



# The Latvian Jewish Courier

## JSL's 2017 YIZKOR

Legally our society, Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc., has existed since 1984, when, on February 16, a group of former prisoners of the Riga ghetto filed a statement with the Secretary of State of New York; on May 8 of the same year JSL, Inc. was issued a Certificate of Incorporation. On December 4, 1985, a final document arrived from the Internal Revenue Service to Steven Springfield in Roslyn Heights—it stated that JSL was exempt from federal income tax and was to be recognized as a nonprofit organization. Former prisoners of the Riga ghetto, now settled in New York, had begun to assemble, remembering the war years, exchanging information about their brethren in other places, and sharing plans for the future beginning at the end of the 1940s; these early gatherings were organized by the founder of JSL, Max Kaufmann. In that decade that had seen the end of the war, the creators of the JSL gathered not less than once in a quarter. In the last few decades we, the second and third generation of survivors, gather once a year in the late fall, coinciding with the anniversary of the tragic events on November 30 and December 8, 1941—the massacre in Rumbula of more than 25,000 prisoners of the Riga ghetto. This year the memorial meeting was held on Sunday, November 12, in the same Park East Synagogue, where JSL has met annually for several decades.

The memorial meeting was opened by JSL Vice President Joseph Faerber. He proposed opening the meeting with the lighting of six commemorative candles in memory of the six million Jews killed during the years of the Holocaust. The candles were lit by Carmela O'Flaherty, Shulamit Rishik, Girsh Sorkin, Adam Springfield, Alexis

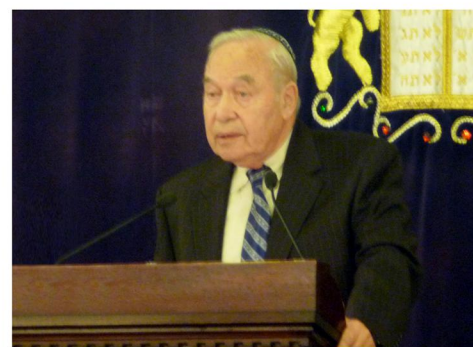
Springfield, and Nicole Springfield. A seventh candle, representing our solidarity with Israel and honoring the memory of our brothers and sisters who perished protecting the independence of the Jewish State, was lit by Semyon Gizunterman.



The seventh candle was lit by Semyon Gizunterman

Mr. Faerber informed those present that our acting president, David Silberman, could not attend the meeting since just a day earlier his wife Bella had passed away and requested to read the report on his behalf (see pages 3 and 4). Mr. Faerber expressed condolences to David from all members of JSL.

Invited as a guest speaker was Jacob Basner, former prisoner of the Riga ghetto, now professor of Yiddish at the California Institute of Jewish Culture and other institutions. Mr. Basner spoke about Jewish resistance against Nazi terror in Latvia; he also called upon us to always remember the Holocaust survivors of Latvia brutally murdered by the German Nazis and their Latvian collaborators 76 years ago. To remember is a cardinal principle of Judaism. The speaker listed several examples and names of his brethren, victims of the Holocaust in Latvia who did not go silently to their graves, but called out damnations to their killers, also proclaiming: "With our death you will not destroy the Jewish people." Most of Mr. Basner's speech was delivered in Yiddish, repeating several times as a refrain: "*Kein mol nisht wieder, kein mol nisht mehr.*"



Jacob Basner speaks

Mr. Faerber then spoke of the death of long-term JSL President Steven Springfield, letting the audience know that some of Steven's family members were present: his son Charles and grandchildren, three of whom lit candles. Charles Springfield delivered a speech about the life and great services of Steven Springfield, followed by addresses of George Schwab and Ivar Brod (see pages 5 to 7).



Steven Springfield's son, Charles, speaks

Mr. Faerber then invited the audience to stand as he read out the names of Latvian Jews, members of JSL, who had passed away during the past period: **Steven Springfield, Irene Faerber, Isaac (Jack) Ratz, Bella Silberman, Isaac Miriam, Mira Hertz, Lev Ringo, and Ada Bulgakov.** Cantor Shalom Kleinlerer sang the prayers "El Mole Rachamim" and "Kaddish." At the end of the official part of the program, the documentary *Operation Wedding* was shown, telling the hijacking case of 1970 in which several Riga Jews participated.

By Bronya Shif



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The officers and Board of Trustees of Jewish Survivors of Latvia are very thankful to those who attended our 2017 memorial meeting at the Park East Synagogue. Also, we want to thank everybody who paid membership dues as well as donations. We especially want to mention those generous members whose donations were higher than usual.

## HUNDREDS OF RIGA RESIDENTS GATHERED TO COMMEMORATE THE TRAGEDY IN RUMBULA



*Gathering in the Rumbula forest*

On Thursday, November 30, 2017, the largest mass murder in Latvia—the Rumbula tragedy—was commemorated. On November 30 and December 8 of 1941, more than 25,000 people were massacred. This year, in the middle of the day, several hundred visitors commemorated the Rumbula, first by a moment of silence, then by laying a blanket of flowers and lighting funeral candles at the base of the memorial monument. This is the spot to which the inhabitants of the Riga ghetto were herded from Ludzas Street to Rumbula forest 76 years ago to be shot. The area is currently located in the Moscow district.

