



The Latvian Jewish Courier

YIZKOR 2023



The memorial meeting was moderated, as in previous years, by Mitchell Lieber

The Jewish Survivors of Latvia held its annual Yizkor on 19 November at the Park East Synagogue as usual. This ceremony honors the memory of more than twenty-five thousand innocent victims—Latvian Jews massacred in the Rumbula forest by German Fascists and their Latvian collaborators. (A total of 73,000 Jews were murdered in Latvia alone during the Holocaust.)



The third and fourth generations—grandchildren and great-grandchildren of JSL members

This year, we marked the eighty-second anniversary of this mass slaughter in Rumbula, the place of our eternal grief, where our loved ones, our sisters and brothers, were killed. As usual, we began our meeting with the lighting of six commemorative candles in memory of six million Jews killed during the years of the Holocaust. These six candles were lit by children in the second and third generations of the JSL members' families: **Michael and Noah Schwab, Michelle Minkin, Eva Phillips, Aviva Solovey, Aaron and Jacob Kramer, and Joshua Rakhman.** Lawrence Kruglyak, a member of the Friends of Israel Defense Forces, lit the seventh candle to express our solidarity with the State of Israel and commemorate our brothers and sisters who sacrificed, and who still continue to sacrifice, their lives in defense of the state of Israel. After the candle lighting, our guest cantor, the world-renowned

Joseph Malovany, sang the prayer "El Moleh Rachamim."

Afterward Master of Ceremonies Mitchell Lieber invited David Silberman, who had been the JSL President for the last ten years, to report on our work during the past year. David stated that the JSL is a normally functioning organization, despite the shrinking of our organization due to the natural aging and passing away of the Holocaust-surviving generation. David informed those present that he recently resigned and the board elected a new president—Charles Springfield. He wished Charles great success. He also spoke about the JSL's activities to maintain the memory of Latvian Jews killed in the Holocaust by mentioning them in various speeches and publications, in particular through the *Courier*. He also noted the importance of last year's publication of a Latvian translation of George Schwab's memoirs, with a foreword by former Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga. After David Silberman's speech, JSL Council member Aelita Fitingof, on behalf of all JSL members, thanked David for his successful leadership of our organization for over a decade.

Mitchell Lieber then read the greeting from JSL Vice President Joseph Faerber, who unfortunately could not participate. He greeted and thanked President Emeritus David Silberman and congratulated new JSL President Dr. Charles Springfield. Mr. Joseph Faerber also reminded us that it is appropriate to recall the founding principles and reasons for which our organization was established over forty years ago, which is to honor the memories of those Jews who perished in Latvia during the Holocaust, as well as to assist those who have survived. Incredibly, and unfortunately, the awful realities of the Holocaust have come under attack again. As we can see from recent events, there are dark forces in the world that both question that the Holocaust ever occurred, and deny the legitimacy of the Jewish people's right to live peacefully in our ancient homeland.

Afterward, JSL president Charles Springfield addressed participants with his speech (see it on pages 2-4). The next speaker was our guest Oļegs Ilģis, deputy permanent representative of Latvia to the United Nations (see his speech on pages 5-6). Then, a very emotional speech was given by Aelita Fitingof, chairwoman of the JSL Board of Trustees.



Aelita Fitingof, on behalf of all JSL members, thanks David Silberman for 10 years of successful leadership of our organization

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YIZKOR 2023 (continued)

She stated, among other things, “that it is an honor to be a part of the Executive Board of Jewish Survivors of Latvia, and follow in the footsteps of such remarkable strong women like Luba Rakhman and Gerta Feigin who were there at the very beginning of this organization. For many years, attending Yizkor services with three generations, I was inspired by the work these ladies did. A few years ago, despite the pandemic, we conducted a memorial service in Brooklyn at the site of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia. It gave me the utmost pleasure to pay tribute to one senior member I’ve admired for many years—Professor George David Schwab, one of the founders of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia. His much-anticipated epic book *Odyssey of a Child Survivor: From Latvia through the Camps to the United States* was published this year in Latvian (earlier in English and in Russian), receiving rave reviews. This book must be read by everyone who holds dear the memory of perished loved ones on whose shoulders we stand today. For me, personally, it has become my quest to pass the torch of our shared Jewish history from generation to generation. These stories must be taught in schools so that such crimes against humanity never repeat themselves.”

Following Aelita Fitingof was Rafaela Neihausen, a representative of the younger generation of JSL members. She drew the attention of those present to the JSL Facebook page, and also invited her peers to get to know each other better after the ceremony. Subsequently, Mitchell Lieber invited the audience to stand as he read the names of JSL members and loved ones who passed away during the previous year: **Eva Gutman, Emma Bramnik, Michael Margolin, Karina Stegantseva, Jane Brod (Bernshtein), Nella Solovey, Rachel Goldschmidt.** Afterwards, Cantor Joseph Malovany said the Mourner’s Kaddish. He then sang several Jewish songs in Hebrew and Yiddish, accompanying himself on the piano. This included the Hebrew song, *Utzu Eytza Vetufar*, the words of which are from the Book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible.

* * *

On November 30th, the day of the 82nd anniversary of the execution of prisoners of the Riga ghetto, a rally was held at the site of the executions in

Rumbula, where on November 30 and December 8, 1941, the Nazis killed 25 thousand Jews. Here today, foreign diplomats, representatives of public organizations and the Jewish community were addressed by Deputy chairperson of the Riga City Council Linda Ozola, Deputy chairman of the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities Dmitry Krupnikov, Israeli Ambassador to Latvia Sharon Rappaport-Palgi, producer-director of the documentary *Rumbula’s Echo* Mitchell Lieber who



Mitchell Lieber, who came from the USA, spoke at the rally on November 30th in Rumbula

was in Riga, and students of the Riga Jewish Secondary School. The ceremony was led by the Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky, with prayers held by the rabbi of the Riga synagogue Eliyohu Krumer and cantor Telman Guzhevsky.

On the evening of November 30th, a mourning event in memory of the 82nd anniversary of the largest mass murder of Jews in Latvia, was also held at the Freedom Monument in Riga. This action was organized by the members of the Latvian civil initiative “Rumbula 82. We remember. We mourn.” The organizers of the event this year, decided as in the past to emphasize that those killed were our fellow citizens, citizens of Latvia, so it was decided to hold the event in the city center, and not just in Rumbula, where it takes place every year. Riga residents lit candles at the monument all through the day. The Prime Minister of Latvia Evika Siliņa and Minister of Culture Agnese Logina also lit the candles.

Prepared by Eva Phillips



On the evening of November 30th, many hundreds of memorial candles were lit at the Freedom Monument in Riga

ADDRESS BY CHARLES SPRINGFIELD, PRESIDENT OF JSL

Cantor Malovany, President Emeritus David Silberman, members of Jewish Survivors of Latvia, family and friends,

I welcome you all to our annual Yizkor service, when we solemnly remember family and brethren who suffered through

the genocide of the Holocaust in Latvia during one of the darkest hours in human history. The holocaust in Latvia ended with 98 percent of the Jewish population murdered, considered to be the highest percentage of mortality in Europe.

