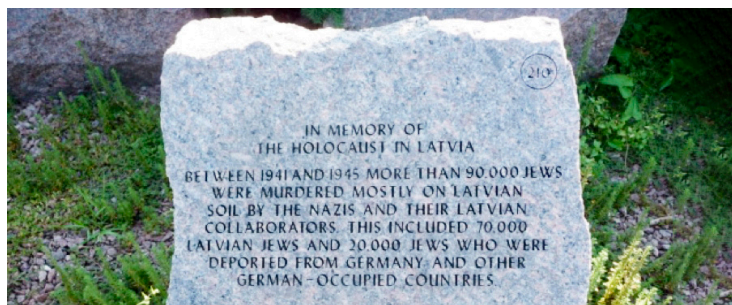




The Latvian Jewish Courier

WE REMEMBER THE MOST TRAGIC DATES FOR LATVIAN JEWS

Due to COVID-19, many events are being held in different ways. Similarly, Jewish Survivors of Latvia also could not gather at the Park East Synagogue, as we have for decades to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust in Latvia. But, unlike many sister organizations that decided to host virtual events on Zoom, the JSL Council proposed a different solution. As you may know, we erected a monument several years ago in memory of the Latvian Jews killed during the Holocaust, which is in Brooklyn at the Holocaust Memorial Park and has been in place for many years. Therefore, taking into account the official guidelines regarding outdoor activities (wearing masks, social distancing, etc.), we held our commemoration in this park on November 29, on the eve of the 79th anniversary of the first massacre in Rumbula.



The upper portion of our stone in the Holocaust Memorial Park

We had the opportunity to lay out an aluminum foil mat and invite each of those present to put their own commemorative candle on it, which is similar to the event usually held at the Freedom Monument in Riga on November 30 and has been a tradition since 2016. We were even ready for the unpredictability of the weather in the form of rain or snow and considered the possibility of setting up a tent. But the weather was kind to us, and the day turned out to be sunny and warm. Our event began promptly at noon with an introduction by a member of the Board, Aelita Fitingof, who initially warned all those present about the need to comply with the pandemic guidelines and then gave the floor to Professor G. Schwab, the Vice President of JSL, for opening remarks. Professor G. Schwab welcomed the guests and briefly noted the significance of our event in preserving the memory of the Holocaust and its victims. Afterwards, upon urging everyone



The meeting was led by Aelita Fitingof, JSL Board member



Professor G. Schwab not only provided a brief opening for our meeting, but also concluded it with a very informative speech

to stand up, JSL member Emil Silberman read a prayer *El Mole Rachamim* and named JSL members who have passed in the past year: **Professor Gertrude Schneider, Sheila Johnson Robbins, Ruth Fitingof, Gita Gurevich, Rozaliya Dumesh, Ludmila Girsheva, Alex Gertzmark, Isaac Gamarnik, Ruvim Udem, Semyon Gitlin.** After that, he read the Kaddish for the departed.

Then David Silberman, President of the JSL, gave a short report regarding the activities of our organization in the past year. He briefly described the contributions of the Board members to our efforts to support the publications. He emphasized our participation in the distribution of books about the Holocaust in Latvia: *Churbn Lettland* by Max Kaufman, *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember* by Meyer Mehler, and Frida Michelson's *I Survived Rumbula*. David Silberman also spoke of the book *Lipke's List*, recently published by the Zhanis Lipke Museum, which was based on David Silberman's book *Like a Star in the Darkness*. Maris Gailis, Chairman of the Lipke Museum Council, his wife Zaiga Gaile, architect and author of the Lipke Museum project, Nora Shnepste, school director in Preili, Tekla Bekesha, director of the Preili city museum, Lolita Thomsone, Lipke museum director, and Maruta Plivda, mayor of Preili, all visited and participated in our commemorative events, which was a highlight for us. In conclusion, David Silberman wished everyone health, success, and a joyful Hanukkah celebration.

Then the presenter Aelita Fitingof read out the greetings sent by Joseph Faerber, JSL Vice President, and Mitchell Lieber, Board Member. Joseph Faerber, among others, wrote: "We take these few moments each year to reflect upon the past and to recall those terrible years when to be a Jew was equivalent to a sentence of death. We remember those who died and how they died and fervently pray that it will never happen again. They were the true martyrs. They were killed for the sole 'crime' of being Jewish."

Mitchell Lieber reported on the progress of the documentary

WE REMEMBER THE MOST TRAGIC DATES FOR LATVIAN JEWS (continued)

“Rumbula’s Echo” and its imminent completion. He noted that this documentary is being created by a team of more than 90 professional documentary filmmakers, historians, translators, college interns, and volunteers. Organization advisors include Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the USA, the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, and the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia in the USA. Principal funders of filming were, among others, The Claims Conference, the U.S. State Department, and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. More than 200 individuals and organizations financially support “Rumbula’s Echo,” including Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the USA and several of its members.

At the end of the meeting, Professor George Schwab gave his final remarks and update on his much-anticipated book of memoirs. He said: “Survival and Continuity of the Jewish People—How did I stumble on this topic? Years ago, I came across a quote that continues to percolate in my mind. Queen Victoria asked her Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli how did he know that God exists? His answer: ‘the survival of the Jewish people.’ Despite

hardships our people were forced to endure for centuries, even millennia, culminating in the Holocaust, which robbed some 50% of an already minuscule worldwide Jewish population, yet, however small in number, we survived as a people.

Whereas Disraeli ascribes our survival to God, I, with my usual Jewish chutzpah, would like to somewhat broaden the scope. I do not believe that we would have survived the way we did and making material contributions to civilization and culture had we not also been The Children of the Book. Think of Spinoza the philosopher, Mendelssohn the composer, Einstein the physicist, Freud the father of psychoanalysis, Trotsky the revolutionary, and Chagall the painter. The list goes on and on.

We, each one of us here, has a role to play in preserving the continuity of the history of the Jewish people. How so? By building bridges between the past and the future, between our ancestors and our children and grandchildren. And the way to do so is by putting pen to paper, that is, writing memoirs. A memoir connects the past with the future. In our lifetime, Max Kaufmann has led the way.”

RIGA, NOVEMBER 30, 2020

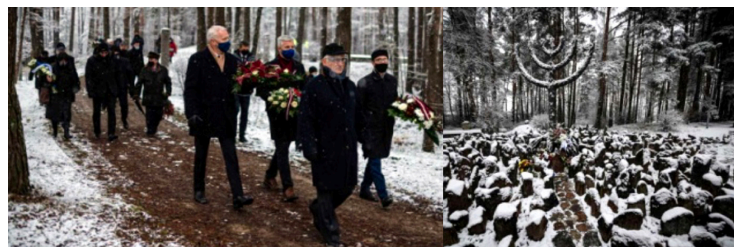
November 30 marks the 79th anniversary of the biggest mass murder of civilians in Latvian history—25,000 Latvian Jews were killed in the Rumbula forest near Riga in a two-day Holocaust atrocity. The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia holds a commemorative event in Rumbula on this day every year. No event was held this year due to COVID restrictions.

Instead, leaders of the Jewish Community of Latvia laid flowers at the Rumbula memorial on November 30, 2020. Other attendees of the ceremony included Andris Teikmanis (Head of the Chancery of the President of Latvia), Artis Pabriks (Defense Minister), Einars Mikelsons (Head of the Latvian Delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance—IHRA), Orli Gil (Ambassador of Israel), Christian Heldt (Ambassador of Germany), John Carwile (Ambassador of

U.S.), and the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of the UAE Hanan Khalfan Al Aleeli.

Many Riga people (including organizers of “Rumbula-79” and even the Mayor of Riga) lit candles at the Freedom Monument on the evening of November 30, 2020, commemorating the more than 25,000 Jews shot in Rumbula.

Lolita Tomsone, the director of Zhanis Lipke Museum, was mainly responsible for organizing a Latvian civic initiative called “Rumbula-79.

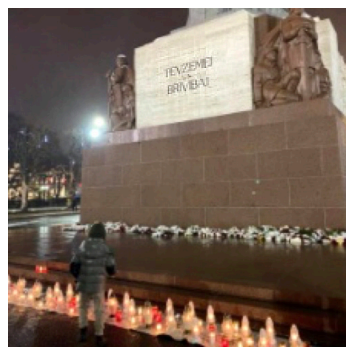


Participants in the memorial ceremony walk to the menorah at the place of executions in Rumbula

We Remember. It Hurts,” which called on Rigans and others to commemorate the tragic events by lighting candles at their own house, yard, through virtual social networks, in the forest of Rumbula, or even at the Freedom Monument itself.

