

# Against one's will: Soviet deportations

---

One of the main causes of population resettlement in the early years of Soviet power was the forced deportations that affected a large part of the population of the Baltic countries. We would like to ask you to look at the deportation processes through the eyes of young people. To provide insight into the course of deportations and the experiences of the deported people, we offer excerpts from the memories of Daina Gerke (*Daina Ģērķe*), diaries of Juris Bubinduss, drawings of Benita Eglite (*Benita Eglīte*), as well as photographs.

**Daina Gerke** (maiden name Smuldere (*Šmuldere*), 1929) was deported in June 1941 together with her parents, sister and younger brother. At the time, she was 12 years old. Daina saw her father for the last time in a railway station in Riga, but after a year and a half her mother died of starvation in front of her. In 1946, Daina, as an orphan, was sent back to Latvia together with her sister Inese, where they were raised by their relatives. In 1989, Daina wrote down her memories about the experience in exile, but when Latvia regained its independence, she returned to live in the house built by her parents in Riga.

**Juris Bubinduss** (1920) was deported on June 14, 1941 together with his parents. At the time of deportation Juris was a veterinary medicine student at the University of Latvia, but he could continue the studies only after he returned to Latvia in 1958. While in exile, Juris wrote a diary on the margins of "Iliad" he had taken with him.

**Benita Eglite** (maiden name Plezere, 1938) was deported on March 25, 1949 together with her family. At that time Benita (or Nita, as she was called in her childhood) was 11 years old, her sister was 12, while her brother – 13. Nita documented her experience on the road and in the exile by drawing on cards that she sent to her relatives in Latvia. The family was allowed to return to Latvia in 1956.

## Teaching ideas

Use the movie "**Deportations. Two nights, one crime**" to give the students the basic information on Soviet deportations. Use the whole movie (30 minutes) or separate parts (text of the movie is attached).

To study the experience of young people deported, divide the class in research groups. The Smulderi (*Šmulderi*) family is in the centre of attention of the offered materials, but other sources are used as an addition to and illustration of the story.

Ask each of the groups to study the sources, while searching for an answer to the following questions:

- When and how the deportation of families was carried out? What was experienced and felt by the authors of the historical sources?
- What was experienced by the deported people in exile? What difficulties did they have to face? What helped them overcome these difficulties?
- When and how did the deported people return? What was their life like after their return??



At the end of the topic ask each student to write a reflection on whether and how should the victims of deportation be commemorated. To spur on reflection, use a fragment of the interview with Benita Eglite in 1993:

*"The new generation distance themselves farther. They think that it is history and they do not realize how unfair it has been. They say that one has to start afresh, forget and live for the future. You could forget if not for the grievance..."*

## Context

World War II brought significant changes to the Baltic Sea region. After the war with Finland, in June 1940, the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic countries – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – and included them in the Union. The first phase of the occupation lasted for one year: from June 1940 to July 1941. It was stopped by the attack of Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union. The second period of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries continued from 1944/1945 to 1991.

During the occupation, the population of the Baltic States was affected by different kinds of political repression. Part of the population was deported to remote areas of the Soviet Union. More than 200,000 civilians of the Baltic States in total, or 10% of the population, were deported, most of them on an individual basis, but a part of them – in mass deportations

Deportation is a specific type of Soviet repression. It differed from other types of repression with its **administrative nature** (deportations were planned and carried out without the involvement of the judiciary) and its **large scale** (deportations were directed against a group as a whole rather than against particular individuals). Even formally, no one sought for proof of guilt – deportation was based on a person's occupation, social status, affiliation with certain political and social organizations, and deportation affected not only individuals, but their family members too. The political and economic elite of the occupied countries – well-known politicians, high-ranking civil servants, army and police officers, writers, academics, the wealthiest farmers, and businessmen – became the victims of deportations.

## The main deportations from the Baltic States

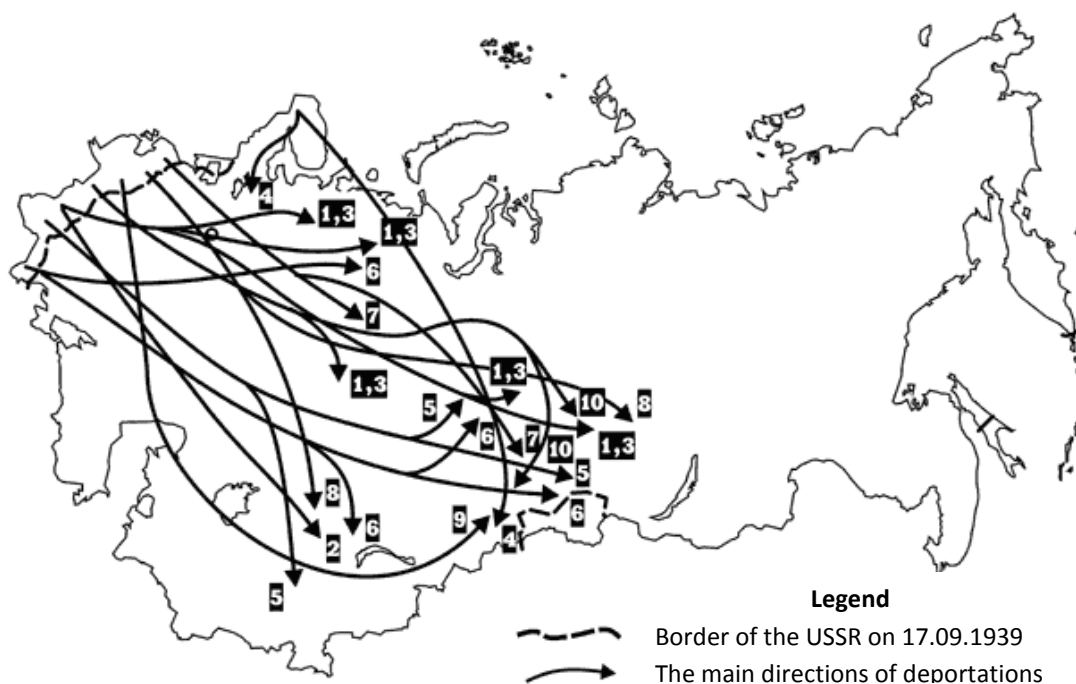
The first mass deportation from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania began on the night between June 13 and 14, 1941. It was a part of a larger deportation campaign. At that time, similar deportations took place in other areas annexed by the USSR in 1939-1940 as the result of the secret agreement of the Hitler-Stalin pact. People from Western Ukraine were deported on May 22, people from Moldova - on the night between June 12 and 13, but from Western Belarus - on the night between June 19 and 20. During this deportation, about 44,000 residents of the Baltic States were deported. The extensive deportation campaign was stopped by the Nazi invasion.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



**Map No. 1. Forced migration from the Soviet Union to annexed regions, 1940-1941**

From: Polian, Pavel M. *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*. Central European University Press, 2004, p.122.