We take this day out of our year and memorialize our victims and commit to never allow the world to forget what happened. We also recommit our support for the Jewish community in Latvia, by upholding its community, health, and welfare programs, while maintaining relations with governmental entities in Latvia and Western Europe as necessary or needed.

It is said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” History reinforces this notion, and that

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ADDRESS BY CHARLES SPRINGFIELD, PRESIDENT OF JSL (continued)



Charles Springfield speaks

has never been so clearly demonstrated than with the heinous atrocities committed against Israeli Jews by the Islamic terrorists of Hamas. Barbaric crimes against civilians including men, women, infants, the elderly, and the sick. Crimes that included kidnapping civilians to serve as hostages in a manner that ripped at our soul and made us cry out in pain. A new example of how evil can turn into antisemitic acts with complete disregard for the value of a Jewish life by entities who hate our very existence.

Earlier this year, at the invitation of the Latvian delegation to the United Nations, a group of our members was invited to the Latvian Embassy and to attend the Holocaust Remembrance Day program. It was a solemn ceremony that was powerful and moving. The final speaker to address the General Assembly was the Israeli ambassador, Gilad Erdan, who clearly pointed out and warned all of us that day of the UN's bias against Israel and the constant attacks by various UN groups against the Jewish State. He predicted the great threat that was to come. More on that in a moment.

Several months ago, I was approached by members of our board to join them as president. Shortly thereafter, David notified the organization of his need to pass the torch and deal with health issues. I was then asked if I would consider taking the position of president of the organization.

While considering my decision, I sat with my wife Gail and asked her thoughts and opinion. Her only concern was her knowledge that I get very emotional when faced with the memories of the Holocaust and when antisemitism explodes in our world. I remember in my younger years first acknowledging the pain, fear—and yes, anger—I would feel when these events occurred or when I was faced with these feelings. I remember reading the book *Children of the Holocaust* by Helen Epstein where she wrote, "I knew I carried slippery combustible things secret and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost. An iron box in my soul, difficult to describe."

Then I thought back to the many times I heard my father, Steven Springfield, a founding member of JSL and its first president, talk of the goals and responsibilities of Jewish Survivors of Latvia as an organization. He feared that with the passing of time and without the continued effort and participation of the second, third, and all future generations, the important and solemn work would begin to fade, and memories would grow distant.

I went back and watched a video of my dad giving a speech at the Wailing Wall memorial dedication in 1993. I accepted the position. Then came October 7.

As plans were undertaken for this Yizkor service, October 7 and the slaughter and barbaric acts committed against civilians and noncombatants occurred. It reignited all those feelings I had

tried to keep buried deep in my soul, in that iron box. Almost worse were the responses on university campuses, supported by many university administrators who were silent, if not supportive, of the anti-Israel sentiment. Major urban centers had demonstrations in the streets also blaming the victims. I wondered whether this is how my ancestors felt on days like Kristallnacht. A sense of dread and, yes, fear crept into my soul. Then I watched the United Nations Security Council and Secretary General Guterres speak. I wondered whether he had forgotten the words he had spoken just nine months ago. Putting the slaughter of our people by terrorists "in context." Where were his words to "Never Forget" from his speech during the Holocaust Remembrance Day we attended just last January? They were hollow words that slipped his mind while he wanted to put October 7 "in context." The words and warnings from the Israeli ambassador flooded over me as the hatred for Israel bubbled back to the surface in the UN. Guterres' speech to the security council was disgusting, antisemitic, and an example of the general bias of the UN to the civilized and Western world.

My own history with our organization was, of course, through my father, Steven Springfield. He was born Isador Springenfeld on 30 January 1923. His family had a general merchandise shop and was active in the Jewish community. He attended the gymnasium and was a drummer and singer in his brothers' boy band, "Peter and his Boys." They had lived in Riga for generations, living in peace with their fellow Latvian citizens.

At 18 his boyhood was brought to a stop and the world as he knew it was obliterated. Invasion by the Soviet army, Nazi occupation, the Riga ghetto. The massacres at the Choral synagogue, Rumbula and Bikernieki, Kaiserwald and Stutthoff concentration camps and the final death march through eastern Pomerania before ultimately being liberated by Soviet forces.

Over those five years, fifty-six out of fifty-eight of our immediate family members had perished.

Steven and his brother Peter survived and ultimately immigrated to the United States. They started families and a business, pursuing a new life. I shared that experience for the first twenty years of my life. In our home, we rarely spoke about the unthinkable, except when war would break out in the Middle East and fear would boil over.

In time, as life settled in for my family in the U.S., the brothers began networking with like-minded Latvian Jewish survivors in the U.S., Canada and Israel. Ultimately, in 1984 they established Jewish Survivors of Latvia as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Their goal was to reach out to the small surviving population to pursue the need for remembrance and historical accuracy, education, and social support for the remaining survivors and their families.

Survivors like Max Kaufman, George Schwab, Peter Springfield, Leo Kram, Jack Ratz, Gertrude Schneider, and my dad, Steven Springfield, as well as others. Please excuse me for anyone I may have left out.

Unfortunately, Latvia was still behind the Iron Curtain and access and information was significantly inhibited by the politics of the day. In the late 1980s, Gorbachev granted limited autonomy to the three Baltic States. Steven and Peter decided to return to Riga to see distant family members and to assess the situation for the small population of survivors and their descendants.

The situation proved itself to be extremely harsh, with

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ADDRESS BY CHARLES SPRINGFIELD, PRESIDENT OF JSL (continued)

little support for our brethren, no accurate history of what had occurred, and the communist historical narrative that we were victims of fascism. The infrastructure looked unimproved since the end of World War II.

Let me take a moment to review the accomplishments of our organization and make a plea to all our members and their second and third generations to support and get involved with JSL. We should not forget our ancestors and martyrs and need to continue supporting crucial Jewish community programs in Latvia like the Jewish Community Center, the Bikur Holim hospital, and the elderly survivors who received no pension while the collaborators were given support during their sunset years.

The government in Latvia has moved to address many of the issues we have raised, we must maintain focus to complete the goals that we set. I was quite pleased to see, after October 7, the President of Latvia and the head of the Latvian Saeima, its parliament, meet with our community at the Jewish Community Center in a show of support. I also came across a photo on Facebook of a pro-Israel demonstration happening in the main square with Israeli flags prominently displayed.

By networking with the American government and Western European allies, JSL and its leaders urged the government of Latvia to gain a place in the community of nations by joining NATO or the EU, while addressing the historical record and complicity of many Latvians. That important approach, led by our own Secretary of State Professor George Schwab, proved successful by developing a close and collegial relationship with the President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, and her government post-independence. JSL helped and was supportive of the government of Latvia, making the case for Latvia to have a new place in the community of nations.