The candlelit commemoration, a tradition begun in 2016, is usually attended by thousands of people each year. Margers Vestertermanis, a Holocaust survivor and the founder of the Jews in Latvia Museum, noted in an interview that “I am happy that I have lived to see this moment when candles are lit at the most sacred place in Latvia, the Freedom Monument, to commemorate the great sorrow and the massive trauma of the Jewish people.”

“There are no speeches and no official photographs by the Freedom Monument. Every year we just light the candles, in silence, to remember the 25,000



Candles at the Freedom Monument on the evening of November 30, 2020

lives lost, and to prevent such tragedies from repeating in the future. This is a story concerning all of Latvia, not just of the Jewish community,” says Lolita Tomsone. “We were hurt in the Rumbula forest 79 years ago, and Jews being killed inhumanely is connected to our lives, too. They were our people—Latvian citizens, neighbors, friends, and colleagues.”

Compiled from online sources

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ARKADY SUHARENKO ADDRESSES THE COMMUNITY ONLINE DURING COVID-19

In the most difficult period of the coronavirus epidemic, the spring of 2020, when everyone and everywhere, including inhabitants of Riga, had to observe self-isolation, Arkady Suharenko, chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, addressed all members of the society remotely from his home with a story about the organization's activities and its future plans. The editorial staff of the Courier considered it expedient to record this address and bring its content to the largest possible number of Latvian Jews living outside Latvia now. Below we publish a somewhat abbreviated version of the text of this address.

"According to the latest population census, the Jewish community of Latvia currently consists of 8,153 people. It is the largest community in the Baltic Sea region; the other largest one exists only in Sweden, where there are slightly more Jews than in Latvia. Where do Jews live in Latvia? Riga has over 7000, Jurmala: 600, Daugavpils: 150, Liepaja: 150, Rezekne: 50, Jekabpils: 30, Jelgava: 20, Ludza: 15, Ventspils: 15.

I would like to tell you about what has been done in recent years, what we think of today and what are our goals and objectives for the development of the community.



Arkady Suharenko during his online address

When in 2002 I was elected as the Head of the Jewish community I saw several tasks for myself. The first task was to unite the community, to make it friendly, and to achieve a situation where we really help each other within the community.

The second task I call "Memory." This was very important for me personally and for all members of the Council. I am the grandson and son of World War II participants. It was very important for me to perpetuate the memory of the Jews who perished in Latvia. Tremendous work was done in a process of identification of almost all places of mass executions of Jews. There are 210 locations throughout Latvia, and in each of these places has a commemorative plaque (if there is no monument installed there) with the names of those who were killed there.

In addition, large-scale memorials were created, two in Riga, one in Rumbula and another in Bikernieki, as well as a magnificent complex near Liepaja, in Shkede. There is also a memorial in Daugavpils, erected long ago, in the 1990s, back in Soviet times.

This work was crowned with the construction of a monument to those who risked not only their own lives, but the lives of their loved ones, the saved Jews in Latvia. The monument to the rescuers (among them the most famous was Zhanis Lipke) was erected next to the skeleton of the burnt synagogue on Gogol Street in Riga. In addition, there is a museum dedicated to Zhanis Lipke himself, which is located on the island of Kipsala, where he

lived and hid rescued Jews.

For three years in a row, a new tradition has emerged. On July 4, when Latvia celebrates Holocaust Remembrance Day, flowers are laid at the Freedom Monument in the center of Riga. On November 30th, on the anniversary of the first extermination action in Rumbula Latvian, citizens gather at the Freedom Monument and light candles to commemorate Jews killed by Nazi and local collaborators in 1941. Also, a solemn meeting is held at the site of the burnt synagogue on Gogol Street, and every year there are more and more participants at this event.

The task of taking care of the "Jewish places" in Latvia is also related to this. I mean, first of all, the historical synagogue on Peitavas street, in Old Riga. The Riga Jewish religious community was lucky, as the synagogue did not function only during the Holocaust, and already in 1945, the authorities allowed to worship there. However, since the completion of construction in 1905, there has been no major overhaul or restoration, and the synagogue looked deplorable. In 2009 the synagogue was restored to the excellent condition as it looks today. The renovation of the synagogue in Daugavpils was completed, with the descendants of the world-famous artist Mark Rothko, a native of this city, taking part. The building where the synagogue was restored now also houses the Cultural Center, which is located in the city of Kuldiga. The Green Synagogue in Rezekne was restored, and now there is a museum with a historical exposition. After restoration, the synagogue in Ludza now houses a branch of the local museum with expositions about the history of the Jews of Ludza; a separate exposition is dedicated to their countrymen: world famous documentary filmmaker Hertz Frank and his father, the photographer Wolf Frank.

Here are some numbers and facts. The structure of the Riga Jewish community is as follows: it is the Hesed Social Center under leadership by Inna Aizensharf; the Jewish Community Center headed by Inna Lapidus-Kimber; the Jews in Latvia museum, which is headed by Ilya Lensky; and the kindergarten named Motek.

The Riga Jewish Community is the largest non-governmental organization in Latvia as an employer. In total, we employ about 300 people. They are the leaders of the community and ready and able to support its activities.

Now what are our major concerns as of today? Helping and supporting the elderly and sick people is our main task, and our Social Center is taking care of this. Today it has 1,744 clients in 20 cities of Latvia, with 603 of them being Holocaust survivors. In addition, there are 35 children with special needs, whom we also help. Now, due to COVID-19 restriction, we communicate with most of our clients remotely by helping people who are isolated in their homes. The gigantic work we have done remotely in the period of the coronavirus can be considered exemplary, and we have received many kind words from the communities of other countries.

All of us and I personally are very much concerned about Jewish education in Latvia provided by Riga Jewish school named after Shimon Dubnov and by our kindergarten. We are very grateful for the fact that the leadership of the Riga City Council provided us with a beautiful building on Miera Street and allocated additional funds to renovate this building. And today we have a beautiful modern school there. On September 386 pupils began their studies at the

ARKADY SUHARENKO ADDRESSES THE COMMUNITY ONLINE DURING COVID-19 (continued)

school, 48 of whom are first graders. In one of the classes the entire educational process will be conducted 100% in Latvian language. This is a great merit of the director of the Riga Jewish School, K. Brikmane. In the future, to support the development of Jewish education in Latvia, we would like to be able to pay scholarships to the Dubnov School graduates, who decided to continue their study in prestigious universities.

Activities of religious communities are in the center of our constant attention and support. We are in permanent and close contact with the Riga's religious community, and with its head - David Kagan, who is my deputy for the Council of Jewish Communities. All of us have an understanding of the importance of this cooperation, communication, and mutual support.

Another very important area of our activity is the restitution of Jewish properties. As a result of our efforts, we received 5 buildings in 2016. However, this cannot be considered as the final solution to the problem. Let's move on. I believe that the issue of restitution will be resolved sooner or later.

Perhaps not everyone knows that we have already created the Jewish Property Restitution Fund. The Council of this Fund, which will resolve all financial issues, will include 11 people: 6 representatives of the Latvian Jewish community and 5 representatives of the largest international Jewish organizations with which we have a long and successful cooperation. The Latvian Jewish community has strong relationships with other Jewish organizations around the world. We are members of the World and European Jewish Congresses; we also have signed a cooperation agreement with the American Jewish Committee.

We are in close contact with the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel and I am very grateful for the cooperation with its president Eli Valk, with whom we often communicate. I also treasure our good relations and mutual contacts with the Organization of Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the USA and personally with its leadership: David Zilberman, Ivar Brod and my dear friend, deeply respected professor George Schwab.

I would like to mention that we have serious concern about our financial issues. The budget of the Jewish community in Latvia amounted to 6 million dollars last year; this is a very large amount, but we have to acknowledge that this money mostly comes from international organizations. The contribution of local sponsors last year was about \$200,000, which, as you can imagine, is not comparable to the total budget.

The major contributor to the budget is undoubtedly the Claims Conference, and the money is used to directly help the victims of the Holocaust. As we all understand, over time, less and less money will come. Of course, we should be prepared for such a development in the future. Therefore, I see two major areas of our activity.

First area: We are now preparing documents for the establishing and registration of the Future Generations Fund. Today, \$450,000 has been accumulated for this fund. I want this amount to grow, and hopefully over time, the fund could receive income from the careful management of this capital. The income obtained in this way would go to the Board of the community, elected by its members.