- 1 – osadniks from Eastern Poland 10.02.1940
- 2 – people administratively deported from Eastern Poland 9.-13.1940
- 3 – forced settlers – refugees from Eastern Poland 29.06.1940
- 4 – foreign nationals from the Murmansk region 5.-10.07.1940
- 5 – forced settlers from Western Ukraine 22.05.1941
- 6 – forced settlers from Moldova, Izmil oblast and Chernivtsi oblast 12.-19.06.1941
- 7 – forced settlers from Estonia 14.06.1941
- 8 – forced settlers from Latvia 14.06.1941
- 9 – forced settlers from Lithuania 14.06.1941
- 10 – forced settlers from West Belarus 19.-20.06.1941

Turning against different groups of society in the occupied Baltic States resumed when the territories occupied by Germans were recovered, especially after the war. The residents of annexed territories resisted the Sovietization policy, some of them even through armed resistance. Soviet authorities used deportations of family members as one of the means of fighting against the members the resistance movement. Operation *Vesna* (Spring) – the deportation of supporters of Lithuanian partisans and family members of nationalists during which more than 49,000 families suffered – began on May 22, 1948. Operation *Priboi* (Coastal Surf) was implemented in the three Baltic States on March 25, 1949. During this operation, more than 94,000 people were deported to camps in remote areas of the USSR.

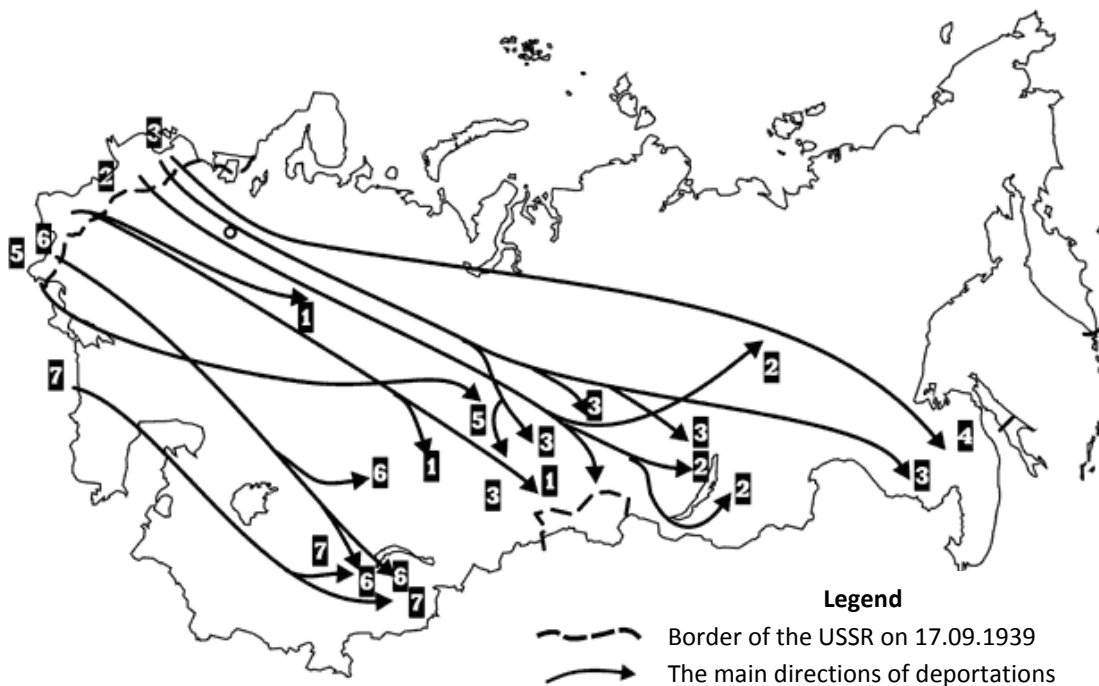
From 1940 to 1953, about 203.5 thousand residents of the Baltic States were deported.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



## Map No. 2. Forced migrations in 1947–1952

- 1 – members of the Ukrainian Nationalist organization from Western Ukraine 1947-1948
- 2 – residents of Lithuania 1948
- 3 – residents of the Baltic States 1949
- 4 – people deported from Pytalovsky District in Pskov Oblast (Abrene district from the former Republic of Latvia) 1949
- 5 – people deported from Izmail oblast 1948
- 6 – people deported from Moldova 1949
- 7 – people deported from the coastal areas of the Black Sea 1949

From: Polian, Pavel M. *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*. Central European University Press, 2004, p. 170.

## How were the deportations organized?

Deportations had been practised in the Soviet Union since the 1920s, but in the early years of Stalin's rule the combination of administrative deportation and forced labour was created and was used until his death. As from the 1940s, this practice was introduced also in the annexed Baltic States.

Administrative deportation was based not on the judgement of a court, but rather on decisions of other governmental authorities. In different cases, decisions were made by different authorities: the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Government of the Soviet Union, the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. Instructions for deportation were prepared centrally in Moscow, but implementation was the responsibility of local authorities. According to instructions, the lists of people to be deported were prepared by the employees of the city and county public security authorities, the heads of the local Communist Party organizations and executive committee chairmen.

## What did the deportees experience?

Usually the family to be deported was awakened at night and were ordered to get ready to go. People carrying out the deportations did not explain the reasons for the arrest, they did not show any documentary statement of charges and did not inform about what is going to happen next. Sometimes, however, they advised to take food and things necessary in cold weather.

Families to be deported were brought to a railway station, where freight cars were already waiting for them. Deportation echelons colloquially were referred to as "cattle wagons" as the people were brought to remote areas of the Soviet Union in freight cars with no windows that were used to transport cattle, rather than passenger cars. During the deportations of 1941, family members were separated in the railway station: men were separated from women and children, as if to prepare the settlement camps. In fact, men were sent to work in GULAG camps, but the women and children were subjected to forced settlement within the USSR. Many deported children never met their fathers after that.

Deported families had to stay in unsanitary conditions and reached the settlement camps after several weeks. The freight cars had no windows or heating. Double bunks were installed at each end of the freight car, but people had to relieve themselves in the corner of the car, in front of everybody. Freight cars were overcrowded: there was a lack of air, water, food and opportunities to move. Many people, especially infants and elderly people, fell ill and died on the way. People were morally destroyed, as they had not experienced anything like it.

Often the deportees were left in an open field or temporary barracks, where they had to survive the winter. Deportees had to work. Women and teenagers had to work as much as men, working in the forest or in agriculture or fishery. There was a lack of food and clothing, but people had to work in hard frost up to sixteen hours a day.

Once deportees reached the place of exile, they were included in the category of forced settlers. Forced settlement was for life. Deportees were denied the right to choose a place of residence, occupation and the way of earning one's livelihood – they had to live and work where the authorities ordered. Mostly it was work in agriculture, forestry and fishery. Passports were taken away from the adults and settlers' identity cards were issued to them that did not give the right to move, but obliged to register at the commandant's office on a regular basis. Upon reaching the age of 16-17, young people too had to register as deportees and immediately sign the agreement on forced settlement.

People could return from exile only after Stalin's death (1953). The first ones allowed to return home were minors, who had relatives left in Latvia. Later, starting from 1956, deported adults also were allowed to return but many did not have a place to return to. Their houses had been looted, their land and livestock had been given to the collective farm, and often other people were living in their homes. They did not receive any compensation for the losses. Sometimes people were just offered to purchase their own property. They had to start from scratch.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

## What is the life of the deportees like now?

Only after the collapse of the USSR did the former deportees get moral satisfaction. They could get a status of unduly politically repressed persons and recover their lost property, but most importantly – they were allowed to speak publicly about their experience. However, hundreds of families never returned home, as the whole family was destroyed. Also, many farms were ruined to such a degree that the heirs had neither the power nor resources to rebuild the recovered property.