“As for what happened then, we first and foremost need to be silent. After all, how can you talk about such events?” said Ilya Lensky, the historian, and director of the Jews in Latvia Museum. In the 1960s, this place was put together by a small group of Jewish activists; for several decades, the Soviet authorities considered holding commemorations undesirable.



*Margers Vestermanis speaks at the meeting in Rumbula*

In recent years, after the restoration of the state’s independence, more and more people have been gathering here. “Young people come here. This is our only hope and comfort—there are people, a whole generation, that

will remember,” says Margers Vestermanis, a survivor of the Riga ghetto who had left all his relatives here, in Rumbula. “This is my place. It’s just by accident that I survived. This is not heroism. I’m holding on here with the last of my strength, crawling on my haunches so I die among these remnants of people. After all, here lie all my people,” he says. Vestermanis has done a lot to prevent people forgetting about Rumbula. Vestermanis says that he is happy he has lived to see the day when, on the evening of this November 30, people of Riga, many of whom were Latvians—not just Jews—were assembled to place a memorial candle at the Freedom Monument in the center of Riga.



*Candles at the foot of the Freedom Monument*

Such commemorative candles at the Freedom Monument were made possible by the efforts of, among others, Lolita Thomsons, director of the Zhanis Lipke memorial museum. Ms. Thomsons said, “Only by honestly and openly discussing this crime can we hope to overcome the brutality of the soul, because only sympathy for the sufferings of others makes us human.” This was the second year the commemoration was held. Ms. Thomsons confesses: “We did not expect so many people to come. Such responsiveness amazes and pleases me. I was approached by old Latvian Jews who expressed grateful words for the fact that this has reached the heart of Latvia, the heart of Riga.”

*Based on the materials of Latvian newspapers, translated by Eva Minkin*



## DAVID SILBERMAN'S ADDRESS AT THE YIZKOR MEMORIAL SERVICE ON NOVEMBER 12, 2017



David Silberman

Dear Fellow Survivors,  
Members of The Jewish Survivors  
of Latvia in the U.S.A.,  
Cantor Shalom Kleinlerer,  
Mr. Jacob Basner,  
Honored Guests:

On behalf of the Board of The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.A, it is my privilege and honor to welcome you to our annual gathering to commemorate the tragedy of the Holocaust in Latvia, which began in 1941—76 years ago.

To begin, I want to let you know that we recently lost two of our dear friends and members of the Board, *Zichrono L'bracha*: Jack (Isaak) Ratz and Steven Springfield.

As we all know, Steven assumed the presidency of the organization after the death of Max Kaufman in 1984. Steven was taken ill in 2013, which forced the younger Board members to assume leadership tasks, and I was elected to be acting president.

Unique person that Steven was was illustrated by, of all people, President

Trump in his address at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's National Days of Remembrance on April 25, 2017. He said: "...We remember the light that shone through the darkness. We remember sisters and brothers who gave every thing to those they loved—survivors like Steven Springfield, who, in the long death march, carried his brother on his back. As he said, 'I just couldn't give in.'"

I am pleased to report that we, in the recent past, have witnessed positive trends on the part of the Latvian government and people regarding the bitter past of the Holocaust in Latvia.

For example, at the latest annual Holocaust Remembrance Day on July 4, 2017—held as usual at Riga's burnt Gogol Street synagogue, senior Latvian officials participated, including Prime Minister Maris Kuchinskis, Speaker of the Saeima Inara Murniece, Minister of Defense Raymonds Bergmanis, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkevichs, among others. Professor George Schwab represented the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States.

I am also pleased to report that Latvia's President Raimonds Vejonis has reiterated that some Latvians did participate in the Nazi extermination machine, which destroyed not only Latvian Jews but also Jews brought in from occupied Europe.

Speaking of Holocaust Remembrance Day, memorial services were also held in Daugavpils, Jekabpils, Rezekne, Kraslava, Ludza, Sabile, Liepaja, and Preili.

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the Preili memorial service. My remarks to my landsmen were read at the service along with remarks by other well-known personalities. Those at the well-organized and well-attended event at the Preili memorial service included guests from abroad, including the United States.

The Memorial service at Preili was concluded at the Culture Hall. It featured Jewish religious songs performed by the vocal ensemble Mazel Tov from Daugavpils, under the direction of Girsh Kagans. This was followed by Klezmer music performed by Rezekne's Klezmers and by a duet from Odessa under direction of Vitalijs Tchachis. The events at Culture Hall were organized by Josif Rochko, Chief of Daugavpils Jews in Latgale Museum.

What transpired in Preili was symbolic of the revival of Jewish life in Latvia's provinces.

I am also pleased to report that Dr. Ivar Brod, our Board Member, Secretary, and Editor of *The Latvian Jewish Courier* delivered a paper at the 10th International Conference on Jews in a Changing World, which was held in Riga in April 2017. His presentation was titled Outstanding Latvian Jews in the United States: Several Half-Forgotten Biographies.

I can also report positive news about our national hero, Zhanis Lipke, who rescued more than 50 Jews during Nazi occupation. We cooperate with the Zhanis Lipke Museum in

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## DAVID SILBERMAN'S ADDRESS AT THE YIZKOR MEMORIAL SERVICE (CONTINUED)

Riga. The museum is now preparing a comprehensive study of the life and deeds of this unique Latvian.