Second area: There are properties that were returned to the community. Not all of them are in good condition. We are already in the process of getting community-owned properties cleaned

up and rented out to conscientious tenants. The income received from the rent would replenish our budget. But as of today our priority is a renovation of our kindergarten. There will be a need to spend at least 120,000 euros.

I would like to mention that for me and for all members of the Council, every area of our Jewish life is important: the synagogue, the Chabad community, and the museum. If we resolve all restitution issues, we will be able to financially support those institutions.

As a community leader, I am aware that all directions need to be supported, including the museum of Zhanis Lipke, which does not belong to our community. As well as all of the places associated with Jewish history, which include memorial sites throughout Latvia. All of them need our help and continuous support.

We foresee a future situation when all applications for the necessary expenses will go to the Fund for the Restitution of Jewish Property, which will fairly distribute the funds received from restitution."

**By Arkhady Suharenko, Chairman of the Council
of Jewish Communities of Latvia
(Article prepared for print by Semyon Gizunterman)**



LATVIJAS
EBREJU DRAUDŽU
UN KOPIENU PADOME

On July 21st, a general meeting of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia took place. Currently, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia includes 13 communities and organizations from 9 cities. Together with more than 20 Jewish organizations with which close cooperation has been established, the Council represents about 8,000 Jews in Latvia. The leaders of the Jewish communities and organizations of Riga, Daugavpils, Jurmala, Liepaja, Ventspils, Rezekne, Jekabpils and Ludza discussed the recent activities of the Jewish community in Latvia and plans for the future.

The priority areas were and remain social assistance to the elderly and low-income community members, support for Jewish education, preservation of the cultural heritage of Latvian Jews and the memory of the Holocaust, the development of cultural and educational programs for people of different ages and interests, as well as the restitution of Jewish property.

The meeting supported the decision to create a Fund for Future Generations to ensure financial stability and independence of the Jewish community. The founders of the fund will be the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, JDC-Joint and Arkady Suharenko, legal entities and individuals who share the goals of the fund and support its activities, will be able to join them.

At the meeting, a 9-member board of the Council was elected:
Chairman: Arkady Suharenko, **Deputy Chairmen:** Benjamin Kajem, Dmitry Krupnikov (Riga Jewish Community), David Kagan (Riga Jewish Religious Community), Raya Legkodymova (Jekabpils Jewish Community), **Board members:** Vitaly Gottlieb (Chairman of the Board of Trustees), Anna Petrova (Liepaja Jewish Religious Community), Riva Uryutova (Daugavpils Jewish Community), Rabbi Shimon Kutnovsky (Jurmala Jewish Community).

IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR GERTRUDE SCHNEIDER



Professor Gertrude Schneider passed away on September 7, 2020, may her memory be blessed. With the passing of Dr. Schneider, we have lost a former prisoner of the Riga ghetto and several concentration camps, one of the founders of JSL, the first editor of *The Latvian Jewish Courier*, a historian, and a university professor.

Gertrude Schneider was born on May 27, 1928, in Vienna, Ottakring. She was expelled from school for being Jewish in 1938 after the “Anschluss” of Austria to the German Reich. Gertrude, her parents, and her younger sister Rita were all deported to Nazi-occupied Latvia in February of 1942. Gertrude kept a diary in which she secretly documented the brutality they faced while living in the Riga ghetto. In 1944, the family was deported to the concentration camp in Stutthof. After surviving a death march, Gertrude, along with her mother and sister, were liberated in March 1945, but their father had died in the Buchenwald


concentration camp.

Gertrude immigrated to the United States in 1947 with her mother and sister. She studied mathematics and history intensively in school and later in college. In 1973, she received her doctorate from the Graduate School of the City University of New York (CUNY). The subject of her thesis was “The Riga Ghetto, 1941–1944”. She met her future husband in New York and they married in July of 1951; subsequently they had a daughter and two sons.

In her academic work, Dr. Schneider combined historical descriptions of the Holocaust with her personal memories and memories of other survivors. She published many articles and several books devoted to the Holocaust in Latvia, such as *Journey Into Terror: The Story of the Riga Ghetto*; *Muted Voices: Jewish Survivors of Latvia Remember*; *The Unfinished Road: Jewish Survivors of Latvia Look Back*; *Reise in den Tod. Deutsche Juden in Riga 1941-1944*, and others. Her articles were published in the *Jewish Frontier*, *Jewish Social Studies*, *Jewish Press*, and the *Daily Forward*. Dr. Schneider lectured on the Holocaust at the University of Toronto, Oldenburg University, the City University of New York Graduate School, and many others.

Dr. Schneider devoted her life and scientific work, as well as her speeches, articles, and books, to the memory of the perished prisoners of the Riga ghetto and concentration camps in Latvia, as well as in other places. We will always remember this wonderful woman who said to us, “My books will continue to speak when the last witnesses fall silent.”

HAS THE ISSUE OF RESTITUTION PROGRESSED?



Release of the JUST Act Report
PRESS STATEMENT
MICHAEL R. POMPEO, SECRETARY OF STATE
JULY 29, 2020

And again the time is ripe to return to the one very uncomfortable to some topic about the word “JUST.” As JUSTICE. Justice for those who never had the opportunity to return home, to hug their loved ones, to breathe the air of freedom and life. For those who perished. For those who lost everything. For those who witnessed unspeakable acts of brutality and horror.

The 2009 Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues was endorsed by the U.S. and 46 other countries and affirmed the importance of restitution of Holocaust-era property.

On December 12, 2017, the U.S. Senate and, then in April 2018 the U.S. Congress passed and on May 9, 2018, President Trump signed Bill 447, The Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act that could help spur the return of lost money, assets, and property confiscated by the Nazis and their collaborators.

The U.S. State Department, according to Bill 447, must report to the President and to Congress any progress with restitution.

On July 29, 2020, the U.S. State Department issued to Congress the Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report.

This is the U.S. government’s first-ever comprehensive review of the state of restitution of Holocaust-era assets across Europe and beyond. The Latvian Council of Jewish Communities welcomed the release of this JUST Act Report. The report shows that 75 years after the Holocaust, 15 European countries, including Latvia, have not yet met their commitments on Holocaust property restitution.

One of the report’s key findings states that from 1991 to 2016, Latvia returned some of the communal and religious property confiscated during the Holocaust and Communist eras, but the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities has identified approximately 265 such properties that still need to be returned.

In 2019, representatives from party Development/For! in the Saeima introduced an initiative called Good will indemnification. The main idea was to offer of monetary reparations instead for all those properties with a payment of 40 million euros within ten years starting in 2021; because of political resistance the proposal had to be withdrawn.

As Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins has mentioned, the process of solving issues related to Holocaust, restitution and any and all consequences of war is a very complex and long one.

However, in my personal opinion, I must admit that there is, if ever so slight, a possibility that this carriage might, just might ever so slowly start to move in the right direction.

What remains for us is to wait and hope.

When there is a will, there is a way.

By Yefim Shteynfeld, JSL Board Member

HOW WE MANAGED TO CONVINCe THE LATVIAN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE TO RECALL ITS OWN DECISION

We have announced before that at the end of 2018, the Latvian Prosecution Office (hereinafter: the Prosecution office) had made the decision to stop the 12-year investigation of the Cukurs case and declare Herberts Cukurs not guilty of genocide of Latvian Jews during World War II (hereinafter: the Decision); in September of 2019, however, the Prosecution office recalled this decision and returned the case for further investigation.

In this article, we will recount the actions that led to this latest Prosecution office decision. In the case files, materials and witness accounts from Latvian, Russian, and German archives, the Jewish community of Latvia, and Cukurs's witness accounts taken by Brazilian authorities, where he was living after World War II, were collected. By 2018, according to the Prosecution office, opinion witness accounts pointing to Cukurs's guilt are uncertain and have been received not in the order specified by Latvian legislative acts and cannot be checked since the witnesses have passed away. Accordingly, Cukurs's own witness accounts taken by Brazilian authorities are acceptable and justified. From the Prosecution office's point of view, Cukurs really was a member of Arajs commando, but engaged only in transport check and repair works. The Prosecution office has also asserted that someone's participation in military Arajs commando is not a criminal act. So, year-end 2018, the criminal case was closed due to the lack of credible evidence of Cukurs's guilt.

After completing analysis of the Decision, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia (hereinafter: the Council) on April 23, 2019, submitted a claim to the Prosecution office asking to resume the investigation. Let's look at the arguments this claim was based on. We would like to point out that the author of this claim was not only the Council, but also three individuals who, according to Latvian legislative acts, are considered to be victims of the Holocaust and, in particular, victims of Herbert Cukurs. Claim was based on arguments that can be divided in two groups. First group: illegal character of the Decision. Second group: new significant circumstances that the Prosecution office did not know when the Decision was made.