As former U.S. Ambassador James Howard Holmes wrote, when he recalled the work by JSL:

“George, as president of the National Committee of America foreign policy, and Steven, as president of Jewish Survivors of Latvia, were the strongest supporters on every count. They provided for President Freiberga to speak to influential groups and leaders about Latvia’s growing maturity on Holocaust issues. They [JSL] were central to the rebuilding of Jewish community centers, synagogues, and restitution issues for Liepaja, Riga, and places of remembrance. Likewise, they worked closely with the historical commission on publications, the training of history teachers about the Holocaust, and political compromises necessary for the commission to deal fairly with the Holocaust on the one hand and Soviet subjugation of Latvia on the other.”

For their work, they both received the Order of the Three Stars for service to Latvia.

He has also described the actions of JSL, and the Jewish community towards the Latvian state as, “a great expression of forgiveness.”

However, what the world has continued to show is that old evils lurk just below the surface. The winds of politics and evil can change and blow as a tailwind, or alternatively, straight into our faces. I am convinced that the need to continue and increase support for our Latvian family by maintaining and shining a bright light on the history of Latvia are crucial.

At last year’s service, Ambassador Pildegovičs spoke honestly about the overwhelming threat to Latvia by Putin’s Russia. That

issues would need to be balanced by Latvia’s need to protect itself from a Russian attempt to subjugate Latvia—again. Fear in Latvia is that if Putin wins in Ukraine his next attempt would be to “retake” the Baltics. A reminder that the geopolitical world also affects the situation for Jews in the Western world and everywhere in the countries where we live.

In closing, I would like to share an Open Letter I received after October 7 from the community of Holocaust survivors who are volunteers at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. They wrote:

“We are Holocaust survivors who volunteer at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, sharing our experiences with the public. We are always gratified to see how much interest there is from young people from every part of the world. To hear their comments and questions gives us hope for the future.

Today, as we see the murderous destruction in Israel, that hope is dimmed. All our lives we mourned for our loved ones, lost to the genocidal actions of the Nazis and their collaborators, but we hoped the lessons of the past could shape a different future. Today, we mourn for an Israel that holds such special meaning for us.

In our youth, we were proud Jews in our communities throughout Europe. Eventually that meant escape or certain death. We wanted to flee, but no one would take us. We longed for freedom and security, but there was no Jewish state. Today, the state of Israel is the guarantor of a Jewish future, but it is under assault by Hamas terrorists. Today, men, women, and children are again the targeted Jews. October 7, we witnessed the worst killing of Jews since the Holocaust.

This is not what we expected in the final chapter of our lives, as we contemplate our legacy, the future of Holocaust memory and education, and the future of our people. We write this letter to humanity with sorrow, but also in hope. We know pain few can comprehend, having seen our families and communities obliterated. We are living proof that the unthinkable is always possible.

Not only that but we are living proof of resilience, that we can rebuild, as our fierce determination demonstrates. We must be realistic about the dangers, but we should never despair. That would be a victory for those seeking to destroy us. That is why memory and education become more important with each passing year. And we are proud of our contributions to fortifying new generations to face the challenges that lie ahead. We promised our loved ones we would never forget and never give up. Especially, at this darkest of moments, that remains our promise and our challenge to humanity.”

With those words, which we echo, your Board of Directors and I ask you to consider the existential need for the second, third, and all future generations to participate in our mission. Our direct survivor victims are mostly in their nineties. We need not forget our families and brethren. I encourage our families and friends to remember the importance of supporting JSL and to be vigilant as we continue to support the Jewish community in Latvia. We must continue our efforts at remembrance, education, and growing the close relationship with the Government of Latvia, as we monitor progress and address concerns as they arise.

I wish us all peace and health and look forward to speaking with you all at our luncheon.

Shalom!

*Charles Springfield, MD
President, Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc.*

ADDRESS BY OĻEGS IĻĢIS, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LATVIA TO THE U.N.



Oļegs Ilģis speaks

President Emeritus Professor George Schwab, President Emeritus David Silberman, President Charles Springfield, Chairwoman Elita Fitingoff, distinguished representatives of the community of Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the United States:

Firstly, allow me to convey the warmest regards from the Permanent Representative, Ambassador Sanita Pavļuta-Deslandes, on this important occasion. It is my great honor to address you today on Her Excellency's behalf as we commemorate victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

Yesterday we celebrated the 105th Anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Latvia. Our country was born on the ashes of World War I, as it was proclaimed after the brave victory of our predecessors over great powers surrounding us. We have always cherished our freedom and independence as indispensable to our wellbeing. However, World War II brought enormous pain and suffering for all of the population of Latvia. Fifty years of occupation, repression, and deportation have left a deep scar in our nation's history.

Holocaust remembrance has always been supported at the highest political level. That led to the establishment of the Commemoration Day for the Victims of Genocide. The President of Latvia, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are always present at the official Holocaust commemoration ceremony on the 4th of July.

In addition to the official commemoration day, the Rumbula massacre remembrance on the 30th of November, as well as the commemorative service at the Biķernieki Memorial on the 27th of January with a wide participation of the diplomatic corps are an established tradition.

Within recent years, the number of local events has also increased. Apart from Riga, covering most of Latvia's territory, such events are held regularly in Liepāja, Ventspils, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Ludza, Jēkabpils, Jelgava, Bauska, and Cēsis, besides other regions of the country.

Placing candles at the Monument of Freedom in Riga on the 30th of November for the anniversary of the beginning of the tragic events in Rumbula in 1941 has become the most prominent newly instituted event. The tradition was launched due to the initiative led by a group of grassroot activists in 2016. The event draws hundreds of participants every year, including state dignitaries. This new tradition has an invaluable significance and serves as a symbol of awareness of the Holocaust as an integral part of Latvia's history.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Extensive efforts are being invested on the issues of Holocaust research and education in Latvia. Fundamental studies have been undertaken on crimes against humanity perpetrated by the totalitarian regimes in the territory of Latvia. The Holocaust has become an integral part of the history curriculum in all of Latvia's schools.

The Holocaust is among the most researched history subjects within academic institutions in Latvia. The Commission of Historians, established by the President of Latvia in 1998, devoted more than twenty years to the research and documentation of the crimes against humanity committed within the territory of Latvia under the Soviet and Nazi occupations, including the aftermath of the Holocaust. A total of twenty-nine volumes have been published by the Commission, several of them were devoted to Holocaust history. The volumes are accessible online and the articles have English summaries.

One of the most important goals, also set by the 2020 Ministerial Declaration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, is the opening of the archives related to World War II. At the Latvian State History Archive, in addition to the rest of the state archives in Latvia, all documents are freely available including those that are related to World War II and the Holocaust.