A movie devoted to the exploits of Zhanis Lipke, titled *Boy with a Dog*, is now being filmed under the directorship of Simon Davis.

On the negative side, there is no major progress to report on the Latvian government's attitude on returning Jewish communal properties first confiscated by the Soviets and then by the Nazis. Of the hundreds of such communal properties, only five have been returned. This, despite the fact that Latvia is a signatory to the 2009 Terezin Declaration, which stipulates, among related issues, the return of such properties to lawful owners.

Professor George Schwab has also taken up this matter at the State Department and with U.S. ambassadors to Latvia.

Close to home, I am pleased to report that since our last Memorial meeting in November 2016, we have published three issues of *The Latvian Jewish Courier*, which can also be accessed on the Internet. You will surely agree with me that it makes for interesting reading: news from Latvia; short biographies of past and present prominent Jews in Latvia and elsewhere; Jewish intellectual resources, such as the Eleonora Schwab Library, which contains more than 14,000 publications that deal with Jewish and Holocaust history, and much more.

For the excellence of the *Courier* I wish to thank Dr. Ivar Brod and Yefim Shteynfeld, and also the *Courier's*

designer Maksim Gershman and our new author Semyon Gizunterman.

Further, The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.A. has continued to promote Max Kaufmann's *Churban Lettland*. Under the direction of Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, a second English edition with additional annotations and comments by Dr. Smirin is to be published by Shamir publications in Riga.

I also call your attention to Meyer Meller's illuminating study titled *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember*; with our support a third Latvian edition of the very well-known *I Survived Rumbula* by Frida Michelson is to be published. It has a foreword by Latvia's President Raymonds Vejonis in which he admits the complicity of some Latvians in the Holocaust. The book will be distributed to all schools and libraries in Latvia.

The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.A. also cooperates with sister immigrant organizations from Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and with the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel. We also cooperate with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, which recently filmed, in Latvia, a documentary featuring Professor Schwab. It is to be released next year.

Speaking of films, we are cooperating with Mitchell Lieber's filming of the documentary titled *Rumbula's Echo*, in which Professor Schwab is also featured as well as the Yad Vashem-initiated Boris Maftsir film titled *Unknown Holocaust*.

In the recent past we also participated in commemorating the tragic

Babi Yar massacre of Kiev Jews, which was held at the Holocaust Memorial Park in Brooklyn. It is also the site of the Memorial Stone placed in memory of the Latvian and foreign Jews killed in Latvia.

In conclusion, I would like to express my profound gratitude to Joseph Faerber for his active participation in organizing and conducting our Memorial Meetings and to Aelita Fitingof for making our annual gatherings unforgettable. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to our Board members Gerta Feigin, Dr. Ivar Brod, and Professor George Schwab for their tireless efforts to keep the organization booming and to help attract the younger generation to leadership positions.

Thank you for attending. It is our duty to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and to pass this tradition to the next generation.

I wish you all many years of good health, productive lives, and happiness.

**David Silberman**

\* \* \*

It is with deep sorrow that the Board of JSL informs members that David Silberman's wife Bella passed away on 11/11/2017. We all knew her and will miss her. Our deepest condolences to David and his family.

**Announcement:** People interested in studying Yiddish or having conversations in Yiddish, please call us at (212) 496-2295 or email [ivarbronya@hotmail.com](mailto:ivarbronya@hotmail.com).



## STEVEN SPRINGFIELD

JANUARY 30, 1923 - OCTOBER 2, 2017

*Charles Springfield's speech at the memorial meeting*



Latvia, his life was full and happy. A family business, a large family, love of music, lead singer of his brother's boy band "Peter and his Boys," good schools, and a full Jewish life, including praying at the Great Choral synagogue. All that ended with the invasion of 1940 of the Russians, with the loss of all private property, the business taken by the state and suppression of all religious activities. Unfortunately, worse was yet to come!

In 1941, the Germans invaded and the objective was clear: to destroy through genocide the existence of Jews in Europe. Their actions in Latvia resulted in the highest percentage of Jewish population in all of Europe, 98% of all Latvian Jews, murdered! What followed was five years of hell on earth, the loss of all family but his brother Peter, the Riga ghetto, Kaiserwald concentration camp, Stutthof concentration camp, and, finally, the death marches through eastern Pomerania. During the final days, he carried his brother Peter for 20 miles. That story was highlighted by President Trump in his speech this year at the congressional and Holocaust Museum remembrance, as "a small light that can brighten even the darkest room."

Dear Friends and Family,

I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you again today, amongst so many friends and family to say a few words about my Dad, your dear friend, Steven Springfield. I believe the work he did with JSL was his life's work and, other than his family, his legacy. When he passed, as all sons, I thought back about what words I could share about him. That made me think about some of the words he used when talking with me about life issues.

