



**"I BELIEVE IN THE SUN EVEN WHEN IT IS NOT SHINING"
A SAFE AND RESTORATIVE ROSH HASHANAH TO ALL OUR MEMBERS!**



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JEWISH SURVIVORS OF LATVIA, INC.

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THE DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN LATVIA



At the monument to the burnt Gogolshul synagogue on July 4, 2020

This year, due to the Coronavirus quarantine, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia could not organize their usual rally that day, but instead gathered at the monument of former Gogolshul in Riga to commemorate the Jewish victims of genocide in Latvia. We always remember that on this day, seventy-nine years ago, the Nazis ordered all the synagogues in Riga to be burned. Jews were locked and burned alive in the most notorious of them: The Great Choral synagogue on Gogol Street. We will never forget this terrible crime.

On the eve of the Day of Remembrance of the victims of the Jewish Genocide in Latvia on July 3rd, the leaders of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia laid flowers at the memorial on

the site of the Gogolshul synagogue, burned in 1941.

Together with the Jewish community and several Riga residents, the President of Latvia Egils Levits, the Chairman of the Saeima Inara Murniece, Prime Minister Krishjanis Karinsh, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkevichs, and other Latvian officials and representatives of the diplomatic corps took part in the ceremony.

Participants of the memorial event also laid flowers at the monument to the Saviors of the Jews. After the ceremony, the President of Latvia Egils Levits talked with the leaders of the Jewish community of Latvia—Arkady Suharenko, Dmitry Krupnikov, Benjamin Kajem, and David Kagan.

CAMARADERIE AND SOLIDARITY IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES



Thank you to the frontline health professionals

Nobody could have ever imagined an event that would be in every newspapers' headlines for months, leave millions of people unemployed, put all day-to-day global operations on hold, and affect the life of virtually every person on the planet.

By March of 2020, the coronavirus had reached every part of the world, putting countries into lockdown in an attempt to isolate families in their homes and slow the spread of the virus. However, millions of people were already infected and stopping the spread of coronavirus quickly seemed impossible. COVID-19 patients were flooding hospitals, resulting in a shortage of ICU beds and, unfortunately, thousands of daily casualties.

While the majority of the population was sitting at home, doctors and nurses were on the frontlines working tirelessly day and night, risking their health and lives and attending to patients to help them fight the virus. The jobs of health care workers became significantly more demanding, exhausting, and time-consuming than they already were. Working in the hospitals, during this time especially, took an extreme toll on all hospital personnel, both physically and mentally. Among these health care workers was my aunt, Doctor Ruth Minkin,

CAMARADERIE AND SOLIDARITY IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES (continued)



One of the appreciation lunches served by La Villa Pizza

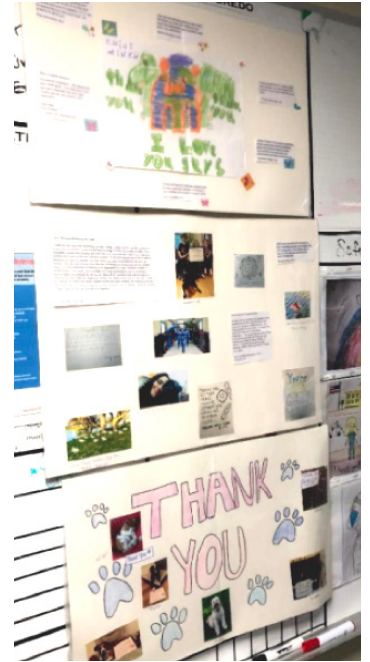
who dealt with COVID-19 patients every day as part of the ICU at the Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. Dr. Minkin was born and raised in Riga, where she eventually attended Latvian Medical Academy (Riga Stradins University) and received her medical degree. After moving to New York City over 20 years ago, she specialized in pulmonary and intensive care medicine and is a current member of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia in USA organization.



Attending doctors of Methodist Hospital ICU Dr. Keerthana Keshava and Dr. Ruth Minkin

400 coronavirus patients, 130 of whom required ICU care. Such a demanding change of workload was extremely stressful for doctors and other health care professionals. During their shifts, doctors were constantly on the move, attending patient after patient. Having personally heard my aunt talk about the environment at work, I thought there had to be some way to help.

The health care workers had such full and seemingly endless days that they did not have time to prepare a proper meal and were resorting to snacking on the go. After hearing about this my mom, Edith Solovey, who was also born and raised in Riga and is now also part of the JSL organization, decided this was the opportunity to help her sister and her fellow hospital workers. She said: "Our doctors are our heroes. They are at risk every single day caring for really sick patients. They don't have time to buy food, let alone to prepare it. Let's help them to not worry about it and continue supplying them meals to keep them healthy!" Edith, an employee at a pharmaceutical company, initially thought that she could get funding for her project through work, as she had gained the support of her colleagues as well. However, this idea could unfortunately not be realized as the law does not permit pharmaceutical companies to donate money to hospitals in this way. As a result, Edith decided to personally facilitate the project. Using GoFundMe, she created her fundraiser and posted it on Facebook for her friends to donate any amount of their choosing to the cause. However, to everyone's delight, friends, and, of course, family, were not the only donors; several strangers donated as well.



Solovey's friends' and family's appreciation posters hang in the Methodist Hospital ICU main hallway

Edith's initial hopes were to raise enough money to buy two or three meals for the medical personnel in the ICU. However, with the help and generosity of all the donors, Edith raised over \$3,500—enough funds to provide meals for about 30 health care workers in the ICU eight times! For each meal, she found several local restaurants offering a variety of cuisines and coordinated with the Pulmonary & Critical Care Division administrator for the delivery. Some of the restaurants: Da Nonna Rosa, La Villa Pizza, and Istanbul in Park Slope. When they heard about who the meals were for, these restaurants prepared the food with extra care; La Villa Pizza even sent a few pizzas without charge and wrote a very thoughtful Thank You letter for the workers. After every meal delivery, Edith would update all of the donors on what type of meal was delivered as well as include pictures from the hospital workers enjoying their lunch. The feedback from the hospital staff was extremely positive; everybody was

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For several months, Dr. Minkin, along with her fellow doctors and nurses in the ICU, was working 12-hour shifts for four days at a time, usually coming home only to continue working remotely. Before the pandemic, there were fewer than 40 ICU beds in the hospital and the number of ICU patients rarely exceeded 20. However, at the peak of COVID-19, the hospital departments were reorganized to make room for about

CAMARADERIE AND SOLIDARITY IN THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES (continued)



Methodist ICU nurses with care packages

very grateful for the meals, but especially for the opportunity they were given to take a few minutes to sit down with their co-workers and have a delicious meal together.

In addition to all of the lunches, Edith, along with her kids, was able to put together care packages for the nurses and doctors in the ICU. The packages consisted of hand lotion, lip balm, snacks, and chocolates; each bag contained an inspirational message. Just like the lunches, these care packages were a great success; everybody was beyond thankful for the love and support.

The coronavirus has brought a lot of pain, suffering, and challenges to people across the entire world, but it has also created a community amongst those sitting at home who were more than willing to help the frontline workers. Fundraisers like Edith's were started by thousands of other groups and people globally, all aimed to alleviate the stress of those on the frontlines. The hard work and bravery exhibited by everyone who has helped with the fight against COVID-19 will forever be remembered.

By Alan Solovey

RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY ACTIVITY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY

The emergency action to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Latvia was declared on March 13 until June 9, 2020.

By order of the government, visits to public places were limited to two people together, working remotely from home was recommended, and other restrictions were put in place that affected the work of the Jewish community: Jewish schools stopped classes, the synagogue was closed, and various buildings of the Jewish community in Riga, such as the welfare center, the JCC, and the Jews in Latvia Museum were all closed to the public, and all activities and camps were cancelled.

The Jewish community faced two main challenges in connection with this complicated situation.

The first challenge was that the community was obliged to continue to provide assistance to clients of the welfare center, primarily the Holocaust survivors. The community saw the need to expand services for all elderly members, who were the most vulnerable group infected by the coronavirus; they were also advised not to be in public places, including shops and pharmacies—what were they to do for food and medicine?

The second task was to organize the work of the community so that its members could continue to maintain contact with the community and offer virtual replacements for events and programs.

The community can proudly state that within three days of the announcement of the coronavirus emergency, the community was ready to operate under the new guidelines.

JCC Riga activities

JCC Riga has created a number of virtual activities. They created two online platforms: one for children on Instagram and a Facebook page for adult community members. The JCC of Riga has introduced virtual activities on its website led by Director Inna Lapidus-Kinbere.

The youth center developed 43 online programs for each age

group. Young children can listen to fairy tales, watch cartoons, paint, or solve riddles; older children and teens have come up with ideas about how to make different, unusual crafts from improvised materials, they can also study Jewish history, Jewish traditions, and Hebrew, and participate in various online competitions. BBYO, a Jewish teen movement, helped a lot in this work.

Fifty-five meetings were held online for the adult members of the community in just 12 weeks. Up until June 9, when the state of emergency was finally lifted, lectures were given by 39 speakers, as well as numerous concerts, workshops, Hebrew lessons, contests, and quizzes.

The public's reaction was very welcoming, and they received a great response from community members. More than 4,500 people took part in the virtual activities, with 59,100 minutes of viewing in total.

All the lecturers were volunteers. The community members all united to help one another. For example, the IT professionals helped with online streams. The feeling of support and unity was amazing.

Lecturers and speakers were from Latvia, Israel, Lithuania, and Russia. The WJC International Yiddish Center helped attract speakers from abroad.

It was very important for all members of the community to hear Arkady Suharenko, the chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, who spoke about the life of the community, what is being done to organize the work of the community in this difficult time, and plans for the future. The chairman's talk was viewed by more than 2,300 people.



*Inna Lapidus-Kinbere,
Riga JCC director*

RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY ACTIVITY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY (continued)

Information about some of the lectures and speeches

The Riga Rabbis read five lectures on the laws of the Torah. For three of the lectures in particular, Rabbi Eliyohu Krumer talked about how the preparation for Shabbat should proceed, as well as the laws of the Passover celebration, and details about the festive seder. Passover fell during the coronavirus emergency, when only a few family members were allowed to gather together and so were at Shavuot.

The director of the Jews in Latvia Museum, Ilya Lensky, gave three lectures on the history of the Jews of Latvia; the museum also prepared a virtual tour of the museum in three languages (Latvian, Russian, and English). The museum also made a video depicting five Jewish tales for children.

Iosif Rochko, director of the Museum "Jews in Daugavpils and



Ilya Lensky, Director of the Jews in Latvia Museum

Latgale" delivered lectures on the history and culture of Jews in Latvia and spoke about the notable Jews of the region. Dr. Elina Vasilieva from Daugavpils University, spoke about introducing Jews to Latvian literature, and Julia Patrakova from Israel spoke about the work of Mark Rothko.

Dr. Valery Dymshits from Saint Petersburg spoke about various aspects of Jewish history, culture, and tradition, discussing whether there was a traditional Jewish form of dress. Dr. Mordechai Yushkovsky, Academic Director of the International Center for Yiddish Language and Culture in Vilnius, highlighted

Jewish culture in the U.S.S.R., a topic not heavily researched. Dr. Lara Lempertene from Lithuania expanded our knowledge of Jewish education, and Svetlana Pakhomova from Moscow spoke about the latest Israeli cinema. Dr. Svetlana Pogodina from Riga and Victoria Alekseeva from St. Petersburg introduced such interesting topics as Jewish amulets and a "Jewish" sense of humor.

Community members who work in various fields were invited to talk about their experiences. Renat Lokomet, a member of the board of the Riga Jewish community, spoke

about start-ups and technologies used by the community, diamond expert Gabriel Levin-Zafirir revealed the secret of these amazing gems, restaurateur Pavel Gognidze spoke about his line of work, wine expert Yevgeny Shifre talked about the history of winemaking in Israel, Alexey Savelyev gave advice on how to find a dream job, and the owner of the travel company BTG spoke of the challenges facing tourism in an area dealing with crisis.

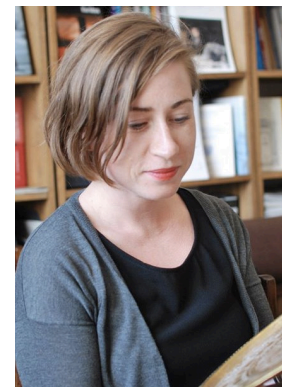
Community members, mainly women, were very interested in workshops on Jewish cuisine and on the weekly publication of recipes. Fourteen people took part in the competition for the best matzoh dish on Passover.



Renat Lokomet, businessman, member of board of the Riga Jewish community

Latvian psychotherapists Natalya Volpert and Ariel Reznik-Martov went live on air explaining how isolation affects the family, expert Marina Gutman from Israel devoted her speech to psychology and hygiene in the crisis, and practitioners Julia Balanova and Anna Solovyova educated listeners about relevant financial literacy and techniques for choosing suitable clothing and cleaning at home during quarantine.

During this time, the leadership and workforce of the community were convinced that this virtual form of communication and community involvement is extremely interesting and useful and therefore worth continuing and expanding.



Dr. Svetlana Pogodina, Associate Professor, Executive Director of the Center for Jewish Studies of the University of Latvia

We could not go without Jewish music. Israeli musicians Uri & Dinor Zer sang their favorite Jewish songs online to members of the community, who listened from their own computers in Latvia. With the support of WJC, the famous singer Alla Reed held a live concert in honor of Israel's Independence Day specifically for the Jewish community of Latvia.

The community considered it their duty not only to entertain people, but also to help them overcome stress and learn how to cope with current circumstances and to provide psychological assistance.



Rabbi Eliyohu Krumer, Rabbi of the Riga Synagogue Peytavshul, teaches Beit Midrash



Iosif Rochko, creator and director of the Museum of Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale, author of books and articles and creator of exhibitions on the history of Jews of Latgale



Dr. Mordechai Yushkovsky, Academic Head of the International Center for Yiddish Language and Culture in Vilnius

By Gita Umanovska, executive director of the Riga Jewish Community

We plan to report on the work of the Hesed Riga welfare center during the quarantine period in the next issue of the Courier.

THE CASE OF HERBERTS CUKURS: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO CONSIDER CUKURS COMPLICIT

Ausland

ISRAEL

„Dies ist mein Mörder“

Protokoll der Jagd auf einen Nazi: Wie der Geheimdienst Mossad den berichtigten „Henker von Riga“, Herbert Cukurs, aufspürte und tötete.

Wenn der ältere Herr mit den Enkeln durch sein palmenbewachsenes Wohnviertel im Nordosten von Tel Aviv spaziert, wirkt er wie ein Opa

kuläre Aktion nachzuhelfen: Die Hinrichtung eines besonders grausamen Massenmörders sollte das Bewußtsein dafür schärfen, daß längst nicht alle NS-Verbrechen



The title of an article from the German magazine, Der Spiegel, No. 31, 1997, about Cukurs's execution

In recent years the story of Herberts Cukurs has once again been part of the discussions about history of Jews in Latvia and Latvian-Jewish relations both in the past and present. Although the issue of his role in the Holocaust in Latvia has been around since late 1940s, the recurring attempts to re-inter him in the Brethren Cemetery in Riga and the staging of a musical *Cukurs, Herberts Cukurs* (2014) have fueled these discussions and generated a wave of publications by scholars, journalists, and writers representing a broad spectrum of attitudes and referring to different sources and narratives to support their position. Recent developments with the criminal case concerning Cukurs (see the *Latvian Jewish Courier* vol. 34, issue 1) have only added new layers to the complicated story.

Here we are not discussing two highly controversial aspects of Cukurs's biography that come up regularly in public discussions: his assassination and the story of survival of the Jewish woman Miriam Kaitzner, who stayed with Cukurs's family from 1941 to 1950. Both of these stories should be researched in the framework of scholarly biography, if one is ever written, but these are beyond the scope of our question: To what extent can Herberts Cukurs be considered a Holocaust perpetrator?

In this article, we would like to briefly present and analyze some of the available sources. Most of the sources mentioned here have been at some point submitted to the Prosecutor General's Office and also made public back in 2014.



Before dealing with the sources themselves, we would like to delineate our approach to research. First, we tried to use as many sources as possible, to have a certain pool of overlapping narratives. Second, we share the concerns of some historians that Soviet investigation documents, especially from 1940s, may have been produced under pressure and therefore should be considered more skeptically. Third, we try to trace the history and origins of the sources, the circumstances of their creation. Fourth, any document whose content raises doubt about its credibility

should be strongly downgraded or even fully disregarded. It's important to emphasize that we are talking about content, rather than the authenticity of the document itself. Fifth, we take into consideration the previous legal work that has been done on these sources, particularly the Viktors Arājs trial in Hamburg State Court in 1975-79. We will not mention nor analyze a big set of sources here—either because these do not convey anything substantial in addition to the core sources or because we do not consider them trustworthy. Also, we would like to note that Cukurs would be very often remembered by survivors as his face was familiar to many—in the 1930s, Cukurs was very popular due to his aviator's career, while Arājs was a low-ranking policeman. We also have to remember that during the Arājs trial there was no separate investigation of the actions of Cukurs (who was by then dead for ten years) and all mentions of him came up incidentally in the witness accounts.

Probably the worst example of a source is infamous “witness account” by Raphael Schub, found in Wiener Library in London, given in 1949 to the Committee for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the Baltic Countries. It has been published and reprinted many times. In this text, Cukurs is blamed not only for burning the Riga Great Synagogue, but also for taking part in sterilization of Jewish men in Bauska, and in forcing 1,200 Jews in Kuldīga to drown themselves in Venta Lake. Today the Holocaust in Latvia has been researched extensively (we can refer to the work of the late M. Melers, *Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember*), thus we know who was responsible for the sterilization of Jews in Bauska and what happened to Jews of Kuldīga (est. 600 victims were shot in several locations in surrounding forests). Schub was not in Bauska at the time nor was he in Kuldīga. Even more, in 1950, Schub would make accusations, based at best on gossip, during the trial of Fritz Scherwitz, the commandant of Lenta camp in Riga (where Schub never set foot), that were dismissed. The same happened during the Arājs trial, where his affidavit also was dismissed as not trustworthy. Therefore, although we have an authentic document with good provenance coming from the “free world,” its content and legal history have been fully discredited.

This said, we want to emphasize that we consider Holocaust history to be tragic and bloody enough to have no need for inflation or exaggeration. We also consider the sources we have to be sufficient to answer, with certainty, the question about Cukurs's participation.

What positions did Cukurs hold in Arājs Unit? Both in witness accounts and surviving Nazi-era documents (pretty scarce), he is listed among leading officers of the Arājs Unit; his position being given as “garage overseer,” “arms overseer,” and “Arājs' aide-de-camp/liaison officer.”

We consider three episodes to be important for discussion in relation to Cukurs's alleged role. First, the events of July 1941, the first weeks of Nazi occupation. Second, the events of November 30 and December 8, 1941, during the killing *aktions* in Rumbula. Third, the 1942 killings in Biķernieki forest.

The events of July 1941. We still do not have the strong evidence for the date of Cukurs's arrival in Riga from his

THE CASE OF HERBERTS CUKURS (continued)

farmstead in Bukaiši; different sources mention various dates from the beginning of the month to mid-July.

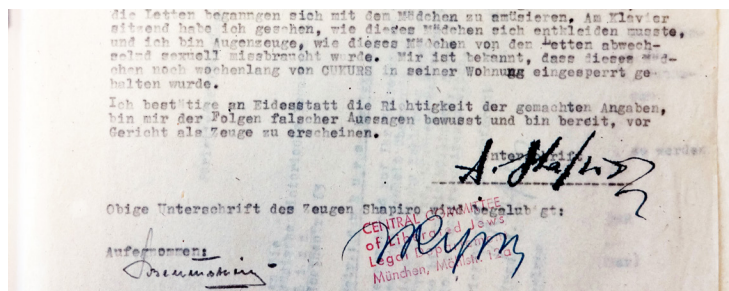
One of the most prominent witnesses, Abraham Schapiro (alias Sasha Semenov) has shown a certain inconsistency in his testimony. Please note that Schapiro offers three sources with different provenance: an affidavit to Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich from December 19, 1948; memoirs, written in 1983, and generously shared with us by Jewish Survivors of Latvia; and a 1995 video interview for the USC Shoah Foundation.

In the 1948 affidavit, Schapiro states that already on July 2, 1941, Cukurs, with a group of Latvian volunteers, came to his apartment at Zaubes str. 4 and forced the family out so he could occupy the apartment. At the same time, Schapiro's father, Pinchus, was arrested. His 1983 memoir assigns arrest to unnamed "Latvian soldiers and some German Nazis in uniforms," while most of other facts correspond. While in his early testimony Schapiro states that his father tried to seek a refuge with Cukurs, in his later memoirs he doesn't even mention his father in connection with this incident, but says that he showed these people his certificate of Independence War veteran (he served in the 10th Aizpute infantry regiment). Even though the two sources partially contradict each other, in both cases Schapiro mentions that his father was arrested in early July, taken to Central Prison and later executed. The list of prisoners of the Central Prison from August 4, 1941—1708 people in total—

<p>per sol- sin, ere ent is in- gon ert lo.; ard at and San om jor "to</p>	<h3>Lists Nazis Guilty of Killing Jews in Latvia</h3> <p>Stockholm — (WNS) — A list of twenty-four Latvians who participated in the Nazis' massacres of Jews in Latvia was on its way to the Allied War Crimes Commission in London after submission to a relief organization here by a Jewish woman who escaped and has just reached Sweden after hiding from the Gestapo for one and a half years.</p> <p>The list is topped by two men who between them are accused of responsibility for the murder of 7,000 Jews. One is Feliks Ditietis, to whom the killing of 3,000 is laid. The other is Peter Seglitis, an interpreter for the Gestapo, who participated in the slaying of 4,000. Also prominent in the list is Pilot Cukurs, who was known in Riga as "the Jew-killer."</p>	<p>but tak sor</p>
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Article published on August 4, 1944 in the newspaper Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle.

Recently Newspapers.com offered free access to many U.S. local papers—one of them contained this article. Information mentioned in the article was delivered from Latvia to Sweden in early summer of 1944 most likely by Zelma Shepshelovich who fled from Nazi-occupied Latvia to Sweden by boat.



The final part of the signed and certified testimony of Abraham Schapiro (Sasha Semenov)

also confirms this, with P. Schapiro being listed as number 822. It could be the same list that, according to Schapiro's memoirs, Cukurs one day showed him, saying, that father is gone.

According to the sources, in late July 1941, under Cukurs's orders, Abraham Schapiro was posted to Arājs Unit garage at 19 Valdemāra Street. Like many other witnesses (Harry Ritov, Ella Medalje, Matīss Lutriņš), he mentions many episodes of people being humiliated and mercilessly beaten at Arājs Unit headquarters.

Harry Ritov, a mechanic at the garage at Valdemāra Street, also recalled in his 1975 testimony (found in the Latvian State Archives as a part of investigation against Viktors Arājs): "Later armed shooters forced us into a big hall in the Arājs Unit headquarters and made us kneel. In front of us there was a row of tables where a former aviator, Cukurs, whom I knew since before the war and many other members of Arājs Unit were sitting. At night they put us into a basement with a cement floor. There were very many people there. Everyone tried to settle the best way they could—some were sitting, some were standing, some were sleeping on the cement floor. On the door of the basement, a metal plaque was attached, which read in Latvian "Jewish Cemetery. Jewish str. 2."

Here is a very significant episode from Schapiro's 1948 testimony: "I worked with a Jew named Lutriņš in Cukurs's garage. That day the Jews were forced out of their cameras to stand at the roll-call and everyone was ordered to be there. Two other people from our brigade hid with us in the garage, and we saw how the people who stood at the roll-call were beaten, put into trucks, and taken away. One of the guards said that our brigade wasn't at the roll-call. Cukurs ordered us to stand in front of him and said that my colleague Lutriņš and I were allowed not to participate because we were working on his car. The two others—Leitman and another one, whose name I don't remember—were terribly beaten by the Latvian guards under Cukurs's order. Later I saw Cukurs take out a gun and cold-bloodedly shoot the two Jews from our work brigade. Since that day I hadn't come to work anymore because I felt deadly threat." Ritov also mentions Press, who worked at the garage.

Although the story of survival of Matīss Lutriņš (one of three people to give witness accounts about the Rumbula massacre) is interesting, it has nothing to do with Cukurs, although such claims are sometimes made.

Most of accounts that mentioned Cukurs would relate his participation in convoying the prisoners of the Riga ghetto to Rumbula forest on November 30. He also indirectly confirmed his participation in a document that he wrote in 1945 in the village

THE CASE OF HERBERTS CUKURS (continued)

186

Liste der Angeklagten im Rigaer Ghetto Prozess. (Nov.1948)

Name:	Rang:
Abel, Xavier	Kapo
Abolina	helf SS Mannschaften in Smiltene
Abols	dito
Adams, Klaus	Kraftfahrer
Aksars, Janpeters	unbekannt, in Talsi
Albrecht	SS-Mann
Altmeier	Hoher SS Rang
Apšite, Karlis	Kommandeur d.lett.Hilfspolizei in Riga
Arajs, Viktor	SS-Sturmabfuhrer (1941)
Cukurs (Zuckurs), Herbert	Fliegeroffizier
Daiber	SS-Hauptsturmfuhrer
Danilow-Milkowski	SS-Mann (Ukreiner)
Danskop	Kommandant eines lettischen Ghettos.
Dr. Dargewicz	Arzt in Rietau
Dering	beschaeftigt im KZ Stradsenhof
Dietrich	Obersturmfuhrer im Libau Getto
Drale (Braie)	Leiter des Ghetto Arbeitamts in Riga
Dravenieks	Leiter der administrativen Abteilung der Gestapo, Riga

The first page from the list prepared in November 1948 by the War Crimes Commission in London of perpetrators in the Riga ghetto

Cassis near Marseille while he was waiting for an opportunity to move to Brazil. In it he describes—even with some sort of empathy, we could say—the brutality of the guards, and the sight of corpses and blood puddles along the route of the march.

Aaron Preil in Riga in 1975, during an investigation of Arājs, gave an account about the second part of November 30: “On my way back [from collecting the corpses in the streets] to the Small ghetto I’ve heard that someone is calling at my neighbor Kugel, but he didn’t stop and continued running. At that moment I was approximately 40 meters from Kugel and I’ve seen how [German] police *wachmeister* Tuchel shot at Kugel and killed him. I managed to hide, and I ran along Ludzas street. On my way I’ve encountered Germans Hesfer and Neumann, as well as Latvians Cukurs and Burtnieks. Cukurs reached to his gun and probably wanted to kill me. Hesfer called me a pig and ordered to pull the sledge, standing nearby, on which a corpse of an unknown prisoner was placed.”

In his 1960 witness account, deposited in Wiener Library, Isaac Leo Kram (one of the later leaders of Jewish Survivors of Latvia) stated about events of November 30: “I was in the vicinity of Ludzas street in Riga ghetto, when I saw that some Jew is being pulled. Herberts Cukurs was leading the soldiers. He was dressed in black uniform of military pilot. He ordered me and others to put the killed Jews on the sledge and bring them to the cemetery. For a while I had the possibility to observe Cukurs rather close. One Jewish woman began to cry, when she was pulled to the truck—she wanted her daughter to stay with her. Cukurs shot her with his gun. I was a witness to that. I have also seen how Cukurs has pointed his gun at some kid who was crying as he could not find his mother in the crowd. With one shot he has killed the kid.”

There are many other witness accounts about the events of November 30, but we will not quote them here as they fail to comply with some of the sections of our “check-box.” Many of these do deserve closer examination at some point.

The third episode relates to the alleged participation of Cukurs in murders in Biķernieki forest in early 1942. These accounts come from former members of the Arājs Unit.

In a 1948 witness account, found in Central Archives of Russia’s Federal Security Service, Eduards Šmits states: “Before we left for [anti-partisan operation] in the vicinity of Nasva station [in

Russia] in April of 1942, the battalion, led by Cukurs, participated in mass extermination of Soviet citizens. Approximately in late 1942, Cukurs has left Arājs Unit. Last time I’ve seen him was in summer of 1943, he wore civilian clothes.” Roberts Puriņš (witness account from 1948, also found at FSS Archives): “In the spring, before going to Nasva, Cukurs led and was actual leader of battalion that under his command perpetrated the mass extermination of Soviet citizens in Biķernieki forest. On April 23 Cukurs—and I was serving in his battalion—has been shooting for the entire day. The trucks would all the time bring victims to be shot, and they were murdered at the specially prepared pits. I don’t know if, at that moment, Cukurs was shooting personally. Last time I’ve seen him in 1943 in Courland.” Here we have to notice that in summer of 1943 Cukurs, indeed, was in Courland, as attested to by the sources provided by the family of Miriam Kaitzner, but in August of 1944 he was appointed the head of police of Courland region.

Genādijs Mūrnieks in his 1976 witness account, submitted in Riga as a part of Arājs trial, and reconfirmed in 1996, gives a lengthier description of events in Biķernieki forest: “I was a witness to one of these mass shootings in Biķernieki forest, that happened in spring of 1942, if I remember correctly—in March. That time were killed Jews, who were brought to Riga from Western Europe, from where exactly—I don’t know. I was posted to the group of policemen that had to stand in a chain [guarding the site]. In this chain there were two rows of policemen. In this chain I stood some 30 meters from the pit. The Jews had to go to the execution site between two rows of our chain. Arājs with 3-4 German officers of Security Police stood next to the pit. There were also officers of Latvian Auxiliary Security police—Dibietis, Cukurs, Laukers, and I think Ķurbis. I have seen that Arājs has several times approached the pit, took the submachine gun from one of his privates and shot at the pit when the Jews were there. I haven’t seen Arājs shooting with a handgun. Of the German officers, Krause was shooting at the victims. I don’t remember if other German officers were shooting. If someone from Arājs Unit, except for Cukurs was shooting—I don’t remember. In Auxiliary Security police, Cukurs was responsible for the weapons.” While Šmits and Puriņš witness accounts were not used during Arājs trial, Mūrnieks report was considered and was found trustworthy.

As we clearly stated at the beginning, what is listed here is just a small part of documents and sources available. There are also some archival collections that would need deeper research, especially the Russian archives, the access to which has become increasingly complicated. We also hope that some of the survivors may still contribute to the research.

In discussions about Cukurs, often all kinds of stories would be told, many of them being very far from being true. Unfortunately, the Internet makes it easier to spread these stories, thus giving the opposite side—Cukurs’s whitewashers—the possibility to disregard all the accusations against him as folklore or pure lies. Our opinion is that Cukurs definitely is not the key figure in the history of the Holocaust in Latvia. But his complicity in the genocide of Latvian Jews, including personal participation, is definitely beyond any reasonable doubt.

By Ilya Lensky, Director of Jews in Latvia Museum, Riga

NEWS FROM LATVIA

May 4, 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the proclamation of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia—then 138 out of 201 deputies of the Supreme Council voted in favor of the declaration “On Restoring Independence of the Republic of Latvia.” The Supreme Council established a transition period, which happened to end on August 21, 1991, with the adoption of the constitutional law “On the State Status of the Republic of Latvia.”

On that day, May 4th, 1990, thousands of people stood at the parliament building all day waiting for the vote results. Deputies who left the Supreme Council building after the vote were greeted with flowers and shouts of approval. Opponents of the declaration—representatives of Interfront—left the building through an emergency exit. After the meeting, the Chairman of the Supreme Council Anatoly Gorbunov sent a letter to the President of the U.S.S.R. Mikhail Gorbachev stating that Latvia was beginning the transition period. The same messages were sent to the governments of the countries of the world, the people of the U.S.S.R., and democratic movements.



The rally was attended by a group of representatives of the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture

In the evening, a rally of many thousands was held on the Daugava embankment at which the leaders of the movement for the restoration of independence of Latvia, Dainis Ivans, Anatoly Gorbunov and Mavrik Wulfson, spoke. During the demonstration, a message came that the BBC radio station had informed the whole world of the declaration of independence of the Republic of Latvia, which the rally participants met with a grand ovation.

On June 3, taking into account the requirements of the countrywide quarantine introduced in Latvia, a rally was held in the suburbs of Liepaja, Škede, dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the opening of one of the most magnificent memorials in Europe, *Kadish*, honoring Holocaust victims. Leading members of the Jewish community, participants of the design and construction of the memorial gathered to partici-

pate in the event; representatives of the City Council, as well as the Consul General of Russia in Liepaja, Alexei Belonosov, were also present. The memorial was built in 2005 by the decision of the recently created the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation, which selected and approved the winning design by Raymond Gabalins. The construction of the memorial was supervised by a committee headed by Sergey Zaharjin, which included the President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Professor George Schwab, construction director Jacob Berlin, and others. In its finished form the *Kadish* memorial is a horizontal menorah built of chipped fieldstone from Kurzeme. The total area of the Memorial is 4,120 square meters. Just one granite stela weighs 7 tons. The Menorah candles are made of seven large granite stelae with Hebrew quotations from the Torah.



Aerial view of the Škede Memorial

At the rally, Ilana Ivanova, head of the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation, spoke, noting that not a single memorial event of the Liepaja Jewish community is complete without visiting this memorial, which is a tribute to the Jews of Liepaja who were murdered in the Holocaust.

On June 30, a lecture about Jewish rescuers in Liepaja, Aizpute, and Rutsava was held at the Lipke Memorial in Kipsala. The educational instructor of the Lipke Memorial, Maija Meiere, spent the time in coronavirus quarantine examining the little-known stories of Jewish rescuers in depth.



Maija Meiere and Lipman Zeligman, a descendant of one of the subjects of her lecture, speak at the end of the event

NEWS FROM LATVIA (continued)

Of the 138 inhabitants of Latvia who have been awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, almost one-fifth were residents of Liepaja, Aizpute, and Rutsava. The names of the Liepaja residents Robert and Johanna Sedols, who hid 11 Jews who had fled from ghettos and camps for 19 months, are well known to many. Moreover, their story is described in the book of memoirs by Kalman Linkimer. But few people know about the tragic ending of the story in Aizpute, where four Jews who were hiding were discovered and together with their rescuers, the members of the Dzenis-Puke-Shuster families, were sent to the concentration camps. In Rutsava, Maiga and Jekab Riteni hid the mother and daughter Lifshits in their household, for whom a haystack proved to be a reliable hiding place. And the two Liepaja women, Hertha Karklina and Sofia Ziverte, testified to a notary public that the Jewish woman Erica Alperovitch was really a German woman adopted by a Jewish family. And when the Liepaja resident Leon Bechalis found shelter for his friend Lev Zeligman and his wife, Michla, at the home of Elsa Perconet, she said: "From now on, you are my children. What will happen to you is with me." All these and other stories were told that day at the Lipke memorial. The event was supported by the State Cultural Foundation and the Uniting History Foundation.

Back in January 2020, with the support of the Jews in Latvia Museum, filming of the documentary *How We Lived On* began. The film deals mainly with surviving prisoners of ghettos and camps and Jewish soldiers from Latvia. Due to the emergency associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the filming had to be put on hold and only restarted in June.



Interview with a former prisoner of the Riga ghetto, 99-year-old Zoni Joselovic, in his home in Berlin

The film will be about people who suffered intolerable mental (and, in many cases, physical) trauma, and how they lived for many decades with it. Moreover, some individuals, after having suffered in the fascist camps, were sent to other camps, Siberian ones; the film will cover how they survived there. They survived, but was it easy for them to live? How did they spend the second half of the twentieth century, and how do they live in the twenty-first? Has the xenophobia that threatened them remained in the past or can history repeat

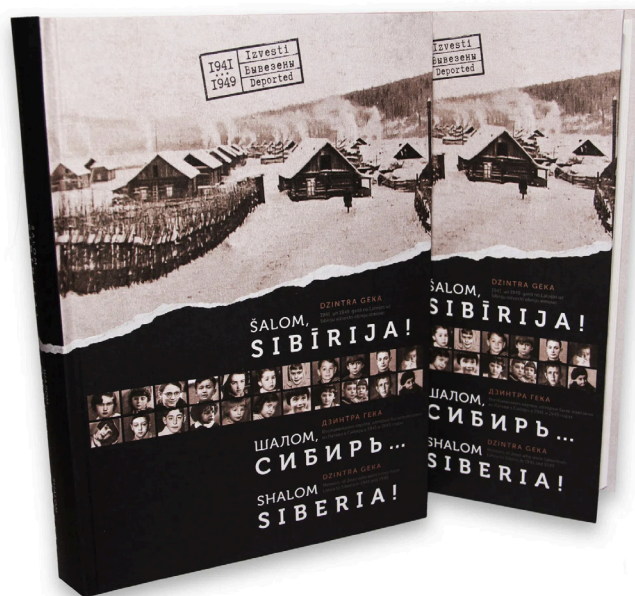
itself?

The filmmakers tracked down survivors and, in many cases, their descendants in various parts of the world and convinced them to tell how their lives turned out. Many will speak for the first time, and viewers will hear amazing stories—each of which would be enough for a separate film.

The filmmakers, Yuniya Pugacheva, a Moscover digital video professional, and Olga Shakina, a journalist associated with TV channels Currenttime and TV Rain, are some of the best young journalists of today, according to *The Guardian*.

The film will premiere on the Riga-24 channel of Latvian television on November 30, 2020—the day of mourning, the 79th anniversary of the first action to destroy prisoners of the Riga ghetto in Rumbula. The *Courier* will have more about the film in a future issue.

The Latvian publishing house Sibirijas bērni (Children of Siberia) has published the book *Shalom Siberia!*, which relates the memoirs of Jews deported as children from Latvia to Siberia in 1941, some in 1949. On June 14, 1941, 15,425 Latvian citizens were deported from Riga; 1,789 were Jews. Among the deported Jewish children, some were infants, others were teenagers. After many decades, the authors Dzintra Geka and Aivars Lubanietis interviewed and placed 25 of the stories in this book.



The Shalom Siberia! book

These stories make the heart ache, while not forgetting that, as one of them, the now famous Latvian transplant surgeon, academician Rafael Rosenthal, says "If we had not been deported, my parents and I would have been killed here by the fascists. There were both my grandmothers, both grandfathers and aunts—quite a large family remained." The book is preceded by an introduction by former Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, in which she writes: "It is amazing to see how many people who have survived unimaginable difficulties and challenges have managed to preserve a hopeful look at life. Their expe-

NEWS FROM LATVIA (continued)

periences have forged a powerful nature and force of will. They have survived, they have attained achievements, and they have never allowed their scars to push them down. No, they have devoted all of their strength in making sure that the scars turn into strength, hope, and the pulsating light of the heart." *Shalom Sibiria!* was printed in three languages: Latvian, Russian, and English.

The contest for the design of the new summer concert hall that will be named after the outstanding composer Oscar Strok has ended. The hall is going to be built in Daugavpils, in the central park of the city.



A rendering of how the Oscar Strok Concert Hall in Daugavpils will look

Members of the City Council of Daugavpils decided to hold this competition last summer; in April 2020, the commission determined the winners. To attract architects, they created a premium fund of 20,000 euros. The first place winner was awarded 10,000 euros, while the second place garnered 4,000 euros. In total, the commission received 11 applications, half of which was professional work. The next stage is finalizing the designs of the hall, which will take at least six months. The construction itself remains to be funded, as the budget of the city of Daugavpils cannot cover the costs. Last year, construction costs were estimated from 3 million to 15 million euros. The city is counting on European funds and the support from the Ministry of Culture, said Jānis Dukšinsky, deputy chairman of the city council of Daugavpils.



The renovated chapel of the Shmerli Jewish Cemetery

On the decision of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, significant work was carried out at the Shmerli Jewish cemetery in Riga to repair the fence, gate, and mainly the chapel, which was last renovated almost 20 years ago. According to the director of the cemetery, Leonid Kilim, all

planned activities have been completed:

- The fence was repaired using modern waterproofing materials and means, which will further protect the columns from destruction.
- Not far from the entrance an additional well has been installed; it collects all wastewater. Visitors will no longer be greeted at the entrance by a huge puddle.
- By the order of the Hevra Kadisho Funeral Society, a new hearse was designed and manufactured; the design took into account the uneven surface of most of the tracks and the lack of asphalt on them.
- Finally, and most important, the facade of the chapel was repaired, including the restoration of walls, reinforcement, decorative plastering, and painting.

In the last issue, the *Courier* reported on a performance in Daugavpils in honor of the 130th anniversary of fellow countryman, the great artist Solomon Mikhoels. It turned out the Daugavpils art lovers had additional ideas. Recently, the famous historian, director of the Museum Jews in Daugavpils and Latgale Joseph Rochko received part of the circulation of a postage stamp commemorating the 130th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding actor, director, public figure Solomon Mikhoels (1890-1948). Rochko had initiated the proposal of issuing this stamp by the Latvian Post Office.



The Solomon Mikhoels commemorative stamp

The idea was supported by the Shamir Society and the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum in Latvia. "Mikhoels was born and spent his childhood in Daugavpils, then Dinaburg. A memorial plaque was installed on his house for a long time, which was later replaced by a bas-relief, and one of the city streets bears the name of Mikhoels. This year, in honor of the anniversary, we decided to promote the release of a postage stamp dedicated to Mikhoels. We had experience in the past, where, based on our ideas, the Latvian Post Office has issued various stamps over the years in honor of Mikhail Tal, Mark Rothko, Janis Lipke, and an envelope in honor of Oscar Strok," Rochko said. The plans of the tireless local historian are to install a bust of Mikhoels in the Daugavpils synagogue *Kadish*. He just needs to find sponsors.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule

PYOTR VAYL: ESSAYIST, JOURNALIST, EDITOR

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.

Vayl, Pyotr Lvovich was born on September 29th, 1949, in Riga and died on December 7th, 2009, in Prague. He was an essayist, journalist, and editor. Pyotr Vayl grew up in Riga. He graduated after corresponding studies at the editorial department of the Moscow Polygraphic Institute in 1976. Before and after serving in the Soviet army, he worked as a freight handler, locksmith, cemetery worker, fireman, and a few years before emigration – a literary contributor. Later, he was deputy executive secretary of the newspaper *Sovietskaya Molodezh* (Soviet Youth), from where he was dismissed for “ideological inconsistency.” He began publishing in 1973.



Vayl emigrated to the United States in 1977. He collaborated in various emigrant newspapers and magazines such as *New Russian Word*, *New American*, *Continent*, *Syntax*, etc. Together with Sergei Dovlatov and Alexander Genis, he formed the core of a group of writers, mainly from New York, who continued to write and publish in Russian. In 1983-84, together with A. Genis, he published the weekly magazine *Seven Days* (the appendix to the newspaper *New Russian Word*).



Writers Pyotr Vayl, Sergei Dovlatov, Viktor Nekrasov, and Alexandr Genis

Pyotr Vayl co-authored six books with A. Genis, the most famous of which are: a collection of essays, *Russian Cuisine in Exile*, first published in Los Angeles in 1987 and later reprinted many times in Russia, *The World of the Soviet People in the '60s* (1988), and *Native Speech* (1990), which were also later released in Russia. He was the compiler and author of the forewords for two of Joseph Brodsky's collections: *Christmas Poems* (1992) and *Rough Terrain* (1995). Additionally, he was the



Pyotr Vayl

author (together with Lev Losev) of the book *Joseph Brodsky: Works and Days* (1998). Vayl is the author of the books *Genius of the Place* (1999), *Map of the Motherland* (2003), *Poems About Me* (2006), and many publications in periodicals. Several chapters of Vayl's last book, dedicated to his beloved country of Italy

and the history of Italian culture, remained unfinished. In 2019, the tenth anniversary of his death, this book, *Pictures of Italy*, compiled by the wife of the writer Elya Vayl, was published in St. Petersburg. She was also the compiler of the first posthumous collection *Word on the Road* (2010). Pyotr Vayl was also the



Pyotr Vayl with his wife, Elya

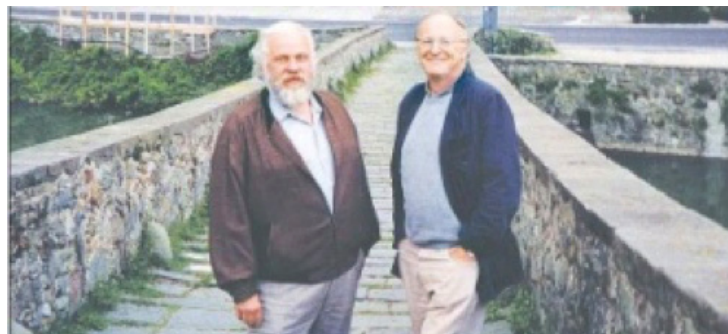
author and host of the 23-episode TV cycle *The Genius of Place* on the Russian channel Culture. Lavishly sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of the world, he actually revived readers' interest in Russian essayism, and became a classic of its genre.

Vayl was a founding member of the Academy of Contemporary Russian Literature, member of the editorial board of the magazine *Foreign Literature*, on the Board of Trustees of the foundation Banner, and the expert on Council of the Guild of Film Critics of Russia. He was the winner of several literary prizes. In September 2009, the editorial board of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty announced the establishment of the Pyotr Vayl Free Russian Journalism scholarship.

From 1984, Pyotr Vayl worked with the Russian service Radio Liberty, first in the New York bureau, where as of 1988, he worked on a permanent basis. He headed the Russian editorial office and led a series of programs: *Heroes of Time* via the radio and *The Genius of Place* via television. From 1995, he lived in Prague, and in his last years he was the chief editor of the Russian service Radio Liberty.

By Ivar Brod

Translated by Alan Solovey



Pyotr Vayl and Joseph Brodsky in Lucca, Italy

LOCK(ER) OF MEMORY: HELP TO PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF THE JUNGFERNHOF CONCENTRATION CAMP



A digital rendering of the memorial

The history of the Holocaust in Latvia is relatively well researched. However, there are some aspects of this history that remain hidden. One of them is the story of Jungfernhof (Mazjumpravmuiža) concentration camp near Riga, which became the destination for the deportation of German and Austrian Jews in December of 1941. Almost 4000 people were deported from Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Hamburg and Vienna, of whom only 148 survived. About 800 people died in

first two months of existence at the camp of cold and malnutrition, and were buried in mass graves at the site. Altogether about 2,500 prisoners were murdered in February and March of 1942 in Bikernieki forest, among them, the prominent intellectual educational leader, Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, Dr. Joseph Carlebach.

Boston-based artist and educator Dr. Karen Frostig, part of the faculty at Brandeis and Lesley University, has worked for more than a decade on commemoration projects for the victims of this camp, among whom were her grandparents. In recent years she has established multiple contacts in Latvia and other countries in order to install a Naming Memorial at the camp site. The multimedia memorial would be part of a broader commemorative initiative, using advanced archeological technologies and other tools in an effort to foster a reflective engagement with the past. The project received support from Jewish organizations in the U.S., as well as commemorative institutions in Austria. The project named the “Lock(er) of Memory” has a strong presence on the internet. The website link is lockerofmemory.com.

In order to develop the project, Dr. Karen Frostig and the project team invite those who have any family stories connected to the Jungfernhof camp—both of survival and of death—or photos of family artifacts, documents or photographs related to victims and survivors, to get in touch via the website at lockerofmemory.com contact (scroll down to descendants) or by email to karen@lockerofmemory.com the e-mail of Karen Frostig, Director.

Based on materials from lockerofmemory.com

In a previous issue of the Courier, we published the first part of the third chapter of “War” memoirs of Professor George D. Schwab, ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR: FROM LATVIA THROUGH THE CAMPS TO THE UNITED STATES. Here we offer the final part of this chapter.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – WAR

Back at the barrack in camp, I tried to convince myself that Bubi would soon follow even though deep down I felt it was over. (In the 1980s, I was called twice to testify against Wisner in Düsseldorf. Despite damning testimonies by survivors, including Professor Gertrude Schneider, he received a light prison sentence of five years.) Unable to fall asleep and despondent when Bubi

did not return after calling out for him in the barrack, I finally accepted the fact that it was his end: Bubinka’s time to be killed had arrived. I was now at a complete loss, not knowing how to manage all alone, and once more blamed my parents for having abandoned me. Quietly crying for Bubinka who had watched over me and who even insisted on giving me half of his meager ration so that I not be hungry and grow, I gradually fell asleep, reconciling myself to the fact that I was not the only one in this predicament.

Sensing my despair, Jule Goldberg, who in Libau labored in the SD with mammy, approached me and said that he would look after me as much as possible, even going so far as to say that for as long as he lived I, too, would live. He was known for his good looks, powerful muscles, and excellence as a yachtsman. He was married to the beautiful Eugenia, also a Reichsbahn

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – WAR (continued)

slave laborer.

At the beginning of August, we were told that the Reichsbahn's satellite work camp would be liquidated and the camp inmates would be transported to Germany where we would continue to work for the Reichsbahn. Although elated at the proximity of Soviet troops, the inmates did not say much about what was felt to be inevitable, namely, our slaughter and the vow to take German and Latvian murderers with us into the graves.

Soon we were forced to march to the Riga harbor where an imposing looking ship, the Bremerhafen, awaited the human cargo of thousands of prisoners from Kaiserwald and satellite camps. Chased aboard and down a stairway to a barracks-like space with bunk beds and bare floors, I secured one for myself next to Jule and other Reichsbahn inmates.

Now the rumor mill sprang into action. Some speculated that we would be drowned in the Baltic Sea, whereas others thought that the Germans would not want to sink the ship that appeared to us to be a troop carrier. While arguments flared back and forth, others on board were certain that we would be thrown overboard. Few believed that we would reach a port in Germany. Some were sure that Soviet planes would not attack the ship because they would see on deck many inmates wearing the easily recognizable zebra-like uniforms that we had recently been ordered to don. I don't remember anyone mentioning the possibility of a submarine attack.

Curious about the ship, I was eager to reach the upper deck. I looked up the staircase to see if SS guards were watching. A woman whose hair was cropped stared down at me and, not recognizing her, I paid no attention. Suddenly I heard a familiar voice calling "Zockele, Zockele." I looked at her once more and discovered my hairless mammy. As we slowly sailed in the Bay of Riga in perfect Baltic summer weather, mammy and I watched several artillery shells explode nearby on land. That meant that the Soviets were truly not far away. For the next few days, we managed to spend time together on deck.

In the course of our meetings, mammy related to me that those who were selected from the Reichsbahn reached Kaiserwald on the way to be slaughtered. She had spoken with Bubi several times across the barbed wire fence separating the men from the women. By promising bribes to some of the higher-ups, mammy thought she might be able to save Bubinka, but finally he refused to go to the fence. The last time mammy saw him, he promised her that he and his buddies would make sure to take some of the German and Latvian killers with them. (To the best of our knowledge, the killings took place either at Rumbula or Bikerniek forests.) With

papinka and Bubinka gone, we both spilled bitter tears.

During the time we were able to spend on deck, we reminisced about our wonderful and warm past, commiserated over our deep hurts, and vowed never to give in and never to return to cursed Latvia. Based on the answers of former Riga inmates, mammy had the feeling that her entire Riga family had been wiped out. One glimmer of hope was Aunt Hermine. Perhaps her Chinese diplomatic passport was helpful; perhaps she had fled to Russia. Who knew?

Once more, mammy reminded me of papa's brother Robert, in London, and my first cousins in the United States. She also talked about papa's sister, Fanny, and her husband, Leiba Galgut, a first cousin, living in Johannesburg, South Africa. Mammy also profusely thanked Jule for looking after me. In turn, he reminded her of how helpful she had been in providing food and news while working for Kügler's mistress. Mammy insisted on sharing her ration with me, claiming, as at Kaiserwald, that she was not hungry.

Surprisingly, the disembarkation went quite smoothly without much mistreatment from the German SS guards. It was thought that they acted that way because on German soil they did not want to shock the local population with their bestiality. But the euphoric sense that we would be treated more humanely was dispelled once we reached Stutthof, an extermination camp, near Danzig. The reception was reminiscent of our arrival at Kaiserwald. Beatings, kickings, and chasings by SS guards with rifles. Some had at their sides fierce-looking and wildly barking German police dogs. It seemed like homecoming to Kaiserwald. The only hope was that the Reichsbahn satellite camp would materialize somewhere in Germany.

As at Kaiserwald, the men were separated from the women. Otherwise, there were few similarities between the two concentration camps, Kaiserwald and Stutthof. The latter was huge, and the double-row, barbed wire fence surrounding the camp was electrified. The camp also had watchtowers manned by SS guards with machine guns. We learned two new words: gas chamber and crematorium as a result of finding out that those designated to be murdered were first gassed in a shower-like construct, with their bodies subsequently cremated. As was the practice at Kaiserwald, we continued to be known by our assigned numbers and not by name. Appell, food rations, and sanitary facilities varied little from Kaiserwald. Hunger, lice, and diarrhea were steady companions. (I leave to the reader's imagination what our underwear looked like and how awful we smelled.) In the barrack, I now slept on the floor atop a straw mattress, with a straw pillow and under a thin blanket. I felt that my work was physically harder—perhaps because I was weaker.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – WAR (continued)

Following Appell in the very early morning and after the morning ration similar to that at Kaiserwald's, I was assigned to shovel sand onto wheelbarrows—just as I had done at the oil terminal—for constructing what we were told were stoves with tall chimneys, that is, crematoriums. The midday meal consisted of very watery turnip or cabbage soup full of sand, much worse than provided at Kaiserwald. It was accompanied by the usual stale and moldy slice of bread. The ration break was momentary; we were quickly chased back to work. Constantly under the watch of sadistic SS guards and like-minded Kapos, we were unable to snatch a moment of rest unless given permission to visit the latrine.

Following Appell, the evening's routine began. It was a replay of the morning's activities: the ration was acquired and consumed; then came latrine visits; delousing (often futile); and washing oneself as best one could in totally inadequate facilities. As at Kaiserwald, religious Jews huddled in the rear of the barrack where they offered prayers to God. Five or six hours of sleep interrupted by numerous latrine visits lay ahead. Camp inmates were so isolated from the outside world that, with few exceptions, even the rumor mills ceased to function. Our sole consolation was the certitude that the Germans and their allies were on the run.

Not long after arriving at Stutthof, the Reichsbahn contingent with a few exceptions was told that we were to be sent to a satellite camp where the work that we had done in Riga would be continued. One difference was Dr. Gaspari, a very well-known Austrian-Jewish surgeon who was acquainted with papa's work was assigned to our group, replacing the doctor who had accompanied us from Riga.

Knowing that the word of a German is not worth a farthing or, as mammy used to say in German, Ein Mann ein Wort, kein Mann kein Wort. Nevertheless, a good number of us believed that we would be transported somewhere to work for the German war machine. The pessimists were convinced, however, that the trip would be our last and would terminate in a killing ground. To our great surprise, the Reichsbahn contingent was given new clogs, clean underwear, and zebra clothing, towels, some soap, and about twice the usual morning and evening ration. Perhaps a greater surprise came when we were ordered to board a normal passenger train that was set aside for us instead of the usual cattle cars. The trip in beautiful weather was pleasant even though the train was overcrowded. The countryside was handsomely manicured and peaceful, unharmed by war. After years of deprivation, I used a proper toilet and even managed to scrub with rough toilet paper and cold water the lower part of my body in privacy

behind closed doors.

On our arrival in the town of Stolp in the province of Pomerania, we were forced to walk a short distance to our new quarters. The women were separated from the men. To reach our habitat, the men had to pass through a gate and a yard that was enclosed by a non-electric barbed wire fence on one side and by a huge stone brick wall on the other side. There we were shown what appeared to have been a large railroad hangar or workshop turned into barracks-like quarters with multi-tiered bunk beds equipped with the usual straw mattresses, straw pillows, and thin dark-gray blankets. Despite sanitary facilities that were better than at Stutthof and at Kaiserwald, lice continued to keep us company.

The new place was administered by a low-ranking SS man with the assistance of a few SS guards and Reichsbahn overseers. The chief Reichsbahn official assigned to us and who appeared to wield considerable power was a tall, slim man whose name I believe was spelled Schiebe. The satellite camp's daily routine was akin to what we had experienced at Kaiserwald and Stutthof: early-morning and evening roll call in the yard and morning, noon, and evening inadequate rations. Because we lived close to the Stolp railroad station and next to railroad tracks, we were able to watch with the greatest of satisfaction the never-ending stream of trains passing by filled with heavily bandaged wounded German soldiers and officers.

My work assignment in the nearby railroad workshop, a part of which housed the women prisoners and a small infirmary, was of a kind I had not seen or done, namely, carpentry. I certainly could not admit my ignorance, and in no time I learned how to smooth surface planks with a plane and sandpaper, for what purpose I had no idea. However difficult the work was for the emaciated me, it was at least indoors and not as difficult as shoveling sand into wheelbarrows. Supervision was less harsh than that at the Reichsbahn in Riga, as was physical abuse by the Germans. The two German Jewish capos, Grünwald and Kurt Kendziorek who hailed from Lübeck, made up with their sadism for the "leniency" of the Germans. For any infringement, including in the extreme case of stealing food from fellow prisoners, Kendziorek did not spare his truncheon and whip from the weak, emaciated, and often sick prisoners.

Two events deserve particular mention: my birthday in November 1944 and the hanging of five male prisoners. Both occurred as Germany, thankfully, was reeling on all fronts. The SS woman in charge of the female prisoners, jointly with her counterpart on the male side, agreed that Jule and I would be

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – WAR (continued)

allowed into the women's habitat to celebrate my birthday, perhaps it even was my Bar Mitzvah, as I had only a vague knowledge of what that meant. For the occasion, Eugenia somehow managed to bake a potato cake, the most delicious thing I had tasted in years. In the presence of the SS woman, Jule, Eugenia, and the women slave laborers sang songs, including one of my favorites, "The Lambeth Walk," with lyrics in English. Everyone, including the SS woman, seemed to have a good time participating in this unprecedented event.

The euphoria that followed the celebration was soon shattered. A rumor made the rounds that potatoes, cabbage, and turnips, among other vegetables, had fallen off an open railroad freight car and five of our boys who worked nearby were alleged to have "organized" (ill-gotten in ghetto language) some of the loot. It was also rumored that they would soon be severely punished, despite their pleas of innocence. Rumor also had it that the five had been framed to cover up the identity of the true culprits, a few Germans. Soon it became official that the five would be hanged in our presence.

For me this was to be a novel experience. Although acquainted by now with dead bodies, I could not imagine how human beings could be hanged. I had not the faintest idea what fellow inmates were talking about, the mechanics of hanging, the gallows, the noose, the rope. One day we were forced to assemble in the yard and witness the horrendous crime that was being perpetrated. Even worse, one of the victims was only half-dead; he was hanging on the rope and jerking involuntarily. He was finally shot in the head. And we were warned that death would be the fate of anyone found stealing.

However exhausted I was from the near day-long spectacle, I could not fall asleep and once more blamed my parents for their failure to protect me. Despite Jule's presence, I felt basically abandoned by my parents, who were responsible for my well-being. I was thinking of my impending death despite the crumbling German war machine. Finally, I looked around and, as usual, noted that I was not alone in this predicament. Reconciled to my fate, though feeling sorry for myself, I fell asleep, crying for mammy, papinka, and Bubinka.

Early in the New Year, in February 1945, the Reichsbahn's satellite camp was dissolved and the inmates were transported in cattle cars to Danzig. According to rumors, we were to be sent from there to Stutthof. The trip to Danzig, which should have taken no more than a couple of hours, took several days under horrendous sanitary conditions and totally inadequate food rations. On arriving in bitter cold Danzig, we were chased out of the cattle cars, beaten, and forced to

march for hours to one of Stutthof's satellite camps called Burggraben. Skeletons too weak to walk on the death march were shot dead by the SS guards. However weak and cold I was, I persisted with Jule next to me.

At Burggraben, we were greeted by a new reality: no guards that I can remember, hardly any rations, walking with clogs in mud, sleeping on cold floors, and no work, which enabled me to catch up on much-needed sleep, at least something positive. Soviet forces were nearby. We basically existed in no-man's-land, experiencing something really new—the exchange of artillery fire over our heads with hardly a shell falling on the camp.

Suddenly, I was alerted that a Lithuanian relative from papa's side of the family was looking for me. He was a sick young man lying in bed in a kind of infirmary. Initially, I was reluctant to visit him as I was afraid that he would ask me for bread of which I had very little left. When he saw me he smiled, said he was glad to meet me, asked about my parents and brother, and expressed the wish to see me again. That was not to be. Only about a week or so after our arrival, SS guards arrived in trucks and evacuated us to Stutthof.

The Stutthof of March/April 1945 was markedly different from the camp in 1944. Then, inmates were free from typhoid; now the disease was rampant—in large measure because of the filthy lice infestation, awful sanitary conditions, and undernourishment. Luckily, I was spared this dreadful disease because papa had immunized the family from the plague and other horrifying illnesses at the very beginning of the Nazi occupation. During our short stay in Stutthof, Jule was terribly bitten by one of the SS guard's bulldogs and his leg became very swollen.

The location of our barracks was elsewhere from where we had first been located—close to the gas chamber and crematorium, the chimney of the latter was clearly visible, with the ovens spewing smoke into the sky. In contrast to Burggraben, we heard artillery exchanges far away. The camp was on occasion attacked by Soviet fighter planes, and, in one instance, as I lay on the ground, face in the sand, and hands covering my head, a piece of shrapnel landed only inches from me.

Sometime in the fourth week of April, we were told that we would be evacuated to Danzig but not told our final destination. One day we received our usual ration of inedible bread, margarine, and some substitute jelly and off we marched a short distance and were then chased onto open, narrow-gauge railroad cars. The Danzig I remembered from our death march to Burggraben I did not recognize now. Perhaps this was not even Danzig. At the destination, the walking skeletons were ordered to board barges—a venture marked by the usual ration of beatings.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – WAR (continued)

The accommodations were a horror. Because there was no ladder or stairs to the lower deck, the less fortunate were helped by those who had the strength to descend by way of a human ladder. They helped us to slide down. The compartment was filthy, smelled of manure, and was overcrowded. There was no room for everyone to sit, not to speak of stretching out. Squeezed like sardines, we took turns sitting. As prisoners died of starvation or disease, their bodies were thrown overboard and the compartment became progressively less crowded and more comfortable.

A corner was set aside for our biological needs and a bucket full of urine and excrement was continually lifted up to the deck and emptied into the Baltic Sea. Those of us who reached the deck with the help of inmates were able to urinate and defecate into the sea by squatting and holding on to the railing. That option proved dangerous as some lost their balance and fell into the sea, while others were kicked into the water by SS guards and drowned. On one occasion as I was relieving myself, I recognized a Jewish Latvian woman from Libau treading water and looking helplessly at me, but I did not know her name. On another occasion while squatting and holding on to the railing and defecating, shortly after some inmates had overheard SS guards speaking of Hitler having been killed fighting the Soviets in Berlin, an SS guard approached me and I was convinced that this was to be my end as well. He looked at me, and I, full of fright, looked at him, and he passed me by.

Suddenly one morning we noticed land and were told by the SS guards that we were docking in Hamburg for food and drinking water. Just as abruptly, after some food and drinking water had been brought aboard the barge, we were told by the SS guards that we would have to leave in a hurry as American troops were in the center of the city. In the course of the following night, we learned that our SS guards and tugboats had abandoned us on the high seas, allegedly on or near a minefield. Luckily, one of the compartments was occupied by Norwegian prisoners of war who were better fed than we. To reach land, they collected our blankets that they turned into sails and by early morning we saw land. The plan was to disembark with the help of the Norwegians and begin to walk toward the Americans in the direction of Lübeck and Hamburg.

By now I was utterly exhausted and weak and begged Jule to leave me aboard the barge. He would have none of it and, despite his swollen leg and general weakness, he helped me to get up to the deck and the Norwegians helped us down into a rowboat that they had found on shore; we were only about 50 meters

from land. We reached the shore relatively dry in the cold morning.

There was no sign of a German in uniform or even German civilians peeking at us from nearby small houses. As prisoners continued to disembark—some even waded to shore—and as we prepared to start our march, I once more pleaded with Jule to leave me behind as I had no strength left in my body. Stubborn as always, he would not let go of me. Even so, the march to freedom came to naught.

On the morning of May 3, 1945, German naval units appeared and began shooting dead those unable to stand and walk and prisoners in rowboats or wading from the barges. They even mounted the barges and shot those still aboard. The remnants were ordered to line up and forced to march. Soon we crossed a bridge into Neustadt in Holstein, a small town, and shortly thereafter we reached an enormous U-boat school with many well-constructed buildings and barracks and a huge soccer field that was crowded with thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners and many SS guards. We were told that we soon would board the ship *Athen* that would take us to another ship, the *Cap Arcona*, once a well-known German luxury liner that was waiting for its human cargo not far from shore. As I gradually made my way to the point of embarkation in full view of the *Cap Arcona*, British fighter planes attacked the ship. The *Cap Arcona* capsized with thousands of prisoners aboard as we later learned. Unfortunately, very few survived that catastrophe.

In the chaos that followed, I lost Jule; I was not in a hurry to board and placed myself toward the very end of the line. Nearby I noticed a huge pile of weapons and what I thought was food being watched over by a German soldier. Excruciatingly hungry and thirsty I, with my last ounce of strength, dragged myself over and asked the unarmed guard for a slice of bread. In my delirious state, I tried to bite into what I discovered was a bar of soap, which I mistook for bread. He told me to walk over to the nearby British tank that had placed itself between the pile and *Athen*. I once more looked at the soap and the pistol almost next to it. The thought occurred to me to pick it up and shoot the guard only to realize that I would not know how to handle the gun and then there was my dread of seeing blood. I slowly dragged my weak and tired feet toward it and saw soldiers in uniforms I did not recognize. I approached the tank and in English I begged the soldier looking out from the turret for a slice of bread. Instead, soldiers on the ground gave me several biscuits. Starved, dazed but free at last. But what now?

By George David Schwab