Today, the deported and the deceased are commemorated by memorials, national remembrance days, as well as recollections of the deportees and museum collections.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007–2013

## The Smulderi family

---

*The Smulderi family – both parents and three out of four children – was deported on June 14, 1941 from Riga. The oldest son Modris was not deported as he was not home on the day of deportation – he was working in the countryside. All the other family members, including their 1 year-old son, were taken to a railway station and deported from Latvia. Both father and mother died in exile. All children met again only in 1950.*

---

### Excerpts from Modris Smulders' recollections

My father was a shipbuilding engineer – the only Latvian with such an education in the 1920s-30s. In the mid-1930s my father was the head of the biggest school in Latvia - Riga City Technical College and Crafts School -, but at the end of 1930s - the head of Riga City Traffic administration managing the tram, bus and boat traffic in the city.

My mother studied philology in the University of Latvia and worked as a teacher. She also used to write poems. After getting married, mother devoted herself entirely to the family and wrote only children's poems.

In June 1941, my father was 51 years old, mother was 40, I was 15, my sisters were almost 12 and 9, but my baby brother was 13 months old. At the beginning of the summer holidays, in June 8, my parents sent me to the countryside against my will, and it turned out later that it actually saved my life. I have been fortunate on several more occasions later. I am one of the few Latvian people of such age, who survived.

When on the morning of June 14 I got to know what had happened the previous night, I immediately went to Riga. At that time, I thought that it is a tragedy that I have been separated from my family and I hoped to find my loved ones. But there was nobody at home and the apartment door was locked. Distant relatives of my father lived in the second apartment of our house. They told me that my family has been taken away by a lorry a couple of hours ago under close guard. They also informed me that the property will be seized later and the liability for its inviolability was imposed on them. However, they let me in the apartment. I saw a huge mess there, the beds were turned upside-down, and I thought they were still warm. The relatives advised me to go back to the countryside, and I obeyed.

I took a tram to the bus station, and on the way I noticed that there is a huge crowd of people at Tornakalna freight yard. I got out of the tram, as I thought that my family is there, but no one was allowed to enter the station area. While the tram was driving over the pontoon bridge, I saw a train going over the railway bridge and people waving their scarves through the holes in freight car walls. Those were the farewell greetings from the deportees.

At the beginning of the war [the beginning of the German – Soviet war in June 22, 1941], while I was living in the countryside, I received a letter with the last message from my mother – a note, written on the June 15, that she had thrown off the train. Among other things she wrote the following: "We are going away to our vast motherland to work there. Stay at your aunt's and tend the cattle." She had a strong spirit and even at this tragic moment she had not lost peace and sense of humour. The note was found by a railwayman, who sent it before the war, noting his own address. The note was lost during the war, therefore I cannot tell the name of this courageous man.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013

When I met my sisters after the war, I got to know what had happened to our family. It turns out they had been taken to Skirotava freight station, not Tornakalns, and the train with locked freight cars set out only the next day. Father was separated from the rest of the family in the station under the pretext that men cannot ride in the same freight car as women. They realized that they had been lied to only after the war began, when the train with women and children arrived at the terminal in Novosibirsk and the men were not there. [..]

In July 1941, they arrived at the Malaya Muromka village[..]. At Malaya Muromka, they had to work in a kolkhoz [kolkhoz – a collective farm in the Soviet Union]. Since my mother was accustomed to manual work, she would not find it difficult, if not for the fact that they were starving. [..] Long before her death she had swollen from hunger, was not able to work, which made the family's situation even worse. She passed away on January 28, 1943. On the last evening of her life she was singing folk songs for a long time. The next morning my sisters saw that mother was in death throes.

There is no reliable information on my father's fate after June 14. My mother submitted an application and received an answer that he was in Solikamsk (in Northern Russia, on this side of the Urals) and had been sentenced to 10 years. In the 1960s, I received an answer to my question stating that my father had passed away in 1944.

After my mother's death, my sisters as orphans were sent to Sredny Vasyugan orphanage in 1943, but my little brother – for upbringing in a family. They did better there, although they still had to live in hunger, just as elsewhere at the time. The sisters were able to use the rights to education declared in Stalin's constitution, and, after a few years break, they continued studying. Although it was not easy for them and they often had to defend their rights with their fists, the life there could not be compared with the one in Malaya Muromka.

I received the first letters from my sisters in October 1994. They wrote to my aunt as they (as well as my mother) had thought that most likely I had been deported and probably died. In 1946, my sisters and my brother were allowed to return to Latvia. Such permissions were mostly given to children, whose parents had passed away. However, they had to have some relatives in Latvia, who would undertake to bring them up. Before starting their own independent lives in Latvia, my sisters and brother were brought up in the families of our relatives and close friends of our father.

## Excerpts from Daina Gerke's (maiden name Smuldere) recollections

### Taking into custody

In the morning of June 14, there was no bread in stores. Mum went to the store early, as always, but brought only milk. We did not know at the time that the transport and drivers had been mobilized for another task. There was a queue of people waiting for bread – it was unusual at the time. When the bread was delivered, I bought all kinds of bread together with Inese and we were scolded at home – what would we do with so much bread. It turned out that the bread was very useful.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



Mum was occupied with our 1 year old brother, when we heard the doorbell ring. Through the kitchen window I saw men with rifles and bayonets. Mum told us to call our dad and tell him to come home immediately (she told us to speak in Russian). They ordered us to collect our stuff. We were told to take with us only the things we could carry.

When mum translated that these armed men are going to take us away, I went into hysterics. The men were not young; they probably had their own children. They sat in a row on chairs and comforted me: „Не плачь, девочка.” (Don't cry, little girl.)

Mum took blankets off the beds and packed warm clothes and bed linens in them. She secretly took 12 kg of sugar that was prepared for the berry harvest season. She also took a bag of rusks (dried bread leftovers). Our little brother ate them all the long way.

At that time, it was forbidden to stock up food and one could be punished for disobeying this rule. Therefore, we did not take the smoked sausages and bacon that we had brought from the countryside, but it would have been very useful on our trip.

Then our father came. The men with guns were humane and allowed us to take the 6 bundles wrapped up in a blanket. Many people had taken with them only small suitcases. The unnecessary things could later be exchanged for food.

### **The beginning of the road**

When we were sitting on our bundles in the cargo box of a truck, I was looking at our house and I thought that I was probably looking at it for the last time and I screamed again terribly.

Our poor parents! Now, when I have children of my own, I can imagine how the parents felt looking at me. It was bad enough without me screaming.

When we were taken to the red freight cars with barred windows at Skirotava, a lot of faces could be seen behind the bars and I screamed again. I thought the freight car was overcrowded with people and they were all standing, head to head.

### **The separation of father**

The door was unlocked in the evening of the same day. The men were called and taken away. We were told that they would ride in our echelon, but in different cars. We saw our men for the last time. Mum managed to give father a loaf of bread and a quilted blanket. Other men left without a thing. I can only imagine what happened to my father. Of course, for men it was a lot harder than for us. Almost all of them died. Maybe later, when we had returned home, it was possible to find someone who made it through and returned. But it was dangerous to look for such people. And there was little hope these people would dare to speak openly.

### **On the road**

The road was long and difficult. I still remember the rumble of the wheels and the high-pitched locomotive whistles at the stations. We went ahead during the day, but at night we remained in the stations. On the way, we got to know that the war had begun. After the beginning of the war, the echelon was rarely parked



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

at night. The freight cars had to be emptied as soon as possible, so they quickly took us east. Behind the Urals, at the shore of a small lake, all the people were released from the echelon to wash. It turned out that we, the children, did not know how to run any more – our legs were atrophied due to the long periods of sitting.

In Novosibirsk, we left the freight cars and continued our trip by barge. Little by little (we were numbered by cars) the people were dropped off. We were taken further on. They dropped us off at Tevriz. After a few days we were taken to Malaya Muromka by raft. Local residents were the kulaks relocated in 1931. Very few of them had survived. They had been dropped off in taiga and left there. Over these 10 years, they had cultivated land and built houses.

### Work and food

We had just arrived and we immediately had to go to work on the collective farm – we prepared green forage, picked flax, dug out and sorted out potatoes, worked on threshing. I usually worked with my mother. Together, both of us could manage to fulfill 1.5 quotas. At the end of the year, when we were paid for our work, we got 2 kg of pea flour and small pieces of cattle cake in three portions.

In winter, mum weaved fishing nets, and I learned how to do it, but it also did not pay much. It was almost impossible to sell anything. We had not taken any dishes with us so we exchanged a wool blanket for an old enamel pot and a half litre mug. We boiled potato tops. We were happy when we got to exchange something for a bucket of potatoes. Then mum grated 3 potatoes a day, poured boiling water over them and told us to drink slowly. Sometimes we had a chance to buy dried potato peel (from boiled potatoes). They were leavened to bake flat cakes on the hot surface of a stove.

If we managed to get fish scales, we cooked galantine. When we managed to get fish bones, we dried and ground them to make flour. In summer, we boiled grass, pigweed, chickenweed, and nettle. Through her connection in the "рыбзавод" (fish processing facility), Mother sometimes got boiled fish guts from which the fish oil was skimmed. It was very bitter. We used fish brine instead of salt. Once I got fish bones after begging at door of some home. I had to take them home, dry and grind them. But they smelled so delicious that I ate them while walking home. I almost died the next day.

My little brother ate the same things as we did – there was nothing else to eat.

Starvation was our main enemy. Of course, there was no place during the war where it would be easy, but, if we had not left, it would not hit us so cruelly. Until spring, we, "the new contingent", were given bread. At the beginning, the adults received 500 g, while children received 300 g. Later the ration was reduced to 150 and 100 g.

I remember how I came down the wet clay mountain, it was dark and there were searchlight rays lit up in the sky, crossing somewhere above the top of my head. It was scary and hard to bring the small piece of bread home, as it was said that bread rations had once again been reduced. Hopelessness and despair was so burdensome, I was in great fear of the next day



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013

## Survival strategies

The locals treated us normally – they were not forthcoming, but neither were they malicious.

We were placed in circumstances where one could only survive by acting like Veronika did. She always had firewood as she always found a place where it was poorly secured and shared, meaning – stole it. She lured in the village dogs and her girls had a broth. Dog owners came to our house searching for the dogs, but they did not find anything.

She got to know that there was a skinned horse left in the kindergarten facilities that were closed during the winter. The horse had broken its leg, the animal was slaughtered and people had to wait for a document that would state what to do with the meat. We would not get it. Mum was still alive when Veronika asked me to go with her one night. She did not say where we would go and what we would do.

She took a saw, put it around her chest and buttoned up her quilted jacket. The villagers were asleep. The door of the kindergarten was not locked – who could carry away a horse. We entered the kindergarten and started sawing. Suddenly we heard the door opening with a creak. It made my heart drop. I was an honest person and I knew that stealing is a terrible shame. We froze, but everything was quiet. We were scared by the wind.

We cut off a piece and went home with a detour. At home the meat was immediately cut in two. She hid her part and told us to put ours under the bed, as no one would look for it at our place. The next time, she took Rita (from a family with 3 children) with her. I know that when the instructions as to what to do with the horse finally came and superiors went to the kindergarten, there was just a head and four legs. The evidence had been eaten.

Now I realize that Veronika took us – the children – with her for a purpose. Even if we were caught, we would not receive a hard punishment – she would have to answer for it. But she had a plan: she would go to jail, while her children would be sent to an orphanage. As hard as it would be there, at least they would get something to eat every day. And she knew that stealing would not make her so weak that she could not survive in the jail. Later Veronika was arrested together with Mrs. Karklina (*Kārklīņa*) and the children were brought to the orphanage we were staying at. Mrs. Karklina was too weak and she did not survive in jail..

## Mother's death

On January 27, mum said she felt better. It was still dark in the morning of January 28, 1943 when I woke up due to mum's death throes. We were sleeping in the same bunk. Milberga<sup>1</sup> (*Mīlberga*) made a fire in the stove and left. I screamed once again. Mum looked at me with her blue eyes, but she did not say a thing. I picked up my brother and put him on the stove next to Inese and Dagmara<sup>2</sup> (*Dagmāra*). The room was lit up by the stove. The little ones looked from upon the stove with terrified eyes. Inese was very weak; she did not

---

<sup>1</sup> Latvian deportee, who was settled in the same village.

<sup>2</sup> Inese – my 9 year old sister; Dagmara – orphan from another deported family.



want to take any unnecessary steps. Aivis was 2 years and 8 months old, but he did not speak nor walk. But it was a miracle he was still alive. I was 13 years and 6 months old.

My first reaction in any disaster is to scream. After screaming for a while I start to act. I accept the things that have happened as a fact and then I start thinking what to do. And then I act. I changed mum's clothes and dragged her to the hallway. There was a broad plank placed over two benches. I laid her down there and covered her. We had to wait until the grave was dug in the rock-hard frozen ground.

The grave was dug by the blacksmith of the collective farm, Snegerjov (*Sņegerjovs*) – a decent man, father of 5. He dug a deep grave with a niche. We put straw in there. Inese helped me put our frozen mother on a sledge and we pulled it to the graveyard. There were no coffins at the time. Snegerjovs put our mum in the niche, placed a plank in front of it and threw the clods of frozen soil back in the grave. After a few weeks I came back to the graveyard together with my sister as the mother of little Andis Gengeris (*Andris Ģenģeris*) was buried in our mum's grave. We wanted to see our mum for one more time.

45 years have passed since mum died. I always have to cry when I remember it. But I do not cry for us, I cry for her. Only when I became a mother myself, I fully realized how hard it was for her to pass away while being aware of leaving us alone in strangeness, in such hard conditions. Any help from peers was too much to ask for. And it was not because the people around us were bad.

We lived alone until spring. Once a week we got some food from the collective farm. I tried to sell something from what was left. We struggled as we could.

We, children, used to go in some houses, stand at the threshold and stay there. No one spoke to us, we did not speak either. The housekeeper knew she has to give us at least a potato – then we would thank her and leave. It was a small village and there were a lot of children like us, so there were not many houses to go to. Sometimes we entered a house, but there was already someone standing there. There were times when people put us out without giving anything, but I already told you that the locals were very poor.

### **In the orphanage**

Spring came and we (me with my sister and brother and Dagmara) were brought by boat to Sredny Vasyugan, to the orphanage. We were washed in a bath-house, our clothes were changed and we were placed in a group. Although we did not always receive food at the orphanage, at least one could not starve to death there. We fit in with the children collective well. At first, some of them did try to intimidate us, but we must have inherited self-esteem, and we were able to defend ourselves so later no one maltreated us. Girls were very afraid of the boys, who often threatened but usually did not act on it. We had teachers, who kept an eye on everyone so we would go to school. Our free time belonged to us, though. We could go wherever we wanted – to swim or to take a walk in the forest. We simply wandered, explored the vicinity. Everyone was present at meal time, there was no need for any clocks or bells.

Sadly, in the end of summer, 1943, our little brother was taken to a pre-school orphanage. But he was not accepted there due to the lack of space for more children. To avoid being busy with a child who did not know how to use the potty, could not eat himself, as he did not speak and did not walk yet (he was 3 years



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

and 2 months old), on the way back, they gave him to the Kargasok hospital. After that, we did not hear anything about our little brother until May 1946.

Late in the summer of 1944, when I heard that the front has reached the territory of Latvia, I wrote a short letter to my relatives in Bauska: we do not know anything about our father, mums is dead, brother is missing, I am in an orphanage with my sister. I put my letter in an envelope I made out of a pink copy book cover and I sewed it up. The letter reached Bauska together with the Red Army. It was the first time we received letters from Latvians back home.

### Road to Latvia and finding our brother

One evening in May 1946, our teacher informed me that there has been a request for a number of Latvian children and they are taking us home. It seemed unbelievable; it was hard to believe in such luck. We were beyond happy and our group buddies were glad about us. We do not know who we must thank for the fact that we were brought back home already in the summer of 1946. Latvian children were the first to be so lucky. Estonian and Romanian deportees were brought back home later.

As soon as there was no ice left in Vasyugan, we left with the first ship. There is a small town Kargasok, where the Vasyugan flows into the Ob. We had to wait there for the next ship for 3 days. It was the place where our little brother had been left. We got to know that our brother has been adopted by pope's widow and her foster-daughter. In the afternoon of the second day, we were able to find the house where our little brother was staying. He opened the door when we knocked at it. Our Aivitis had learned to walk and speak, but he did not recognize us. He had just turned 6.

When we explained who we are and why we have come, the widow denied the possibility that we could be the sisters of her foster-child. She told us he had been taken from surrounded Leningrad and his name is Vitaliy. As they say – within misfortune, good fortune hides. We were able to use Aivis' hernia surgery scar. Using the scar, we could prove that this child is our brother. We had to deal with the documents, but there was only one day left before the ship would leave. So we were forced to leave without our brother.

In May 1947, we received news from Riga that our brother is in Riga 2nd Orphanage. Children brought back home from Syberia were placed in quarantine in the 2nd Orphanage that was located on the corner of Kuldigas and Gregora Street. The orphanage was located across the street from our father's house. We used to look through the fence of our parents' warm nest at the children of the orphanage. There also came a timewhen we were the children of this orphanage, although only for 2 weeks when we were put in quarantine.

### After returning

We grew up both at our relatives and acquaintances. Now we have our own families, children and grandchildren. Even our little brother has a married son, whose wife is expecting a child. The memories about our parents, our childhood at Gregora Street are very dear. I often dream of our house and these dreams and memories are the only thing left from those times.

Our childhood before the war now seems so warm and sunny. I can still feel the smell of my childhood: the smell of melting snow, the smell of soil and grass, the smell of decaying leaves. I thought that tulips had the



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013

smell of childhood. In Paraugava, Gregora Street, we had a house on a hill and a beautiful garden that our parents had created on a dune of white sand. There were blossoming chestnut-trees at one end of the house and five birch-trees at the other. I remember the birch-trees wrapped in the morning fog and the rising sun behind them. At the time, I realized the beauty that was around us. I remember I watched the sun coming up and wanted to preserve the memory of this beauty for my whole life.

Long ago, blue anemones used to bloom under the lime-tree in our garden in the spring, while white anemones bloomed under a birch-tree. A swing was hanging from an oak tree. There was a bird graveyard next to a birch-tree. Neighbour kids came to play in the meadow.

I go there once a year and slowly walk past the house . When building this house, my parents were forced to give up everything. I think about the people that live in the house now. They have neither worked to build it nor put their hearts in it, but they live in a room where our mother gave birth to us. Even though there are no more flowers around this house, there are just sheds and fences, I still remember all the beauty. And if I still had time, I would like to plant some flowers, the same shrubs in the same places as they were back then.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



**Picture 1. Children of the Smulderi family in the house garden at the end of the 1930s.**

From the left side: Inese, Daina, Modris.

Daina Gerke: "Parents used to call us 'stairs'" –because the children were born 3 years apart."



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007–2013**



**Picture 2.** Smulderi family photo from 1933.

From the left side: Daina, mother Alma, Inese, Modris, father Voldemars (Voldermārs).



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**





**Picture 3. The Smulderi family in January 1940.**

From the left side: mother Alma, daughters Daina and Inese, son Modris, father Voldemars Aleksandrs. The youngest son Aivis had not been born yet. He was born later – on June 24, 1940.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007–2013



**Picture 4. The Smulderi children in 1950.**

The first family photo since deportation in 1941. Photo was taken in 1950, when the older brother returned from the army. From the left side: Inese, Aivis, Daina, Modris.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007–2013



**Picture 5. The garden in the yard of the Smulderi family house.**

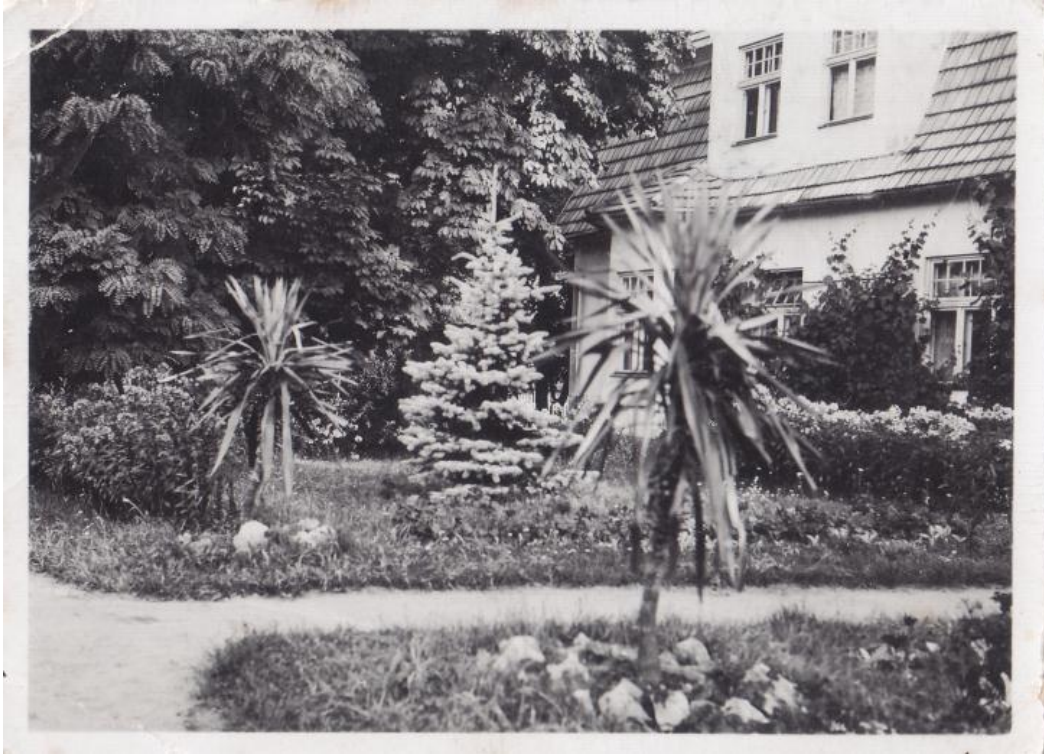
Photo taken by Voldemars Smulders. Birch-trees mentioned in the recollections of Daine Gerke can be seen on the left side of the photo. After returning home from exile, there were no birch-trees any more.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



**Picture 6. attēls. The garden in the yard of the Smulderi family house.**

Photo taken by Voldemars Smulders.

Daina Gerke: "The palm trees were grown by mum's sister. Before winter, we took the plants inside."



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 7. Stairs at the former Smulderi family house in 1992.**

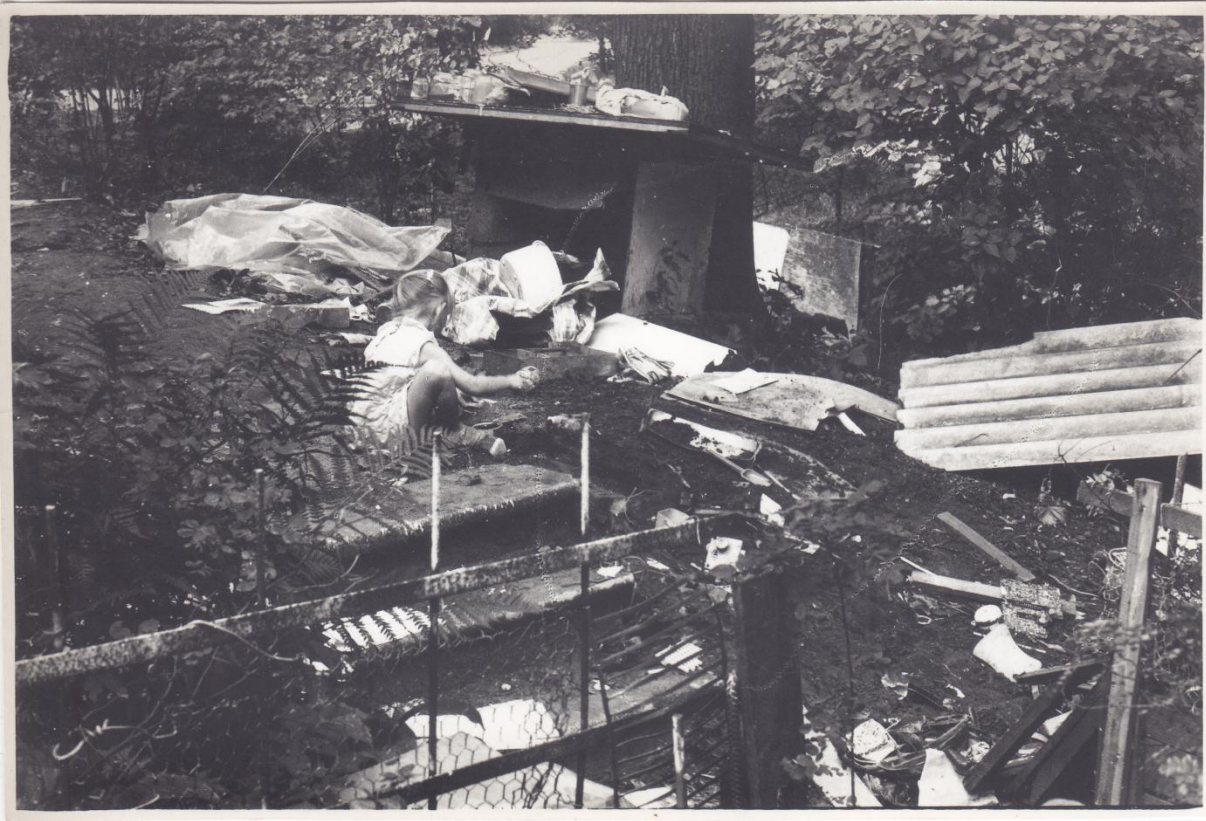
In 1991, Daina Gerke swapped in her apartment and returned to the house built by her parents. The house was not cared for during the Soviet times. Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 8. The garden at the former Smulderi family house in 1992.**

When returning to live in the house built by her parents in 1991, Daina Gerke began to restore the garden arranged by her parents. She had to put in a huge amount of work, as the garden was not cared for during the Soviet times. Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 9. The garden at the former Smulderi family house today.**

When returning to live in the house built by her parents in 1991, Daina Gerke restored the garden arranged by her parents. Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

## Excerpts from the diary of Juris Bubinduss

*Juris Bubinduss, a first-year student, was deported on June 14, 1941 together with his parents. While in exile, Juris wrote a diary on the margins of "Iliad" he had taken with him.*

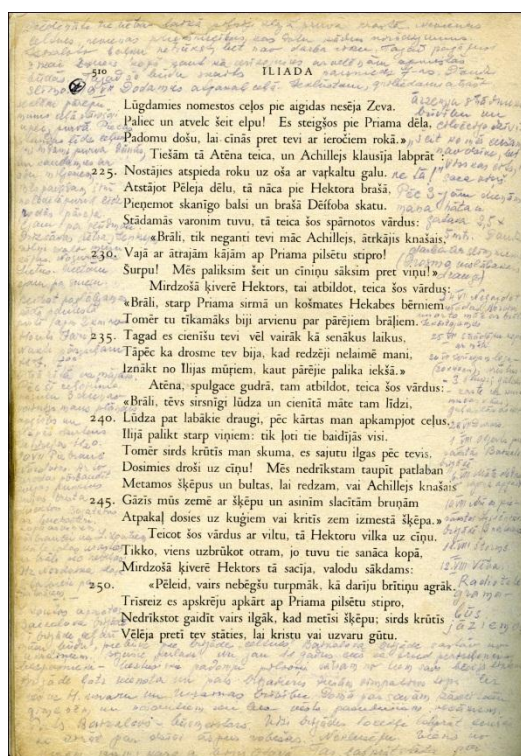
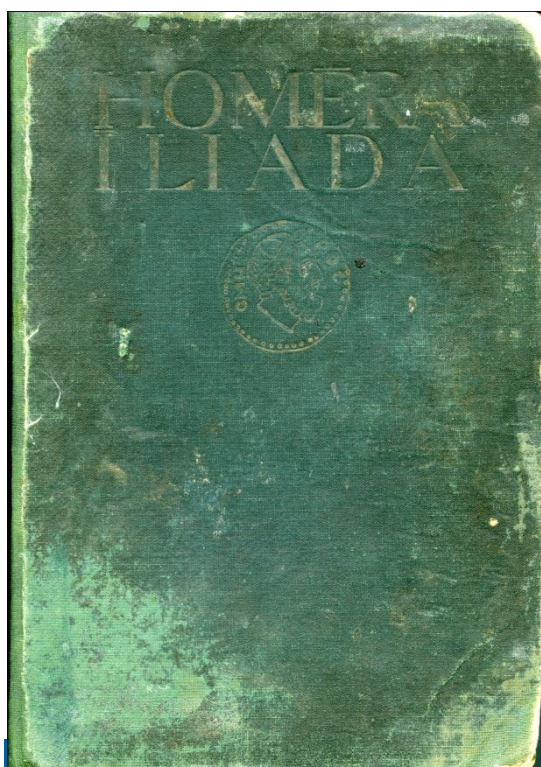
On the night of June 13-14, 1941, our apartment doorbell rang several times. Father asked who was there and got a reply that it was our street sweeper. That was the voice of our street sweeper.

"Wake up!" ordered the NKVD major, having thrown open the door to my room. There are several armed Red Army soldiers in the apartment. Everything in the apartment is being ransacked thoroughly, sorted out and then thrown on the floor. Mother's jewellery is also thrown on the floor.

Father has to sit on a chair in the hallway; an armed man is standing behind him. He calmly answers questions and signs a warrant for his and his family's arrest. We are ordered to get ready to leave the apartment in an hour, to leave Latvia, taking with us no more than 100 kg of necessary things per family. Mother is worried and tries to put something in a couple of suitcases.

I am wearing my new suit, I have a shirt and light sports clothes underneath it (there is a physical education test today at 9 o' clock in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine). I have a briefcase in my hand – there are the lecture notes in Zoology Part I and the recent gift from my father – Homer's "Iliad". I am writing a diary on the edges of the pages. I have a couple of cigarettes and my student's certificate.

I am sitting next to my father, who is sure that we are going to be shot to death. He asks me for cigarette although he has not smoked for a long time. Mother gets sick for a while, she is unconscious, becomes pale and stoops. Major says there is a possibility to postpone her removal, but mum says convincingly – never! I went to the kitchen to bring mum a cup of water, but the major pushed me back in the anteroom.



Picture 10. attēls. Homer's "Iliad" with the diary of Juris Bubinduss written in exile. The book was given to Juris by his father shortly before deportation, on June 14, 1941.



510 ILIADA parimēdži 4-ās. Daudz  
slimo. Dodamies atpakaļ atpakaļ. Seklūdam, gūlīdam, a tra-

510  
225  
230  
240  
245  
250

Lūgdamies nomestos ceļos pie aigidas nesēja Zeva.  
Paliec un atvelc šeit elpu! Es steigšos pie Priama dēla,  
Padomu došu, lai cīnās pret tevi ar ieročiem rokā.»  
Tiešām tā Atēna teica, un Achillejs klausīja labprāt.  
Nostājies atspieda roku uz oša ar varkaltu galu.  
Atstājot Pēleja dēlu, tā nāca pie Hektora brašā,  
Pieņemot skanīgo balsi un brašā Dēifoba skatu.  
Stādamās varonim tuvu, tā teica šos spārnotos vārdus:  
«Brāli, tik neganti tevi māc Achillejs, atrkājis kņašais,  
Vajā ar ātrajām kājām ap Priama pilsētu stipro!  
Šurpu! Mēs paliksim šeit un cīņiņu sāksim pret viņu!»  
Mirdzošā ķiverē Hektors, tai atbildot, teica šos vārdus:  
«Brāli, starp Priama sirmā un košmates Hekabes bērniem  
Tomēr tu tīkamāks bijī arvienu par pārējiem brāļiem.  
Tagad es cienīšu tevi vēl vairāk kā senākus laikus,  
Tāpēc ka drosme tev bija, kad redzēji nelaimē mani,  
Iznākt no Ilijas mūrēm, kaut pārējie palika iekšā.»  
Atēna, spulgace gudrā, tam atbildot, teica šos vārdus:  
«Brāli, tēvs sirsnīgi lūdza un cienītā māte tam līdzī,  
Lūdza pat labākie draugi, pēc kārtas man apkampjot ceļus,  
Ilijā palikt starp viņiem: tik ļoti tie baidījās visi.  
Tomēr sirds krūtīs man skuma, es sajutu ilgas pēc tevis.  
Dosimies droši uz cīņu! Mēs nedrīkstam taupīt patlaban  
Metamos šķēpus un bultas, lai redzam, vai Achillejs kņašais  
Gāzīs mūs zemē ar šķēpu un asinīm slacītām bruņām  
Atpakaļ dosies uz kuģiem vai kritīs zem izmestā šķēpa.»  
Teicot šos vārdus ar viltu, tā Hektoru vilka uz cīņu.  
Tikko, viens uzbrūkot otram, jo tuvu tie sanāca kopā,  
Mirdzošā ķiverē Hektors tā sacīja, valodu sākdam:  
«Pēleid, vairs nebēgšu turpmāk, kā darīju brītiņu agrāk.  
Trīsreiz es apskrēju apkārt ap Priama pilsētu stipro,  
Nedrīkstot gaidīt vairs ilgāk, kad metīsi šķēpu; sirds krūtīs  
Vēleja pretī tev stāties, lai kristu vai uzvaru gūtu.

Arzēnu sēdēnu  
brītiņu un  
cīņojošo dēvi.  
«Tā no mēs cīņām-  
nav ošāne, bet  
Vtas kas es, kas  
Pēc 3-jām dienām  
māra hātā  
gadāna 2,5 x  
5mt. Daudz  
darba ar slom, niemē  
(Orosme uolābānān  
draugi)  
24. VII. Negaidot  
nodas, Aburūn  
un ar to mātē ar brīti  
Tevātojamie  
25. VII. Sbrātoju kopē  
ar mātē  
26. VII. Sbrātoju kopē  
(20x40cm); mēs lūc-  
- 3 ošņi; galds  
- 3 ošņi; galds  
- 3 ošņi; galds  
mūcas vāc; un  
gūlīdam, a tra-  
28. VII. Druvis.  
1. VIII. Ošņi ju  
vāstās Baralov  
brītiņi  
2. VIII. Mātē ošņi  
- 3 ošņi; galds  
10. VIII. Mātē ošņi  
vāstās Baralov  
brītiņi (3 ošņi)  
11. VIII. Sbrātoju  
12. VIII. Vēta.  
Radio tele-  
gramā-  
lūs.  
jāziem!



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



**Picture 11. Bubindusi family in the 1920s.**

The book was given to Juris by his father shortly before deportation, on June 14, 1941.  
Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Bubindusi family in the 1920s.**

From the left side: mother Sofija, son Juris, father Andrejs.  
Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 13. Bubindusi family in the 1930s.**

From the left side: son Juris, mother Sofija, father Andrejs. Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 14. Bubindusi family in January 1941.**

In the foreground, from the left side: son Juris, mother Sofija, father Andrejs. Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**

## Benita Plezere's drawings

*Benita Eglite (maiden name Plezere) was deported on March 25, 1949 together with her family. At that time Benita (or Nita, as she was called in her childhood) was 11 years old. Nita documented her experience on the road and in exile by drawing on cards that she sent to her relatives in Latvia. The family was allowed to return to Latvia in 1956.*



**Picture 15. Detension.**

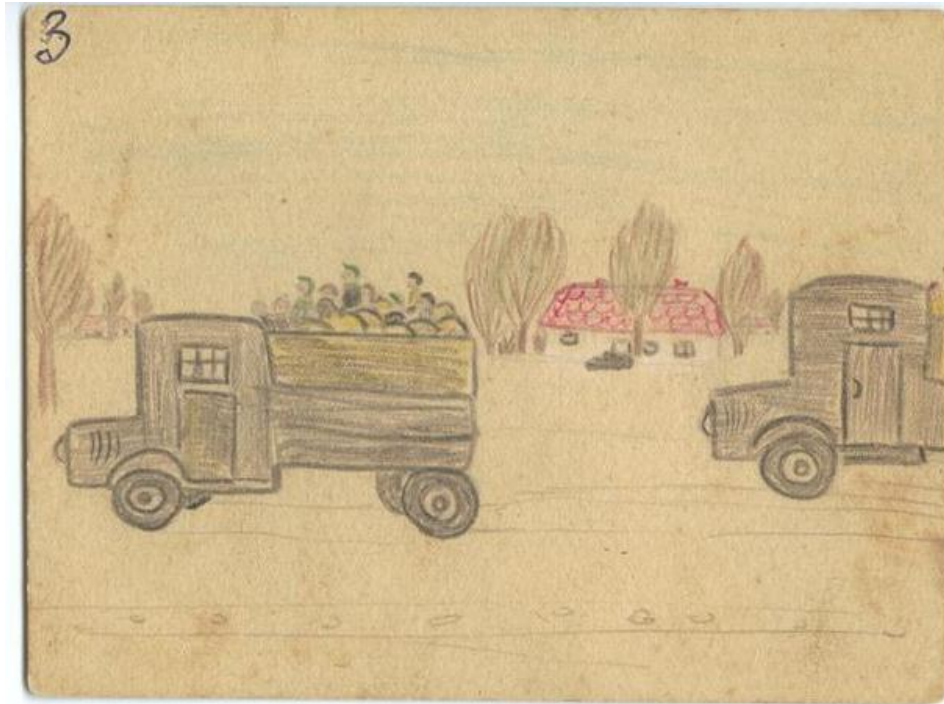
Benita Eglite: „It is an early morning. A car stops at Annenieki school where we live. Dad is going to the cattle-shed.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 16. On the way to the railway station.**

Benita Eglite: „We were taken to Biksti. There was a long train with a lot of cars and people were gathered from all across the parish – the elderly, young people, infants.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 17. Deportation.**

Benita Eglite: "At the beginning, they said they would not take us far – just to the border of Latvia. But when we passed Berzupe – the last stop in our native land, the train did not stop – it was station after station..."



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**





**Picture 18. Road to the place of settlement in the village of Odessa, 100 km from Omsk.**  
Benita Eglite: „It was just a plain, steppe only, no trees.“



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013



**Picture 19. Shelter of Plezeri family in the exile.**

Benita Eglite: „Our apartment above the cellar. Furniture – a little stove, shakedown made out of straw and a barrel where we put our food on. We can hear mice running through the straw. Romantic, isn't it?”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007–2013**



**Picture 20. Survival.**

Benita Eglite: „Children are gathering cow manure in the steppe to burn it in the stove.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 21. Work. Poultry farm.**

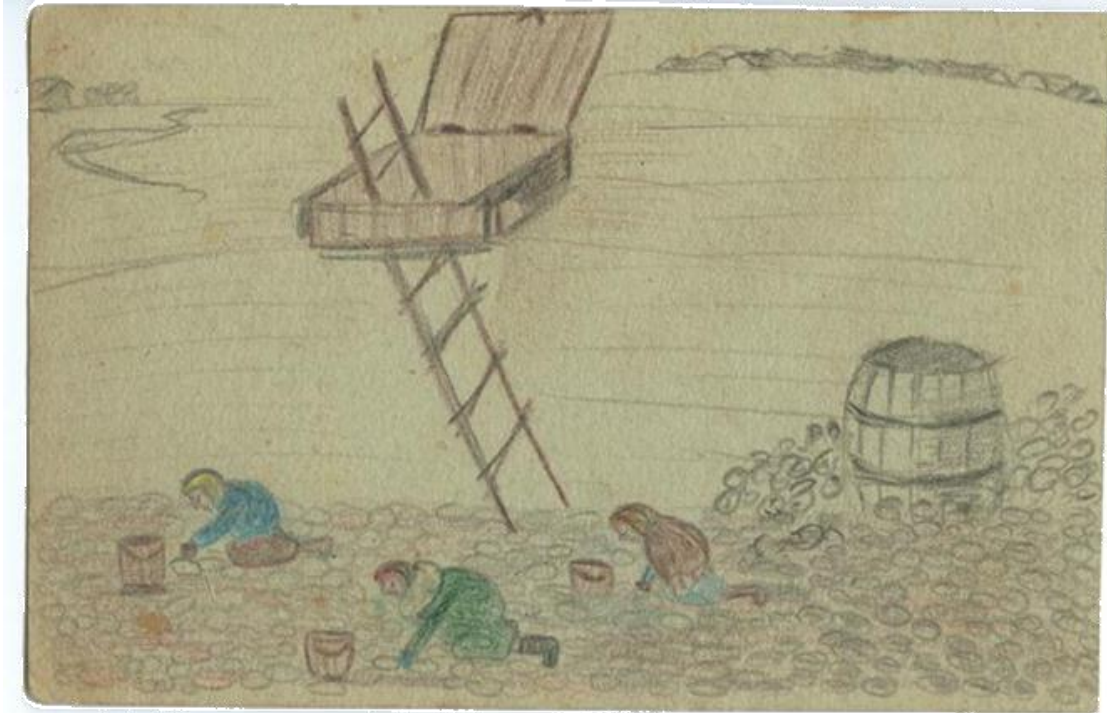
Benita Eglite: „Later they gave us a poultry farm to take care of. There was an eye disease spread in the farm and the collective farm sold the hens. But mother liked the hens a lot so she started to take care of and attend to them and expanded the farm. We helped her. She started breeding turkeys and geese. They usually don't survive there, but we knew how to tend to them and they survived.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 22. Sorting out potatoes.**

Benita Eglite: „At the beginning, mother was assigned to all the hard work. She had to sort out potatoes at the collective farm. The basements there were huge and deep. Half of the potatoes were rotten and thrown away. The other ones were planted.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 23. Living conditions.**

Benita Eglite: „This is our part of the house. There's a window right there. At night we put a piece of ice outside the window so the wind would not blow inside.”



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013









**Picture 26. Alma and Karlis Plezeri on their wedding day on December 26, 1932.**  
Photographer unknown.



EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND  
**INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE**



**CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013**



**Picture 27. The Plezeri family in exile, in the winter of 1949-1950.**

From the left side: son Dzintars (14), father Karlis, daughter Anna (13), mother Alma, daughter Benita (Nita, 12). Photographer unknown.



**Picture 28. Alma with her children next to the poultry house.**

Photographer unknown.



CENTRAL BALTIC  
INTERREG IV A  
PROGRAMME  
2007-2013