"Who you are is what you do when no one's looking." "Your actions speak so loud I can't hear you talking." "Put your money where our mouth is." As my mind wandered it occurred to me, and I came to realize, that his life was like the Vivaldi Concerto—"The Four Seasons"—as Steven also had four seasons to his life journey: pre-war Riga and Latvia, the war and the Holocaust, restarting a family in the U.S., and, finally, returning to Latvia in 1989 and his work on behalf of JSL and the Jewish community and the survivors. In a sense, he closed his circle and completed his seasons. In pre-war

Upon liberation he and his brother went to Berlin, rather than back to Riga, taking jobs with the Russian army as translators. Unfortunately, the Russians arrested him and he spent six months in prison. "How could two Jewish brothers survive, they must have collaborated with the Germans." After finally being released, they decided to move to the United States. Life in the U.S. was filled with family and work.



*Steven Springfield in the 1990s*

He and his brother opened some retail textile stores, Springfield Curtains and Linens, our family spending summers in Bal Harbour, Long Beach, and Sunday family activities like trips to Bear Mountain or Yankee Stadium to watch our Yankees! My idea of camp in those days was 8 weeks in the Catskills, which dad and mom stretched to make possible. While never owning a home, we lived a happy life. My only dark memory being during one of the Arab-Israeli conflicts, my uncle coming in screaming, "They are trying to kill us

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*Steven and his brother Peter, who were both mentioned by President Trump in his speech on Capitol Hill in Washington, on Tuesday, April 25, 2017, during the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's National Days of Remembrance ceremony.*



## STEVEN SPRINGFIELD (CONTINUED)

again!" Steven later married Muriel Springfield, who served as First Lady with grace and, of course, style. Dad worked in Jackson Heights where Max Kaufmann also lived. A frequent visitor, he constantly emphasized the importance of remembering and documenting the tragedy of Latvia—at that time, behind the Iron Curtain. In 1985, JSL was incorporated as a charitable organization, with like-minded survivors, including Leo Kram, Jack Ratz, Professor George Schwab, Professor Gertrude Schneider, Peter Springfield, as well as Joseph Faerber, Esq. (Vice President and leader of the second generation), amongst many others. (Please excuse me if I have left off others.) In 1989, when Gorbachev gave limited autonomy to the Baltic States, Steven and Peter traveled to Riga, connecting with distant family members, looking at the present conditions of their previous home, and conditions of the Jewish community and the survivors. During that trip, a gentleman stopped Steven on the street, "Isidor, don't you recognize me?" It was his best friend from teen years, Sasha Bergman, who had returned to Riga from Germany after the war. During that time he as well others had started Jewish Survivors of Latvia—in Latvia! That led to constant contact, coordination, and a rekindling of a dear friendship. The story was ultimately told in a documentary film, *Die Presidenten*, by German documentary filmmakers Heike and Volker Glaser. It premiered at the Riga Operahouse with many JSL members and Latvian political dignitaries in attendance. (An electronic version of the film is available.) In 1991, dad asked my brother Stewart

and me to join him and Peter on a return trip. During that trip, each of us carried 9,900 dollars in a money belt under our clothes to help family and provide dollars for future projects within Latvia. My brother and I were stunned by several realities. Riga looked like infrastructure improvements and repair from after the war had been ignored. Broken roads, bullet-riddled buildings, the Jewish Community Center in poor condition, monuments to the Holocaust completely ignored, no memorials at the Choral Synagogue site, all the public displays spoke of victims of fascism, no mention of the Holocaust or Jewish genocide. Absolutely no memorial at Rumbula or Bikerniecki mass murder sites, Latvian history books in the school with no mention of the events that happened with Latvian complicity. Holocaust survivors with no pension while the soldiers and complicit criminals did. By 1993, with like-minded groups around the world, the First World Wide Gathering of Latvian Jews and Holocaust Survivors occurred. Latvian Jews and their families arrived from Israel, South America, Australia, Canada, and South Africa, amongst others. At the scene of the Choral Synagogue, "Wall of Tears" inaugural, Steven gave his "I Remember" speech outlining all the above-listed unacceptable states of affairs for Jews in Latvia, the historical record, the lack of German support for adequate memorials at the killing fields. (Speech is available as a video clip for any interested.)

Subsequent to that World Wide Gathering, much has been accomplished by the world and local Jewish communities. These accomplishments occurred in four main areas: Humanitarian, Cultural, Educational, and Political. Some of these include: memorials at both Rumbula and Bikernieki, return of the Jewish Community Center with increased funding and support, return and support of Jewish hospital Bikur Cholim with great help from the Jewish community of St. Louis, a feeding

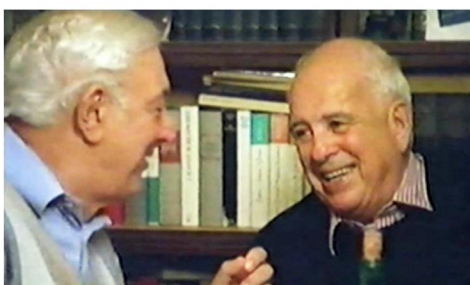


*Steven gives his "I Remember" speech at the Choral Synagogue site in Riga during the first reunion in June 1993*

program for survivors through the community center to provide meals for impoverished survivors. One of dad's favorite awards was a hand-written proclamation thanking him and signed by each member of the community who benefitted from the feeding program. A senior program for survivors for two weeks vacation at the beach per year in the summer. He said, "It's always good to have something to look forward to."