Let's start from the second group of arguments. The Council has found in Israel and talked to a witness who was unknown to the Prosecution office (hereinafter: Witness 1). According to Witness 1, at the end of November 1941, Witness 1 was prisoner of Riga ghetto.

In the morning of the day described by the Witness 1, the Germans started convoying people and lining them in columns to bring to Rumbula. During that roundup, as described by the Witness 1, the people in the Riga ghetto were beaten and murdered, the shooting was everywhere. Witness 1 recounts: "During the aforementioned events, to which I was a witness, observing from the window of

the cellar of 4-storey building at the corner of Ludzas and Liksnas streets, among the Latvians and Germans, convoying the Jews from Riga Ghetto to the killing site in Rumbula, I have recognized Herberts Cukurs, who has been managing these deeds."



Photo: Mark Ioffe

Contemporary view of the building, in the basement of which the witness observed Cukurs' actions as described in the article

After the end of the process, during which many people from the Riga Ghetto were killed, Witness 1 left his shelter and ran to the place where his parents have been residing. While he was running through the Riga Ghetto, he encountered Cukurs, among others. This and other recollections of these events were included in the memoirs of Witness 1, written in Israel shortly after his repatriation. It fully complies with what he has told us 70 years later.

So, this is the first fact, on which the Council and victims have been basing their appeal to the Prosecution office. In its response to the appeal, evaluating the facts mentioned by the Witness 1, the Prosecution office has decided to "consider them not revealing any new facts," and, therefore, has found them to be an insufficient basis to reopen the case, claiming, that Witness 1 had not seen Cukurs with own hands kill anyone. They also claimed that, at the moment when Witness 1 has seen the aktion, he didn't know that people were being led to slaughter and Witness 1 only post factum made the conclusion that Cukurs had been an active participant. The Prosecution Office maintains that Witness 1 learned after the war that people had been being led to be killed; accordingly, his affidavit does not testify to anything but the fact, that Cukurs was present at the Riga ghetto, which is not proof of guilt. In May 2019, the Prosecution office ruled that the affidavit of Witness 1 cannot be considered important and cannot be the reason

HOW WE MANAGED TO CONVINCED THE LATVIAN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE TO RECALL ITS OWN DECISION (continued)

for the repeal of the Decision. This decision has shocked and enraged the Jewish community of Latvia. The logic of the Prosecution office seems to be: If the witness did not see someone pulling the trigger, then the person cannot be considered complicit in the genocide. We continued to look for witnesses; after May 2019 we found one. On July 31, 2019, we submitted to the Prosecution office additional proofs—the affidavit of the second witness (hereinafter: Witness 2), also a former inmate of the Riga Ghetto, who was imprisoned there at the age of 15-16 years.

He recalled in his affidavit that Cukurs frequented the Riga Ghetto, always wearing the military uniform. Witness 2 saw three episodes, when Cukurs murdered people in the Riga Ghetto, also shouting insults at them. During one of these episodes, as described by Witness 2, Cukurs was trying to force an adult man to beat a child, but when he refused to do so, took out a pistol and shot both of them.

There were few other similar episodes, recalled by the Witness 2, relating exact time and location, even the addresses, where these took place, and also where he himself was located at that point, and how he happened to witness these. I would like to emphasize, that the affidavits of Witness 1 and Witness 2 were critically assessed and analyzed in the context of other accounts that were submitted in different years to different institutions, and these fully corroborate one another. These new facts were unknown to the Prosecution office at the moment of decision-making.

As to the second set of arguments, we have conveyed to the Prosecution office our opinion that we don't share their view, that the affidavits proving the guilt of Cukurs are not to be included in the prosecution, and therefore we consider that failing to analyze these is illegal, and thus so is the Decision in general. Even more, we clearly see different and unequal approaches in assessing the affidavits of Cukurs, given in Brazil, and of Holocaust survivors—his possible victims. Our point is that both Cukurs and Holocaust survivors have given their witness accounts not to Latvian law-enforcing institutions.

The survivors submitted their accounts and gave affidavits to special institutions that were created after the war and aimed, among other functions, at collecting evidences and locating and prosecuting Nazi criminals, which was clearly stated in their statutes. The Committee for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes in Baltic Countries in the British zone and The Central Committee of the Liberated Jews in the U.S. Zone of Germany. We have no evidence that these organizations would pressure witnesses.

We also have no evidence that when taking Cukurs's witness accounts in the 1950s and 1960s that the Brazilian law-enforcing institutions would follow the guidelines of

Latvian criminal procedure law. To our great surprise, the Latvian Prosecution office has rejected the possibility of accessing all the witness accounts relating Cukurs's guilt, but considered trustworthy and includible in the prosecution his own witness accounts given in Brazil—whose legal system in 1950s-1960s are little known to us.

In our opinion, the accounts of Cukurs should be assessed with the presumption that he possibly could be trying to evade the prosecution and responsibility for his deeds, as he himself has stated several times that there has been an "accusation campaign" organized against him. Nevertheless, the Latvian Prosecution office has made the Decision, proclaiming Cukurs not guilty based only on his own words.

Therefore, our appeal to the Prosecution office concerned the need to reassess the witness accounts of Holocaust survivors and former Arājs Kommando members that were unlawfully rejected in the course of prosecution. We disagree with the statement, that these accounts are "general" and "do not describe specific events." Just the opposite—these usually are very detailed and specific. They scrupulously relate particular events, mentioning dates and addresses and describing the criminal deeds committed.

While we were elaborating our appeal, we received another important document. Thanks to our American colleagues (whose privacy we respect), we learned that a certain prisoner of Riga Ghetto, named Eliezer Karstadt, had been a witness at the famous Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961. In his affidavit, given under oath to Jerusalem regional court, he, among other details about his Holocaust experience, has related that he has personally witnessed Cukurs murdering women and children in Riga Ghetto in late November 1941. This witness account was given without pressure and to the official law-enforcing institution, the witness was informed of his responsibility for providing true information. We officially received an excerpt from the trial minutes and submitted a legally certified translation as a supplementary to our application, which was accepted by the Prosecution office.

On September 16, 2019, the Prosecution office, after analyzing the Decision to end the case, has decided to reopen the investigation. It has been officially recognized that the initial investigation was superficial, not assessing a much evidence that may be crucial for making a well-considered decision on the guilt of Cukurs. Currently, the investigation is in the active phase, and we are waiting for the decision.

**By David Lipkin, lawyer,
Riga Jewish Community
board member**

MAX WEINREICH: SCIENTIST-LINGUIST, WRITER

In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews from Latvia to be included in the *Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia*, planned for publishing by the Shamir society in Riga. The following is an article prepared for the aforementioned volume.



Max Weinreich

Weinreich, Max (April 22nd, 1894, Goldingen [now Kuldiga] - January 29th, 1969, New York) — a scientist-linguist, as well as a writer. He attended Russian and German high schools, and pursued higher education in universities at St. Petersburg and Berlin. In 1923 he received his PhD. at the University of Marburg (Germany), having defended the dissertation on history and distribution of dialects of Yiddish language.

After receiving his PhD., Max Weinreich lived in Vilno, at his wife Regina's parent's house. Regina's father, Doctor Tsemakh Shabad, served as the prototype for "Doctor Aibolit" to the writer Korney Chukovsky. One of the rooms in his apartment became the first headquarters of YIVO (Jewish scientific institute) in 1925. Weinreich has headed research work and the educational centre of YIVO, has put a scientific basis not only in the field of the linguistics closest to him, but also the literature and folklore of Yiddish, the Jewish history, economy, sociology, psychology, philosophy and education. In 1939-40 Weinreich and his family managed to leave Europe where the war was already brewing, to New York. The headquarters of YIVO were soon transferred to New York too. Through 1940-50 Weinreich was the scientific director of YIVO in New York. Here he also started to teach in the City College where he became the first professor of Yiddish.

