



The Latvian Jewish Courier

RESTORATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN LATVIA AND PASTOR KLAUS-PETER REX



Pastor Rex speaks at the award ceremony



Pastor Rex speaks in the Aizpute cemetery

A very important part of the activities of Jewish organizations in all countries—especially those where the Holocaust left its terrible legacy—is preservation and perpetuation of memories of people and events. A significant part of this work in Latvia is usually done in the summer by local activists and groups of volunteers, mostly young people, from other countries. For many years this activity has been organized by German pastor Klaus-Peter Rex, educator, humanitarian, and leader of the Germany-based LOT organization. The work of LOT will be discussed in greater detail later in this article. First, though, a brief rundown of recent events: At the end of January of this year, Pastor Rex was in New York City and Paramus, New Jersey, to receive an award from The Prakhin International Literary Foundation. The foundation annually bestows its Literary Award for Best High School and College Curriculum on the theme of “Truth About the Holocaust and Stalinist Repression.” The Prakhin Foundation considers this award one of its contributions to the struggle for peace and democracy and against anti-Semitism, all forms of repression, and degradation of humanity.

At the award ceremony, Pastor Rex gave a speech: “The LOT Association—How the Shoah Became My Topic.”

LOT takes its name from the Biblical story of Lot, the nephew of the Prophet Abraham and how he was saved from Sodom’s intolerable conditions. Like Lot, the organization also wants to look to the future and put things right. Thus LOT could also stand for “life of tomorrow.”

The LOT organization was founded on April 28, 2008, and has the following objectives:

- To keep the memory of the Shoah alive among the younger generation
- To facilitate encounters between people of different religions and nationalities
- To promote joint activities and work projects for youths and young adults of different faiths

LOT’s advisory board has representatives from Israel, Germany, and Latvia. Latvia is represented by Gita Umanovska, executive director of the Jewish Community of Latvia. Mrs. Umanovska was a guest speaker at the JSL’s annual 2016 Yizkor.



The Jewish cemetery in Aizpute before its restoration, 2011



Jewish cemetery entrance in Aizpute, 2017

One of the most significant aspects of LOT’s activities is creation of international work camps to restore destroyed or neglected Jewish cemeteries in Latvia. People participating in LOT’s activities are volunteers who use their vacation time to

do this work. Once a restoration is complete, the team holds an opening ceremony that is attended by local officials, diplomats, and leaders of Jewish community.

Here is the list of the cemeteries in Latvia that LOT has helped to rehabilitate: Gostini (Plavinas) in 2005–2007, Livani in 2007, Vishki in 2008, Talsi in 2009–2010, Aizpute in 2011–2012, Preili in 2013–2014, Ventspils in 2015, Saldus in 2016.

By Semyon Gizunterman

Below is an abridged version of Pastor Rex’s speech:

My topic today is “The LOT Association—How the Shoah Became My Topic.” I will talk about what I learned from my Jewish teacher, Janusz Korczak, even though I never met him. He was killed before I was born. I learned from him that telling a story is better than giving a lecture.

When I was a pastor in Wulfrath, I did many things that are not part of a pastor’s job. One of them was the play about J. Korczak, *Facing the Wall*. After performing the play at Yad Vashem, the director of Yad Vashem approached me, saying that they were very well-informed about me and the group: “You often go to Plavinas in Latvia. Do you know that there is a Jewish cemetery there being overgrown in the woods?” I knew there were about 800 Jews who had lived in the district of Gostini in Plavinas. And I knew that the executions had taken place at a swamp about 25 miles away.

When I came there in Latvia—panic! “No problem,” I told them, “I will be back in four months and by then you will surely have found the cemetery!”

I got permission from the Plavinas city hall, but I felt like there was a moral owner of the cemetery as well: the last remaining Jewish community in Riga. I wrote to them and their answer was

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RESTORATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES

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It was important to me that from the beginning that we should try to have young people from other nations participate. If Europe is supposed to grow together, that does not happen in a disco or at the beach, but when people work hard together. We move tombstones of up to 1,300 pounds with nothing but physical strength and levers after all. That is how future grows out of the Jewish past the Nazis wanted to erase.

Dutch and Austrian people participate very often, but we have also had Italians, Czechs, Turks, Russians, Romanians, and Israelis participate. We have had up to 25 people per camp.

For the opening ceremony in Plavinas, a big delegation of the Jewish community came. A cemetery has probably rarely ever seen so many sparkling eyes and happy people. "It is a dream, like heaven," they said. And then: "We have 85 cemeteries more in Latvia. Could you not do them all?" I will not manage that, because more than one cemetery per year is not possible at the moment. But we do have colleagues who may be able to do more than one cemetery every year in the future.

Concerning making the writings readable, we discovered something that is now the extent of scientific knowledge. We lather the stones with shaving foam. We then wipe off the spare foam—a white writing remains in the recess and can easily be photographed. The next day, the stone looks like before. If the writing is raised, we usually work with chalk. Neither technique harms the stone.

As far as time permits, we try to research the history behind the stones. For some people, these stones are the last remaining memories of ancestors.

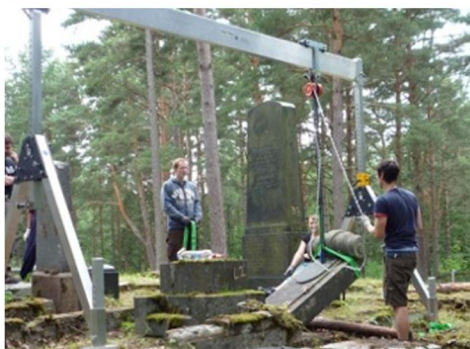
At the end of every camp, there is always an opening ceremony that the ambassadors of the participating countries are invited to. It is something special for a young person to get a personal appreciation in front of the wafting flag beyond the usual greeting from an ambassador.