He supported and helped arrange for the young Jewish *Kinnor* Choir to travel to the United States for 15 concerts in Jewish communities around the country. He felt that it was an opportunity for the young Latvians to see America and to increase awareness in the United States of the difficulties in Latvia, discussed throughout the U.S. Jewish community. He worked with the U.S. and Latvian governments to assure compliance with American standards of Holocaust remembrance for countries wanting to join world economic programs at the EU, World Bank, etc. He wanted to encourage the Latvian government to respond and be proactive in addressing all these issues. The collaboration with President of Latvia Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Professor George Schwab, and the American ambassadors representing the U.S. government proved effective in accomplishing the organization's goals. President Freiberga and Dad became dear friends, my father thinking of her with great admiration for her intellect, moral compass, and depth of honesty. My brother Stewart, Joe Faerber, and I

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*Steven Springfield with his old friend, Sasha Bergman*



## STEVEN SPRINGFIELD (CONTINUED)

developed friendships with her son Karlis, enjoying a few beers in a few local pubs. The desire was to have the Latvian history books reflect the true facts of Latvia during World War II. Both Dad and Professor Schwab served on that historical commission and for that and all of their works, both received the Three Star Medal from the Latvian Government.



*The meeting during the reunion of 1993 in Riga. L to R: Peter Springfield, Alfred Lipke (son of Zhanis Lipke) from Australia, Steven Springfield, George Schwab, Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Per Almark, Grigory Krupnikov*

The publication of a trilogy of books of short stories by Latvian Holocaust survivors, edited by Professor Gertrude Schneider, served to fill in some of that information. The books served as a written Shoah of Latvian Jews during the Holocaust. This trilogy had *Journey into Terror*, *The Unfinished Road*, and *Muted Voices*. In Steven's story, "A Life Saved by a Beating," he closed with the following statement: "I dedicate this story to my sons Stewart and Charles, since I feel a strong need to leave them a legacy of a family they never knew and a life they never experienced. Sons, always remember that your birth gave meaning to your parents' survival and constituted a victory over those who sought to destroy our people. Never cease reminding the world what was done to us... never forget that the greatest crime of all is indifference to the suffering of others. I love you both very much and always will." Much more can be said, much more left to be done. JSL and his return to Latvia and his works became the driving force in his life and, when his health no longer allowed him to travel, he continued his love of the organization and all concerned. His life was filled with love and

respect for all of the survivors and resetting the "state on the Ground" for Latvian Jewry. Dad, I love you, we all loved and respected you, we will miss you, I will always remember the lessons you taught me, and will always try to make you proud. Rest in peace Pops, you earned it.

*Charles L. Springfield*

### From the address of Professor George Schwab:

I commemorate Steve—*Zichrono L'Bracha*—by celebrating his life. Introduced by Max Kaufmann—*Zichrono L'Bracha*—I truly began to know Steve after he became a founder and head of The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.A. A natural-born leader with an endearing personality, he stirred and enjoined us all—when addressing us in his deep, warm, and booming voice—to never forget those we had loved and lost and to help our brethren in need in the USA, Latvia, and elsewhere.



*Steven Springfield and Arkady Sukharenko with colleagues from JSL's Board: Jack Ratz, Liuba Rakhman, George Schwab, Gerta Feigin*

There was yet another side to Steve. He loved life, good food, and music. Following tasty Russian meals at hotel *De Rome* in Riga, I cannot forget the walks we took with Steve, Muriel, and Sheila humming and singing American songs, or, for that matter, Steve singing some of my favorite Russian songs as we strolled past the Freedom monument and watched the changing of the guards.

Yes. Steve, you were a man with a unique personality—one that can never be forgotten. Please, Steve, rest in peace.

### From the address of Ivar Brod:

Among the many, many things that Steven Springfield did for the Latvian Jews, there is one incredibly special that is memorable to a number of people who are sitting in this hall now. There are ten times more people who remember it with love and gratitude in different countries. I am referring to the year 1989 when Steven visited Riga for the first time after the war. There, in Riga, he saw and heard the Jewish youth ensemble *Kinnor*. Since he was so happy to attend the concert by this unique group, he decided and did everything possible to bring *Kinnor* to America and did it in Autumn 1990, bringing almost 30 teenage girls and boys to the U.S.



*Steven Springfield and Michael Leinwand, artistic director, with members of the ensemble Kinnor during performances in America in October 1990*

He organized 15 *Kinnor* concerts in different cities in America from New York to New Orleans. By the way, one of concerts was here, in Park East synagogue. Not only had he brought joy to both the Latvian and non-Latvian Jews here in America, but he also brought happiness and unforgettable memories to those children and their parents that would last their whole lives. When they occasionally meet, these now no longer children always remember Steve's attention and his speeches before every concert. They have requested me, as one of the participants of that trip, to remember Steve's kindness and wonderful memory today, when we are saying good-bye to him. Dear Steve, we will always fondly remember you.



## RESTITUTION OF THE JEWISH PROPERTIES: THE CURRENT SITUATION



**Dmitry Krupnikov, Chairman of the  
Latvian Jewish Society's Restitution Fund**

From the more than 270 properties seized during the war, only five have been returned to the Jewish society. We consider these five to be just a first step in a lengthy process of restitution of properties that belonged to Jews or to Jewish organizations before WWII. Two former synagogues were returned in Kandava and in Jurmala, and one former hospital and two schools were returned in Riga. All properties are in bad condition and require significant repairs. For example, the hospital on Ludzas street has not been used for at least 20 years; all radiators have been stolen.