Distinguished participants,

After regaining its independence in 1991, the Republic of Latvia affirmed its goodwill to redress the historical consequences of the Nazi regime and the nationalisation of property that was enacted by the Soviet occupation regime. Therefore, Latvia has addressed, with the highest political responsibility, the issue of restitution of immovable property that was confiscated or otherwise wrongfully seized during and after World War II to its rightful owners.

The restitution process of private property that started in 1991, under existing legislation, was completed in 2006. In addition, during the denationalization process, ownership of more than forty communal and religious properties have already been restored to the Latvian Jewish community.

However, due to the fact that most of the pre-war Jewish community in Latvia was exterminated during the Holocaust, a large number of religious and communal properties could not be reclaimed where no Jewish community is present.

The Government continuously maintained the dialogue with the Jewish community of Latvia in regards to this challenging phase of the restitution of heirless immovable property.

As a result, "The Law on Goodwill Compensation to Latvian Jewish Community" was adopted in Saeima and was entered into force on the 7th of March 2022, thus being a concluding step of the restitution of immovable property to the Latvian Jewish Community, and simultaneously fulfilling the commitments of the Terezin declaration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to bring your attention to current global events. It is with great concern that we follow the devastating situation in the Middle East. Latvia condemns the brutal attacks by Hamas on Israel and underlines that further terrorist threats must be

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ADDRESS BY OĻEGS ILĢIS (continued)

prevented. Latvia expresses its deepest sympathy for all civilian lives lost and continually prays for the safety of hostages and their families.

Every loss of civilian life is deplorable. It is crucial to ensure the protection of all civilians at all times. People are suffering. It is urgent that continued, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access and aid reach those in need through all necessary measures. The situation calls for a rapid and significant increase of international support to humanitarian organizations. In our immediate response, Latvia has allocated additional funding to Israeli Red Shield, the UN agencies of UNRWA, and the World Food Programme to contribute to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine continues. Russia continues to challenge the global rules-based order and violate international law. Ukraine is fighting for its survival and its right to exist. Ukrainians are fighting for the freedom of us all. Latvia's support to Ukraine remains steadfast. It exceeds 1 percent of our GDP, both in military and humanitarian assistance. We must and will continue our support until Ukraine prevails and those accountable for the crimes are brought to justice.

Distinguished participants,

The world is facing multiple crises. While continuing to be an active member of the UN, Latvia has presented its application as a candidate for election to the United Nations Security Council for the years 2026 and 2027. This bid is a confirmation of our country transforming from a captive nation to a full-fledged member of the UN family. It is a sincere pledge to take up additional responsibility to international peace and security, protection of international law, as well as effectiveness and modernization of the UN system.

It is our turn and duty to protect the UN Charter; to defend the rule of law, peace, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the UN member states. We know the value of freedom and independence due to our own history.

In conclusion, let me emphasize our belief in the importance of facing challenges together! This has been also proven by the President of Latvia, H.E. Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, who is, at this very moment, in Israel to express our solidarity with the people of Israel, the fight against Hamas, and to discuss ways to prevent the escalation of conflict within the region.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and to share this moment with you. *Todā rabā! Liels paldies!*

RUMBULA'S ECHO TEST SCREENINGS BEGIN SOON

The documentary *Rumbula's Echo* is approaching final editing. Producer-director Mitchell Lieber said, "We're scheduling test screenings to inform final revisions to the edit."

The film's eyewitness accounts tell the story of the massacre at Rumbula in Riga and the struggle of a few thousand Jews to survive afterward. The movie shows both pre-war Jewish life and mass shootings throughout Latvia with sections about Daugavpils, Liepaja, and as an example of a small town, Preiļi.

Lieber continued, "Test screenings are being arranged in New York, Chicago, Terre Haute, Indiana, and probably Los Angeles, Riga, and Europe in the first half of 2023. Subscribers to *Rumbula's Echo's* free e-newsletter will be informed of how to get tickets in their area."

The movie's archival images and footage of Holocaust places are narrated by survivors, supplemented by statements of bystanders, perpetrators, local collaborators, rescuers, and the murdered, that were sourced from diaries. Mitchell Lieber noted, "We want to provide a fuller view of the Shoah. *Rumbula's Echo* includes passages from the diaries of two murdered teen girls. These are spoken by actresses as the girls' photos are seen on screen and give voice to the murdered. The murdered must be included."

Survivors in *Rumbula's Echo's* draft include George Schwab, Edward Anders, Margers Vestermanis, Sia Hertsberg, David Silberman, Yakob Basner, Riva Shefer, Leo Kram, Jack Ratz, Israel Hurin, Sasha Semenoff, Carolina Taitz, Jacob Lake, Henry Zivcon, Boris Kacel, Kalman Aron, Henry Bermanis, Margie Oppenheimer (German deportee to Riga), Bella Mischkinsky (Vilnius Ghetto deportee to Riga), Gertrude Schneider (Austrian deportee to Riga), and many others.

Gerta Feigin, Boris Vukovich, and Ruvin Ferber are also in the edit.

The film's cinematographer is Sid Lubitsch, whose work is seen on PBS, NBC, and the BBC including in other Holocaust documentaries. Sound recordist Rich Pooler's audio has been on all PBS documentary series as well as Ken Burns' *Jazz*, NBC, and CBS' *60 Minutes*. Co-producer Jason Kliot has produced more than 40 movies including award winners at the Sundance and Cannes film festivals and the Oscar-nominated documentary about Enron, *The Smartest Guys in the Room*. Producer-director Lieber has made three short documentaries about the Holocaust in Latvia. He began chronicling this history in 2002 with the educational Rumbula.org website. Earlier, Lieber produced a program of documentaries and interviews on Chicago radio.

To be informed of the upcoming test screenings as well as progress, public screenings, and TV broadcasts in their area, individuals may subscribe to *Rumbula's Echo's* free occasional newsletter by sending a blank email to: News@RumbulasEcho.org.



Members of the seven-person *Rumbula's Echo* crew set up a 39-foot camera crane and monitor at one of the mass graves at Rumbula (photo courtesy of Rumbula's Echo).

HOW “OUR RUMBULA” BEGAN MEMOIRS OF A PARTICIPANT

BY DAVID SILBERMAN

Editor’s Note: In recent years, several articles have been published in the Courier and in the Israeli Ezleinu about the execution of Riga ghetto prisoners in Rumbula. Below, we print David Silberman’s detailed memoirs, who was a direct participant in the post-war search and discovery of the execution site on the outskirts of Riga. This publication uses materials from the above and other existing articles (in particular, the memoirs of Shmuel Tsetlin) on the events described. For many English-speaking readers and even historians, the following details of the preparation and uncovering of these heinous events will be a revelation.

On one spring day in 1962, David Karsttadt, the agronomist of the kolkhoz “Garkali,” was looking at the map of the kolkhoz property and noticed an area of the Rumbula forest that had never been used for agriculture. The area had not been used for construction of the adjacent airport fuel storage facility either.