Most of the team members were changed by the camp. About half of the participants come again at least once. Some people have already participated in ten camps, so they are experts. Some could lead a camp by now. Many participants said afterwards that they wanted to go to Israel now. Some cemeteries took us longer than one camp. In 2018, it is going to be Kraslava.

Sometimes I am asked why I do a job like that at the cemeteries. I cannot undo the past. I also do not want to just restore what once was. But I can retrieve the names that were lost and guide people to act differently today. Relatives are supposed to get a place at which they can remember. And experience shows at least this: at all the cemeteries we restored, there were stones and candles in the years that followed on many graves.

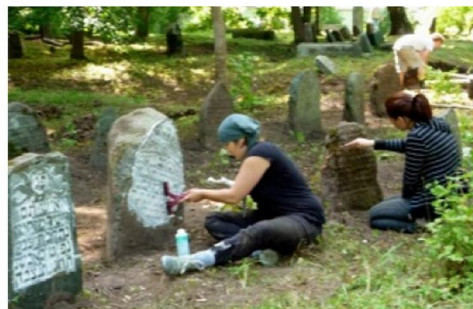
Readers can find details about this team's work at www.friedhofsprojekt.de.

"Germans, Christians, Jewish cemetery—never!" I then went to Riga to talk face to face about how I wanted to work.



The team of volunteers raise the headstones in the Ventspils Jewish cemetery, 2016

The result: They said, "We don't think that this makes sense. But you get one shot." I needed money, a lot of information on the design of Jewish cemeteries, and people who would participate. Our government signaled that trips to memorial sites could be subsidized. And I found the Bauorden, an international organization supporting European construction projects.



The team of volunteers washing and cleaning the monuments in the Jewish cemetery in Preili, 2013

What do we do? We clear the terrain of underbrush and sick trees. We try to understand the system, to create a plan of where the graves are. We put right the stones that have fallen over, so all inscriptions are readable. We repair broken stones. We use probes to search for stones that now lie below the surface because of drifts. Every stone gets a number that we transfer to the plan as well. We make inscriptions that are hard to read temporarily readable. In the end, we document everything photographically. Back in Germany, we also translate the writings.



The team of volunteers in Aizpute, 2012; Pastor Rex is third from the left

In Memoriam LIUBA RAKHMAN

(DECEMBER 19, 1918 – JANUARY 11, 2018)



With great sorrow we inform you of the recent passing of a wonderful person, Liuba Rakhman, at age 99. Liuba Rakhman (née Lautzen) was born on December 19, 1918, in the town of Kraslava in southern Latvia. Her father died in 1926; her mother and her beloved sister were killed during the Holocaust in the ghetto of Daugavpils in 1941. In Kraslava, Liuba graduated from a Jewish school in 1937, at which point she moved to Riga, where she started studying at the Riga Teachers' Training Institute. In 1938 this institute was transferred to the city of Cesis; it then

became known as the Cesis Teachers' Institute. In 1939, she finished her studies and, until the summer of 1941, she worked at the Vishki Jewish School—first as a teacher of the Latvian language. She was later appointed as the director of this school. After the outbreak of the war, Liuba managed to evacuate to Russia and, until June 1943, worked as a German teacher at a rural school in Mordovia; she was then appointed as the director of the Krasnopol Secondary School, where she worked for one year. In August 1944, Liuba was sent to the courses for senior officials of the Latvian Ministry of Education, after which, from September 1944 to October 1946, she worked in the Ministry of Education as an inspector, then as an economist. At the same time, she studied at the University of Latvia at the English Language Faculty, graduating in 1948. She took a position as an English teacher at the Riga 27th High School, where she worked until she left for permanent residence in America in 1978.

During her more than 30 years of

work at the school, she taught English to hundreds (if not thousands) of students. Some of them now live in the United States. Her pupils loved Liuba—and even that is saying too little, she was simply adored. Over the years of her life in America, she helped many dozens of new Americans get to know the culture of this country and helped them obtain and prepare various necessary documents. She performed and sang Jewish and non-Jewish songs at all the evenings arranged in the community, for friends and family, at JSL meetings, and at events in the synagogue. She will be greatly missed and will always be remembered. May her memory be blessed.



L. Rakhman with pupils at school, late 1950s

The Life of the Righteous Liuba Rakhman

Let us focus on life, on the promise and honor of family, friends, and individuals of the Jewish faith. I came from the advantage of being the first daughter-in-law. We have all lost a legend.

Both my sister-in-law Maya and I achieved honorary status when our Liuba called us her "daughters." And, I smile when I say, "We had to work at it to achieve this status." Our Liuba was the keeper of high standards for all living beings.

And so it is we come together to return our precious Liuba to her Creator. On this day, January 11, 2018, we mark the completion of life on Earth for our Liuba.

Ninety-nine years, correction. . . while in the hospital Liuba was asked many times about her age; by the end of her last stay, she was confronted by one of

the medical team: "So, Miss Liuba, I see you are 99 years old." She glanced sternly at us gathered at the bedside as if to say "Do not challenge me" as she remarked: "No, not 99, but 100!" The conviction in her voice defied a challenge.

One of her chochmas was: "I want to live to be one hundred and ten, so when I die they will say "too soon." You could not guess her age as she had the playful spirit of a child.