Regarding the rumor that we've exchanged one of the returned buildings for another: Untrue. We have neither exchanged anything nor given anything to anyone.

Our Restitution Fund was created by the Council of Jewish communities of Latvia; per Latvian law, the Fund cannot earn any profit. The three-person Fund Board works without compensation. The Fund Council has representatives from the United States, Israel, and the EU. There is a seat for a representative from the Latvian government as well. At the end of this year, we plan to begin to distribute part of the accumulated resources. Although the amount will almost certainly be small, it represents a first step. We plan to publish information on how to apply.

At least 270 properties have yet to be returned to Latvian Jews. Stolen by the Soviets in 1940, these proper-

ties were not returned when Latvia regained independence. Latvia wrote its laws in such a way that precluded the return of such seized properties. That prohibited us from getting back all properties that belonged to Jewish communities before June 17, 1940.

At one time, an agreement had been reached between the government and the Jewish community about payment for unreturned properties. We don't use term "compensation" because it implies guilt. However, at the time of the Holocaust, Latvia as a state did not exist. After regaining independence, those properties were given to some other people/organizations who used and continue to use them. This is unjust. It is imperative to either return those properties to us or to award monetary equivalent. Some politicians believe that five returned properties are enough. They are just a beginning. Other religious groups have had their property returned. The same should be done for us. Let us look to Lithuania, which repaid Jewish organizations gradually over ten years.

And where, should we receive restitution, might this money be spent? Exclusively in Latvia.

There are many Jewish communities and organizations in Latvia and not every one of them think the way we do.

One of those organizations is Shamir. Its head, Mr. Barkan, is against receiving money for properties because he believes that money cannot compensate for blood spilled. That statement is correct but does not apply to our current situation because Latvia did not exist as an independent country during the Holocaust and thus cannot be held responsible for those horrors. As for the opinion that Latvians as a whole participated in Holocaust, we emphatically deny such Soviet point

of view that there is a collective responsibility for the crimes committed. We believe that every participant is responsible for his personal actions.

Historically, anti-Semitism wasn't widespread in Latvia. Other countries had pogroms, Latvia had none. Jews fought in the war for Latvia's independence.

As for restitution, we'd like to put the entire issue to rest. We see the issue as an unfortunate consequence of two occupations. One authority took away, the other exterminated almost an entire nation. We want to discuss, reach an agreement, put a final "dot," and turn the page—looking to the future. We live in a very complex world. Some are trying to pit us against each other. What we want is to have all of us pull together—at least here in Latvia. As long the question of return of these properties remains unresolved, we cannot move forward.

**By Dmitry Krupnikov  
Chairman of the Latvian Jewish  
Society's Restitution Fund**

*This article is based on the author's  
interview in the Latvian newspaper  
NRA on September 27, 2017*

### **Editor's Note:**

*We, Latvian Jews residing in the USA, fully support the position of the leadership of the Jewish community of Latvia, which is that the return of 5 out of 270 properties that belonged to Jewish communities before the Holocaust should be considered just the initial step of the restitution process, which must be continued.*

*However, there are clear signs that current Latvian authorities have no plans to act accordingly. At a meeting with American Jewish leaders in New York this September, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Mr. Edgars Rinkevichs has indicated that the current Saeima will not discuss this issue further.*

*Material prepared by Yefim Shteynfeld*



# NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



*The President's congratulatory letter*

On September 20, the President of Latvia sent Rosh Hashanah greetings to the Jewish Community of Latvia. The letter reads:

Dear members of the Jewish Community of Latvia! I congratulate you on Rosh Hashanah! Let the year 5778 be generous, full of prosperity, and bring fulfillment of hopes—peace, mutual respect, and tolerance among all people in the world! *Shanah Tovah u'metuka!*

With sincere respect,  
*Raymond Vejonis*



*Chairman of Knesset Y. Edelstein and Saeima speaker I. Murniece speak in Rumbula*

On September 11, the Chairman of Knesset Yuly Edelstein was in Riga in connection with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Latvia. During the visit, he met with the President of Latvia Raymond Vejonis, Prime Minister Maris Kuchinskis, Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevichs, and Speaker of the Saeima Inara Murniece. Mr. Edelstein thanked the leaders of Latvia for the firm pro-Israel position that Latvia holds in international affairs. The Chairman of the Knesset together with the Speaker of the Saeima visited the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Rumbula. In his speech, Mr. Edelstein said: "Jews will never again be victims in a foreign country, they will never again stand in line waiting for execution. We will never allow this to happen again."



*Professor L. Eidelman - WMA President*

At the conference of the World Medical Association (WMA) in Chicago in October, leaders of medical associations from around the world elected Leonid Eidelman as the next President of the WMA. Professor Eidelman, a graduate of the Riga Medical Institute who emigrated from Riga in 1987, is a member of the medical faculty of the Tel Aviv University in Israel. Since 2009, Professor Eidelman, an expert in the field of anesthesia and emergency therapy, has held the post of the chairman of the Israel Medical Association. In Israel, he is one of the most recognized authorities in the field of medical ethics.