Later, the kolkhoz watchman, an old local resident pointed out the strange area to David Karsttadt, Shmuel Shiren, and Miron Rappoport. The watchman was able to identify the dreadful zone where the mass killing of the Jews had taken place during WWII. He identified eight mass burial spots.

Soviet POWs were forced to dig the trenches for Jews from the ghetto and then cover the graves with dirt. These POWs were killed as well by the Germans after completing their task. The watchman was able to point out the spots where the POWs were killed and buried.

Even in 1962, so many years after those horrible events, it was pretty easy to see where the victims were buried: purple flowers were growing atop of the graves.

Soviet policy had changed somewhat by 1962, and the first ever event memorializing the Nazis’ victims was organized by the authorities at Bikernieki forest in October 1962. Following the meeting, a group of Jewish activists went to Rumbula forest to establish more accurately the location where most of Riga’s ghetto population had perished. Chaim Averbukh, Zalman Baron, Mark Blum (Mordekhai Lapid), David and Miriam Garber, David Silberman, Benzion Kaplan, and Joseph Mirsky made up the group. Mirsky used a nail to scratch in Yiddish on a piece of board:



*Here the voices of 38,000 Jews of Riga were extinguished forever.**

11/30/1941 – 12/8-9/1941

The first memorial sign at the site of the execution in Rumbula was a wooden board with an inscription in Yiddish

We fixed the board high on a tree growing by one of the presumed burial spots. The marker hung there until 1964.

Letter: To the Chairman of the Executive Committee of Riga Soviet Workers Deputies, Comrade Zepp,

We, the undersigned residents of Riga, plead with you as follows: The German occupants assisted by some local collaborators brutally murdered 38,000 Soviet citizens, Jews from Riga ghetto—men, women and children—in Rumbula forest during the period between 27 November and 9 December 1941. Our relatives and friends lie among those innocent victims, and we carry their sacred

memory in our hearts.

We know that Riga City authorities organized a public memorial service to honor the victims of the Nazi terror at Bikernieki forest last October. We ask you respectfully to organize a similar memorial service at Rumbula forest on the second or the ninth of December 1962.

This petition is registered at the Executive Committee, #30.1191, dated 11/21/1962. Signed: Vagenheim, Baron, Dalinin, Potash, Feinstein, Kaplan, Meister, Khaitov.

Reply: 11/23/1962 Comrade Lindan,

Inform the petitioners that the Executive Committee will not allow this event to take place, since the Memorial Day to honor all victims of German atrocities is held annually at Salaspils. It was commemorated this year already. It will be also organized next year, one week ahead of the Soviet Latvia Independence Day.

Chairman of the Riga District Executive Committee, Zepp

The Salaspils Concentration Camp tragedy unfolded later than the Rumbula massacre. Unlike the murder of the Jews at Rumbula, killings at Salaspils fell on multinational prisoners some of whom were lucky to survive, except the Jews, of course. So, the Latvian authorities opted deliberately to use the Salaspils location for memorial meetings where some of the old Bolshevik survivors could speak along the party line. At Rumbula, only three Jews miraculously survived—Frida Frid (Michelson), Ella Gutman (Medalie), and Matvey Lutrin. They might share their stories, which might differ from official party propaganda.

While understanding the authorities’ motivation, the Jewish petitioners could not accept the cynical answer from Comrade Zepp and continued their work at Rumbula in preparation for the memorial meeting.

Colonel Boris Izrailevich Slutsky (retired) stepped into make a public statement: “If 38,000 dogs were killed at Rumbula in lieu of Jews, a memorial for dogs would’ve been erected by now.” Repercussions to this statement resulted in the authorities’ softening their position and moderating their previous response.

This Government leniency, though not granting full permission for a ceremony in Rumbula, made the organizers more resolute. To mark the Yahrzeit of the massacre of 1941, the first memorial meeting was held in Rumbula on November 9, 1962. A fairly large crowd gathered for the meeting. The wooden Magen David adorned with dried flowers and smaller stars was erected at one of the marked tombs and candles were lit for the first time. Benjamin Getz recited Kaddish, orators shared their memories, and songs from the ghetto were sung.

The latest response from the Riga District Executive Committee was read to the gathering and the decision was made to gather again on November 16 to mark the day of the so-called “second action” by the Nazis.

Heavy snow fell on November 16, but it did not deter people from coming. On the contrary, a significantly larger crowd gathered than at the first meeting. The memorial part of the meeting was opened by David Blum’s recitation of the Kaddish. Then, a discussion was held on how to use the Salaspils community experience to inspire wider popular support for embracing the cause.

First of all, the official sponsor of the location improvement project had to be established. The Riga District Executive Committee, in reality, was the only organization that could have the

* In reality, in 1962 Riga’s Jewish activists didn’t know the accurate number of deaths. Later, it was deduced that the approximate number was 25,000.

HOW “OUR RUMBULA” BEGAN (continued)

final say in further developments. Luckily, they had some interest in helping Jewish activists with the Rumbula memorial project since a number of Jews were prominent in various city enterprises and organizations. Therefore, they could be called upon by the Committee for future civic projects.

Next, the construction project had to be developed including the cost estimate. Nekhemia Paul who worked at Latgipro-prom, the Latvia architectural design institute, took on the task. Bubi Tseitlin delivered the project to the Garber's apartment just a week after the meeting. The project was reviewed and approved in the hallway of the apartment while another group of people discussed some different aspects of the project with the architect, Isaak Rakhlin.

Then the activists decided to memorialize the twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising on April 21, 1963. Miriam Garber, Mark Blum (Mordekhai Lapid), and the artist Zalman Baron fabricated and delivered to Rumbula a tall, black wooden board with red spots on the back signifying large drops of blood. The photographer Joseph Shneider attached a picture to the middle of the board—a fragment of a large painting “The Last Journey” (“Baby Yar”) by Joseph Kuzkovsky (the painting is on display at the foyer of the Knesset in Jerusalem now).

A very large crowd came to Rumbula on that day. Memorial candles were lit. Many survivors shared their memories including Frida Frid (Michelson) who told the crowd about her escape while standing on the same spot where she had miraculously escaped from the mass grave.



Horse-drawn carts were hired to carry out excavation work

the plan, developed by engineer Benzion Kaplan, the former ghetto prisoner and a member of the Government Special Committee that investigated the atrocities committed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

The unusual uniform vegetation (purple flowers) served as a good indicator for the tractor driver where the burial spots were located. After he finished his task, volunteers came every Sunday with spades and rakes to better form the burial mounds and cover them with fir branches. Two hundred truckloads of good soil were brought to the site to use for even better shaping of the mounds and in preparation for planting. Volunteers used 100 stretchers to carry about 300 meters from the dump truck to the site. When the number of stretchers was insufficient, people used their own buckets brought from home. They formed a bucket brigade from where the soil was dumped to the site and passed buckets along. Occasionally, horse-drawn carts were engaged privately.