In her century of existence she wore many hats: a daughter, a mother, a daughter-in-law, a wife, a grandmother, teacher, writer, translator, friend, and fashionista. . . taking great pride in her appearance.

Her life's mission was completed—to love all people—and, in the end, accept, finally, the love that came back to her 100-fold from friends, acquaintances,

and those she cherished from around the world. She was a giver of self from her heart at all times.

If there was a stage or a microphone at public celebrations, she proudly took center stage at, I believe, all weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, anniversaries, and birthdays. And, she was always applauded, well-known for her eloquent and effortless long-winded toasts.

Her life was marked with many trials and tribulations. She endured the tragic losses of her mother and loving sister Hena not surviving the Holocaust, and the tragic fate of her husband who was wounded at the front and whom she nursed for almost a decade.

Through all this and more we cannot know of, she did not succumb—rather with a steadfast determination, as if to

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In Memoriam LIUBA RAKHMAN

(DECEMBER 19, 1918 – JANUARY 11, 2018)

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Our dear Liuba

turn the tides against the bondage of Fate, touched in an amazing way soul after soul after soul. She was famed for taking immigrants into her modest apartment in Forest Hills. Taking in anyone with a suitcase standing on the corner asking no questions. Teaching English to the engineers, the doctors, feeding them, clothing them, inspiring them year after year, decade after decade. For this, her heart of gold and compassion she gained a world of followers who sent stories of success and congratulations to her on every birthday.

Her stamina to serve like none other. As if not enough she received honors and awards as I dare say, "The best and finest volunteer LaGuardia Hospital has ever known."

She replaced her *tsouris* with hope and promise for herself and others. A joyful never-ending compassion everywhere she stepped.

A champion joke teller with volumes to share, which she did every chance she got with anyone who would listen, Liuba modeled accepting things as they are with the wisdom of Solomon. There were no ordinary encounters with Liuba but rather she had a natural, keen talent to merge seamlessly with others—making an instant connection

and capturing you as her audience, whether you were family, friend, neighbor, or chance encounter.

She artfully uncovered the buried truth and boldly spoke it if you were ready to hear it or not. Her soulful eyes could express sincerity and empathy or examine you with great displeasure if she felt things should be otherwise.

Liuba was at her best when cooking and feeding you at her table. She enjoyed summers at the Catskills where she will be remembered for teaching everyone from 5 to 80 how to play Cuncan (cards). Her legendary quotes, snippets remain behind: Her "ABSOLUTELY and ABSOLUTELY NOT!"; "I am NOT Rothschild!" when losing at cards. "It is just a misfortune, not a tragedy."

Life was precious to her. The family, the center of her universe. There is a fable in Asian literature of a young man who rode from town to town on an elephant and in every imprint a flower was left behind. And so it was with Liuba Rakhman. . . every space she entered was made richer, better.

Let us vow to remember her by the telling of stories. This is the best testimony, the ultimate respect for all she has given her world.

Liuba speaks to you now: "Remember me not for the trials of my life, for they are over, finished. Recall not my suffering but my strength you witnessed, the strength from a source greater than I, to face the challenge of my long and fulfilled life."

In her last week her granddaughter Joana caring for her at home called to say she was calling, "Mama, mama." And on the night before she crossed over, she cried out in her sleep, "Hena, Hena, where is this Paradise? Hena, show me this Paradise." On the following night as her son walked through the door of her apartment, she took her last breath. I know she found Paradise. Amen.

By Susan Ziji Small

From parting words of Gerta Feigin:

Liuba was an extraordinary person, a real *Yiddische mame* to all the members of our organization. She always had a warm word to whoever connected with her. We never heard from her: "No, I am not doing this or that." She was always ready to listen, help, and make herself available for any task she was asked to do. Liuba will always remain in our hearts with love and admiration.



For several decades, Liuba greeted and registered the participants at the front desk at all our annual memorial gatherings

From parting words of David Silberman:

Liuba Rakhman was a unique person in this our world and left an indelible mark on a wide circle of relatives, friends, and public.

Her late husband Joseph Rakhman was my cousin, our mothers were sisters. Liuba's unique memory was phenomenon—she told me in detail about my first visit with my mother to her native Kraslava in the mid 1930s. She was not only a caring, devoted mother and grandmother but a caring person to many people whom she met in life. She was born by nature as a talented caregiving teacher, a bearer of old Jewish-Yiddish traditions and culture. Her fluent knowledge of languages was phenomenal—nobody except Liuba could translate almost without dictionaries straight from Latvian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, German into English or vice versa. For many years, she was an active and devoted member of our JSL Society and an Executive Board member.

RIGA'S BIKUR HOLIM HOSPITAL CELEBRATES 25 YEARS SINCE REOPENING



In the fall of 2017, Riga's Bikur Holim Hospital celebrated its quarter-century anniversary since the Latvian government and Riga's Dome (City Council) returned the hospital to its original owner—Jewish Bikur Holim Holding.

Bikur Holim Hospital in Riga is one of the oldest medical facilities in the city. It was founded in 1924 and has since served generations of Riga citizens, who associate the name "BIKUR HOLIM" with health, quality, comfort, and the highest standards of medical care.

Bikur Holim Hospital offers a wide range of outpatient and inpatient services: five inpatient care departments, an outpatient care facility, experienced specialists, and various modern diagnostic methods. A full annual physical examination can be performed within 2-3 days at the inpatient care facility or on an outpatient basis. The surgery department performs a wide range of surgical procedures, most of which are covered by government-provided insurance. The hospital's palliative care facility offers short- and long-term care for those with terminal illnesses

and those needing end-of-life care.

Bikur Holim, with the help of a generous donation by Ulrich Milman, an industrialist and philanthropist, first opened its doors in 1924. The original hospital was established as a multi-specialty inpatient care facility. The hospital's first physicians were the innovators in their medical specialties and in general care. They were especially on the cutting-edge of innovation in diagnostics.

Attending physicians and directors included:

I. Ioffe, I. Haaze, specialists and professors V. Mints, V. Kretser, Z. Cherfas, L. Khnokh, M. Dubinskiy, G. Shneider, L. Yavorkovskiy, G. Gitelson, M. Girzhberg, I. Kron, and N. Magalif. All were distinguished humanists, teachers, and successful researchers. Because of the modern medical technologies of that time and the skills of its personnel, Bikur Holim earned the deepest respect among the citizens of Latvia.

In 1940, when the Soviet regime was established in Latvia, the hospital was nationalized. During World War II, the fate of Bikur Holim's staff was tragic: many of them perished in concentration camps or in battle. The memory of them, their fortitude, and heroic work will forever remain in the hearts of those who survived; the eyewitnesses and those familiar with the work of these great physicians related the stories and published books.

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Bikur Holim hospital on Maskavas Street in Riga

RIGA'S BIKUR HOLIM HOSPITAL CELEBRATES 25 YEARS SINCE REOPENING

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First Executive Council of the hospital (from left to right):

M. Malkiel, G. Krupnikov, A. Sukhareenko, A. Gandz, Yu. Anshelevich, Z. Ioffe, A. Bluger

Multitudes of past and current members of the Riga Jewish community were born within the walls of Bikur Holim and were welcomed into this world with the assistance of the legendary OB-GYN specialist Dr. Semyon Berman.

After Latvia achieved independence in 1992, one of the first acts signed by the government and the Riga City Council was the resolution outlining the return of the hospital to its owner, the Jewish Society of Latvia. First, property management rights were restored to the Society in September 1992; on May 21, 1998, the Saeima (the Parliament of Latvia) restored ownership rights to the Jewish Society. Those physicians and health organization entrepreneurs who undertook this Herculean task of restoring the hospital to its former prominence will always be honored. Among them: Professor Anatoliy Blueger, Professor Yuly Anshelevich, Dr. Arkady Gandz, Honorable

Zalman Ioffe, and industrialist Lev Lubotsky. The hospital's management worked tirelessly to restore the hospital's humanist, professional traditions, its former fame, popularity, and its reputation with citizens. All the internal operations had to be reestablished—be it organizing a competitive system of hiring, planning reconstruction, or acquiring medical equipment. The efforts of American and Latvian Jewish organizations resulted in the Jewish Hospital of St. Louis donating its medical expertise and medical equipment and supplies. JSL activists took part in the realization of this project. Many skeptics at the time considered restoration of the hospital to be impossible. Nevertheless, in just a few years, the hospital has grown into a modern medical facility, while preserving and advancing its main traditions: taking care of the health of its patients and

ensuring highly professional skills among its attending physicians.

Nowadays, in the 21st century, the Bikur Holim Hospital occupies an established and honorable place among the leading hospitals and clinics in Latvia.

To commemorate its 25th anniversary, a special celebration was organized. Distinguished guests included Israeli Ambassador in Latvia Liron Bar-Sade, Chair of the Board of Jewish Latvian Communities Arkady Sukhareenko, member of Latvian Saeima Andris Berzinsh, Vice President of Latvian Physician Society Maris Plyavinsh, Director of Higher Education Department of Latvia Janis Vetra, Riga Stradinya University Dean Janis Gardovskiy, Head of Latvian Center of Infectious Disease and Hepatology Research Prof. Ludmila Viksna, and others.

Rachel Shatz, the hospital's director, welcomed everyone with introductory speech, expressing gratitude for the dedicated work of the hospital's staff and shared with attendees her perspective on the recent achievements and future plans. Those staff who had been with the hospital at least 25 years received special awards.

We would like to express our best wishes to the hospital staff and hope for many more decades of fruitful work in providing excellent care and treatment to its patients.

***By Professor Michael Dumesh
Materials from Latvian and U.S. publications have been used in this article***

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE



Memorial service in Bikernieki

Commemorating the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia conducted a memorial event on January 26 at the Bikernieki Memorial. The ceremony featured prayers by the representatives of the major religious denominations in Latvia.

The Bikernieki forest is the largest mass grave of victims of Nazism in Latvia. From 1941 to 1944, 35,000 people were killed there, including 20,000 Jews from Latvia, Austria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, as well as opponents of the Nazi regime and Soviet prisoners of war.

Nations, and other officials. The speech of Mrs. Eva Lavi who was the youngest Holocaust survivor to have been included on the list of Oskar Schindler, was met with special emotion by the event attendees. She was two years old when the World War II broke out and she was sent with her family to the Krakow Ghetto. Eventually she was transferred to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where she was selected to be on Oskar Schindler's list. Currently, she is an active member of Yad Vashem, where she shares her story.

After the award ceremony, Margers Vestermanis spoke about the motivations of the saviors of the Jews—"The Story of the Impossible."

After the award ceremony, Margers Vestermanis spoke about the motivations of the saviors of the Jews—"The Story of the Impossible."



Maris Gailis and Lolita Thomsone present a Silver Log award to Margers Vestermanis

The Zhānis Lipke Memorial Museum established the honorary award Silver Log, which will be awarded to residents of Latvia who unselfishly fought for the preservation of life and dignity of people in the years when totalitarian regimes were committing crimes against the people. Maris Gailis, chairman of the society "Memorial of Zhānis Lipke," and Lolita Thomsone, director of the memorial, explain: "We want to honor those people in Latvia whose selfless actions and courage made a significant contribution to the recognition of Latvia as a democratic, pluralistic, and legal state." The log was chosen as a basis for the award's design based on the rescue work of Zhānis Lipke, who placed logs to cover the entrance to the bunker where he hid Jews from persecution and certain death. The Silver Log was designed by the artist Aigars Bikse.

On February 1, on the 118th birthday of Zhānis Lipke, this award was presented to the historian, former prisoner of the Riga Ghetto, and the founder of the Jews in Latvia Museum, Margers Vestermanis. Mr. Vestermanis devoted his life to pre-



On January 13, the tradition of the Sabbath prayer for the government and the country of residence was restored in the Riga Synagogue.

This tradition has been observed by Jews from all over the world since ancient times; its first mention dates back to the prophet Jeremiah, who the Jews, exiled to Babylon after the destruction of the Temple, asked how they should live. The prophet told them to go about their life—to bear children, build houses, grow gardens, and pray for the peace of the city in which they found themselves as this will bring peace to them. At all times and in all countries of the world, Jews, as stated in the treatise "Pirkei Avot," prayed for kings, presidents, or other leaders of the country where they lived. This tradition was also observed in the independent Republic of Latvia in the 1920s and 1930s.

In January 2018, the Riga Synagogue also introduced the tradition of blessing soldiers serving in the ranks of the IDF.

Rabbi Kalev Krelin of the Riga Synagogue expressed the hope that these traditions would take hold in the community and be performed every Saturday.

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A prayer by Cantor Malovany in the UN hall

In January in New York, the UN held a series of exhibitions and other activities devoted to remembrance of the Holocaust. The main event—2018 International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust—took place at the UN General Assembly Hall. A group of JSL members was among those in attendance. The ceremony was opened by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Emotional speeches were given by H.E. Danny Danon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, H.E. Christoph Heusgen, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (CONTINUED)



Conductor Maris Jansons

On Sunday, January 14, the Latvian National Library congratulated the world-famous Latvian conductor Maris Jansons on his 75th birthday and presented him with an unusual gift—a variety of tulip named after him. Maris Jansons is the son of well-known conductor Arvid Jansons and Iraida Jansons, a Jewish Latvian opera singer who gave birth to him while hiding from Nazis during the Riga occupation. Maris is famous in the Netherlands, where he has been the principal conductor of the Amsterdam Royal Orchestra for 11 years. The joint idea to name a new variety of tulip for the conductor came from the Dutch and Latvian embassies.

Representatives of the Latvian Embassy in the Netherlands and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Latvia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Directorate of the National Library, and the Institute of Latvia as well as florists took part in the event.



The 125th birthday envelope in honor of the composer O. Strok

The Latvian Postal Service issued a commemorative envelope dedicated to the anniversary of the great Latvian composer, the “King of Tango” Oskar Strok (1893–1975). The envelope, *Oskars*

Stroks - 125, with a total printing of one thousand copies, features a portrait of the composer and fragments of his most famous song “Black Eyes.”

On January 6, in honor of the 125th birthday of the composer of popular tunes, customers could also receive a special stamp on the commemorative envelope at the main post office in Riga.

Over the course of his life Strok composed more than 300 tunes in different genres; most of all he was famous for his emotional tangos: “Moon Rhapsody,” “Tell Me Why,” “Sleep, My Poor Heart,” and countless others. In his long career, Strok performed all over the world, touring everywhere from France to Jamaica.



Shmuel Barzilai, the chief cantor of the Vienna Synagogue, sings at the Riga Synagogue

On December 19, 2017, the Riga Synagogue hosted the festive Hanukkah concert featuring Shmuel Barzilai, chief cantor of the Vienna Jewish Community. Cantor Barzilai has held his post in the Vienna Synagogue since 1992. He performs in the leading concert halls of the world, including Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna, Mozarteum and Landestheater in Salzburg, Prinzregententheater in Munich, Tonhalle in Zurich, Heichal ha Tarbut in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem Theater, and the National Gallery Victoria in Melbourne. He also collaborates with the famous symphonic orchestras of Europe, Israel, and the United States.

On July 14, 2017, he was awarded the Austrian Ministry of Culture with the Golden Medal of Honor of the Republic of Austria. During the awards ceremony, the Minister of Culture of Austria Thomas Drozda noted that Chief Cantor Barzilai has successfully represented Jewish culture in Austria and the Austrian Republic abroad for decades.



The artist, Daina Skadmane

From January 17 to 31, the exhibition “Daina Skadmane’s Art World” was on display at the Rietumu Banka Gallery. The exhibit presented works by the young artist whose life was tragically cut short during the collapse of the Maxima supermarket on November 21, 2013.

Most of Daina Skadmane’s works are dedicated to the events of the Holocaust in Latvia, a theme that she worked on from the age of 13. Many of them gained international recognition during her lifetime.

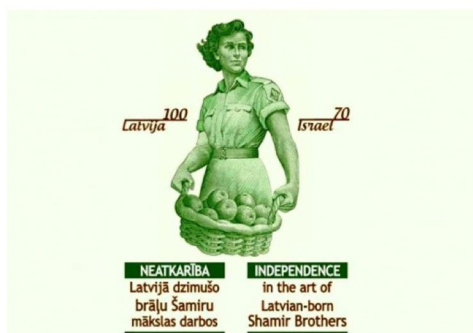
The current exhibition revealed the world of creativity of the young artist. Graphic and painted works, drawings, as well as part of her internationally known collection of works dedicated to the events of the Holocaust in Latvia were on display.

Daina Skadmane’s works can be found in public art collections as well as in private collections. Many of Daina’s paintings and their reproductions, such as “The Last Look” (2003), “Frida” (2004), and “The Jewish Boy” (2003), are at various centers of culture and art and institutes dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust all over the world. Several of Daina’s works are in the private collection of filmmaker Vladimir Molchanov (Russia), who used them to create his well-known documentary *Melodies of the Riga Ghetto*. The artist’s works are also in the archives of Elie Wiesel at the Center for Archival Studies at Boston University. Daina’s works are also reproduced in several editions of Frieda Michelson’s book, *I Survived Rumbula*. Many of her works can be viewed on the web at www.DainaSkadmane.org



Daina Skadmane’s painting, Frida

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (CONTINUED)



A poster for the Shamir Brothers Studio exhibition in Riga, Latvia, 2018

The exhibition "Independence," dedicated to Israel, which presented artworks of the Shamir Brothers Studio, is open at the National Library of Latvia from February 2 to April 4. The brothers Gabriel and Maxim Sheftelovich, born in Latvia, transported their studio from Albert Street in Riga to Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv in 1935, naming it the Shamir Brothers Studio. The designs created by the Shamir brothers reflected the elements that shaped Israel's independence: sovereignty, the assimilation of immigrants, the symbols of security, and the development of the economy, language, and national culture. The work of the Shamir brothers can also be seen in Latvia; one is the monument to fallen Jewish soldiers in the Jewish cemetery created in 1934.

After Riga, the exhibition will move to Liepaja and then to Daugavpils. The works of the Shamir brothers can be found on the site www.shamir-brothers.com.

On February 1, during the opening of the exhibition "Independence," the Embassy of Israel awarded medals to the Jews in Latvia Museum, the founder of the museum Margers Vestermanis, and other individuals or institutions who have made relationships between Israel and Latvia deeper, stronger, and more respectful. The medal is dedicated to the 100th Jubilee of the Foundation of the Republic of Latvia and the 70th Jubilee of the State of Israel and to the Shamir Brothers Studio for helping connect both countries.

The first week of February was a week of awards: at the International Jewish studies conference in Moscow, Ilya Lensky, the director of the Jews in Latvia

Museum, received the prestigious Eugene Weiner award for his contributions to the development of Jewish studies, to education, and to research. *Mazel tov!*



The artist Joseph Elgurt

Noting the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 24, the Jews in Latvia Museum opened an exhibition of the drawings of Joseph Elgurt; these works were lent to the museum by private collectors.

Joseph Elgurt (1924–2007; born in Chisinau, Moldova) was a Latvian painter and specialist in serigraphy. In 1941, Elgurt's entire family was deported to the ghetto in Transnistria, where his family members perished. In 1944, he was liberated and he returned to Chisinau. Beginning in 1952, Elgurt lived in Riga. He graduated from the Art Academy of Latvia, later being accepted to the Latvia's Artists' Union. His graphic works are considered masterful and were exhibited in many countries.



Chef of the restaurant "7:40" T. Bekermeister tells the master class participants about the intricacies of preparing dishes of Jewish cuisine

In response to growing interest, the Jewish community of Riga has launched a new project called "Maor" (from the Hebrew meaning luminaire, torch). On January 21, the Riga Jewish community sponsored a workshop in Latvian for young people with Jewish roots. As a part of this project, the Jews in Latvia Museum provided them the opportu-

nity to continue to learn about Jewish traditions and history and to meet interesting people. A second event was held on February 25, it featured a Jewish café "7:40" that offered traditional Israeli food such as falafel, pita, and a master class. Chef Tatjana Bekermeister and participants worked at their preparation and made and ate these Israeli dishes.

We are in deep sorrow informing JSL members that on February 24, at the age of 93, Kalman Aron, a former prisoner of the Riga ghetto, and later a famous American artist who resided in Santa Monica, has passed away. May the memory of him be sacred.

We received a report about the death of Kalman Aron just before going to print with this issue of the *Courier*. More about Kalman Aron will be presented in the next issue.

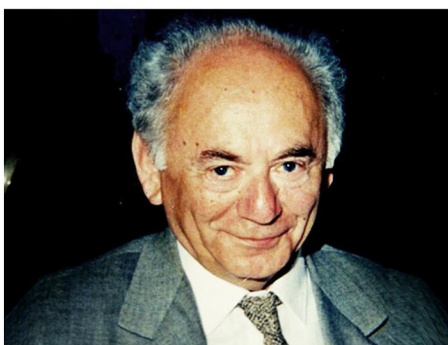


About 1500 people took part in a march in memory of Latvian legionaries on March 16th in Riga. The commemoration of the Latvian legionaries, organized by the Daugavas Vanagi society, began at 11 a.m. from St. John's Church in Old Riga. Some former and current politicians gathered near the church, along with representatives from Lithuanian and Estonian national associations. Participants from the procession were met up with by picketers by the Freedom Monument, holding placards stating "They fought for Adolf Hitler," and some of whom were, it should be noted, the leaders of the Russian Union. Participants of the procession laid flowers at the foot of the monument. According to the police, the march dedicated to the memory of the legionaries on Friday went smoothly overall.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated from Russian by Mariya Taukule

KHAIM KORDONSKY: SCIENTIST AND PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS

In the fall of 2010 we began to compile articles about outstanding Jews native to Latvia to be included in the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, planned for printing by Shamir in Riga.



Kordonsky, Khaim (1919-1999) – scientist, professor of mathematics specializing in the theory of probability and statistics. He was born in Tula, Russia, in 1919. His family subsequently moved to Leningrad where, in 1941, Khaim Kordonsky graduated from Leningrad University after studying in the university's departments of mechanics and mathematics. Once the war began, he attended the Leningrad Air Force Academy; he served in the air force on the Northern front, receiving many awards and medals. After the war, he returned to the Air Force Academy and continued his graduate studies in the department of mathematics. In 1951, he defended his Ph.D. thesis in the applied theory of probability and statistics. (In 1968, he earned another doctorate.) From 1951, Kordonsky worked at Riga's Engineering Institute of Civil Aviation as a lecturer, an associate professor, a full professor (1969) and the head of the Department of Aircraft Technical Repairs and Production. In 1993, he immigrated to the United States with his family.

Kordonsky was one of the most knowledgeable experts on the durability of aircraft designs in the U.S.S.R.

His scientific work was tied to the development and deployment of statistical quality control methods within the field of engine manufacturing. In his later work, he addressed problems of aircraft reliability. Kordonsky founded the field of science concerned with the reliability of aircraft equipment and flight safety; in these two areas, he was the main authority for the Department of Civil Aviation. The research team he directed solved the most difficult statistical problems that arose in civil aviation, including predicting aircraft failure based on inspection checks, determining and extending the life expectancy of the engines, analyzing the durability of aircraft designs, etc.

In 1965, Kordonsky was named head scientist on a project to automate and computerize the scheduling of flights for Aeroflot's large fleet in more than 200 airports; numerous problems had previously arisen. No member of Ministry of Aviation management had the slightest idea about how to approach these issues nor even what was meant by "Computerized Scheduling." The computers then available, which often took up entire floors, had less power than today's pocket calculator. During this project, many important scientific problems were solved. The principle of probabilistic priority was formulated and was later used in many other areas. The main goal of the project, the creation of computerized airline scheduling, was developed and successfully introduced. Aeroflot used this system from 1971 up to the collapse of the U.S.S.R.



A team of specialists led by Kh. Kordonsky

His colleague writes: "Kordonsky created a stimulating atmosphere of intensive exchange of opinions and discussions, sometimes heated, but



Kh. Kordonsky at a rare moment of leisure

always efficient. He was open to any suggestions and observations by others. Despite his tremendous scientific authority, nobody was afraid to ask questions."

In his final years, Kordonsky worked on one of his major ideas: picking optimum time scales for calculations of reliability. The results of his research were published in America's top scientific magazines and further developed by his students.



Some of Kh. Kordonsky's important books

Professor Kordonsky was the author of seven books and more than 150 scientific publications on the subjects of the theory of reliability, statistical quality control, and the application of the theory of probability and statistics for reliability and durability of mechanical design. Khaim Kordonsky combined knowledge of both physical processes and mathematics and was able to clearly describe them. His books, articles, and lectures offered simplicity and clarity while dealing with very complex subjects. Under his guidance, more than 50 scientists earned doctorates in various disciplines. They have worked and are currently working in some of the largest countries in the world.

In 1969, Kh. Kordonsky was named Honored Scientist of Latvia; in 1985, he received the most prestigious Latvian State award.

*By Ivar Brod
Translated from Russian by Alan Solovey*

HAPPY TO MEET UNKNOWN RELATIVES



All 500 participants in the reunion did not fit into this photo

For 70 years, Girsh Kuklya believed he was the only surviving member of his family.

His Latvia-born father had been shot dead in the Holocaust, while his grandfather was burned alive in Riga's Choral Synagogue. A phone call from Ian Levine ended his solitude. Levine, a pop producer, was tracing his family tree and told the stunned 90-year-old that he had seven living cousins. Levine had spent more than two decades meticulously tracking down all 3,000 of his relatives.

One Sunday last summer, he met up with 500 members of his huge family—who range in age from one week to 92 years. Family members, including the seven cousins, flew to London from 15 countries, including the United States, Israel, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, Canada, Argentina, and Australia. The surname Kukla has evolved into at least 20 different spellings since the early 1800s.

At the party where they all gathered Ian also unwound his record-breaking paper family tree, measuring an incredible 180 feet. "When the family tree was unwound there was a mixture of shock and amazement," says Ian. Levine has also recorded his incredible heritage trail in a 600-page book: *The Kukla Chronicles*. It tells

the story of nine Jewish brothers, the Kuklas, who were born in Rezhitsa (now Rezekne), Latvia, in the early 1800s and their 3,000 descendants' fight for survival. Their resilience in the face of Nazi persecution and the Russian pogroms is captured in more than 5,000 photos in the glossy tome.



The 600-page volumes published by Ian Levine, with the names and photos of this huge family clan

Girsh was not alone in believing that he was the only one to survive. Ian, 64, said: "You can imagine the tears that were shed when everyone got together. I certainly did. There were at least 10 people at the party who had spent decades thinking they were the last surviving member of their family—that everyone had been wiped out in the Holocaust. To reunite people who met their cousins for the first time—who had only recently

found they existed—is such a wonderful, wonderful thing.

"I'm not a religious man myself, but it's a miracle that so many survived, bearing in mind how many were wiped out."

The road to this wonderful reunion began when Ian's maternal grandmother Golda Cooklin died in 1995. He said: "All my life she talked about the Cooklin family and referred to them as the 'Jewish royal family.' She was a lovely woman who had 15 grandchildren, a really, really lovely lady who had always told me we were part of this big family. After she died, one of my cousins suggested we hold a party the following year—1996—to mark the 100th anniversary of the brothers' arriving in the UK. That prompted me to find out more about the family. I visited a cousin of my grandmother's: Sarah Bobroff. She had a memory like an eagle and knew every single aunt, uncle, and cousin. This was before the internet, so I started scribbling notes down. When I started tracing relatives, I never in my wildest dreams thought we would find so many and find out just how resilient the family has been.

"Considering that the Nazis exterminated six million Jews, and we lost huge numbers from our own family, it's a miracle that we were still able to trace descendants from all nine brothers.

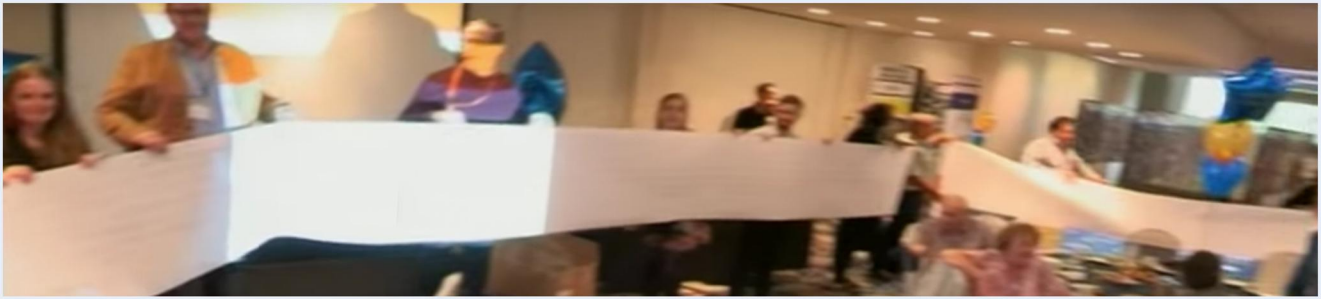
"If there's one message this sends out, it's that we are a family of survivors."

The nine Kukla brothers were Hatzkel, Berka, Hirsch, Dov-Azriel, Elikim, Josel, Leizer, Yehuda, and Abram. They were born between 1821 and 1845. Poor record

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HAPPY TO MEET UNKNOWN RELATIVES

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Participants in the reunion were impressed by the family tree, represented on a 180-foot-long canvas (60 meters)

keeping, spelling mistakes, and misheard speech had the original Kukla surname morph into a dozen-plus variations, including Cooklin, Kuklya, Cuckle, Cookler, Kuklin, and Kukle.

Ian's side of the family, with 800 descendants of Hatzkel Kukla, generally go by Cooklin, while Hirsch's descendants became Kuklin or, in some cases, Cookler. Many of Abram's branch became Cooklin, while Berka's descendants became Cooklyn.

But the tears of joy also come with more somber stories of relatives massacred by the Nazis. Ida Kukla lost her grandfather and every aunt and uncle—only her father survived. Radi Cantor's

mother's five siblings were gassed in Auschwitz, while Viktor Brod's grandmother, together with more than 25,000 Jews, was shot dead in the Rumbula massacre in the Riga ghetto.

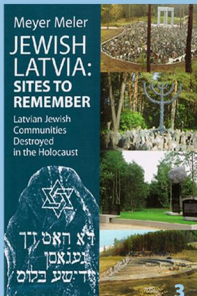
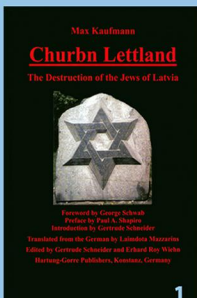
Before tracing all his family became his life's work, Ian launched the career of the group Take That, producing their first three singles, including Britain's best single of the year for 1992 "Could It Be Magic." But tracing a dynasty against all the odds—with all the records in East Europe having been destroyed—has become his "greatest legacy." His early efforts to trace relatives led to a cousin, Howard Cuckle, who is

originally from Hull, England, but now lives in Israel, contact him. They met up and Howard showed him family documents, which led to further discoveries.

Even a serious stroke three years ago hasn't stopped Ian, he keeps on searching. News of Ian's search had people contacting him to ask if they were related. At the reunion, Ian took to the stage, saying: "It has been a real labor of love. It was totally separate from my music. I actually feel a bit lost now that it's all over. I don't know what to do with myself. But it was worth it."

Based on an article in Sunday People by Lewis Pantherlee Harpin

Editor's Note: *Some of the large Kukla family are members of JSL: Paulina Naisteter, Ivar Brod, Anna Taukule, Mariya Taukule. Their uncle, Tewel Kukla, was born in Rezekne in 1925 and came to New York in 1958. He passed away last year. Tewel was one of the oldest members of The Jewish Survivors of Latvia in the U.S.*



BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE:

1. Max Kaufmann's **Churbn Lettland — The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia**, English translation, updated with commentaries and photos.
2. Max Kaufmann's **Churbn Lettland — The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia**, Russian translation, updated with commentaries and photos.
3. Meyer Meler's **Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember**, published in English. This book describes 73 Jewish communities in Latvia prior to World War II and the more than 200 sites where they were murdered.
4. Sergej Braun, **Beyond the Realm of the Past**, published in Russian. This book describes the author's life in deportation in Siberia and then in Latvia, and contains sketches of historical personalities.

All four books are available by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check of \$49.00 for Meler's book, and a check for \$20.00 for any of the other books (including handling and postage in the U.S.), payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc., and mail it to the address shown on page 2. Please specify whether you would like English or Russian edition of M. Kaufmann's book.