On October 16, 2017, at the annual meeting of sponsors for U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, JSL member Sheila Johnson Robbins was presented the 2017 National Leadership Award. Mrs. Robbins's involvement with the Museum began in 1986. Over the last 30 years, she has raised millions of dollars to build and sustain the Museum and its mission to combat hate, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity. Among her many endeavors, one is especially valuable for us Jews from Latvia: She initiated and created the special Fund for Study of the Holocaust in Latvia. The Board of the JSL is proud that Mrs. Robbins was honored with this high award. Thank you, Sheila.



*Order of Three Stars and Cross of Recognition*

On October 20, the Order Chapter of Latvian Parliament awarded:

**Josef Rochko**—the Order of Three Stars of the V Degree for special services to the State of Latvia. Mr. Rochko is a well-known figure in the world of education and culture, a local historian, and is a director of the Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale Museum.

**Menachem Barkahan**—the Cross of Recognition of 3rd degree for special services to the State of Latvia. Rabbi Barkahan is the head of the Jewish religious community "Shamir," and the creator and head of the museum of the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust in Latvia.



*President V. Viķe-Freiberga and one of the subjects of the project, reb Zalman Ioffe, the longtime gabay of the Riga Synagogue*

In June, with the support of the Public Fund for Integration, the Max Goldin Jewish Cultural Heritage Society initiated the "Return and Recollect: Deportations and National Minorities" project. Over the past six months, within the framework of this project, the society's website published materials about notable Latvian Jews who were deported in June of 1941 but later returned after many years in exile: Israel Feigelson, Grigory Beilin, Sergei Braun, Zalman Ioffe, and others. On October 15, a presentation of the exhibit prepared by the participants in this project was held in the Riga Synagogue on Peitavas Street. Work on this project is conducted by students of the S. Dubnov Riga Jewish Secondary School and students of the Rezekne Catholic High School and Majori Secondary School.

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## NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (CONTINUED)



Detail view of the memorial in Bauska

In the previous issue, the *Courier* reported on the progress of construction of the memorial dedicated to the Bauska Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. The grand opening of this memorial, built on the site of the former synagogue and named "The Garden of the Synagogue," was held on October 15. Among the nearly 100 participants were descendants of the Bauska Jews; they came from Israel, the United States, and Great Britain. Among the people who spoke at the ceremony was U.S. Ambassador to Latvia Nancy Bikoff Petit.

The memorial includes conventional walls of a synagogue and five human figures—as if they were coming out of the building after a service. A menorah has been placed at the site where *aron kodesh* was located; a symbolic *bimah* is standing in the center of the memorial—it is inscribed: "Dedicated to the Jews of Bauska, who for centuries lived here and built this city, and who in 1941 were murdered by the Nazis and their local accomplices. In memoriam—descendants of Bauska Jews and Bauska citizens." The *bimah* also bears a brief history of the Bauska Jews and their families.



One of the steps of the airplane escape plan

In October, the first Latvian-Israeli documentary *Operation Wedding* premiered in Riga. The film tells the story of one of the most dramatic events in the life of Jews in 1970—an attempt to

hijack an airplane to escape to the West. At the time, a group of Jews, many of whom were residents of Riga, planned to seize the aircraft at the Smolnoye airport near Leningrad. The KGB, which learned about these plans early on, tracked down and arrested the participants. At the trial held a few months later, the group's leaders were sentenced to death, while other members received lengthy prison terms. This event stirred mass protests in the free world, which led the Soviet authorities to commute the death sentences and reduce the imprisonment terms of the participants, who were lauded as heroes throughout the world, but were considered terrorists in the U.S.S.R. The director of the film, Anat Zalmanson-Kuznetsova, daughter of two members of the group, used many historic shots from the 1970s, as well as recent recordings of conversations with former group members living in Israel.

The film was shown in several cinemas in Riga; on October 24, it was broadcast on TV. The October 18 screening of the film was followed by a discussion with the director and one of the subjects of the film, Silva Zalmanson. It took place at the Corner House, a former KGB building in Latvia on the corner of Stabu and Brivibas streets, and was received with much interest in Riga.



Professor Simon J. Bronner of Pennsylvania State University

On October 30, the Jews in Latvia Museum in cooperation with Latvia's Academy of Culture presented a lecture by famous American social anthropologist, Professor Simon J. Bronner of Pennsylvania State University. His lecture was titled: "THE JEWISH JOKE ONLINE: Controversies Over Jewish Jokes When They Go Public." Professor Bronner addressed the issues of differences between the Jewish joke as the "inner" issue of the

Jewish community, and the Jewish joke in the broader public discourse, especially when it gets to the Internet.

Professor Bronner was in Riga at the invitation of the Latvian Academy of Culture to conduct discussions on his well-known book: *Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture* and its use for the study of folk traditions.



René Nyberg's book, *The Last Train to Moscow*

On November 16, the presentation of René Nyberg's book, *The Last Train to Moscow*, which also included a meeting with the author, took place at the Jews in Latvia Museum in Riga. Mr. Nyberg is a Finnish diplomat who worked in many countries throughout his career. That his mother Feiga Tukatsier, who was born in Riga and who lived there in the 1920s and 1930s, was Jewish was a family secret. The book tells the story of René's mother, whose life was tragic in its own way: After marrying a non-Jew, Bruno Nyberg, she was rejected by both the Jewish community of Helsinki and her own family. It also relates the history of the relatives who stayed in Riga and died during the Holocaust, as well as the fate of other relatives who managed to escape—having been able to get the last train to Moscow. These stories, like magnets, attracted others that are included in the book. The book was translated from Finnish into Latvian and printed by the publishing house JUMAVA in October of this year. A little earlier, the book had also been translated into Russian and published in Russia.