The work continued through the late fall. There was a genuine enthusiasm among Riga Jewry, even the slogan “Next Sunday in Rumbula” sprang up. More and more people joined the effort, some of them from places other than Riga where Nazi mass



Organizers of the work and the monument in Rumbula: Shmuel (Bubi) Tseitlin, Itzhak Rakhlin, and Kalman Freisus

killings also happened. It was remarkable how the common cause and common work influenced Jewish young people. Their every day life was in schools, Komsomol meetings, among gentiles who had a different view of life in the Soviet system than young Jews, a different view of recent history. So young Jews had to play the game, while pretending and hiding their true feelings. Working as a team at Rumbula, young Jews found a new world, the world of Jewish solidarity and compassion, the world that was closer to their hearts. It could be said paradoxically that Jewish blood spilled at Rumbula cemented the friendship and solidarity among the younger generation.

Our struggle to commemorate Jewish victims who perished at Rumbula had wide repercussions. A similar movement resulted in creating memorials at Baby Yar (Kiev), Ponary (Vilnius), Trostintsi (Minsk), and other places.

The topographic plan of the future cemetery was created by architects Yaakov Vagengeim and Isaak Rakhlin and by Doctor Lilly Kalender (Libman) in the fall of 1963. The Executive Committee cooperated with us now.

The largest crowd gathered at Rumbula on September 29, 1963, to commemorate the anniversary of the Baby Yar tragedy. That happened in response to the announcement at the Synagogue written by Ytzhak Kozin:

Voskresnik—volunteer work on Sunday—is organized tomorrow, September 29, 1963, in Rumbula forest.

Trains Riga-Ogre leave at 10:13 and 10:30 or take a bus to the Rumbula airport. Bring spades and rakes with you.

In the meantime, the burial ground still looked uncared for. Mark Blum (Mordekhai Lapid), Boris Slovin and Boris (Dov) Shperling made a large Magen David from barbed wire and placed it over the burial ground close to the railroad tracks. It was there for everyone to see, but only for a short while until the “vigilant authorities” removed it. This sequence was repeated several times before the Star disappeared entirely. Regrettably, there were a few Jews who didn't like the display and considered it a provocation by “Zionists.”

This and some other episodes served as clear indicators that the KGB was monitoring Jewish activities. A few activists were called in and questioned, particularly regarding who the Jewish leaders were.

Regardless of some disagreements within the Jewish community, a large crowd assembled at Rumbula on December 5, 1963, for the massacre commemoration. Kaddish was recited, memorial candles lit, and speeches delivered.

At long last, the Riga District Executive Committee approved the cemetery project developed by Isaak Rakhlin and agreed to

HOW "OUR RUMBULA" BEGAN (continued)



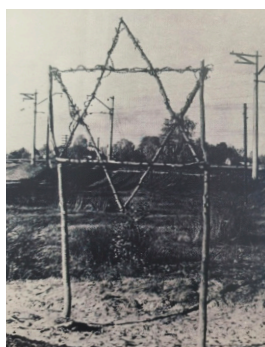
Zhanis Lipke in Rumbula at the monument to the executed Jews

cover the cost. However, there was a snag with the text on the memorial stone slabs. Text in Yiddish was considered an "ideological deviation." Party member Skutelskaya, an old communist who was employed as a secretary to the Minister of Culture of LSSR, pushed the text successfully through the

bureaucracy until the Ministry approved it in mid-June 1964.

The spring cleaning and grass planting started in May 1964. Kalman Freisus, an amateur gardener, was particularly helpful in this effort.

After approval of the text, frantic preparation for the installation of the stone slabs began. A lot of construction material had to be delivered to the site. Remi (Irmeiagu) Zamuel, a truck driver, was indispensable in helping with deliveries. The Riga Executive Committee turned a blind eye as Jews who worked at various construction organizations managed to obtain the necessary construction materials, bypassing the rigid State planning.



Large barbed wire Magen David, placed close to the train tracks

At this time, the artist Kuzkovsky was working on his own project: he created a billboard depicting a male figure with a raised fist. This billboard was erected at the same spot where the barbed wire Magen David used to be displayed. It could be clearly seen from the windows of passing Riga-Moscow trains. The authorities raised hell about the billboard: Who is the raised fist addressed to? The artist added a "Condemn Fascism!" sign to it. It didn't help—the billboard was destroyed and after a few restorations disappeared entirely.

Work at the site continued unabated—every weekend people came to Rumbula to dig trenches for future foundations, fill them with crushed stone and pour concrete. Plinths were made from remnants of black stone works. Young people worked with enthusiasm. Delivery of materials continued unhampered. Suddenly Granit, the stonework shop that had fabricated the memorial stone slabs, declared that they would not be able to deliver the slabs, "according to orders from above." The order was actually a new demand to change the text on the memorial stones: the text must be in two languages only—Russian and Latvian, Yiddish was not permitted. All appeals were fruitless until Bubi Tseitlin sent a telegram to Khrushchev personally, followed by his trip to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow. Tseitlin has reached a compromise: Yiddish text would be allowed if the Hammer and Sickle emblem was etched in as well.

The memorial stones were delivered to Rumbula forest on October 2, 1964, and were guarded for two days against thieves and vandals. Then on a Sunday, they were installed in place by crane operator Boris Shluper, witnessed by a large crowd. This was also the day when, for the first time, an official representative of authorities visited the site—Comrade Zeltin, Secretary of

the Executive Committee.

Following a protracted negotiation with the unsympathetic Latvian Communist Party leadership, December 25, 1964, was designated as the Memorial opening day. The official program would be followed by a buffet with drinks, typically held for "new Soviet traditions," though no Jews wanted this.

The memorial ceremony was announced in the press and on the radio. That alleviated misgivings felt by some Jews about being seen visiting the site. December 25, 1964, was a rainy day. Nevertheless a huge mass of people came via additionally provided trains and buses.

Delegations from all five Riga boroughs arrived with memorial wreaths by the start of the ceremony. The meeting was opened by Comrade Reichmanis, Deputy Chairman of the Riga Town Council. Rumbula Memorial Cemetery was now open.

The official ceremony started with a report on achievements of the Latvian Republic's economy. Next, the Old Bolsheviks chorus sang in Latvian the song "Three Tall Pines" by the poet Janis Rainis. Both were hardly relevant to the memorial ceremony. They were followed by the artist Arthur Ritov, the Riga ghetto survivor, who delivered a speech. David Khait, who used to be an orderly for the Soviet ace, three times hero of the USSR Ivan Kozhedub, sang a couple of songs and Dina Roitkop, former actress at Solomon Mikhoels' theater recited in Yiddish a poem "Teefe griber" ("Deep Graves") by Samuil Galkin. All three of them touched our hearts deeply.



