, when I retired.

As a retiree I had time to work with the *American Latvian Association* and the *PBLA* again. It always happened that new committments immediately replaced completed ones; therefore right now, free of any obligations, I really enjoy the complete freedom.

Maija Hinkle: Did Gorbachev's assumption of power in the USSR have any effect on the broadcasts at the Voice of America?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Yes, yes. Not only Gorbachev, but also Chrushchov, when he came to power. All in all, the events of the Cold War between the USA and USSR were like a barometer that appeared in our broadcasts we well. Whenever relations became strained, the language of the broadcasts turned stronger and sharper. With relations softening, so did the broadcast language. But it was never like an order or censorship. Maybe some people thought that we were not allowed to report or to tell anything. But that is patently not true. We were free to use and broadcast the materials we had collected as we saw fit, except that there were political guidelines which had to be followed in each country and there were daily news that had to be broadcast to a certain part of the world. The Baltic countries had their set, the Soviet Union their's, Eastern Europe in general, another, etc. In this regard there were guidelines; but in general the broadcasts very much reflected the political mood.

Maija Hinkle: How did you handle the changes in the American government – between republicans and democrats?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: This did not affect broadcasts at all – they were always based on the principle of freedom of the press. The director of the Voice of America was John Chancellor, the famous NBC anchorman; also John Dewey. They would not have allowed any slanting of the news. That was very fortunate for the broadcasts of the Voice of America. Besides, there was a rule that no material could be broadcast unless it came from two different, reliable sources – no material. The Voice of America made very few mistakes. Throughout all the years I was there, the occasions when something untrue was broadcast, could probably be counted on the fingers of one hand. There was one piece of misinformation that the Latvian branch aired one time. We announced on the air that composer Graubiņš had died, when he was still very much alive. This happened because we had received unsubstantiated information from Stockholm, "Graubiņš has died" and we just passed it on on the air, "Graubiņš has died." Graubiņš was happy as a bug in a rug in Latvia. This was a good lesson for us. Now, I believe, I have finished my life's story.

Maija Hinkle: What is your opinion about the press and radio in Latvia today? Do you have any contacts or relationship with them?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Well, I do not have as much contact with the press people as I have with the people in politics, especially those whom I met while being on the *PBLA* board. I attended the *Saeima* meetings regularly in order to follow their work. I am acquainted with most of the officials in politics, and when we meet, once in a while, it is nice to talk things over. These connections started at the time of the Supreme Council and continued into the *Saeima.*

For example, I remember that when Pavlovskis became the deputy Secretary of Defense, and I became the President of the American Latvian Association, we invited the Chairman of the Supreme Council in Latvia, Mr. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, to be a guest in our 41st Congress. There was much agitation here in America – a communist was invited to the *ALA* Congress! However, I think that this was a very valuable experience for our people to have personal contact with a man who was the highest official in Latvia, and to ask him here, in a free country and in a free society, all the questions anyone wanted. He was asked, "Why did you say this or why did you say that? Why did you do this?" He did not avoid any questions and answered without anxiety or anger. He explained why in a given situation he did what he did. One can never satisfy everybody, but I think that at least 80% of the participants had their minds put at ease by his answers. They then understood the situation at the time when he had to act, and the reasons things were not done differently. This meeting with Gorbunovs was very valuable and helped create further contacts.

I also keep in touch with several journalists, among them Dimants, who took over from Gunārs Meierovics, when he resigned.

As far as the press, radio and TV in Latvia are concerned, I have my own views and opinions. Regarding the press, I am greatly disturbed by the extreme mangling of the Latvian language. This is terrible, terrible, terrible. While in the Soviet time the Latvian language was full of Russian words and expressions, now it is full of English. This is pathetic. We do not have any respect for our own language. And why? Borrowed foreign words do not make anyone smarter or more intelligent. Apparently, they think it makes them appear smart. "Oh, we know this." Who needs it? It looks pitiful. The same goes for television. A new generation is taking over, people who have just graduated from college, or haven't even graduated yet; somehow they have gotten into the press corps. They have no training, no experience; they sound amateurish. All those questions they ask in interviews! Not everyone is like that – there are some very excellent journalists, but many in the younger generation are the most amateurish. I am surprised at this, because today they can watch all the Western broadcasts on Latvian TV. They can watch how interviews are done, how reports are given. If only they would learn a little from that! But no.

This is the problem that I mentioned before, this attitude of, "we know ourselves how to do this." Journalism, radio and TV reporting are fields where you have to learn and learn, all your life – that is what journalists here say and nobody is ashamed to admit that one has to keep learning. There are always new nuances, additions, innovations. But in Latvia, it is as if it was cast in stone, "This is our formula and this I follow." It is so awful that after a while I have to say, "I can not take this any more."

And then the art of speaking, of projection, of a "stage presence". If you are, as they say *"diktors,"*[78] (I do not know why they use such a word; it hurts my ears) the primary requirement of such a person is the ability to speak well in order to engage the attention of the listeners and to be sure that they hear what you are saying. No, they mutter something under their breath; they slur the endings. It should be a simple thing to learn the art of speaking – nothing is easier.

Maija Hinkle: Don't you feel the urge to speak about your experience and conclusions to the professors of journalism at the University of Latvia?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: During one of the first times I visited Latvia, I had a meeting with Andrejs Krastiņš, who was the Vice Chairman of the Supreme Council.

I said to him, "Andrej! This thing is totally screwy here."

When the Prime Minister Birkavs left his post, Andrejs Krastiņš was charged with the task of forming the government, which, incidentally, was not ratified.

He told me, "As soon as the government is in place, then you should come in. Take it over and teach them how to speak."

But I declined. "Let it be."

Had I been 10 years younger, I woul have gladly done it, but today I do not feel like it any more, because I realize that there is serious resistance to innovation. Why should I upset myself, worry and

[78] news announcer – tr.

stress myself out? Eventually it will take care of itself. I am sorry, though, because this could be done so easily. They have good theater schools, etc. where they teach the art of speaking. They should send the announcers there; just one course there would suffice.

What we did at the Voice of America, when I was the producer of the European Division – we organized seminars where we taught how to speak, how to prepare interviews, how to give on-line presentations. All new employees had to go through this. They should have done that in Latvia.

Maija Hinkle: Were these seminars and training for all news people at the Voice of America, or just for the Latvian branch? Were they separate for each branch?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Not for each branch separately, but for the whole European Division, which did broadcasts in 15 languages and consisted of 15 branches. That was a regular routine – there was a person who taught how to speak, how to prepare interviews, etc. Even if some newly hired employees had had experience, their knowledge had to be supplemented. This is necessary also in Latvia – it would greatly improve the quality, and the listeners would enjoy it more. Well, eventually things will improve.

Maija Hinkle: You said that there was a certain resistance to ideas from the West, and that you did not want it to get on your nerves. Have you personally had any unpleasant experiences?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: No, I have not. I have only observed it as a bystander. No, I do not have that. At first I was very annoyed with the negligent attitude in shops, but that has improved.

Maija Hinkle: We have talked at length about your personal and the Latvian exile society's relationships with Latvia. How would you characterize the people of Latvia? What is essential in the people of Latvia? What spiritual values would characterize the people of Latvia? And what are your own spiritual values that you have adhered to? What seems important to you?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Basicallly Latvians, the Latvian people in general, are tough and have great endurance under all circumstances. There is a saying, "No matter how you throw a cat, it will always land on its feet." I believe that the Latvians are like that; they are able to somehow get through all kinds of situations. The part of the nation that fled into exile has proven this with their achievements in foreign lands. Arriving into foreign places and unknown situations, Latvians have been able to reorient themselves, to take advantage of any circumstances to achieve his or her goals, to change his profession, whatever. I think that their success is proof that Latvians are tenacious and able to adapt to various situations. The same applies to those Latvians who remained in Latvia. How else could they have endured 50 years under occupation and the resultant oppression, if they did not have the ability to be adaptable, to adjust to the existing conditions because there was no other choice – either you live as you can or stop living at all? In situations like that most will choose to adjust in order to survive and to save their families.

A certain negative phenomenon that appears in the people in Latvia is that somehow they have acquired an inferiority complex, and I have the impression that they are trying to hide it under an apparent bravado. Another thing that breaks my heart is that in Latvia – a Latvian country, where the Latvian language is the official language – there are immigrants, in this case Russians, who have lived there for decades, maybe they are born and raised there, and maybe they are friends with Latvians, but when they all get together, all the Latvians there will speak Russian. Often in such gatherings where I have been present in Latvia, I have been totally baffled, knowing that the foreign person or persons in question understand Latvian. Maybe they do not speak perfect Latvian, but they understand it. But – all the Latvians immediately switch to Russian. I myself do not understand Russian, and immediately I feel isolated. I would understand this if the person had just come from abroad, from Russia. If there was an American visiting Latvia and he did not speak Latvian, it would only be polite of those who could, to speak English in his company. That is understandable. Howeveer, in this case, if such behavior continues, we will never achieve the goal that Latvian is the official language, if we, ourselves, each Latvian, will not insist on speaking Latvian with everyone who wants to talk to us and wants to be our friend. Well, if you do not speak our language, learn. This is the negative side of our ability to adjust. One can adjust too far and in situations where it is not needed.

In America, or Germany, or England, wherever we live and where all of must learn the official language of that state, if we meet a person who speaks English, it is normal to speak that language. When we Latvians in America are among ourselves, we can speak only Latvian, but if we have invited a person who does not speak Latvian, we must be polite and speak his language so he can understand. In Latvia, where the official state language is Latvian, and there is this person who has lived in Latvia maybe 10, 20, 30 years, even was born, raised and educated there – if that person can not speak Latvian – that is beyond my understanding.

Maija Hinkle: How about your own spiritual values? What is the moral or ethical standard that you have followed in your life? Where do you find strength in difficult moments?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I have always held the view that a person must be truthful. No matter what job you do or how you do it, if you can not be truthful, keep your mouth shut; don't flatter, just act.

Tape 4, Side B

(Faith, religion and God) have guided me and given me strength to persevere throughout different periods in my life and to stay true to myself. This had been instilled in me in my childhood, in my school. I think that it was very beneficial that they had classes in religion in schools in Latvia – it gives a person a good foundation early in life. At that time I probably did not grasp its significance; only later in life you go back but do not consciously realize it. And suddenly, "Why did I do this?" And you realize and remember that this is because of the class – yes, faith and religion.

Maija Hinkle: On the other hand, what are the happy moments you have had? Has there been a most wonderful, happy moment of which you could say that it alone was worth living for?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I have always believed that things in life happen the way they are meant to happen. There are sad times, and difficult moments – you have to accept them. It has been predestined and it must happen that way; one can not change it.

What has been a happy, beautiful moment? You know; my years are so many; it is hard to decide right on the spot. There have been many wonderful, moving times in my life and it is almost impossible to single out just one. There have been very many brilliant, beautiful moments in my life. One, which happened during the time I was active in the theater field, was at the Song Festival in Cleveland after the performance of *"Ugunī,"* when the 3000-person strong audience came together, completely unified, as one. It was an inspiration. In politics an impressive moment was our *PBLA* session in the Rīga Palace. That was a unique, singular event which can never be repeated; that is a very very strong memory. And, of course, meeting my relatives, when we went to Latvia for the first time in 1989. Personally, that was the highest point emotionally. These are the three high points which I can name out of many others that I could have mentioned.

Maija Hinkle: What have you done in your life that gives you the greatest satisfaction? What has been a success?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I am very pleased that I have been so lucky as to have had a chance to work for the Voice of America. That was a unique opportunity in a man's life, especially considering the conditions in the world at that time, the situation in Latvia; that I had the opportunity to speak to the people of Latvia every day. That was extraordinary. I went to work every day with great enthusiasm. It is awful to have to go to work, if you feel it is a dead end. But I went to work every day with the knowledge that there always would be something new, something different. In my opinion, the best time of my life was my career at the Voice of America.

Maija Hinkle: Is there something in your life that did not work out? Something you wish had been different?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: The part that did not work out happened early in my life – the fact that I was not able to get the education that I desired. I did not have any chance simply because of material circumstances. However, the school of life has been very satisfying – what some gain by attending many schools,

I have gained from society, from people, from the social environment. I have walked through the world with open eyes. I have travelled all over Europe; and every trip, every visit has been an educational journey to me personally, where I have watched, learned, gained and absorbed a great deal.

Maija Hinkle: What would you still want to achieve?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: What else can I achieve? [*laughs*] I have 77 years on my shoulders; how much more can one do?

Maija Hinkle: You have vast experience. Don't you have the urge to write it all down?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I don't know. I do not know. I am too lazy to take this up. I think that others have much more important things to write down. I think not; I do not know yet. When I receive the cassettes and see what all I have said here, then I will take a look, think about it [*laughs*] whether it is worth while to do something about it or not. For the time being, no.

Maija Hinkle: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Kārlis Ķuzulis: I would like to thank you that you have undertaken such a difficult job. To go and listen to all these things from strangers. That is really very admirable, that there are people who take up such projects.

Maija Hinkle: Recording life narratives has been very enriching, fascinating work. I find it deeply satisfying and enriching, and am grateful to everyone, who has entrusted their story to me.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: My only drawback is that I am a very emotional person; that I can not control my feelings sufficiently. When there are emotionally moving topics, my eyes always get wet [*laughs*]. But that is that, and nothing can be done about it. Maybe I should have controlled myself more in my life, but I have always believed that it is not worth it to strangle your feelings and keep everything inside. Let them out.

Maija Hinkle: Thank you.

While completing the documentation forms, the following topic came up:

Maija Hinkle: You mentioned the theater archives, recordings and video materials.

Kārlis Ķuzulis: Very well. The archives of the Washington ensemble of the American Latvian Theater, covering over 20 years of its existence, have been organized and handed over to Mr. Hausmanis in 1999, since he works with all the materials concerning Latvian theater arts outside Latvia in the Western countries. This archive contains all photographs and correspondence, etc., whether with authors, producers or various other persons. All this is in Mr. Hausmanis' possession. Several productions of the American Latvian Theater are on video tape – the performance of *"Divu kungu kalps"* with which we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Osvalds Uršteins stage career, and the performance of *"Sarkanvīns,"* by Voldemārs Kārkliņš, directed by Anda Uršteins. These video materials are in my possession; all other materials are with Mr. Hausmanis.

NMV 863

BAIBA DUMPE

Interviews conducted: USA, 1999–2001
Interviewer: Biruta Abuls
Transcriber: Ilona Grūbe
Processed for publication with comments by Biruta Abuls
Translator from Latvian: Mirdza Eglīte

"Ciems Latvija" is a predominantly Latvian community in the state of Michigan; it is a residential subdivision of about 40 Latvian homes, started in 1967.

For this project 27 persons from the village's 22 families were interviewed and their life stories recorded on audiotape and documented. The goal of this study was to try and identify some of the motives that prompted the residents to leave their previous homes and, at the time of their retirement, to relocate to a strictly Latvian community.

Support for this project was provided by The Kalamazoo Council of Arts, The Latvian Foundation, Inc, American Latvian Association

This is the story of Baiba Dumpe.

Baiba Dumpe was born in 1930, in Latvia. She vividly remembers her family home in the beautiful Latvian countryside. She recalls the war years and the meager existence in the refugee DP (Displaced Person) camps in Germany, as well as the difficult beginnings of a new life in the United States.

Baiba Dumpe lived most of her life in Chicago, working and caring for her family, at the same time being very actively involved with her Latvian friends and community. Latvian traditions and lifestyle helped to shape Baiba Dumpe's personality.

At the present time she and her husband live in Ciems Latvija, where she is still very active in all aspects of community life.

This interview was edited and shortened. Three periods separated by two spaces indicate omissions in the quoted text.

Biruta Abuls: Please, tell me about your life, about your childhood. Where were you born? How big was your family? Are you from from the city or the country?

Baiba Dumpe: I am a city dweller, born in Valmiera on July 7, 1930, in Birzulis family. My father was a bookkeeper in the local bank, Valmiera *Zemes* bank. My mother stayed home at first and took care of the house and family. In 1940 she took an outside job. My life in Valmiera was very nice. I have remembered it all my life; and when I was in Latvia again, I found some of the old places, like the steep bank of the river Gauja, called *Stavie krasti*. I also found places that are gone now, but I still remembered where they once were.

Biruta Abuls: Please, tell me about your family. Were you the only child?

Baiba Dumpe: No, we were three sisters. My sister, Maruta, was born three years after me, and my sister, Ilze, eight years after me. We lived in Valmiera until it was time to leave because of the war; I finished grade school there. My sisters were not as fortunate as I, and did not get as far as I did with their education. But I had already taken the entrance exams for high school before the war, and was ready to start Valmiera High School in the fall. I also attended the School of Music in Valmiera. I was eight when I started, and I liked it very much. It was the other area of activities that I remember very fondly, besides my school work and school years. I also liked school a lot. My piano teacher was Mrs. Sineps, she lived in Milwaukee for many years after the war. My homeroom teacher was Peteris Burkins, a remarkable personality. He played the piano exceptionally well, and he knew that we were a bunch of girls who liked music very much, especially the piano. So during recess he played classical music on the piano to please us. Thus he introduced us...

Biruta Abuls: In grade school?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, in grade school. Mr. Burkins was a bachelor, and he took teaching very seriously. One of my classmates was Andrejs Dripe, who is well known in Latvia now. Sometimes I look at my grade school pictures and think, "Oh, this one I remember! This one, too, I remember very well." Also there are people from Valmiera in States, whom I have known since my school years.

In my life back home,[79] before we left Valmiera [*because of the war*], summers were very, very important. The whole family, except Father, spent the summers with my mother's parents. They lived on a farm in Kiegelu County, about 11 km from Valmiera.

But on that farm... that farm we spent all the summers, absolutely all – as long as I can remember. And we even started on our journey out of Latvia from there. That was... that was quite a dramatic moment.

But speaking of summers, they were... they were irreplacable. Of course, when we were still little – well, we just enjoyed ourselves and were under Grandmother's feet all the time. But later... especially I, when I grew older, I had to herd the geese and sometimes the cows. The summer before our last summer, Grandfather hired me as a full-time cow herder. And that was just what I wanted to be. I wanted very much to prove that I could do it. And I did. But, well... some days were harder, some days were easier. Some days Grandfather spoiled me. On Sunday mornings he would say, "Baiby, sleep a little longer – I'll let the cows out!" But by the fall I had earned for my work a piece of wool fabric, large enough for an overcoat or a dress. I know that they made an overcoat from it and I wore that overcoat for most of the years of exile. Besides the cloth, I received flour … I received potatoes. Unfortunately I can't compare, whether this was a standard salary for a cow herder or a standard salary for a granddaughter. It's hard to say. But at any rate, I had earned it. And then the last summer I said, "No, I do not want to be just a cow herder all summer, I want to do something more!" Well, then I got to hoe the sugar beets, which was one of the most unpleasant jobs for me. It seemed the rows were endless, and I hoed and hoed, and it was still the same row, and you had to hoe until you were sick and tired of it.

What did I like? I liked to tie up bunches of grain stalks after they were cut and put them up into shocks. That was fantastic! When I had finished my first shock and placed the top "hat" on it, I thought, "Oh, now I have accomplished something!"

I was also taught to harvest flax. And hemp – well, I had been harvesting hemp for a long time. When people talk about marijuana now, I remember the sweet smell. I had to harvest it at noon when the smell was the strongest. Why exactly at noon – I do not know. But sometimes I got as dizzy as a fly. I had to walk out of the hemp field, sit down to catch my wits, and then I would go back and harvest hemp again.

I also had to prepare the food for pigs. I had to hack leaves and then cook them, as it was the custom in Latvia. I liked to do that very much. So I've had a taste of everything. I don't know; it seems to me – maybe I am not completely a city girl; maybe I am partly a country girl, since I liked all this farm work so very, very much. I don't know if I would have liked to do it all my life, but I liked it then.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember family festivities like the Midsummer Night celebration *(Jāņi)* or the religious holidays or any big parties?

Baiba Dumpe: Midsummer Night. That we usually celebrated out in the country. It was a real Latvian *Jāņi* with much cleaning and polishing before that day. All the paths outside were swept and swept and swept again. Grandmother baked white bread and bacon rolls – *pīrāgi.* Singing, too, of the special Midsummer Night songs.[80] My grandfather played the violin very well; he also played the zither, and he had a very good voice, as did my parents, my mother, my uncle, and one of my aunts. The singing was beautiful.

Christmas... Christmas was a family affair, only the family was there. Of course, with a Christmas tree, as was the custom in Latvia, with real candles, and various cookies baked by Mother, that we fully

[79] The author used the expression, "Dzimtenes posmā", which literally means "During the homeland period."
[80] "līgo" songs – MH

expected year after year. With reciting of poetry – many poems. There were three of us sisters, and we had to recite a poem for almost every gift we received. So we recited again and again, and again. Of course, in those days there was not such an abundance of presents as there is now. It was mostly books, and some chocolate figures, something tike that.