**Compiled by Ivar Brod**  
**Translated from Russian by Maria Taukule**



## THE SOCIAL CENTER OF THE RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY



*Passover celebration in the Hesed Social Center as Rabbi I. Aizenshurf shares Passover stories and customs with the guests*

One of the most significant institutions of Jewish life in Latvia is undoubtedly the social center—Hesed-Latvia—headed by director Inna Aizenshurf. The center's main office is located in the Riga Jewish community building located at Skolas 6.

The center has approximately 2,500 members living in 28 cities and towns of Latvia. The aim of the center is to provide full assistance to members of the Jewish community in organizing their daily lives and to support the Jews of Latvia and their families in difficult financial circumstances. All of our clients fit at least one of the following three categories: the elderly, families with children, and middle-aged individuals. Each of these groups has specific programs devoted to them.



*Guests gathered in the Hesed Social Center to celebrate Purim. Members of the art group dressed as Purim characters*

**Programs for elderly persons** serve the largest group (about 1,700) of clients of the Center; to a large extent, these programs are sponsored by large international organizations:

- Joint Distribution Committee

(JDC, Joint). The largest American Jewish charitable organization founded in 1914.

- Claims Conference. Represents the world's Jews in negotiating restitution and compensation from Germany.
- Baltic Jewish Forum. Swedish charitable organization that provides assistance to Jews in the Baltic countries.
- Foundation pour La Memorie de la Shoah. Organization created in France in 2000 with money paid for valuables stolen from French Jews during World War II. Helps to maintain educational and cultural programs.

Programs for the elderly fall into two categories: programs for victims of the Nazis (individuals who meet the special criteria of the Claims Conference, which finances the program [about 45%]); programs for those who were not victims of fascism (about 55%). These programs are financed by the organizations mentioned above.

The main types of assistance for people in these programs are: Patronage (home care), which works to improve the quality of life of the elderly. It offers help with cleaning, cooking, grocery and other shopping; escorts on outdoor excursions and banking and social visits, etc. This program

also includes the provision of special medical and sanitary equipment to clients.

Food assistance: Provides a card that permits holder to buy a specified amount of food.

Pharmacy assistance: Provides a card to that covers a specific amount to purchase prescriptions.

Customers also receive material assistance for purchasing health insurance, in paying for medical and public services, and for visiting offices of rehabilitation experts and psychologists.



*Curators of the Center A. Zaharova, O. Koltsova, L. Maximenko, and art director S. Rozentsveig*

For those who are interested in communication and self-development, the center has various interest groups to address a variety of creative and intellectual activities. Activities include: painting, choral singing, playing chess, gymnastics, Jewish dances, and Hebrew and Yiddish language studies. The center also has a music club and a cinema section, organized sports groups, and a cycle of lectures on healthy life-

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## THE SOCIAL CENTER OF THE RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY

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styles. Excursions are organized to Latvia's memorable and historic sites. Center members also celebrate a wide range of Jewish holidays. All of these activities help our elderly members remain engaged and feel needed.



*A performance by the center's vocal group*

Once a year we hold a "Golden Age camp." This five-day health promotion event is held jointly with the social centers of the Jewish communities of Estonia and Lithuania. After consultation with a doctor, clients can participate in various recreational activities. Lectures, creative workshops, and cultural programs are also held during the camp. The 2017 camp will be held on December 14-18 in Pärnu, Estonia. Any member of the community of retirement age or persons with disabilities of Groups 1 and 2 may attend.

**Programs for families with children** are supported by JDC and the Baltic Jewish Forum. Assistance is provided to Jewish children with serious health problems or low social adaptation and to children from low-income families (15% of families have less than €128 per person).

For these families, the center

assists with the purchase of food, clothing and shoes, school supplies, and medicines. It also assists in paying medical fees and for attending recreational camps. The center is currently caring for about 400 such children.

**Programs for middle-aged people** are designed for those who have been living in difficult financial circumstances or who have serious medical issues. These programs provide one-time or emergency assistance. They also will pay for training courses (language courses, computer, etc.) to improve individuals' chances of finding a job. These programs are financed with the help of JDC, the center's partner. More than 600 persons are in need of this group, with about 100 receiving assistance annually.



*Members of the Riga Hesed Center visiting a synagogue in Daugavpils*

This remarkable and noble activity of the Hesed-Latvia center enables the Jews of Latvia to be assured that, under difficult material circumstances, they will be given full assistance and support sponsored by organizations and individuals.

**By Semyon Gizunterman**



The previous issue of the *Courier* mentioned the late Riga native **Sergei Braun**, the Israeli scientist, and his book of memories of the deportation of June 1941, life in Siberia, the return to Riga and life in Latvia and Israel. This book, published in Riga in Russian, is now available for JSL members. Please send a check for \$20 (including shipping and handling) made payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc. and mail it to the address that appears on page 2 of this issue.