Meeting in Rumbula in 1964

A traditional Jewish memorial ceremony followed the official part of it after the departure of the Government officials who finished their presentation. "Kaddish" was recited by Yakov Shostak, a member of the Synagogue choir, and 6 candles were lit symbolizing 6 million Jews who perished in the Holocaust. Songs and short speeches associated with the Ghetto and Jewish themes were performed.

Sara Levin, wife of the writer Nakhum Levin, who was shot by the KGB in 1952, stirred the crowd with her memories. There were many moving moments and one woman even fainted. Custodians of the Law remained present but they did not interfere. The ceremony was over in a couple of hours, everybody went home leaving a lot of flowers and wreathes on site.

This event has become traditional in the ensuing years. It happens at the end of November- beginning of December to mark the two mass actions at the Riga Ghetto on November 30 and December 8 of 1941.

I have participated in this meeting for the last time on November 30, 1970. I emigrated to Israel in April, 1971.

Translated from Russian by Leon Pukshansky

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE

Following the barbaric attack on October 7th by the Hamas terrorists on Israeli settlements and kibbutzim, protests in solidarity with the people of Israel immediately took place in all civilized countries. On October 12th the Jewish Community Center at Skolas Street held a meeting in the White Hall, which was attended by many important political figures, including the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs, the Speaker of the Saeima Daina Mieriņa, the Israeli Ambassador to Latvia Sharon Rappaport-Palgi, and many other officials and foreign diplomats. President Rinkēvičs said in his speech, among other things: "We clearly see what is happening in the neighborhood very close to us, in Ukraine. We see clearly what is happening in Israel now. And we should understand one thing—if we do not unite and fight, then this evil will continue to attack. We all unanimously believe that Israel has the right to defend itself. Israel has the right to respond and fight this evil. And we have the right and duty to support the Israeli people and State in this fight. And this is what our country will do." The meeting was led by deputy chairman of the Jewish community Dmitry Krupnikov.



At a meeting in the White Hall of the Jewish Community Center, with President Rinkēvičs participating

Already on October 8th, the day after the Hamas attack on Jewish settlements, Arkady Suharenko, chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, published a statement of solidarity with the people of Israel. And on October 14th, 1,300 candles were lit at the Freedom Monument in Riga in memory of the victims of Hamas.

The President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs was in Israel on a solidarity visit from November 19th through the 20th. He met with the Israeli President Isaac Herzog, family members of civilians being held hostage by the Hamas terrorists, and Latvian nationals living in Israel.

President Rinkēvičs expressed Latvia's solidarity with the people of Israel. "Latvia stands with the people of Israel at this difficult time. There is no justification for the brutal and inhumane terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Hamas terrorist organization. Israel has the right to defend itself, and Latvia supports Israel's fight against terrorism in accordance with humanitarian and international law," said President Rinkēvičs.

"The cynical and cowardly tactics of Hamas to hide behind captives and civilians deserve the strongest condemnation," the President of Latvia stressed. At the same time, E. Rinkēvičs pointed out that in the fight against terrorism, civilians must be protected to the maximum extent possible.

When meeting with the family members of the civilians captured by Hamas during the terror attacks on October 7th, 2023, President Rinkēvičs again expressed his solidarity with the people of Israel and the relatives of the hostages.



Meeting of the President of Latvia, E. Rinkēvičs, with the President of Israel, I. Herzog

Latvia's head of state also visited the West Bank and met Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority.



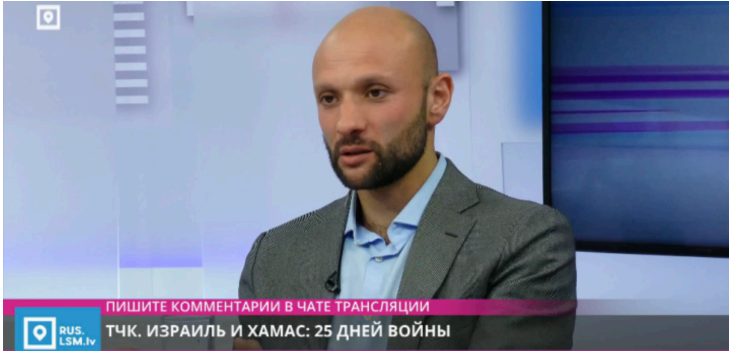
Meeting of the President of Latvia, E. Rinkēvičs, with the President of the Palestinian Authority, M. Abbas

The parties discussed ways to prevent further violence and humanitarian catastrophe in the region and to support the Palestinians in their humanitarian needs. President Rinkēvičs also noted that Latvia, as a member of the European Union (EU), was in favor of closer EU-Palestinian political dialogue and supported the finalization of a fully-fledged EU-Palestinian Association Agreement.

The sharp escalation of the situation in the Middle East, provoked by the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th, caused another surge in waves of antisemitism throughout the world. European media report cases of violence towards Jews in a variety of forms including physical violence, verbal aggression, online threats, as well as expressions of hatred on walls and in leaflets. In Latvia, a conflict between Jewish and Arab students occurred within the halls of the Riga Stradins University. This problem cannot be ignored.

But in general, the level of antisemitism in modern day Latvia is low, certainly much lower than, for example, in Sweden and in many other European countries. This is what member of the board of the Riga Jewish Community, attorney David Lipkin said on a TV program: "A certain everyday antisemitism is present at some, perhaps subconscious, level, but I would not dramatize the situation. We have excellent relations with the country's leadership, we receive all kinds of assistance and we do not feel

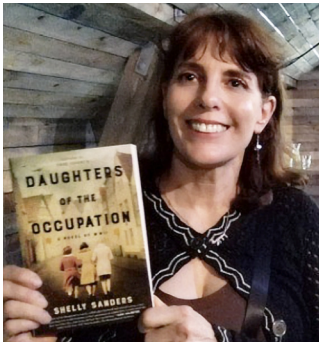
NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



David Lipkin speaks on Latvian TV, condemning the incident at Riga Stradins University

antisemitic attacks or antisemitic influence in our daily life. At the same time, we are very concerned about what is happening in Europe.”

In July, the Zhanis Lipke Memorial hosted a presentation of the book *Daughters of the Occupation* by Canadian writer Shelley Sanders. The content of the book is based on documented facts of the story of Holocaust in Latvia. The writer describes the history of her family during the Soviet and German occupation, and then, in the seventies, the return of the protagonist to Soviet Latvia to save her grandmother’s brother.



*Shelley Sanders, author of the book *Daughters of the Occupation**

The book was published in English and can be purchased at the Zhanis Lipke Memorial. A Latvian translation of the book is also planned.

On the eve of the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jewish People, in many cities and towns of Latvia, Jewish cemeteries and places of execution from the early days of the fascist occupation were being spruced up. One of these events took place on July 1st at the Jewish cemetery in the small town of Dagda, Kraslava region, organized by the local tourism center. Despite the bad weather, the event participants did a great job—the grass was mowed, garbage was removed from the cemetery area, and some of the graves overgrown with grass and moss were cleaned and given a fresh look.