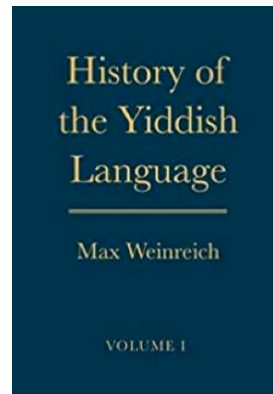


Max Weinreich (right) with his wife, Regina (first from left), and his in-laws in his apartment, Vilna, 1921. (Second from right) Regina's father, Tsemah Szabad; (third from left) mother, Stefania; (YIVO)

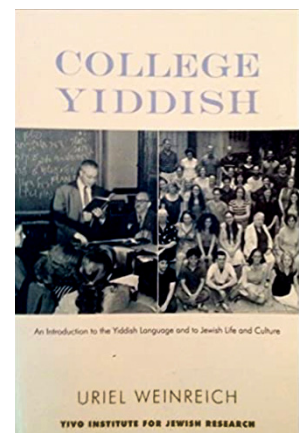


The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York

The directions of research offered by Weinreich became the directions of the work of YIVO. He was the active author and editor of many publications printed in the academic magazine *YIVO-Bleter*, as well as other scientific editions of YIVO, and a popular magazine *The Yiddish Schprach* (*The Jewish Language*). He is also the author of numerous articles in the oldest Jewish newspaper on Yiddish (the *Forverts*) and in many English magazines. As a result of his sharp aversion to the cooperation of the German scientists with Nazis and their participation in the Jewish genocide, he published the book *Hitler's Professors* in Yiddish (1947) and English (1946). The 4-volumes of *The History of Yiddish*, published posthumously in Yiddish in 1973 and in English in 1980, dealt with the events of his life. In this significant work he scrupulously considers all aspects of the appearance of Yiddish in VIII-IX centuries in the valleys of the Main and Rhine rivers: historical and cultural—Yiddish arose among Jews, descendants of immigrants basically from Italy, including soldiers of the Roman legions speaking dialects of



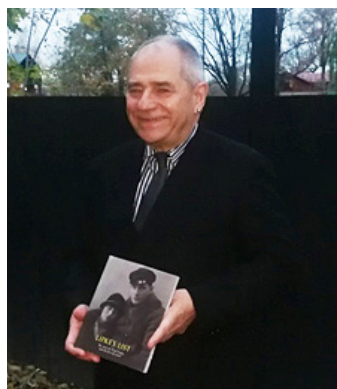
old French and old Italian languages with elements of Hebrew and Aramaic, linguistic—about the presence in Yiddish of etymological components of Hebrew, Roman, German and Slav languages, about the influence of Yiddish on the Talmud and life conditions of the Jewish boroughs, and mutual relations of Yiddish with other Jewish languages. The major legacy of Weinreich is the continuation and development of his scientific ideas by many generations of scientists—his followers. One of them—his son Uriel (1926-1967), the author of the textbook *College Yiddish* and the *Modern Yiddish-English and English-Yiddish Dictionary*. Among followers were also the listeners of the Center of basic researches of Yiddish at YIVO.



A Yiddish language textbook, written by Max Weinreich's son, Uriel

By Ivar Brod
Translated by Alan Solovey

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



Maris Gailis at the presentation of the book about Zhanis Lipke

The Zhanis Lipke Memorial Museum organized a week-long symposium to mark Lipke's 120th birthday. During this week the Lipke Memorial Museum presented the book *Lipke's List*—the story of Jewish rescue in Latvia—how one brave man made a difference. The Latvian version of the book was published two years ago. Now the English version has been published. In the introduction to the book, Maris Gailis, the founder of the

Zhanis Lipke Memorial Museum, wrote:

In Latvia, there has been little talk of people who, risking their lives, hid Jews during the WWII. By highlighting the phenomenal and relentless work of Zhanis Lipke and other rescuers of Jews we tried to take a look at the other side of the coin to acknowledge that amongst Latvians, just like in any other nations, there have been not only murderers and villains but also selfless and courageous heroes whose achievements help us not to lose faith in humanity.



The chairman of the Association of Jews from Latvia and Estonia in Israel, Elie Valk, speaks at the previously recorded and shown on Azkara's YouTube channel—a mourning ceremony in memory of fellow countrymen who were murdered in the fire of the Holocaust

Given the situation with COVID, our friends and colleagues from the Association of Jews from Latvia and Estonia in Israel, could not organize Azkara, as usual, in Givatayim, but they did record the candle lighting ceremony in advance and posted it on YouTube. This solemn meeting also featured a lecture-story about Jewish children in Latvia before and during the Holocaust, as well as several songs performed by the Kinnor ensemble under the direction of Michael and Fanny Leinwand.



The headline of the Latvian newspaper of the first days of the occupation: "The power of the Jews has been destroyed"

Until the end of summer, Latvian news site **LSM.lv** featured a documentary in Latvian, released within the framework of the Latvia-100 project, dedicated to the greatest crime in modern Latvia — the Holocaust in small towns across the country. Using the example of the city of Sasmaka (since 1926: Valdemarpils), it is shown how, after capturing the city, the Nazis—just as they had as in many provinces of Eastern Europe—organized the execution of Jews (80% of the population in the mid-19th century) at the hands of local Latvian volunteers. According to the narrator, in the documents left after those terrible days, not a single German name appears—this was the policy of the occupiers: to carry out their atrocities at the hands of local residents. In August 1941, the 400-year history of the Jews of Sasmaka was ended within two days. Here is a link to this documentary: bit.ly/3kSMUCg



Rally in Preili at the monument to the executed Jews. Ilya Lensky, a descendant of Jewish Preili residents and the director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, speaks.

Holocaust Remembrance Day has been dedicated in the small Latgale town of Preili since 2003 — not on July 4, as it is in the rest of Latvia, but in August. Before the war, Jews constituted half of the population here. In late July–early August 1941, their mass extermination began; about 800 Jews in Preili, Aizkalne, and other towns were shot. On August 8, 2004, a memorial was opened at the Preili Jewish Cemetery, and 11 years later, on August 9, 2015, an arch with a gate was added to it, where the falling letters of the Hebrew alphabet symbolized the perished Jews. New Yorker David Silberman became the sponsor of both projects. Unfortunately, he was unable to come this year due to the coronavirus restrictions. The author of the memorial project, Sergei Ryzh, informed those present that a third part of the memorial is planned near the place of execution. Perhaps it will be possible to open it next year.

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



In his leisure hours at home, Margers Vestermanis sits down at his beloved piano and plays songs from the ghetto

September 18 marks the 95th anniversary of the birth of Margers Vestermanis, a famous Latvian historian and an Honorary Doctor of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Many people in Latvia, Jews and non-Jews, know him as a patriarch of Latvian historiography: studying the Holocaust in Latvia and perpetuating the memory of its victims, the founder and curator of the Jews in Latvia Museum, a member of the commission of historians in the Office of the President of Latvia, and holder of the Order of the Three Stars and the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and high awards from the governments of Austria and Hungary.

On the day of the jubilee, friends and colleagues came to congratulate Margers Vestermanis and to celebrate this wonderful event in the Riga Jewish Community Center. Among many others, a greeting from JSL-USA was read:

Dear Margers,

On behalf of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States, we heartily congratulate you on your 95th birthday. Residing in Latvia, you provide those living there and those beyond its borders with invaluable facts and insights about the dark years of the Holocaust that otherwise would be lost. You have even appeared in United States television—the “American Heroes Channel” (AHS). So, dear Margers, you have no choice but to continue for years to come your precious work which we will celebrate on your birthdays.

With very best wishes, Board of JSL.

A unique exhibition “Jewish Artists in Interwar Latvia: Application” was held in the gallery of the bank Rietumu in July-August. The exhibition introduced the works of now half-forgotten artists who formed an important part of the artistic



The exhibition opened in the spacious gallery of the Baltia Bank

life of Latvia between 1920 and 1940. Mikhail Yo, David Shkolnik, Isaac Friedlander, Moisey Parparov, Alexander Kopelovich, Bernhard Dannenhirsch, Samuel Haskin — many of these artists were forgotten because of the tragedy of the Holocaust and the subsequent policy of the Soviet regime. Their works were provided for this exhibition by the Latvian National Museum of Art, the Jews of Latvia Museum, the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, and several private collections. Ambassador of Israel to Latvia Orly Gil attended the opening of the exhibition.



Opening of the memorial stone donated to the Jews of Riga by a delegation from Germany

In July, an official delegation from Germany led by President of the Bremen (this is twin-town to Riga) Parliament Frank Imhof visited Riga. On July 14th, guests visited the Bikernieki Memorial, where 35,000 people were killed between 1941 and 1944, including 12,000 Jews deported to Riga from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia. Later that day, the guests went to the Museum of the Riga Ghetto and the Holocaust. Here they presented the museum with a special gift from the citizens of Bremen—a memorial stone dedicated to all the Jews killed in Latvia during WWII, all those whose names are listed on the museum’s stands. The memorial stone donated to the museum was created with money donated by residents and entrepreneurs of Bremen, not from politicians, explained Mr. Frank Imhof.

On Thursday, November 12, the Riga City Council unanimously adopted a decision to re-transfer the municipal property in the area between Moscow Street, Turgeneva Street and General Radzina Krastmala for free usage of the charity organisation—the association “SHAMIR”. This will ensure support for activities of the association, including contributing to the preservation of the commemorations of victims of the Holocaust tragedy, as well as the further development of the Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum.



The Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



In the Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale Museum

Ten years ago, in July 2010, the the museum Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale began to operate. It was opened in a room on the second floor of the Kadish synagogue in Daugavpils. According to the historian Iosif Rochko, the permanent head of the museum, Professor Iosif Shteiman inspired him to create the museum.

The main part of the museum's exposition is a collection of photographs. A separate stand is allocated for Daugavpils, there are also showcases dedicated to the Jews of Rezekne, Ludze, Kraslava, Preili, Varklyany, Dagda, Vilany.

At least 1,500 visitors come to the museum annually. Among them are diplomats (the ambassadors of the USA and Canada, Israel and Germany have visited the museum), deputies of the Saeima and other statesmen.



Iosif Rochko presents his new book

On July 25th, the second part of the book *Famous Jews of Latgale* was published in Daugavpils. The author of the book, a historian, ethnographer, director of the Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale Museum Iosif Rochko says: "The first book contained information about Jews born in Dinaburg-Dvinsk in the period from 1820 to 1920. In the second one I supplemented this section and added two new ones—the famous Jews who were born in Dvinsk-Daugavpils after 1920, and the famous Jews of Rezekne, Ludza, Kraslava, Krustpils, Livany, Varklyany, Preili, Dagda, Vilyany. The book, which features 535 pages and 125 photographs, has a circulation of 250 copies.

On October 1st, the director of the Zhanis Lipke Memorial Museum, Lolita Tomsone, was awarded a cross with a ribbon of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. "It is a great surprise and joy for me that my work and the work of the memorial are so highly appreciated!"—said Lolita

Tomsone. The ceremony was attended by members of the recipient's family, Memorial staff, representatives of the Jewish community and public organizations.

Lolita Tomsone has been working at the Memorial of the Savior of Jews Zhanis Lipke on the Riga island of Kipsala since September 2013 and has been at the helm since January 2014. The award was presented to her in connection with the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II—for her outstanding contribution to the good of society. Representatives of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany noted that the fact that the form of perpetuating memory for the first time since 1991 crossed ethnic boundaries is Lolita Tomsone's achievement. Thanks to her, in 2016, a tradition was formed to commemorate the victims of the tragedy in the Rumbula Forest at the Freedom Monument.



Lolita Tomsone receives the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany



Vlad Shulman in the Peitavshul synagogue in Riga, giving the first lecture in the series

"Is there a Jewish culture?"—this almost provocative and enticing-sounding question became the title of the series "Conversations on Jewish Culture", launched in September, on the www.ebrejukultura.lv channel, organized by the Max Goldin Jewish Cultural Heritage Society. The first program, in which the creator of the series and presenter Vlad Shulman, began his program in the Riga Choral Synagogue Peitavshul, near the pulpit, where before the war, as he said, a wonderful children's choir sang with conductor Haim Weisbein, as well as many outstanding cantors, the first of whom was Abram Abramis, the founder of a remarkable Jewish-Latvian cultural family. In the course of the conversation, the presenter invited the famous psychologist Professor Gershon Breslav and the art expert Herman Berkovich to assist. During the lecture, recorded music and songs by Mikhail Aleksandrovich, Herman Yadlovker, Joseph Schwartz, as well as our contemporaries Vlad Shulman and the men's group of the Balsis choir, Riga Kleizmer Band, were played.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule

A LETTER FROM RIGA



Dear friends—readers of *The Latvian Jewish Courier*,

Through your newspaper, I would like to address all ex-residents of Riga and other immigrants from Latvia who love Russian culture and Russian theater.

As you know, Mikhail Chekhov Riga Russian Theater, the oldest Russian theater outside Russia (founded in 1883), is located in Riga and is well-liked by the audiences. The theater's history is truly rich and glorious: legendary figures performed there, world-renowned directors created their productions on that stage, new genres and new authors were (and are) discovered by the theater. The repertory policy has always taken into account a variety of tastes and preferences. The theater offers musical performances, among which *Odessa, That Magical Town...*, based on stories by Isaac Babel, and *Tango with Oscar Strok*, dedicated to the famous king of tango, should be considered the brightest gems. One of the most fascinating creative experiments of the recent past was the production of *Yakish and Poopche* by Hanoch Levin, staged by Evgeny Arye. The play *The King and the Jester*, about the fate of the brilliant actors Solomon Mikhoels and Veniamin Zuskin, repeatedly enjoyed a full house. In 2018, a new small venue was opened with the concert program *This is the Room...*, dedicated to the creative heritage of Bulat Okudzhava.

For almost a quarter of a century, the restored Society of Guarantors of Mikhail Chekhov Riga Russian Theater has been assisting the theater. The Society was founded in 1901, but interrupted its activities after the annexation

of Latvia by the U.S.S.R. The Society was created in order "to guarantee the existence of the Russian theater in Latvia" and keep supporting the theater financially and organizationally (financial help, medical insurance, training, and workshops for the actors, etc.). Guarantor No 1 is the legendary Latvian composer Raimonds Pauls.

The COVID-19 pandemic means challenging times for the theater and actors. In order to prevent the spread of the infection, only 50% of the auditorium capacity is used; the Ministry of Culture of Latvia cannot fully compensate for financial losses; most creative projects outside the theater have been canceled or postponed indefinitely. Naturally, this affects both the income and the psycho-emotional state of the actors, who are acutely aware of and influenced by all the limitations and restrictions of the current situation. In spring 2020, when the theaters in Latvia were closed, the Society of Guarantors redistributed its budget in such a way as to support the actors as efficiently as possible. Today, the Society appeals to everyone who has emigrated or temporarily left Latvia but still remembers the Riga Russian Theater with a request for any possible financial assistance, either one-time or regular (there is an idea of establishing a foreign section of the Society). Every donator will receive a letter of thanks from the Society of Guarantors and will be recognized as a supporter of the theater in a form, depending on the donation amount. Those who are interested in becoming members of the Society of Guarantors, which currently has 28 members (individuals and legal entities), are welcome to ask for the charter of the Society to learn more about its activities and procedures. Also, if you have any questions, please, don't hesitate to contact me by e-mail:

garanti.rrt.info@gmail.com.

We hope for your kindness and personal involvement!

On behalf of the Society of Guarantors,

Edward Tsekhoval (Eduards Cehovals)
Chairman of the Board

If you are willing to transfer any funds, the bank data of the Society of Guarantors of the Riga Russian Theater are as follows:

Mihaila Čehova Rīgas Krievu teātra garantu biedrība

Registration No: 40008037266

Legal address: Kaļķu iela 16, Rīga, LV-1050

Bank: Luminor Bank AS

SWIFT: RIKOLV2X

Account: LV06RIKO0000082863799

Purpose of payment: assistance to the actors of the Riga Russian Theater.

In a previous issues of the Courier, we published the third chapter “War” of memoirs of Professor George D. Schwab, ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR: FROM LATVIA THROUGH THE CAMPS TO THE UNITED STATES. Here we offer the beginning of Chapter IV, “Street Boy”.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY

Emaciated and limping Jews, non-Jews, British soldiers, military vehicles, and army ambulances with Red Cross banners swarmed all over the huge U-boat base, where many of us survivors huddled on the soccer field. The dreaded German SS men in their unmistakable green uniforms, army soldiers and sailors were nowhere to be seen. I recognized Jewish survivors barely able to drag their feet breaking into naval canteens and helping themselves to whatever was on the shelves and on the floor. I followed suit and barely managed to drag by the handle a familiar looking can filled with substitute marmalade. I dragged it aimlessly, for I had no idea where to go and what to do. Suddenly Jule appeared as if I had willed his return and told me that he with two former Reichsbahn inmates had quartered themselves in a clean room in one of the barracks on the base. There I found a clean bunk bed for myself. I sat down and enjoyed the treat created from their bread and margarine and my marmalade. Although afflicted by hunger, I was able to consume only small portions, for my stomach apparently had shrunk considerably. Jule had a much larger appetite but did not stuff himself. Many who did died.

After a short while we heard knocks at the door. Several former Polish inmates, probably capos, entered the room, looked around, liked what they saw, and ordered us to vacate the premises. Despite his dog bites and physical weakness, Jule and the two other roommates read the intruders the riot act and the Poles vanished.

After nearly a week of resting, sleeping, obtaining some food from the British, and meeting former camp buddies with whom we daydreamed about the future, which had appeared bleak, I suddenly collapsed on May 8—the day of the official end of World War II in Europe. A British military ambulance rushed me to the town’s hospital, where I remained for over a week recovering from general bodily weakness.

I was raving madly from hunger as I was only given small amounts of warm porridge and water several times a day and was told that this was the best cure for my condition. Jule, also hospitalized and suffering terribly from the dog bites, came to visit me. On one occasion when I was delirious, craving food, I remember screaming at him. He just stared at me for some time

and left.

After gradually regaining strength, I was returned by a British military ambulance to the base that, in the meantime, had been converted into a huge displaced persons camp. Just before leaving the hospital, I ran into the former Jewish capo, the sadist Kurt Kendziorek, who informed me that he, too, would be released from the hospital later in the day and that I should convey his greetings to our mutual friends. On my return to a large barracks that had been turned into a rehabilitation quarter, I was reunited with a number of former camp inmates whom I immediately informed of the cruel Kendziorek’s imminent arrival. As expected, they rapidly organized a welcoming party at which he was clobbered with fists and chairs. Bleeding profusely, Kendziorek was returned to the hospital. That was my last encounter with that walking horror.

Because I was still weak and emaciated, I rested a lot and watched older former inmates play poker and blackjack with German currency. The money, I was told, came from selling cigarettes on the black market in town—cigarettes obtained from British soldiers. I borrowed some money and began to play as well and had beginner’s luck.

With loot in my pockets, I, too, began to make my way to town—passing the railroad station that was packed with unarmed, unshaven, filthy-looking German soldiers in unkempt uniforms. What a wonderful sight it was to observe these so-called Übermenschenn begging us survivors for bread and cigarette butts. In town, I struck up an acquaintance with a German- Jewish gentleman who was married to a German woman. In the foyer of their small apartment, they had a huge dog that allegedly once belonged to Heinrich Himmler. She was very protective of her puppies and did not like me to come close to her and her offspring. On one of my visits, the gentleman sat me down in his living room and asked me questions about my background and wartime experiences, which he recorded on pads of paper.

Those few weeks came to an abrupt end when I once more collapsed in the barrack and was immediately returned to the hospital. The diagnosis was identical to the one rendered before, general bodily weakness. In the course of my recovery, which took more than a week, I was visited by Soviet officers accompanied by their British counterparts. I was urged by the Soviets to return to my homeland, Latvia, where I would be reunited with family and friends. The British urged me to accept the invitation, but I categorically refused, remembering mamma’s directive never to return to Latvia but to move west—to England or America. As I later learned, many of those who accepted the offer were sent to deep Russia. Those that did not die there succeeded in returning to Latvia in the 1960s and 1970s.

For reasons unknown to me, the British military ambulance did not return me to the displaced persons

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY (continued)

camp. Instead, I was driven some five kilometers from Neustadt to a Latvian children's home in a suburb-like setting called Haffkrug. I was well-received as a son of Latvia. Everyone spoke Latvian, sang Latvian songs, danced Latvian folk dances, and talked much about returning to the homeland. Some of the Latvian staff claimed to have known papa and to have been patients of his. The head of the home was a woman who often traveled to Lübeck where, among others, she met with General Dankers, a name that did not mean a thing to me. According to the head of the children's home, the general wanted to meet me, which, fortunately, did not come to pass. (I subsequently learned that he was a notorious anti-Semite.) Yet, despite the warmth with which I was received, I did not truly feel that I belonged in that milieu where the focus was on returning to Latvia. On a day when the head of the children's home was visiting Lübeck, I made my way back on foot to the DP camp in Neustadt; I never returned to the children's home.

Once more I was assigned to the rehabilitation barrack where some new faces greeted me. Jule, in the meantime, had left for Kiel where his wife, Eugenia, had been liberated. As before, the former Jewish prison inmates were busy playing cards and were engaged in black marketeering. With some money left over from my previous success, I resumed playing cards and my luck held.

Some of my older camp buddies talked me into traveling to nearby Lübeck. There, I was told, they would "beat off their troubles" (in the Yiddish: *obschlogen die tsores*). Not yet fourteen, still weak, and not fully physically mature, I did not yet understand the meaning of getting rid of one's troubles. I thought it meant going to movies and cabarets. Not daring to reveal my ignorance, I did not ask questions and agreed to go with them to Lübeck.

The trip was nothing like what I had expected. A short walk from the railroad station led to a street by the name Clemens, I believe, which had twelve numbered buildings—six on each side of the street. In the doorways and windows of buildings I and IA, stood or sat very attractive young girls inviting us in. My three buddies soon disappeared, and I was left alone to fend for myself. Not really knowing what to do and politely refusing invitations, I walked back and forth on the street, just looking around and trying to quiet my pounding heart. I was struck by the contrast of the women sitting in the windows of houses XI and XII with those in I and IA. The former appeared to be in their forties or fifties and terribly overweight. On the return trip to Neustadt, my buddies compared notes and cruelly snickered at me for not having joined them.

I was hiding my shame that I was a sissy. In addition

to not being fully grown, I did not yet have pubic hair to speak of. Nevertheless, I agreed to join them on their next outing, even though I was sure that I would not go back. After considerable prodding and teasing, I went along on their next trip. I paid some twenty marks to a young attractive brunette. Showing understanding of my innocence and fright, she patiently and lovingly introduced me to a phenomenally enjoyable experience. Finally, I understood the meaning of *obschlogen die tsores*.

I entered the bordello a child and left feeling a man ready to conquer the world. On the train trip back to Neustadt, I joined my buddies in laughter and in comparing notes. Merriment notwithstanding, deep down I was despondent—wondering whether my mother had survived and where she might be and what I should do without her and papa and Bubi. I sensed that she was alive, but had no clue how to find her in war-torn Germany. Mail service to the United States and England had not yet been restored. With pockets full of money, and even some hidden under my bed in the barrack, I had the urge to strike out and see the world—remembering stories my parents, relatives, and friends had told about their travels.

My frame of reference was, of course, stories I had heard from Aunt Hermine—her stories overshadowed those of my other relatives, including my parents, even though they shared some of the excitement when they were in Berlin frequenting *Kabaret der Komiker*, dinner parties with diplomats, dancing in Paris nightclubs. President Hindenburg insisting that Aunt Hermine, whom he called *meine Garbo* (my Garbo), be seated next to him, and so on. One unforgettable story was of a dinner party with diplomats at the residence of Aunt Hermine and Uncle Xavier, which papa and mamma had attended. The gossip about fellow diplomats was scathing—so much so that nobody dared get up to use the facilities for fear of becoming the target of gossip. Another story I never forgot and mamma told it over and over again related when she, papa, uncles, and aunts were on a trip to Paris from Berlin with some relatives joining from Vienna—they were dazzled by the food at Maxim's. Mamma asked to be shown the kitchen and was horrified to see cats on the counter. I also remembered the brand names of cigarettes aunts Hermine and Tanya smoked—*Went Patent* and *Diplomat*. What had also impressed me was Aunt Rita's luggage: on arriving in Libau for a visit, she brought her suitcase that I marveled at because of the beautiful labels of hotels she stayed at in Rome, Venice, Zurich, and elsewhere—places I was sure to visit. Aunt Tanya, who also lived with her husband, Karl, in Berlin noted that Berlin was only a village in comparison with Paris and Paris a village in comparison with London.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY (continued)

Remembering also my parents mentioning distant relatives living in Hamburg, it occurred to me to take a train to that city on the pretext of looking for them and seeing the city to broaden my horizons. I arrived at Hamburg's heavily damaged but bustling main railroad station (Hauptbahnhof) in late September or early October with a small suitcase. Wandering in and around the station, I was shocked to see the destruction all around me—which reminded me of the destruction of Libau but even worse. I was at a total loss about where to go, what to eat, in short, what to do. Apparently noticing my dilemma at the station, the police approached me and asked for identification papers; I presented those I had obtained in Neustadt's DP camp. After consultations with higher-ups at a police station, I was driven to a Jewish children's home in the Hamburg suburb of Blankenese, the city's equivalent of Greenwich, Connecticut. A few child survivors were already there and more were scheduled to arrive. Fellow survivors from Libau Hirsh Dorbian and Joske Genton arrived somewhat later, and I made new friends with the half-Jewish Rolf Redlich who hailed from Berlin, Wolfgang Teichtahl who originally came from Vienna, and Szlamek Bresler from Poland.

On the large estate overlooking the Elbe River stood three solidly constructed buildings and a gatehouse where the estate's caretaker lived with his wife and dog that had belonged to the Warburgs. The owner of the estate, I learned was a banker by the name of Max Warburg, whose family had been dispossessed of the estate by the Nazis; he regained it immediately after the war. Not living there, the family made it available to some Jewish organizations—the American Joint Distribution Committee and British Relief Unit—for the purpose of sheltering a small number of child survivors.

What a relief life on this tranquil and scenic estate was. Originally I was placed in the guesthouse, which was on a small hill, and then was moved to the White House—the main building. The three-story structure even had an elevator. The children's home was administered by the American Joint Distribution Committee. I remember Selma Bendrehmer who hailed from the Bronx proudly wearing a handsome American military uniform, as did Charlotte Rosenbaum, even though she was from Metz, France. Other staff included Egon Fink from the U.S. and Hilda of the British Relief Unit who wore a British military uniform. From time to time, we were visited by an imposingly tall and heavy high Joint official in American military uniform by the name of Rothman.

In the rear of the White House was a barrack where, after morning calisthenics and breakfast, we studied the Hebrew language, Jewish history, the Jewish-Arab struggle over the Holy Land, the geography of the

region, and the Jewish-British struggle over Jews being permitted to enter Palestine. Instructors were members of the Jewish Brigade, including Zvi Teier and Ben Yehudah, both in clearly identifiable British uniforms. We were heavily indoctrinated with Zionist ideology and for the need for us to prepare to enter the Holy Land. To reach it, Jews had to evade the British blockade for which we were being prepared mentally and physically by keeping our bodies in shape. This illegal immigration was known as alijah bet in contrast to the very small number of legal immigrants who received British certificates—I believe 1,500 a month. To me, who had been brought up in an assimilated home, welcoming the Sabbath was very meaningful. Following the festive meal, we folk danced and sang Hebrew songs, which I enjoyed immensely. Some of the dances called for boys to invite girls and vice versa. I was particularly attracted to Rosi from Czechoslovakia who later left for a kibbutz in Palestine.

The war years coupled with the Jewish education I was now receiving continued to sensitize me to Jewishness. Without becoming religious, including not adhering to dietary laws, I was beginning to be impressed by the richness of Jewish history and my cultural heritage. In short, I was on the way of becoming a proud Jew prepared to fight for the liberation of the biblical Jewish homeland of Palestine.

Even though the material covered in the classes I attended in the barracks near the White House was interesting and influenced my evolving mindset, I, as in Libau, continued to have difficulties warming up to school routine. Unlike most of the kids who listened to the teachers, some of us—out of boredom—shot spitballs at them. Obviously aware of our wartime experiences, they did not get too upset and counseled us on the value of education in general and what it would mean for building a Jewish state.

In Blankenese, I was finally able to scribble some words to relatives in England and the United States telling them that I was alive. My "announcements" were sent by military mail. Addressing my uncle in London, I simply wrote on the envelope Mr. Robert Schwab, London, England, neglecting to indicate that it be sent to Shell Oil where he was one of the directors. Obviously he did not receive any of my semiliterate epistles. Nor did my scribbles reach my cousin Nuta and her husband, Dr. Elie Bruskin, in Hartford, Connecticut. Addressing letters to the husband of my cousin Manya, David Alder, in Salt Lake City, Utah, I ascribed to him the title director of Shell Oil. On receiving several of my announcements, the manager of the Shell gasoline station in Salt Lake City looked up the name David Alder in the phone book. There he was listed as the owner of an insurance agency. On telephoning David Alder,

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY (continued)

the Shell manager asked whether the name George Schwab meant anything to him. David confirmed that I was his wife's cousin. Thus contact with some of my relatives was established by way of Salt Lake City.

In the meantime mamma, who had been liberated by the Soviets in March 1945 in the small town of Chinov, not far from Stolp and Lauenburg, heard that there were many Jews in Lodz, Poland, and decided to travel there in the summer of 1945 in the hope of obtaining information about my fate. On leaving a trolley car in Lodz, she was recognized by a woman who called out Frau (Mrs.) Dr. Schwab. That lady from Libau, Mrs. Dorbian, informed her that I was alive and living in the British zone. Overwhelmed by the news, mother neglected to ask where in the British zone. Back in Lauenburg, where she was working as a nurse in a Soviet hospital, mamma packed her few belongings and with some money in her pockets she made her way to Berlin, a city she knew from visits in the late 1920s and early 1930s. There she rented a room in Schöneberg and visited the American Joint Distribution Committee. Because she was a fair-skinned, blue-eyed blonde unable to speak Yiddish, the Joint assumed she was a German, and on her numerous visits refused her pleas for help to locate her son who had survived four years of hell.

At last one lady at the Joint said that she believed mamma's story and would help her locate her son. On mamma's behalf she sent letters by military mail to our relatives in England and the United States, which they received; this lady of the Joint also succeeded in establishing telephone contact between my mother in Berlin and me in Hamburg. We both cried and promised to look for ways to reunite.

Once a week we were able to speak by way of a military telephone. In the meantime, our U.S. relatives especially began to bombard us with packages containing clothing, cigarettes, chocolate, canned meats, coffee, and so on. In addition, every letter I received by military mail contained a five or ten dollar bill. My cousins wrote that the cigarettes and coffee were not meant for me but to be used by me to exchange for things I needed.

Discipline at the school was not strict. Under the pretext of looking for relatives and seeing the city, I soon made my way to Hamburg's Reeperbahn—the amusement part of town also known as the red light district. Bribing a bouncer with two cigarettes, I was admitted to a dance parlor whose name I believe was Alhambra or Alcatraz. There I had a beer or two and, like a man of the world I imagined myself to be, smoked a few American Camel cigarettes that scratched my throat. I could hardly stand smoking, but as a man I felt compelled to do so. To be "with it" was the name of the game. The immersion into a world of pleasure helped

me at least temporarily overcome memories of my painful past and sad present. Beneath my happy-go-lucky

facade, I was emotionally unsettled. Despite my emaciated looks, which had been aggravated by a recent appendectomy in a hospital in the Altona district of Hamburg, older women invited me to dance—I hardly knew how—and asked me for cigarettes and chocolate, which I dispensed with alacrity. At the time, I was convinced that this dive, where I was always warmly welcomed, was the height of elegance in cosmopolitan, bombed-out Hamburg.

I also hired a driver who claimed that his family owned a factory that produced parts for machines and employed 200 people in Hamburg-Harburg. The owners offered to sell it to me for 10 lbs. of coffee and 40,000 cigarettes. There was no way I could muster the quantities asked for. Nor did I know anything about owning a factory or, for that matter, any kind of business. I was just eager to have a good time, enjoying being a man of the world on the verge of turning fourteen.

At about the same time, Jule reappeared on the scene. He was now the driver for Norbert Wollheim, a German-Jewish gentleman who headed the Jewish community of the British zone. He lived with his wife in Lübeck. On their way to Bergen-Belsen's DP camp, Norbert and Jule would, at times, pick me up in Blankenese and together we would drive to the camp. There I was introduced to, among others, Yosele Rosensaft, head of the large Jewish part of the DP camp. The huge camp also had a Polish district, where it was dangerous for Jews to be seen—especially after dark when some were beaten for no other reason than being Jewish. I was told that Jews were even shot at. As Poles were widely known for their rabid anti-Semitism, that section of the camp was, of course, avoided by Jews during the day as well.

Norbert spoke Yiddish with a German accent that I was able to follow. It was akin to the Yiddish spoken in my part of Latvia, which, as already noted, I had picked up during the war. It was different with Yosele's Yiddish, which I had difficulty following. Both Jule and Norbert understood him and translated his questions about Blankenese, which I answered in a yiddishized German. On one of the return trips, Norbert invited me to stay overnight at his home in Lübeck where I was told I would meet his wife. She was very attractive and they lived in a lovely section of town. On another occasion, Jule brought me to Kiel where he lived with Eugenia in the nearby DP camp at Eckernförde. Our reunion was warm and wonderful.

One day at Blankenese I received an invitation to appear at the Joint's suite on the second floor of the White House.

**By George David Schwab
Continued in the next issue.**