We had Easter, too. With swings in the country.[81] When we went there – yes, that is what we did. But at Easter you could not be so sure of the weather. Sometimes the weather was bad, sometimes somebody was sick, and then we did not go anywhere.

I do not remember any other specific family traditions, not realty.

Biruta Abuls: Was it customary to go to church?

Baiba Dumpe: It was, but we definitely attended church much more often in America than in Latvia.

Grandfather, yes – he was a sexton at our church, and he took me with him. The two of us actually went to church quite often. Grandmother was rather reserved. She believed in God, but she was not a churchgoer. Also when we were in Germany and later here, in America, she would read a hymnbook, read her favorite hymns, but she was not inclined to go to church. Grandfather sure was, and sometimes he would play the violin there on special occasions. He was the churchgoer.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember the annual memorial day[82] at the local cemetery?

Baiba Dumpe: The Cemetery Day! ... Yes, good thing you reminded me. On that day Grandmother was the first to leave the farm. No matter who was at home – a maid or a farm worker – she gave the instructions about work and said, "I'm going!" And away she went.

The Cemetery Day – that was really a family tradition. Then you could see the relatives, who also came to remember the dead. People came from all around and stayed all day. There was eating and there was the church service, the memorial services, and finally the social life. The cemetery of Rubene was very close. However, part of our family was buried in the Kokmuiza cemetery, which was further away, near Valmiera. Mother's relatives were buried there. Father's relatives were buried in Valmiera. Sometimes we went to Kokmuiza, but mostly we went to Rubene. Of course, we, girls went, too, jumped into the coach and went.

What else can I tell about our life out in the country? Country life, that was the highlight of the year. Then in the fall, when we had to go home, we all cried, including Grandfather. He walked around, saying, "Now the house will be so quiet, the girls will be gone!" But there was always the next year to look forward to.

And it was from the farm... there we started our way to exile. We left the farm at the end of August. Valmiera was already in a state of war. Father came from Valmiera on his bicycle; we had already packed the wagons. We left with two wagons. Valmiera was burning; the horizon was in flames.

The first night we stopped at a farm where the people let us in and allowed us to sleep there.

In September we boarded the ship.

There were five persons in our family, and Grandfather and Grandmother. Dad and I walked all the way to Riga, since there was no more room on the wagons.

Biruta Abuls: And who stayed on the farm?

Baiba Dumpe: The farm remained empty.

Biruta Abuls: What about the cattle?

Baiba Dumpe: They stayed, the stayed behind. Grandfather had a Polish couple working for him; they stayed. German soldiers were already there. I heard Germans had tried to defend the farm, to make trenches, but nothing came of it. Those German soldiers had stayed overnight, shot all the cattle and chickens. The last thing I heard was that the Polish couple had stayed on for a while. Ilmars [*her husband*]

[81] Swinging on specially hung swings during Easter celebrations is an old Latvian custom. – MH

[82] Once a year Latvians gather in the cemetery on a Sunday, the priest or minister holds a memorial service, and relatives come from even far away places to commemorate their deceased loves ones. The day usually involves a lot of visiting with friends and relatives, as well as singing and eating. It is called "Cemetery Festival." – MH

and I – returned there recently to see the place. That building had originally been an old country inn – the walls were so thick one could sleep on the windowsill. On one end was the barn, on the other, the living quarters. But it had been maintained very well. Now all that was left of that building was a corner, literally a corner. Grandfather had been building a new house; that had been almost finished. When we saw it... it looked rather miserable from the outside, but the inside was literally demolished. An old woman was living at one end of it. She told us that drunken Russians had taken hammers and made huge holes in the walls and ceilings. Since then the property has been sold. There is a little store in it and a small restaurant. That's about all. Everything else... the whole apple orchard is all gone, absolutely all... nothing is left. It had become a part of a collective farm.

Biruta Abuls: At the time when you left, was there talk that we will soon be coming back?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, yes! We'll just go to Riga, and then... after a couple of months the Russians will be driven back, and then we will return. That was the idea, but we had made it to Riga already. My Father's sister and Grandfather's brother lived in Riga. Another one of my Father's sisters was in a gardening school at Tiraini, near Riga. We planned to meet them, and decide together what to do, where we'll stay in Riga or whether we'll go on to Tiraini. But then, already by the first night, it seemed clear that we could not stay in Riga, we had to make plans what to do. Should we all drive our horses together all the way to Liepaja?[83] The decision was to try to get on a ship right here in Riga. I do not really know how we finally made it to that ship. The fact that the horses and carriages stayed on the shore of the Daugava[84] - that, I think, was something that my Grandfather and Father, who was not a country person, never overcame. They talked about it for a long, long time. Actually, it was the same for my sister and me, because one of the horses was hers and the other one was mine.

Biruta Abuls: And you simply had to leave them on the shore of Daugava?

Baiba Dumpe: Literally – that's where they stayed. It was almost like leaving a family member behind. For example, that one night when we were allowed to stay in a shed where hay was kept, we were told to sleep in the shed and to keep our horses with us, or we might lose them. And that night I know that as we all slept in a row on the floor, on a thin layer of hay, a drunken soldier ran in, speaking Latvian, and he gave a terrible, ugly scream and yanked open the shed door, and pulled open a hand-grenade and threw it, and the grenade fell right behind the hind legs of the first horse. It did not go off. But nobody knew what would happen if the horse stepped on it. Nothing happened. But I know that we were all in shock.

But eventually we reached Riga. We were chased off the main road, though, and we had to slog along the seashore, practically through sand, and our horses were overstrained, and we almost lost a horse that last night, but we finally managed to reach Riga. And then we had to leave it all.

And then we travelled on a German army transport ship.

Biruta Abuls: From Riga?

Baiba Dumpe: From Riga. We were ordered unto the lowest deck. We were at one end of the ship; horses, at the other end – not our horses – army horses. And that night an alarm went off. We were being followed by a submarine. We were given life jackets; the ship might be hit at any moment. But again we were lucky that we were not hit.

There were also soldiers on the ship. But refugees were few, since apparently only a part of the ship was meant for them.

So we went to Germany, yes. But I do not really remember any more how we finally arrived at Thuringen. The whole family was together. Seven of us had left the farm, then in Riga Father's other sister, the other sister with her husband and two children, and Father's mother joined us.

Father's married sister was pregnant. That winter, around Christmas time, her baby was born. And then … we had that dramatic journey across Germany. We were put on a train and taken down to Thuringen. On the way there was the air bombardment of Dresden, at the train station.

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[83] A harbor city on the Baltic Sea

[84] The major river in Latvia. It flows into the Baltic Sea at Riga.

Biruta Abuls: And you were in Dresden?

Baiba Dumpe: We were right in Dresden. We were told to get off the train, and there was a large bank nearby. Underneath the bank were air raid shelters. We were all driven inside. And this was the first time that I saw war casualties, when they carried in the Air Force helpers, young boys, badly burned, some completely burned. And then, of course, we had to get back into the train, and there were no windows left in the train; all the windows had been shattered.

We were literally pushed from the train into the shelter and from the shelter back to the train. There were mostly Latvians there. Most of us were from the same ship, it seems to me. But why were we sent exactly there I don't know, maybe it was a German order. We had no destination in mind; we were refugees, and we went, where we were sent – that was that.

Well, first we were taken to Dachau, and afterwards to Thuringen. Dachau was a transition point, sort of. In Dachau we were – oh, a week at least, if not more. There was a concentration camp next to the refugee camp.

Biruta Abuls: Did you realize at that time that it was a concentration camp?

Baiba Dumpe: We knew that it was a place where there were Jews inside. .... I assume that the grownups knew what it was. But there we had to go through the repugnant delousing procedure. We were pushed in naked, and the soldiers dusted us. This was also the place where for the first time we found out how it was to live on just a slice of bread and peppermint tea. I used to like peppermint tea but after that time, whenever I smell peppermint tea, I think of Dachau.

Well, after that we came to Saalfeld, Thuringen. My parents had to start to work right away at an arms factory. I – and there was another girld there - we were sent to a German high school. We had to take a train every day to get there.

We had to go by train, but then the bombing was so intense, we had to stop going to school since the train could not go. The train would travel into a tunnel, and then it could not leave because there was bombing on both sides of the tunnel. So I spent only a short time in that German high school.

Those who stayed at home, of course, had to run to the shelter every time there was an air raid. Our nearest shelter was quite a distance away, built under a hill. At that time my aunt's husband had gotten a job at a gardening establishment. He had a lot of work there, and he managed to get permission for me to work there. I did not get paid for it, but at least it was something to do. I had to walk several kilometers every day to get there and after work walk back again. That was the place from which I saw Saalfeld being destroyed. I was out in the field when the bombardment began. Wave after wave came over Saalfeld. I saw the bombs falling, and I knew that all my family was there. That was terrible for me as well as for my family in Saalfeld because for days we did not see each other and did not know if anyone was still alive. There was quite a large group of Latvians who worked in that factory and lived in a wooden barrack – rather thin, draft came through the cracks. But we survived.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember actually starving?

Baiba Dumpe: Not really starving, but sometimes Mother and Grandmother were almost in tears from worry how to scrape some food together. There were fields around. The factory was in an open field, and we thought we would get bombed for sure. There was nothing but fields around. … But Mother and Grandmother went through those fields, looking for a potato or a beet that had not been harvested. They also found a small meat shop. My little middle sister Maruta was with them. And for some reason the shop owner really liked Maruta. She was bold but not obtrusive. She felt at ease with people. So she and Grandmother went there with a metal milk jug and the butcher gave them some blood. We still had some flour from home. And then Grandmother made blood pancakes from flour and blood and some horrible cooking oil. I don't know where she scraped up the oil, but it had a rather unpleasant taste. But the pancakes came out crisp, and for a long time it was our standard meal. All we had to do was to go and get the blood. So we were not actually starving. The food was meager and monotonous... the same thing every day. But we pulled through.

Well, about those times... Oh, yes, we celebrated Christmas together and the 18th of November – Latvian Independence Day. We did a lot of singing. My aunt gave birth to a daughter, my cousin Ruta, right before Christmas in a cloister hospital. But everything turned out all right, and they were housed in a German apartment.

The old lady who owned the apartment was very nice. I wrote to her from America. She has since passed away. She was a big help with my little cousin. Latvians ... there was a group there; again the important days were celebrated, especially in Saalfeld. There were also many Latvians, living with Germans in other places, but those of us at the factory celebrated even name days.

The talk was that we'll have to spend a couple of years in Germany for sure, but nobody thought at that time, that we would not be able to stay even in Germany, that we would have to go even further. The feeling was that this was just temporary... a transient time of life, and that somehow we would survive it. This thought held on for a long, long time. We did not have any great or specific plans for the future. I just thought of school, thought that I'm missing it again, it is passing me by, passing by, when will we regain the lost time? While we were still living in Saalfeld, one of my uncles - the one with the little daughter - he was very much interested in Latvian literature, and he taught us, girls, too. We learned poetry by heart, we read ... You simply opened a book, looked at what was on that page, what was on the next one, and so on... until you had read the whole book. He told us about our writers. Finally we knew all those poems by heart, especially I. My uncle would recite poetry, and so did I. We spent a lot of time like that.

The end of the war came while we were in Saalfeld. Actually I was out of the city, in that village where I worked when the American soldiers came in.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember any emotional experience, any event in connection with it?

Baiba Dumpe: Personally I did feel some relief, but at that time I mistrusted soldiers – on any side. Let's say that I did feel a relief that the war and the bombings were over, but I did not feel any real joy... there was a feeling of insecurity that there were again soldiers around. Soldiers again... But then the Russians came to Thuringen, and we were taken to Jena. We stayed in Jena for a few days until they figured out what to do with us. Once again we, all of us, were put on a train, and we were transported to Fischbach. We were on the train exactly on midsummer night. The train stopped once in a while, so we could take care of our toilet needs, usually in the woods. But on that midsummer night when the train stopped, there were meadows on both sides of the tracks. On one side the neadow was especially beautiful, with all kinds of flowers. Of course, all the women jumped into that meadow – we plucked the flowers and sang the special midsummer *"līgo"* songs. We came back with armloads of *"jāņuzāles."*[85] And we spent all night on the train with the *"jāņuzāles."* We made wreaths and we sang, and sang and in the morning we arrived at Fischbach. Of course, we were shown immediately where we should stay. It had been an army camp. We were put in those barracks, temporarily. There was also a hospital. My sister got sick and was in that hospital there for a while. But it turned out all right. She got the right medicine. We lived there until it was time to go to America.

Biruta Abuls: What about your school years, in high school?

Baiba Dumpe: The most beautiful time in my life…. until these days. But during those emigration days, that was the most beautiful time, the time in the Fischbach camp. It was a large camp in area. It was surrounded by heather-like plants with yellow blossoms. When they were in bloom all the camp was awash in yellow, like a yellow sea. Around the camp there were beautiful, white highways, and we spent many hours, walking on those highways, once the high school was established. And if was established very soon. We arrived there on the St. John's Day in June, and in July the high school was established.

And then began the studious school time. Our teacher of Latvian was the poet Zinaida Lazda, also Mr. Karklins.

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[85] *"Jāņuzāles"* are all the flowers, tree branches and other plants that are picked for the Midsummer Festival, *"Jāņi"*, which is celebrated with bonfires, singing of *"līgo"* songs, special foods and other traditions and festivities and is one of the most important fetivals on the Latvian calendar. – MH

Biruta Abuls: Did you finish the high school in Germany?

Baiba Dumpe: I did not get to finish the last grade.

Biruta Abuls: Was it five years?

Baiba Dumpe: Five years, yes. We went to school continually – winter and summer, absolutely no vacation. The time to emigrate came before I could finish in 1949.

Oh, our school was very, very strict. We received prizes as the best Latvian school of that time. And we had very good teachers. Mr. Abele, who later became the principal, taught mathematics, physics, astronomy, and cosmography.

Biruta Abuls: And how many foreign languages did you study at school?

Baiba Dumpe: Besides Latvian we studied Latin, German, and English. The Latin teacher was Mr. Dravins – excellent. And we had a very good math teacher, Ms. Klostina. Very, very good.

Every teacher seemed good to me. Some were peculiar like our homeroom teacher Mrs. Rutmanis. She taught history. She was so original!

Biruta Abuls: How was your social life? What did you, kids and young people, do?

Baiba Dumpe: We had very active Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and singing, and theater. There were groups for sewing, for woodcarving, and for sculpting.

Biruta Abuls: No opportunity for piano lessons?

Baiba Dumpe: Actually there would have been the opportunity, but I did not have the time. In addition to school, I took part in the chorus, and I was very busy with the Girl Scouts. It just did not work out. The school days, they were fantastic!

As for the Girl Scouts, at first we did not have a leader at the camp. But we had a very good scoutmaster. He had such an imagination, such enthusiasm! And he took us, the Girl Scouts, with him.

There was a heath next to the camp which still contained some ammunition dumps left from the war, which might explode... Obstacle courses... Girls were all carried away with excitement. When I look at those old photographs... all that we did! We were taught everything, survival and orientation skills, just like the Boy Scouts. I reached the highest level in the Girl Scouts, and that was a different world again. There we were together with Rovers. It was unforgettable when we put on the famous Latvian play *"Uguns un nakts"* [*Fire and Night*] staged there on the rocks in the woods, illuminated by bonfires. There was a "Shakespeare night" – we performed *"Macbeth."* And the performace of *"Hamlet"* was so impressive that shivers go down my spine even now. And all the discussions and everything – it has stayed with all of us. You can't get that any more somehow. I think that people had already grown very close, living in those camps. And then when you make such special, concentrated groups – it was very impressive. I also... I took a scoutmaster course in Virzburg, where there were still all the good, old leaders. And then, of course, came the emigration. But I think that you cannot erase something like that. The seed that was planted in those days, developed, and has stayed with us all for the rest of our lives.

Oh, yes, a very significant event was the first Latvian Song Festival in exile, which took place at Fischbach.

Biruta Abuls: You all took part in it?

Baiba Dumpe: We all sang. We also danced the folk dances. That's where I made myself the Latvian national costume, before the Song Festival.

Biruta Abuls: What did you use for material?

Baiba Dumpe: Actually the material came from England. The material was actually baby diapers – white and very, very soft and light, like feather. I dyed the fabric black. I was lucky. Just before the Song Festival, I twisted my ankle. I could not walk, so I was allowed to stay home from school. All around Fischbach there was a beautiful pine forest, where I sat, day after day, with my leg put up, and sewed and sewed.

Biruta Abuls: With all the ethnographical designs?

Baiba Dumpe: I made the designs for the blouse. Of course, my blouse was not the fanciest. I had started to make it before the Song Festival. The main thing was the rim of the skirt. I did the entire orange rim, sewed on all the designs. Mother finished the vest. Where we got the shiny ribbons, I don't know, but we had them. Our home economics teacher gave me the white linen fabric for the blouse. She also cut it out for me; I had already made the designs, and they had to be put on the blouse. Mother helped me... And finally I had my national costume.

Biruta Abuls: Do you still have it?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, yes. It was used by the Latvian folk dance group in Chicago; somebody danced wearing my skirt and vest.

But in those days it was an extraordinary, unique feeling. I was also lucky to be chosen as one of the attendants when the Latvian flag was brought in during the Song Festival. I thought, "Oh, this is the highest summit!" It was, it was a deeply emotional experience, this Song Festival. So many Latvians together, the singing and everything!

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember any family parties; were there birthday and name day celebrations?

Baiba Dumpe: The highest point was when somebody had a confirmation party. We celebrated name days also. That was interesting. Name days or birthdays – whoever was able to prepare something for the festivities. Something as delicious as "Spam" on rye bread – fabulous! We still talk about it and remember those fantastic birthdays or namedays with the "Spam" sandwiches. You would take one and think, "Wait, do I dare to take another one? Will there be enough for everybody?" But people shared with each other. It was extraordinary. And, of course, the confirmations. Everybody waited for these celebrations, hoping to be invited and to have a good time.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember where you got the material for your confirmation dress?

Baiba Dumpe: Mine was made out of an old parachute. But I do not remember where I got the white shoes, because I did not own a pair of white shoes then.

And then it was time to emigrate. We were transported from Europe to America on an old army ship – Father, Mother, we three daughters, and Grandmother (my mother's mother), Father's two sisters with their families and Father's mother were all on that same ship.

Biruta Abuls: You were together all the time?

Baiba Dumpe: All the time, yes. In that respect we were very lucky.

Biruta Abuls: Do you remember whether you had any special thoughts, reflections, or experiences when you boarded the ship?

Baiba Dumpe: I had a deep emotional experience. Mainly I did not think that much about leaving Europe, but I thought about the school I left behind, although lately the school had been rather empty. I did not get to finish school, and it was just breaking my heart. Besides, I also had a boyfriend who stayed. We discussed our marriage with my family and decided that I would go to America first and get settled, and then, when I would be a little older, and if we still wanted to get married, we could do it in America.

Ilmars knew we could not get married in Germany. No, no. And so we arrived at New York on September 24, 1949. Of course, from New York we were sent further. We went by bus.

Biruta Abuls: Who were your sponsors?

Baiba Dumpe: This was a family in upstate New York. They sponsored us. Father promised to work on their farm. We were such a large family that it was hard to find sponsors. The sponsor family was meant to employ me as well, if needed. But they did not need me, so I got another job. We were out in the country, and we were put up in an old farmhouse. There was no central heating or anything like that. There were two large stoves and many windows. It was cold. Very unpleasant, it was a depressing fall. But the area was beautiful. The mountains were very pretty – trees in all the fall colors. But I just kept thinking about how our life was ruined. Being so young I took it very hard that I had to leave school and that all my friends were scattered now. Good thing that I had my family.

Biruta Abuls: Let's go back to friends. Apparently your friends left a great impression on you. Was it the same with the others? Did everyone stick together?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, the whole school, beginning with the first grade.

Biruta Abuls: Whose doing was it that it turned out that way?

Baiba Dumpe: I don't know. I think we were just lucky. Somehow we all had common interests. There were some that stayed on the sidelines though.

At one time we had a lot of former legionnaires who had been drafted before finishing high school. When they were released from the POW camp, they came back to school. Of course, they were much older than the rest of us.

Biruta Abuls: Was llmars in that group, too?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, llmars too. He stayed till the end and finished high school. But there were many who were older than llmars. They came, and stayed a year or so, and then they left school.

In the States we had only our immediate family. Absolutely no other Latvians. In the Displaced Persons' camp, life had been pulsating all around, from early morning to late at night, all kinds of activities – singing, dancing, and this gathering and that gathering. Now it was all gone. But, gradually, of course … we got over it. It was not easy though, for any of us. My Father had been a bookkeeper; now he had to milk cows, clean the barn, work in the fields, and chop wood. It was hard on him partly also because he was not used to doing physical work.

Mother sometimes helped the lady of the house with the housecleaning and baking, but mostly she just took care of the family. Father was the sole supporter of our family.

Biruta Abuls: And how much did you get paid at that time?

Baiba Dumpe: Ten dollars a week and free housing in that old house. The whole family had to be fed on that money. Of course, when I started to earn a salary, I added my money to the family income.

Biruta Abuls: And you – also ten dollars a week?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, my actual salary was 75 cents an hour. But I did not work every day. Jobs were not that available. I cleaned houses. In the spring I got a baby-sitting job, where I lived with the family during weekdays; I babysat two children, cooked, and did the housework.

Biruta Abuls: And how did those Americans regard you – as plain workers who came to work for them, or did they think: these people will not stay with us for long, they have had a different lifestyle? How did you feel?

Baiba Dumpe: That was very interesting. The wife of our sponsor was a schoolteacher, and she had gathered information on us, who we were previously and where we had lived.

But my aunt's family had a very kind sponsor, a big, heavyset man. He called them "Latavians". And he had thought the family was there to stay, that this would be Paradise, with absolutely the cheapest labor imaginable. But it did not work out that way.

Biruta Abuls: Did you have to sign a contract?

Baiba Dumpe: No. We were lucky – there was no written contract. It was just our understanding that we would stay for a while to pay back the kindness of our sponsoring. But they had not paid for anything but the transportation, and we had to repay that. We had to try to save money and repay the sponsor from the same small salary. The whole amount was $65.00 or something like that. It was our first debt. It was terrible, but we repaid it and pulled through. We did not stay long.

There was something else I wanted to talk about. … There was a Methodist minister, a very active man, almost like a politician. He was involved in refugee matters. His church had found the sponsor for us. And the very first evening... We had just arrived, had come off the ship, then rattled on the bus without sleeping. We all got nauseated on that long trip from New York to Odessa (that was the name of the local city). And on that first night he took my sister, Maruta, and me to the church. And right away in our meager English we had to tell who we were, how we got here, and why we were here. And my little sister was taken to still another church. She fell into panic because she knew almost no English. It worked out

somehow. But from that day on, this Reverend Peterson dragged me all over New York State. Wherever a Methodist church had some kind of gathering, meeting, or presentation, I went there.

Biruta Abuls: Were you willing to do it, or did you do it unwillingly?

Baiba Dumpe: Well, you know… At first I was rather unwilling since the weather was very cold. I did not have warm boots. My coat was not warm enough either. I had one decent dress; I was not dressed in rags. So – if he wanted me - okay, I'd go. But physically it soon became too hard. The minister was well to do, but his car was very old and very cold. I was terribly cold because I was very skinny at that time, I did not have any extra pounds on my body.

His secretary went along. She was an elderly lady who was thoroughly enamored with everything that the Methodists did. So I went to many churches. Now when I look at the map of New York State, I think, "Oh, I was there; there it was terribly cold; I was there and there..."

Biruta Abuls: Did you usually just answer questions or did you go in front and tell your story?

Baiba Dumpe: At first I was told, "Oh, you just have to answer questions."

I asked, "Will somebody translate those questions so I can understand them?"

"Well, this first time we can try to do it that way." I really was not sure whether I answered those questions correctly with my limited knowledge of English, or maybe it was not even what I intended to say. Then we agreed that I would have a very short statement that would include that which he wanted me to mention – why we had wanted to get out of Germany and to come here to America, because he had found sponsors for many refugees.

Biruta Abuls: It would be interesting to know what you as a young girl told them about the reason why you wanted to leave Germany?

Baiba Dumpe: Maybe I would have said it a little differently, but I was supposed to tell what he thought was important. For instance, I would not have said I really wanted to leave Germany, but he implied that we did not have any future in Germany at all. And it was true. It really was that way. That was not hard for me to say, but the summary, that I gave him, that did not come from my heart.

While here in the States I have talked a lot at Girl Scout gatherings, and I have never said anything that I did not really mean. It was actually interesting to go around with this minister. But at times when I was driving home, especially that one time. … as I was driving home, I cried.

Biruta Abuls: Why?

Baiba Dumpe: Because never before had I met with such... such malice. "Why do you come here? We do not need you." Not everybody there felt that way, but there were two women who were the main speakers, and this was what I heard from them.

It seems there had been some refugees before us, who had taken advantage of the local people. But no one had talked in front of people before like I did, and so they dumped it all on me. The minister, though, immediately defended me and said that we, Latvians, were different; that we were willing to work and did not demand a new car and a fine apartment, because we had suffered so much. We did not expect to be pampered. But all this really got to me so deeply that I thought I never would go with that man again. I did not want to see anyone. But after a while, I got over it.

Then I had a very good time in Ithaca, at Cornell University. Shortly before Christmas, Methodists had some kind of conference there.

At that time another Latvian family had arrived in our region. That family had two sons and one was about my age. He could sing; he had a very good voice. He came with us. He sang Latvian folk songs, and I accompanied him on the piano. He had a nice voice, but totally untrained. It was good enough for folk songs though. He did not speak. Rev. Petersons said to me, "No, only you speak."

Biruta Abuls: You were a very brave young girl. You could stand in front of a hundred people, look at them and speak.

Baiba Dumpe: Now, when I think about it, I am surprised at myself. At that time I really was timid and withdrawn. Now I feel much more at ease, even with strangers – it does not bother me. But then... I

don't know how I could go to all those churches. Maybe I felt I had a mission, sort of... I don't know. But really... I did it.

Biruta Abuls: Did you get paid anything for this?

Baiba Dumpe: No, no, no. I received a couple of books from him.

Biruta Abuls: But the people you spoke to – did they give you an honorarium or something?

Baiba Dumpe: No, no, no. They had a program, to help refugees. All the money people donated at such gatherings went to find sponsors for more refugees. This was, so to say... maybe my good deed. I sometimes think that I have been a Girl Scout for a long time, and that I have done some small good deeds. Maybe this will be counted toward my overall credit. I'm glad I could do it. Rev. Peterson was so energetic. He died of a heart attack after we left.

For Father it was a hard period. He liked the place, and he liked those cows. He said, "I have really fallen in love with these cows." The barn was a very modern one, and there were a lot of cattle. That fall was hard for Mother, too. She now had a much smaller income. My sisters had to go to school; they needed clothes, and shoes. We survived somehow. Grandmother was taking care of our household. We spent only one winter in that place. We were there a little less than a year. Then my uncle received a job offer from a soil-testing lab in St. Mary, Ohio. His sponsor in New York State, the heavyset farmer, was very angry. He blasted them with all kinds of words he could think of – that he had been taken advantage of if they left now.

But it was our luck that the lab in Ohio also needed a man to work the machines. My uncle thought that my father could do it and invited him to go there. And so we all moved to St. Mary, Ohio. But before that we were in Indiana, because before that job in St. Mary, my uncle had a job in Indiana on a chicken farm. And so we went there first. It was because of Mr. Abele that we went there, as Mr. Abele had received a job at a college in North Manchester and found the job opportunity for our family.

My uncle got the job first, and then we moved there too. Both of our families lived together in a farmhouse. All around us were chicken houses where chickens were hatched. My uncle and my father worked with these chickens.

This was better than the first place where we were. I got a job with a divorced lawyer. One of his sons was already in college; the other son was in one of the last grades of high school. My job was to clean the house and do the laundry. And I, too, began college there. I lived with that family and began to attend the college where Mr. Abele worked.

Mr. Abele helped students. He started to work there as a caretaker but moved up and gradually became a professor.

I attended college there for only one year. That spring was very hard for me, because Americans always do a big spring house cleaning, which occurred at the same time that I had all the final exams. I cleaned that house inside and outside, scrubbed the steps, and studied for exams during the night. And then suddenly one night I could not swallow anything. I began to choke. It turned out that the nerves in my throat were too tense! I was taken to a doctor right away, and the doctor was very sympathetic. He understood my situation. He gave me a tranquilizer and said, "When the exams will be over, you'll be all-right." And so it was. I passed the exams, and everything was all right. But that one horrible night I thought, "This is the end!"

Biruta Abuls: What did you plan to major in when you started to attend college?

Baiba Dumpe: At that time I thought I wanted to be a pharmacist, and I probably would have continued in that direction. But now I know that that would not have been the right thing. If I went back to college now, I would study library sciences.

Biruta Abuls: What was the American attitude towards you? Was the society friendly with you?

Baiba Dumpe: At the college I did not have any close contact with other students. I went to classes and then hurried back home because I had all that work to do. About the time in college... it was nothing like in high school. I did not expect it to be either. But generally the time spent in North Manchester was

very pleasant for my family, because there were quite a lot of Latvians living there. And we got together every weekend.

Biruta Abuls: Where did you get together?

Baiba Dumpe: At my parents' place, since it was outside the city, and there was room enough. We could sit inside or outdoors, and there was nobody around. Nobody bothered us.

By the way, it was there, in the local church, that Ilmars and I were married. By then Ilmars was in Chicago. We decided, that since I would turn 21 in July of that year, that it was time. We got engaged during Christmas of 1950. We planned the wedding for June 1951. But before the wedding day, Ilmars was drafted into the American army.

Biruta Abuls: Was it the Korean War?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes. He arrived on June 2, shortly before the wedding. We were married on June 2, in the Methodist church. Ten days later he had to leave for Korea. We did not see each other for 18 months. But we did not worry. We believed in our good luck and got married. And the wedding was very nice, out in the country.

Biruta Abuls: Did Americans take part in it?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, they were there. But Methodists absolutely do not use alcohol. The reception was right after the ceremony. There were all kinds of sandwiches, but only lemonade, tea, and coffee to drink. Later they left.

And everybody waited impatiently for them to leave, because then we could really start to celebrate for real. But the Americans were having a good time, and they sat and sat and sat. It was horrendously hot, close to 100°F, and everybody was sitting outside underneath the big trees and enjoying themselves. And Mother said, I wish they'd leave … Well, afterwards, then we started our Latvian celebration. There was even a pig slaughtered, as it was the custom in the country.

After the wedding I stayed in North Manchester only for a short time, because Ilmars' family was in Chicago. So I moved to Chicago, and I started to look for a job. I filled out all the papers, went to job interviews, and it turned out I was accepted at a telephone switchboard. But when my boss found out that I was not an American citizen, he said, "Oh, you are not a citizen."

I said, "No."

He said, "Then we can not hire you. It is the federal law."

I said, "Oh, that's interesting. My husband is not a citizen either, but he got drafted."

"Oh, that can not be!"

I said, "What do you mean, it can't be! He is in Korea!" Then he apologized profusely that he could not hire me. So this job did not work out.

And then I got an office job through a Latvian. But in those times you could not work in an office if you were more than five months pregnant. But at that time many employees had left. They needed new ones. So I got that job and stopped working only ten days before my son, Peteris, was born.

After the birth of Peteris, I did not work any more, of course. Then I started to take a college course, offered on TV. The boys were little. My other son was born in December 1954. I gathered approximately 60 credits. I took psychology and various literature courses. It was very interesting. That was the only way I could take those courses - from television. I listened to the courses and then did all the housework. To take those courses you had to register and pay a fee, but it was not much. At certain times we had to take exams. The last ones were in 1961, the year my sister died. My middle sister died of anorexia. In those days nobody knew what anorexia was. The doctor opened a book and said, "Take it and read about your sister's illness." She lived with us and practically starved to death.

Biruta Abuls: And you could not help her?

Baiba Dumpe: She did not want to do anything about it. I even took her to see a doctor. She said, "Do not bother; I will not go back to him." She would not go to a psychiatrist either. "I have nothing to tell him." It was literally like a suicide.

Biruta Abuls: Terrible!

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, it was horrible. And it was a terrible blow to my parents. Mother, somehow, got over it sooner, but Father, it seems to me, never could really accept it.

Biruta Abuls: I hope the object of her affection understood it?

Baiba Dumpe: No, I don't think so.

Biruta Abuls: Well then, and you - you had children, and you raised your family?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, I raised a family, yes, and Ilmars was very active in Latvian society with sports, theater, and all kinds of activities.

We rented our apartment from my father-in-law. He had a house. And when they were old enough, the kids attended Latvian Sunday school at *Ciana* church. When our youngest son was four, I decided it was time for me to start to work again. I was looking for a job that would start in the afternoon or be during the evening. And so I went to banks. Banks were looking for employees to do a new special technique in typing. I chose a position with The First State Bank of Chicago. I could go there by train, and I didn't have to walk far. So I started to work, learned the job, and worked there for 30 years. It was a very pleasant period in my life. I acquired a lot of friends; some of them still visit me here.

Biruta Abuls: Americans?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, Americans, yes, yes. Latvians did not work there.

Biruta Abuls: Please, describe your social life, if you wish.

Baiba Dumpe: When Ilmars came home from work, I rushed out the door. After the boys came home from school, we worked very diligently for a few hours at home work and I had the dinner almost ready. Then I would rush out, and Ilmars came home. And then Ilmars took over the care of the kids, which was very beneficial. He took them to sports training, to Boy Scouts, and not only our sons; the car was full of kids sometimes. A lot of Latvians lived in that neighborhood.

Biruta Abuls: And what about the adult social life? Did you get together? You had all those friends?

Baiba Dumpe: We had, yes... friends... friends... Actually we have been very, very lucky – we have always had many friends, and really close friends. When our children started to attend Sunday school, we got to be very good friends with a group of Latvians there. We got along very well. Ilmars, too, would not have been able to live without Latvian friends.

Biruta Abuls: And you celebrated birthdays and name days?

Baiba Dumpe: We celebrated, yes, but not so grandly... less often name days, but it happened that all of a sudden we thought – oh, now we should get together! No special reason!

Biruta Abuls: Did you have big parties? Did you gather about twenty people, or did you usually just get two or three families together?

Baiba Dumpe: It all depends. At Christmas or Easter it was just the family. When the boys had birthdays and their godfathers and godmothers came, it was a larger celebration. But later when the boys grew older, we had a group of very close friends. They lived close by, and we saw each other often. When someone had a birthday or a name day party, we sang and danced. Sometimes we spent the New Year's Eve together. Actually we had two groups of friends. One was a group that we had common interests with – we attended local concerts and plays together. And there was another group with whom we had wild parties.

Biruta Abuls: Did you get together with Americans on weekends; did they invite you and vice versa? You said you had a good relationship with your colleagues at work.

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, very good. No, they lived too far away, those good girl friends. But they invited us when somebody had a wedding. Ilmars and I have attended a Polish wedding, a Greek wedding, and all kinds.

Biruta Abuls: And did you, in turn, invite them to your sons' weddings?

Baiba Dumpe: No, not them, not any more. And generally we did not see each other outside our work place. We had no need to try to integrate with Americans.

Biruta Abuls: And what about neighbors? Did you make friends with American neighbors?

Baiba Dumpe: We always had a friendly relationship, but we were not really good friends like it usually is in the suburbs, when you go and have coffee together.

Biruta Abuls: Do you feel they avoided you, or maybe you avoided them, or did it simply happen that way?

Baiba Dumpe: No, there was no avoiding. Simply in the neighborhoods we were, nobody had started to that kind of socializing. Sometimes we talked outside for hours. They sat on their side of the fence, and I sat on my side, and we could talk about all kinds of things. But we did not have a close friendship. We were friendly, but not especially so.

Biruta Abuls: During what time did you start to participate so actively in the Chicago Latvian community? I know you worked with the Girl Scouts, and you said that you played the piano.

Baiba Dumpe: At the very beginning, when Ilmars was still in the army after I came to Chicago, then I started to work with the Girl Scouts. [*Later she was the main Girl Scout leader.*] The activities were on weekday evenings.

Biruta Abuls: So parents had to take their children there?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes. I did not work there very long. But I played piano for the *"Dzelme"* folk dance group. Actually I started there as one of the dancers. And then it turned out they had no one to play the piano. They had a lot of young dancers, but no music. And then they persuaded me to play the piano, too. Well, I could not do both. So I gave up dancing and started to play. I think I played for them for about ten years.

The rehearsals were very regular, very strict, and long. I think it was mainly from those times that I acquired such a wide circle of acquaintances. And also from the time when I was active in Girl Scouts. When I was the Girl Scout leader, I also had a chance to get to know their parents. I knew many of them well.

Biruta Abuls: Would you say your social life in Chicago was quite active? Were there social events every weekend, when you had to go to parties, or people came to your place?

Baiba Dumpe: During the last years, I could say it was almost like that.

Biruta Abuls: When you got together, did you discuss the future of Latvians in exile, did you talk about the possibility of returning to Latvia? Did such topics ever arise?

Baiba Dumpe: Definitely they arose, and we talked about it. In our group, and it was a rather large group, nobody had any doubts that we had to raise our children in Latvian culture. We had to send them to the Latvian center," *Garezers,"* in the summer, and to Latvian Sunday school in the winter. In our group we never entertained the thought, as I now hear people say, "I never taught my children Latvian, because I knew that in five years Latvian society would be gone." This was the answer when they were asked why their children did not speak Latvian. And in those days they had been conviced that, "It was absolutely unnecessary, because Latvian society will not exist any more."

Biruta Abuls: What is your opinion of assimilation – is it unavoidable?

Baiba Dumpe: I think a some Latvians will survive as Latvians. Also those who are middle-aged now, even some of their children.

Biruta Abuls: What is the purpose of it?

Baiba Dumpe: Maybe to die with the feeling that I am a Latvian, who supports Latvian activities, speaks a clear Latvian language. I can almost guarantee that there are several families like that.

Biruta Abuls: And some of those that did not support Latvian activities at first, do they live in the Latvian Village now?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, some do. They still have their Latvian heritage, and they are great Latvians now. But they had deprived their children of it.

Biruta Abuls: Did you consciously think about preserving your Latvian heritage, or did it simply just turn out that way and could not have been any other way?

Baiba Dumpe: I think it was very natural. If the opportunity was there, it never occurred to us not to take advantage of it. Others did not. They did not consider it important; they thought that it would end soon anyway.

Biruta Abuls: Did your children ever protest that they had to go again to Boy Scouts, to Girl Scouts, to folk dancing, to Latvian school, or to church?

Baiba Dumpe: They... [*laughing*] yes, they protested against Latvian homework. "Again! We just finished! Again!" But they liked to go to school very much. They liked their companions there, and they liked their teachers too.

Biruta Abuls: And, of course, your life was also very much involved with all those sports?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, yes, yes. There... that is already a different story altogether.

Biruta Abuls: Do you think all your Latvian friends had a similar attitude? A similar way of thinking? And were they all well situated? Could they afford all those Latvian activities? Did their income not limit them?

Baiba Dumpe: Actually, I do not know of anyone who would have had financial difficulties. Some were doing well, some not quite so well. There were also some who were very well to do, but they did not have any children. If they had had children, I'm sure they would have taken part, too.

Biruta Abuls: You have your Latvian friends. American friends do not visit you. If you had lived only among Americans, would Americans then be your close friends, or would you not have any friends at all?

Baiba Dumpe: Probably then Americans would have been closer friends than they were in Chicago. In Chicago we had lots of company... it was really good luck to be among so many Latvians. Especially if you are a person who needs other people. If you are a person who does not need company, you can take a book, sit and read while eating lunch, then it makes no difference whether you are among Americans or Latvians. Then you do not need anybody.

If children protest against Latvian school, I tell them, "You do not go to school just to have fun! You must learn to combine both things – having fun and what is necessary." Now our grandson attends Latvian school, little Karlis goes there.

Our children then were busy from morning till night. They were completely busy.

Biruta Abuls: But didn't they have any obligations or committments at their American school?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, they played in the band at school. In later years they did not have time for Latvian folk dancing any more.

Biruta Abuls: Do you feel you have been living a double life?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, yes... Those kids really had a great load. So it is. I know; our grandson in Atlanta is on the run all the time. But for them it is not a double life. But here [*in Kalamazoo*] it is – you speak in Latvian, in English, in Latvian, in English – all the time. However, we pulled through. And I think noone was traumatized from it.

Biruta Abuls: Are your children married to Latvians?

Baiba Dumpe: The middle son is not married. The other two are married to Americans. Both my daughters-in-law are Americans.

Biruta Abuls: How did it happen?

Baiba Dumpe: I do not really know. I only know that my eldest son, Peteris, told me, "Mom, Latvian girls [*from the days in Garezers*] – they are like sisters to me. We have exchanged socks and clothes. We have told each other our secrets. We feel almost like a family, like brothers and sisters, all of them."

Peteris got married when he finished university. But I really have very good daughters-in-law. And I think of the way Peteris' wife has raised her daughters – I take my hat off to her!

Biruta Abuls: Do they speak Latvian?

Baiba Dumpe: Unfortunately not.

Biruta Abuls: None of your grandchildren speak Latvian?

Baiba Dumpe: No. Well, in Andrejs' family – Karlis goes to Latvian school now.

Biruta Abuls: Do they take part in Latvian activities?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, yes... yes, yes, in Kalamazoo. In Atlanta, too. They invited athletes from Latvia to visit them during the Olympics.

Biruta Abuls: Would his wife like to have American friends, too?

Baiba Dumpe: They have very good friends there, very good. Peteris' school friends or Susan's friends, too. They come and go, come and go there.

Biruta Abuls: Was it hard for you to accept that they both married Americans?

Baiba Dumpe: Yes, at first it was a big shock. And I think Peteris himself felt badly about doing this to us. But he said, "Mommy... this is the person I want to live with." And I think they have a good marriage, amazingly good. They have common interests. They both like to do the same things.

Biruta Abuls: And how is it when you have a family gathering with your daughters-in-law who do not speak Latvian? Do you all speak English then?

Baiba Dumpe: We use both languages. Completely, absolutely both. And nobody minds. And I think that now they at least understand what the topic of conversation is, and if they want to join in, they speak in English about the same thing, or they ask, "Wait, what you are talking about now?"

Biruta Abuls: Do you have any family traditions that you had to give up because your daughters-in-law are Americans?

Baiba Dumpe: No. Except that at Christmas time we give presents twice — on Christmas Eve and on Christmas morning.

Biruta Abuls: Do your sons have any interest about the present life in Latvia?

Baiba Dumpe: Oh, yes. They have all been there. The youngest son even took his wife along. Our eldest granddaughter has travelled there with Ilmars. She is Peteris' daughter. She does not speak Latvian. She had taken some extremely beautiful photographs of Latvia, such typically Latvian moments. I was completely surprised.

Biruta Abuls: Do you feel you have fulfilled your life here, in America, and do you sometimes think about how your life could have turned out differently? Does it ever occur to you?

Baiba Dumpe: I think that when I left, I was a little too young to have any great dreams for the future. But it was very, very painful to see my grandfather's farm when I returned. It was the place where I had my happiest times, the place closest to my heart. And to see that it was all ruined, that there was nothing left – that was hard.

Biruta Abuls: Tell me, why absolutely all the people with whom I have talked tell me the same thing – that the old farm in Latvia was the true home? Although they had only spent summers there. What do you think, why is it like that?

Baiba Dumpe: I don't know... all the open space around, the old apple orchard, and our beloved willow trees – one for each of the sisters. We called them our "houses." And there was a glade, and there was a birch grove… Our house in the city, it was... it was home. That was dear, too. It was all very nicely arranged, and the school was there, and everything. But that at that age... I don't know... nothing since has impressed me as much as the summers spent on that farm.

Biruta Abuls: Do you think there is something in the Latvian soul that attracts us to country living? Do we strive to be near nature?

Baiba Dumpe: I think it is so. Maybe, if we had lived in Latvia all the time, Latvia would have progressed more, and then the impression would not be like that. But at that time country living definitely was something unique. Each day was a new adventure.

Biruta Abuls: Would your mother have said the same thing?

Baiba Dumpe: I think so, definitely, and even Father who lived mainly in the city. But when he came to see us on weekends, he completely blossomed out. He really liked all waterways; especially the river Gauja, and he went fishing.

Biruta Abuls: But was it not because he was just a visitor there; he did not have to work so hard? If he had to work every day, dig ditches, sow, bring in the harvest – would he say the same thing?

Baiba Dumpe: My father, definitely. On the other hand, my mother's brother, who would have been the lawful heir to that farm, was not interested at all. He worked there, yes, because his father made him

work there when he was young. But as soon as he was not forced to work there, he left. It all depends on the person.

Biruta Abuls: As for your life, do you feel your home is here? I do not mean so much the physical, but mainly the spiritual home.

Baiba Dumpe: It is hard to tell. [*Sighs*] When I walked on the streets of Valmiera again, I thought - this would have been the right place for me. It seemed that I would not be a complete person unless I returned to Latvia. But then at one point that feeling passed. Now I definitely could not move to Latvia to stay.

Biruta Abuls: Why?

Baiba Dumpe: Not only because my children and grandchildren are here. It is the way of life over there that seems so strange now. Over there they say that you have to change with the times, but to me it does not seem like the real Latvian life any more. If I returned there for good, I would like to live in a purely Latvian way, and I do not think such a way of living will ever be there any more. Maybe after a couple of generations. So I feel that somehow here is my real home. Here I can at least dream about my life in Latvia as it might have been. Over there I cannot do that any more. Something has been lost.

Biruta Abuls: Is it that all those friends you had here and your family, and relatives were the ones who gave you the strength to survive here?

Baiba Dumpe: Definitely, very much so. When I was young, I was shy. I liked to stay at home. And after we moved to Chicago, when the kids were still little, I was not much interested in going out. Ilmars attended his sports events a lot. Also there was the problem that we did not have anyone who could stay with the children. In those days this baby-sitting business was not yet so popular. And to bring home a strange person to stay with your kids – almighty God!

Biruta Abuls: Why did you move from Chicago to this Latvian Village in Michigan?

Baiba Dumpe: Well, it was either that or stay in Chicago and we did not want that, not really.

Biruta Abuls: Why?

Baiba Dumpe: Somehow it seemed best, after all the kids had left and we had retired... Personally, I always liked Chicago. I probably would be willing to live there still. It was rather peculiar that Ilmars actually was the one who mostly wanted to get out of Chicago. And at the beginning, when he was young and strong, I could not imagine that he would not want to live in the city. But now he said no, he would not stay in Chicago for anything, no, no, no, and then those offers to buy land began. We actually came to Michigan in late fall. There was snow on the ground already. We had heard about the land for sale, and a very good girl friend came with us. Yes, she actually persuaded us, but she still has not even started to build anything.

Biruta Abuls: Did she buy a piece of land?

Baiba Dumpe: Her place is right across the road from us. We wanted it like that. We talked about being able to wave to each other in the morning, from our windows. But it does not look like she will ever build anything there. However, this was the place we wanted, because *Garezers* had been almost like a second home to us. You could not imagine summers without *Garezers*, and without all those friends, all those happenings, and performances. It was a different life than in Chicago; *Garezers* was almost like the Displaced Persons' camp in Germany after the war.

Biruta Abuls: And the community you have now – do you feel you strengthen each other, help each other or can you get your strength also from the local community?

Baiba Dumpe: To some extent, I would say. Maybe we are lucky that the time has not come yet when we actually need support from others, not material support; but knowing that you are not alone, that there are people around, who think and feel the same way. For the time being Ilmars and I are still rather independent.

Biruta Abuls: And did you actually want to work here, or did it just happen that way?

Baiba Dumpe: Actually, I was invited to come and work here while I was still in Chicago. Already two or three summers ago I was asked, "When will you come here [*to work at the Garezers' office*]? We need

you very much." I am not a specialist, but they knew what I could do. I was not a professional bookkeeper, I had worked at the bank, and that was that. And I said – let's see after I've moved here. We moved here in 1992, at the beginning of July, and the same fall I had a cancer operation. Right away I was invited to start to work. I said "that's out of the question, – maybe next year." They said, "Just come, you do not have to go to the office, we will bring all the books here. Just sit at home and look through those books." That happened to be a time when *Garezers* didn't have anyone working there, noone. There had been a sudden change in the *Garezers*' administration. During the winter it was not so crucial. There was not much work anyway, but books had to be closed at the end of the year. At first I thought – I couldn't, I simply can't do it. After the operation I had to take radiation treatments, but then I started to think – maybe this is just what I need. The winter was dark, and none of my children was nearby. Then I thought – maybe I need this so that I will not have time to think. I'll just dig through those books. And I said – "All-right, I'll try," and it has worked out very well. I soon got over all the gloomy thoughts. I went to radiation treatments in the morning and after that went right to the office, and it worked out better than I had thought. And now seven years have passed.

Biruta Abuls: Do you feel that we live in the past here, and do you take part in what's going on in Latvia? For instance, do you try to get information about events in Latvia, do you get Latvian newspapers or books, or do you correspond with anybody in Latvia?

Baiba Dumpe: Personally I do follow the events in Latvia. I have never been very interested in politics, but I am interested in what's happening in Latvia. As for living in the past, it seems that I have done it a lot in my life. I think it simply is in my nature. But I do follow events in Latvia. I do not think I would want to actively participate, though. Sometimes I get upset about things over there, yes, but my anger does not help any.

Biruta Abuls: Do you ever discuss the problems in Latvia with your children?

Baiba Dumpe: Not much. They have travelled in Latvia. They know what's going on there... but I do not think they are very interested in their politics.

Biruta Abuls: Does their lack of interest sometimes hurts or bothers you?

Baiba Dumpe: I do not think that I feel hurt about that; I felt hurt more when they did not marry Latvian girls. But when I see that they have a good family life, I think... and their children are doing all right and everything... I think it makes up for it. I felt differently when they got married, but now, after all these years, their lives have turned out well, and I think that is very important. They surely have been lucky. At any rate, I would have preferred that our family had been only Latvians so we would not have to speak English; we could speak only in Latvian when we get together. But we talk a lot in Latvian anyway.

Peteris lives in Atlanta. He is our eldest son. Peteris and our youngest son open up so when they come here to the Latvian Village at *Garezers*. Of course, they attended school here. They know this place well.

Biruta Abuls: Do you see any future for *Garezers* and the Latvian Village?

Baiba Dumpe: Well, it started with great dreams for the future, but we now are all retired here in this Village. What kind of future can senior citizens have?

Biruta Abuls: Will your children come to live here when you leave?

Baiba Dumpe: Well... maybe one of them will, yes.

Biruta Abuls: Maybe they will keep this house as a summer home?

Baiba Dumpe: Probably so... I think this house will definitely remain in our family. Either one or the other, or the third one will keep it. I do not think that the house would be sold or simply boarded up; I think it has already somehow... taken root in our family.

Biruta Abuls: But don't you think that our children – at least some of them – will look for a different kind of society? Maybe they do not want to be only among Latvians.

Baiba Dumpe: Of course, that's very possible. But there is no family in Atlanta where Peteris lives; neither his nor her family is there. Her family is in Ohio, and we are here.

Biruta Abuls: Yes, but in that case they have friends from work.

Baiba Dumpe: That's why they moved there, because of Peteris' work. And they are doing very well. They have found new friends.

Biruta Abuls: But I see something else. This younger generation of Latvians, they rely on us, the older generation, to keep on maintaining *Garezers* and other Latvian establishments. They expect that we will keep paying and organizing, and that it will always be there.

Baiba Dumpe: I think that we have to start to drive home that idea... literally drive. Right now they have a comfortable material life, and we are the connection – I like it here, I attract my children here, and that's all - but that is not enough any more. You have to start to give out of your pocket now.

Biruta Abuls: I don't really know where they will get the understanding; it is very seldom that anybody talks or writes about it.

Baiba Dumpe: Well, yes, Mikelsons has started to speak out a lot, but how many people read what he writes in the *"Kalamazoo Latvian News"*?

Biruta Abuls: There is one more question I want to ask, that we have not touched it yet. We have not talked about you conducting the chorus; I know you have a small singing group here.

Baiba Dumpe: We have a small chorus, yes.

Biruta Abuls: How did it start?

Baiba Dumpe: It already existed before I came. They wanted to sing on November 18th or on Midsummer Night, but they had found out that it did not sound right if nobody played the piano. At that time they had fewer singers. Before I came here, I had never conducted a chorus. They persuaded me simply to play the piano. So we started somehow, and our group grew larger, and we did very well. We also had fun together.

Biruta Abuls: How many are you in that group?

Baiba Dumpe: Twenty-three. I think we also have... a good atmosphere in that chorus. We do not quarrel. We sing songs that everyone likes, and I never insist – this is what I want you to sing! I look over all the songs I can get, and consider what we would be able to sing, and then we try it. In between... well, we do not sing like in school – one song after another. We talk a lot. Someone will say – I read something interesting, what do you think about it? Or, if somebody has a crisis at home, we talk it over, and I think that is very good, and, of course, we learn the songs, too.

Biruta Abuls: I think it is wonderful; it gives those people a feeling of self-worth – they are doing something.

Baiba Dumpe: I think so, too, although we sing rather simple, sentimental songs or folk songs.

Biruta Abuls: Would you say that people who live here have responsibilities, or do most of them have none?

Baiba Dumpe: Most of them probably do not have any. Some of them are active, for instance, those who belong to the *"Daugavas Vanagi"* organization. There is a lot to do. As for me, it definitely helps to have a regular activity, even if it is only three hours a day that I work in the *Garezers*' office. I have to get up at a certain time every day; I have to get dressed, and I do not walk around slovenly. I feel like a normal person.

Biruta Abuls: Judging from everything you have told me, it looks like you like people.

Baiba Dumpe: Really... yes, I like people. I don't like everyone personally, but I like to hear about people, what they are doing.

Biruta Abuls: Living in such a place... I imagine if a person does not have any obligations, it is comforting to be able to call somebody and just talk about things.

Baiba Dumpe: I'd say! Dzidra Cirulis and I we, are very good friends. She went to Chicago for a few days, and then last Friday, we left. On Friday morning she said to me, "To whom will I talk tonight?" I said she should call somebody else, but she said she did not have anyone else to talk to about the things she wanted to discuss. I said, "I'll be back on Monday," but she says, "Monday night you will be busy with the chorus, then again I can not call you." We miss each other.

Sometimes I think how it would be if I were here by myself. Let's say that most people would have moved away from the Village, and I would have stayed here. On my mother's side everybody lived a long life. Their lives were not easy, but they lived long. I think I am not quite that strong any more, but I do not know, if I could live alone. Only if I was so old that I did not care about anything, then maybe. But therefore, therefore... then I think about our little chorus – it helps all of us. Especially when we have to perform, and then... "What will we wear, and do we need another rehearsal?" I say, "No, I think it will be enough," but they say, "Just once more time, if you possibly can, just once more!"

Sometimes I think, that because I like to read books, maybe we should have a literary group, but it does not work out. People have too many different interests.

Biruta Abuls: Thank you for the conversation.

[*A personal remark after the interview:* "I wanted to remain a Latvian in spite of the difficulties. I wanted to prove to myself that it can be done."]

LATVIA AND ITS PEOPLE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

By Māra Lazda

1905: The Revolution in Russia reverberated in Latvia as a movement against the power of the Russian tsar and of the German nobles in Latvia.

1914–1918: World War I. Germans occupied Latvia and many Latvians fled to Russia as refugees.

November 18, 1918: Proclamation of the Independent Republic of Latvia. The end of World War I and the fall of the German and Russian empires provided the opportunity for Latvians to declare independence.

1918–1920: War of independence.
In 1918 the future of Latvian independence still appeared unstable; German troops remained on the territory. Several years of war on several fronts followed – against German troops, a Russian invasion and Bolshevik red terror. Latgale, the eastern part of Latvia, was formally incorporated into Latvia only in August 1920.

1920: All citizens – men and women – over the age of twenty-one gained the right to vote. The first elections were to establish the Constituent Assembly on April 17 and 18, 1920.

August 11, 1920: Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia.

1922: The constitution of 1922 confirmed the civic, multiethnic nature of the Latvian state. According to the 1920 census, the total population of 1,596,131 consisted mostly of ethnic Latvians, while ethnic Russians made up 7.82 %, Jews, 5%, Germans, 3.6 %, and Poles, 3.4%. Other smaller minority communities included Belorussians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Ukrainians. Specific laws guaranteed the rights of minority communities; the state offered financial support for minority schools.

1920: Very significant land reform was carried out to redistribute the lands held primarily by Baltic German large landowners.

September 1921: Latvia admitted to the League of Nations.

1922–1934: Parliamentary democratic government. The governing structure was a unicameral parliament (*Saeima*), whose members were elected by proportional representation for three-year terms. The *Saeima* elected the Prime Minister, who was the head of the cabinet and the leader of the state, and the President, whose role was mostly ceremonial. The Agrarian Union and Social Democrats were the strongest parties. There were also ten minority-based parties.

1934–1940: Authoritarian regime of Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis. On May 15, 1934, the Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis, backed by the Agrarian Union and Home Guard (*Aizsargi*), carried out a peaceful coup. The liberal election system had resulted in so many political parties being represented in the *Saeima* that governing and coalition building had become very difficult. In the four *Saeimas* between twenty and twenty-seven parties elected delegates. The resulting political instability, accompanied by economic tensions, led to demands for reform. Although political rights were curtailed during the years of the regime, Ulmanis succeeded in stabilizing the economy. Therefore for many people Ulmanis remains a positive memory associated with national growth.

August 23, 1939: Soviet and Nazi Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Agression Pact. Secret protocol divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. The Baltic countries were assigned to the Soviet sphere.

October 1939: Soviet bases established in Latvia.

October-December 1939: Hitler repatriated Baltic Germans.

June 16–17, 1940: Soviet Union presented an ultimatum to Latvia. On June 17, Soviet troops entered Latvia, placing it under Soviet occupation. In August, after orchestrated elections, Latvia was illegally incorporated into Soviet Union. Thousands were killed, imprisoned or deported to Siberia without trial. Kārlis Ulmanis was arrested and disappeared.

June 13–14, 1941: First mass deportations to Siberia. 15,000 men, women, and children were loaded into cattle cars and sent to Siberia. Deportation affected Latvian citizens of all nationalities.

June 22, 1941: Germany invaded the Soviet Union. By July 5th Latvia was under Nazi control.
Soviet establishments were evacuated to the interior of the Soviet Union. Some Latvians, who had been conscripted into the Red Army, retreated to central Russia.

1941–1945: Nazi occupation of Latvia. Because the German invasion interrupted deportations, many Latvians initially welcomed the Germans as liberators. The repressive germanization policies and the Holocaust soon made it clear that the Germans had no intention to liberate Latvia and resistance to the occupation grew.

1943: The Latvian Legion formed as part of the German armed forces to fight the Red Army. Many Latvians saw the legion as a first step toward regaining Latvian independence, seeing it as a force that would defeat the Soviet threat.

1943: Resistance to Nazi occupation increased. Latvian Central Council, an unofficial Latvian shadow government, was formed. In the fall of 1944, many activists were arrested and sent to the Stutthof concentration camp in Germany.

1945: The Soviet Union reoccupied Latvia at the end of the war, when Germany was defeated. Tens of thousands of men became guerilla fighters (*meža brāļi*: forest brothers). Resistance forces continued fighting into the 1950s.
Approximately 100,000 Latvians fled to Western Europe to escape the returning Soviets. After spending 4-6 years in Displaced Person's refugee camps in Germany, most emigrated to other countries - the United States, Canada, South America, Australia and others.
In Latvia the postwar period saw a great increase in the number of Russian-speaking immigrants to Latvia, including Soviet officials, military personnel and workers. Over a 10-year period (1945 to 1955), 535,000 workers were sent from the Soviet Union into Latvia.

March 25, 1949: Mass deportations to Siberia. People accused of being *kulaks* or so-called "wealthy farmers" were deported. In fact deportations targeted any person that the Soviet regime saw as a threat. Deportations continued throughout the 1940s and 50s and throughout the Soviet occupation.
Deportations considerably speeded up agricultural collectivization. Already by 1951 98% of all Latvian farms had been collectivized.

1953-1959: Period of "national communism," when Latvian Communist leaders led by Eduards Berklavs sought to institute reforms.

1953: The death of Stalin.

1956: Three years after Stalin's death, many deportees were permitted to return to Latvia from Siberia, but they were not allowed to return directly to their homes.

1960s and 1970s: Reforms halted; national expression suppressed.

1985: Mikhail Gorbachev appointed Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party. Subsequently he introduced *glasnost* and *perestroika*. In Latvia a movement of dissent appeared and gained momentum.

June 14, 1987: Latvians held a large demonstration at the Freedom Monument to mark the anniversary of the first mass deportations of the Soviet regime.

1988: Founding of independence and reform movements. The Latvian National Independence Movement and the Popular Front (*Tautas Fronte*) were formed to push for independence from the Soviet Union, while pro-Soviet forces formed the *Interfront*, which tried to squash the independence organizations.

August 23, 1989: On the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians linked hands all the way across the Baltic countries, forming the "Baltic Road," as an act of resistance to and defiance of the Soviet Union.

May 4, 1990: The Latvian Supreme Council declared the restoration of Latvian independence.

January 20, 1991: Bloody clashes in Riga with the Soviet special police, OMON. Several civilians, including reporters, were killed.

August 19–21, 1991: Attempted coup in Moscow.

August 21, 1991: Independent Republic of Latvia was reestablished.

August 24, 1991: Independence recognized by the Russian Federation.

September 1991: Latvia became a member of the United Nations.

July 6, 1993: Elections to *Saeima* were held.

1993–1994: Russian military forces were withdrawn from the three Baltic countries.

October 3, 1998: Parliamentary elections and citizenship referendum were held.

May 1, 2004: Latvia became a member of the European Union.