At the end of the 19th century, almost 70% of the inhabitants of Dagda were Jews. The cemetery was founded at the beginning of the 19th century, and the three synagogue buildings that have survived to this day were built in 1897. In 1935, 589 Jews lived in Dagda. On July 25th, 1941, some of the Jews of Dagda

were driven into the Daugavpils ghetto, and the rest were shot at the Jewish cemetery on August 1st, 1941.

On July 4th, on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jewish People, city and regional leaders, together with a group of ordinary citizens, laid flowers at the monument erected in the cemetery dedicated to the murdered Jews.

The Jewish community of Latvia expressed gratitude to everyone who took part in the event for their responsiveness and for the work well done!



Monument to Holocaust victims in Dagda

On July 4th, on the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jewish People in Latvia, the commemorative event, organized by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia at the memorial on Gogola Street in Riga, was attended by Speaker of the Saeima Edvards Smiltēns, Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs (now the President of Latvia), and other officials and foreign diplomats.

The audience was addressed by a former prisoner of the Riga ghetto and concentration camps, historian Mārgers Vestermanis (the text of his speech can be found on page 12), Israeli Ambassador Sharon Rappaport-Palgi, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Dmitry Krupnikov, the author of the idea of preserving the memories of the victims of Nazism at the concentration camp Mazjumpravas muiža in Riga, prof. Karen Frostig from the USA, whose grandparents perished in this camp.

Prayers were read by the rabbi of the Riga Synagogue Elijohu Krumer and cantor Telman Guzhevsky. The ceremony was led by the director of the Jews in Latvia Museum Ilya Lensky.



The July 4th meeting led by Ilya Lensky, as Karen Frostig (right) is preparing to speak

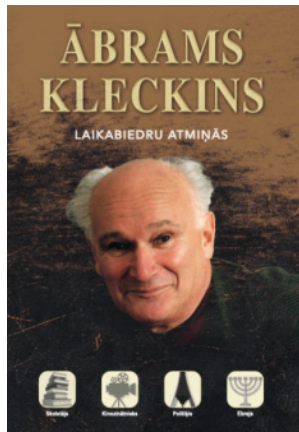
Commemorative events on this day were also held in Liepāja, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Rezekne and other places in Latvia.

In the evening, a chamber music concert took place in the Riga Jewish Community Center in memory of those killed in the Holocaust.

Two years ago, on August 23rd, 2021, the outstanding journalist, teacher, film expert, and professor at the University of Latvia Abram Kletskin passed away. On October 11th of this year, he

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

would have turned 90 years old. This became an occasion for his friends, students, and colleagues to gather and present a copy of the book of memories about him.



The book of memories about Abram Kleckin

The meeting took place on the sixth floor of a building on Doma Square; this was the last place of employment of Abram Kleckin, who headed the National Council on Radio and Television from 2007 to 2012. On the table in the conference hall is, so far, one copy of the book *Abram Kleckin: Memoirs of Contemporaries*, published by Jumava Publishing House.

“The idea for the book came in the following way,” said publishing house director Juris Vysotskis—“Three people met: banker and chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia Arkady Suharenko, his deputy the businessman Benjamin Kajem, and myself. And we conceived a book of memories.”

The book consists of four sections. An important component of the book is the “Jew” section. Born in Latvia in 1933, Abram Kleckin was one of the most prominent representatives of the Jewish community, this is recalled by the living (he is now 98 years old) historian Marģers Vestermanis, Natalya Bragilevskaya, Arkady Suharenko and physicist Ruvim Ferber, who attended the ninetieth birthday celebration.



Announcement about the exhibition in Liepāja

“day” was organized. The main focus of the selection of books is on the Holocaust and antisemitism, topics that have unexpectedly become sensitive again in recent months.

One of the exhibition’s materials that attracted visitors’ attention was the book *Sunflower*, written by S. Wiesenthal himself, as well as books and magazines containing excellent articles about his work—the hunt for Nazis who escaped punishment. Overall, it is an impressive selection of books about the history of the Jewish people, antisemitism, the Holocaust in Latvia and throughout the world. It turned out, unexpectedly, that many people do not understand where the roots of the conflict between Arabs and Jews are and want to figure it out. This topic has now become relevant all over the world and such an exhibition provides an opportunity to recommend the appropriate literature to readers.

The exhibition “The Founder of the Center for Jewish Documentation, Simon Wiesenthal’s 115th Birthday” in the reading room of the Liepāja Central Scientific Library is open until the end of December.

ABOUT LATVIAN COLLABORATORS IN WWII MARGĒRS VESTERMANIS’ SPEECH AT THE JULY 4TH MEETING

We need to do more than talk about the need to remember the victims. For the lost people were not born to become victims. They were born to be friends, to love, to leave behind some cherished reminders. We know well how people become victims. I saw it with my own eyes. The Wehrmacht had not yet entered Riga when Lieutenant Colonel Robert Weiss, speaking on the radio, ended his speech with the words “Kill the Jews and the Communists.” As soon as the Wehrmacht entered Riga, darkness fell and on July 1st, at night, armed thugs with patches on their arms, painted in national colors, burst into the apartments of Jews, and led people away. And from our apartment, that night, my cousin was taken, and two weeks later my brother and other relatives were also taken away.



Marģers Vestermanis speaks

We say that the Nazis are to blame, the German occupation is to blame, Hitler and Himmler, Goebbels and Goering are to blame. But Hitler did not touch a single Jew with his own hands, just like others. They only gave orders. But try to imagine this: they order, but no one reacts. In this case, neither at that time nor today the crimes would have occurred. Imagine: Putin orders, but no one launches drones or missiles. But the reality is that these orders were immediately and actively responded to.

I just can’t believe that a table was set up on the sidewalk in front of the house at 19 Voldemara Street and volunteers, in front of everyone, signed up for Arais’ team to kill, and considered it the right thing to do. The history of Latvia does not know such ruthlessness and such cynicism towards victims, as Latvia and the Jewish people experienced during the Holocaust. There is always a time for decision-making, when a person must decide what to do, which side he must take. This is true both then and now.

Unfortunately, the people called these murderers, who killed with pleasure, with joy and mockery, “those who shot Jews (*zhidu shaveji*).” This is only a statement of what they did. The famous Latvian writer and philosopher (after WWII, associate professor at the university in Uppsala, Sweden) Zenta Mauriņa did not hesitate to call them beasts. It would be right that 80 years later they would go down in the history of Latvia as beasts. We have not forgotten a single vile act. We also have not forgotten the sympathy and help. We also did not forget that there were people who, risking their lives, were ready to help and save. And you see here a memorial that will be completed before the end of this year. And the already recorded number of those who were saved will be doubled, and we will remember and celebrate the saved ones, the names of those who voluntarily saved and were ready to die. Each tree will have its own post with the name of the deceased to remind that it has always, at all times, been and will be important to decide which side to stand on. Thank you.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule