



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JANUARY 27 – INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Every year on January 27, many residents of Riga—both Jewish and non-Jewish—gather at the Bikernieki Forest Memorial, the largest burial site for Holocaust victims in Latvia, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. From 1941 to 1944, more than 35,000 Latvian Jews and Jews from other European countries, as well as political prisoners and Soviet POWs, were brought together and killed in Bikernieki.

This year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a public event was not possible. Instead, the leaders of the Riga Jewish community visited the Bikernieki Memorial, and laid a wreath there.



The leaders of the Jewish community laying a wreath at the memorial in Bikernieki

On the following day, the Latvian Council of Jewish Communities and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany held a virtual event at the Riga Jewish Community Center.

That event was led by Ilya Lensky, the director of the museum Jews in Latvia. In his opening speech, Mr. Lensky honored the memory of Latvian and European Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, along with all other victims of Nazism and fascism in Latvia. He stressed the importance of remembering the tragic past of the country and looked forward to friendly and productive relationships among all nationalities in Latvia in the future.

Mr. Lensky emphasized the importance of collecting and preserving the personal stories of survivors and witnesses. It is important these days, he said, to preserve and share stories of the past with the younger generation in Latvia. He started with a short movie presenting the recollections of Margers Vestermanis, Valentine Freimane, and Riva Shefer. These people, along with many other former Nazi victims, are prominent in Latvian society, not only for being Holocaust survivors but for their significant contribution to Latvian culture and life. Mr. Lensky emphasized that the current virtual event was organized with the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. He then



Margers Vestermanis, Valentine Freimane, and Riva Shefer are the three named in the introductory part of the virtual event from many members of the Jewish community in Latvia, who are known in society not only as victims of the Holocaust, but also made a significant contribution to the culture of Latvia

introduced Mr. Christian Heldt, the German Ambassador to Latvia, and invited him to take the podium.

Mr. Heldt emphasized that July 4, 2021, marks the 80th anniversary of the start of the Holocaust in Latvia. Between November 27, 1941 and October 26, 1942, 25 trains from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary brought almost 25 thousand Jewish women, men, and children from 16 European cities to Latvia. Only 1 thousand of these deported people survived.



Ambassador of Germany to Latvia, Mr. Christian Heldt, at the ceremony

A few years ago, a tradition was established in Latvia to organize a special event on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. I am especially grateful, Mr. Heldt said, that this year we have cosponsored the event with the Council of Jewish communities as well the Jews in Latvia Museum.

The German Federal Foreign Office supported the establishment of a global task force against Holocaust misinformation in 2020, and recently presented their recommendations, which cover four main areas: monitoring and identifying Holocaust misinformation, training policymakers

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to tackle misinformation, strengthening and safeguarding memorials and museums, and recognizing and responding to Holocaust misinformation online.

At the end of his speech, Mr. Heldt offered his personal remarks: In my neighborhood in Berlin, he said, we also have parts related to this important project: cobblestones, like blocks out of bronze, containing the names of former inhabitants of the city who were deported and murdered by the Nazi regime.



Photo: Leonid Blatt

One of the commemorative cast iron slabs laid out on the railway tracks of the station in the suburbs of Berlin (Berlin-Grunewald. Platform 17 Memorial), from where transports with Jews went to ghettos and concentration camps

Some were also deported and murdered in Riga. This shows yet again the legacy of Nazi Germany, which organized this unique structure of terror all over occupied Europe, as well as here in Latvia. History cannot be changed. And we, as Germans, must come to terms with this terrible heritage. What happened in Shoa was a singular attack against what humanity and civilization stand for. We commemorate, but the real challenge is to keep this remembrance alive.

Afterward, Ambassador Heldt introduced participants to the virtual event's programs. The *Courier* will not publish some of

these presentations, so we invite readers to watch two special sessions of the virtual conference online—the activities of the German-Riga Committee and the work of the Arolsen Archives. Mr. Lensky described the work of the German-Riga Committee, and introduced Dr. Thomas Rey, the Secretary General and German-Riga Committee Coordinator.

We often forget, Mr. Lensky said, that a large part of the Holocaust started here in Eastern European forests and fields.



Dr. Thomas Rey, Coordinator of German-Riga Committee describes the preparations for the construction of the memorial complex in Bikernieki

That was followed by much larger events in Auschwitz and other camps. It was a tragic fate for Latvian, Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian Jews, as well as for thousands of Western European Jews. The abducted spent only a few hours in Riga before being taken directly from the trains to the Bikernieki forest for execution. In 2001, a major memorial complex was erected in Bikernieki, maintained by the German-Riga Committee.



The memorial in Bikernieki, erected in 2001

Dr. Rey acknowledged the history of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe and went on to explain the work of the German-Riga Committee, describing what the German-Riga Committee is, its history, aims, tasks, and outlook.

Our Committee, Dr. Rey said, is an alliance for remembering and commemorating the deportation of Jews. It consists of member cities throughout Europe, mainly in Germany. Sixty-four German cities belong to our organization, in addition to Vienna, Prague, Brno, Theresienstadt, and Riga. The deportation to the occupied Baltic regions began in autumn 1941 before the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, where the Final Solution was agreed upon. The first transport arrived in Riga on November 30, 1941, early in the morning. Followed immediately by the murder of 1,053 people in Rumbula. The youngest one was 2 years old and the oldest was 80. In all, 25 thousand men, women and children were deported to Latvia.

There were different discussions in Latvia and in Germany in the last decades of the twentieth century about establishing a monument in Bikernieki. The German-Latvian War Graves

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Agreement of 1996 gave us the task of caring for the graves of the deported and murdered Jews as well. Between 1999 and 2000, initial talks occurred between the President of the Volksbund (a humanitarian organization caring for the graves of German war casualties abroad) and the mayors of the 13 German cities from which the deportations started circa 1941 and 1942. Then on May 23, 2000, the German-Riga Committee was founded.

The Memorial was opened on Friday, November 30, 2001, on the 60th anniversary of Black Sunday 1941. For those unfamiliar with the group, the German-Riga Committee works to keep alive the memory of and commemorates the murdered former citizens. It also organizes exchanges among its member cities. In addition, it:

- published a “Book of Remembrance” in 2003, which contained more than 31,300 names and dates of the victims and of the survivors;
- held three joint commemorations and remembrances;
- established the website www.riga-komitee.de, with sub-sites for each member city containing brochures, mostly in German, but some are also in English;
- organized five symposiums in different German cities.

To be clear, the German-Riga Committee doesn’t handle the search for missing people. The “Book of Remembrance” was created to provide a list of people’s names. A new part of the book was a report about the deportation from every city. It is available today in digital form.

On November 30, 2021 (the 80th anniversary of Riga’s Bloody Sunday), the German-Riga Committee plans to open the outdoor exhibition in Bikernieki.

One particular part of the session described the work of the Arolsen Archives. Two representatives from this institution—Dr. Cristian Höschler and Christa Seidenstücker—presented reports about their very important activities.



Arolsen Archives offer enormous potential for discovery and research

The Arolsen Archives are located in Bad Arolsen, a town in northern Hesse, not far from Kassel, Germany. The central tasks of the Arolsen Archives are clarifying fates and looking for missing persons. Every year, to this day, the archive’s workers answer inquiries about some 20,000 victims of Nazi persecution. Their work in the field of research and education is more important now than ever as it seeks to inform today’s society about the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis.

The Arolsen Archives are committed to preserving their

unique collection of documents on Nazi persecution and to making them accessible worldwide. Employees search for the traces of victims and survivors of the National Socialist terror regime. Today, they are still helping to reunite families torn apart by the Holocaust, the persecution of minorities, and forced labor.

The documents of the Arolsen Archives offer enormous potential for research. Arolsen scientists participate in conferences and workshops to establish good contacts with specialists from various disciplines and strengthen their international network. By keeping the memory of the crimes committed in the Nazi era alive and reminding people of the millions of victims, they also aim to increase awareness of anti-Semitism and attacks on democracy today. Scientists support local educational projects and memorial initiatives by providing traveling exhibitions, teach-the-teacher workshops, and easy-to-use teaching materials.

Most memorable was the report of Ms. Christa Seidenstücker. She talked about the Initiative of the Arolsen Archives, an ongoing project called “Every Name Counts.” Research workers on her team are building a digital monument to the victims of Nazi persecutions for current and future generations. This is an enormous undertaking. They invited volunteers and students from different countries to participate, hoping that many tens of thousands of people from all over the world will join in and take a stand. Ms. Seidenstücker explained what they are expecting volunteers to do. For example, some volunteers are working with personal documents, such as prisoner’s registration cards, registration forms from Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Buchenwald and other concentration camps.

We are asking volunteers to add some attributes, Ms. Seidenstücker said, for example, the name of the prisoner, the individual’s date of birth, birthplace, and the prisoner’s number. But we are also asking for more details: their profession, the names of their parents or relatives, etc. It is important, to find their last known address. We are also asking volunteers to enter the date of death, especially for Jewish relatives. We understand how important it is for Jewish families to have the date of death, so relatives know when they have to say Kaddish for this person.

We have more than 12 thousand volunteers working on this project. As of now, 2.5 million documents have already been indexed. We have an ambitious goal: to be able to assemble all these names and all their documents in a simple online search by 2025. That means that all the sources would be researchable in the online archive.

All of the above gives reason to determine that the work of commemorating the tragic events of the Holocaust in Latvia will be continued and expanded.

After the presentation, a special program of UN, UNESCO, and IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) was provided.

The broadcast of the virtual event was recorded by Eva Minkin

REMARKS BY H.E., AMBASSADOR ANDREJS PILDEGOVICHS, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LATVIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE REMEMBRANCE DAY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

In honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the United Nations held a special event on January 25th at the Park East Synagogue. H.E., Ambassador Andrejs Pildegovichs, Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations gave a speech for the event. The following is a transcription of his speech.

Honorable Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,

Honorable Rabbi Dr. Arthur Schneier of Congregation Zichron Ephraim,

Honorable Gilad Erdan, Ambassador of the State of Israel to the United Nations,

Excellencies, colleagues, and friends:

For decades, the Park East Synagogue has been the hospitable venue for Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Latvia to commemorate the victims of the Shoah, and to reflect on the pressing challenges faced by the Jewish community. This year due to COVID-19, many events are being held in different ways. Nevertheless, on January 27, I will visit the Brooklyn Holocaust Memorial Park to pay the tribute to the victims of the Holocaust in Latvia and to mark the heroic legacy of those who rescued Jews during the Second World War. We will never forget that between 1941 and 1945 more than 90,000 Jews from Latvia, Germany, and German occupied countries were murdered on Latvian soil by the Nazis and their Latvian collaborators.

In recent years, there has been an alarming increase in antisemitism worldwide. We have witnessed deplorable incidents of hatred, intolerance, discrimination, and violence against individuals based on their religious beliefs. These heinous acts have also targeted public institutions, schools, cemeteries, cultural centers, and places of worship. Many of them have also taken place in the digital space or occurred at sports arenas. The Jewish Community has been targeted in particular.

As a democratic state, Latvia strongly condemns any manifestations of racism, xenophobia, hate speech and combats racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance. We have been working on awareness-raising campaigns in close

cooperation with educational institutions, civil society, media organizations, including these subjects in the school curricula.

It's imperative for governments around the world to promote tolerance and mutual respect across their societies. That should include educational initiatives, teacher training programs on the poisonous nature of antisemitism, as well as support for law enforcement in order to more effectively investigate antisemitic attacks, including online. At the same time, we have to be firm in upholding our values. Free access to information and freedom of the press must be respected. I recall how limited access to information on the Holocaust was during the Soviet period. That work only began once Latvia regained independence in 1991. More needs to be done to open and digitalize the archives and libraries, to expose the sources of prejudice, bigotry, hatred, the nature of extremist and totalitarian ideologies, to address all of the tragedies and controversies of WWII. In this regard, I was greatly inspired by taking part in 2018 in the March of the Living in the Auschwitz death camp alongside thousands of young people from all corners of the world.

Humanity must learn from the tragedies of the past. We must constantly remain vigilant, rejecting complacency, cynicism, and indecisiveness. Dealing with the past and healing of the present traumas is never easy; however, we must strive our utmost every day to eradicate the sources of evil, to end impunity and to prevent the repetition of the crimes against humanity in the future.



On January 27, Ambassador Andrejs Pildegovichs visited the Holocaust Memorial Park in Brooklyn, where a memorial stone to the victims of the Holocaust in Latvia has been erected

Dear JSL members and friends,

Your membership fee and donations are vital source of funds for our organization, including publication of the *Courier* and organizing meetings. These publications keep you informed of our various activities and events in Latvia.

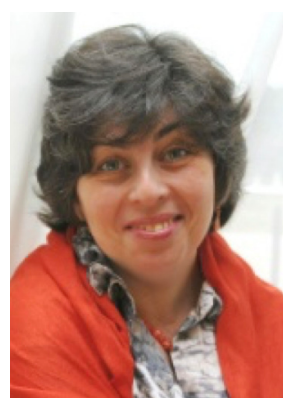
In the future, the *Courier* will be sent only to those whose membership dues are up-to-date. Annual dues are \$25.00.

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HESED, THE RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY WELFARE CENTER

The Jewish community of Latvia is estimated to have between 12,000 and 15,000 members. (Although, the State Register estimates 8,100.) The Jewish population in Latvia is the largest of the three Baltic countries and our numbers are stable, even though demographics is one of the major challenges for Latvia.

The general economic situation in Latvia, however, is not stable. This was true even before the pandemic started. The community faces many social and political issues, and Latvia has one the largest populations at risk of poverty in of all of the EU countries. Therefore, providing welfare is one of the most important efforts being made in our community. We are grateful to our partners that help us in our mission to provide support to Latvian Jews in need. When COVID-19 hit Latvia in March 2020, it aggravated the already complicated economic and social situation in Latvia.



Head of the Hesed welfare center, Inna Aizensharp

Hesed, our Jewish Community Welfare center in Riga, directed by **Inna Aizensharp**, provides assistance to more than 1,700 individuals in 26 cities in Latvia. Hesed has three main targets: Holocaust survivors, adults/seniors in need, and Jewish family services.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all our elderly clients were automatically at high risk due to their age and health problems. To protect them, we followed all restrictions and measures provided by the government. We developed various crisis plans to cope with emergency situations and restriction changes. We implemented a hotline to answer questions and emergency messages from our clients. We have been working on a new system to make sure clients make appointments prior to arrival to maintain social distancing. We have also encouraged clients to make their requests remotely. In addition, we redeveloped all our administration systems within a couple of weeks. Employees have undergone training so that communication is smooth while working remotely, and our services are still provided efficiently. All the programs were adjusted to reflect the new recommendations. Our operations systems were redeveloped to both ensure continued service for clients and eliminate possible risks of infection.

Adults and Elderly in Need (not supported by the Claims Conference) The Adults and Elderly in Need program provides more than 750 seniors with an opportunity to improve their quality of life. In supporting the elderly, we focus on helping them live dignified lives. Beyond providing basic necessities, we provide targeted, additional support for what is needed most.

Many elderly people (including many Jews) do not hold citizenship status even though they were born in Latvia. As a result, their pensions are insufficient to cover rent and

utilities, especially heat during the long, cold Baltic winters. The situation in Latvia is somewhat unique in this case because many of our elderly do not speak Latvian well due to historical reasons. We need to ensure that our social workers can provide basic needs, assist in filling out pension forms, arrange medical appointments, and inform seniors of important news and regulations in multiple languages.

Due to the growing numbers of coronavirus cases, the government has implemented strict measures and restrictions. Social activities in the community had to be cancelled. For our elderly clients, these community programs (celebrating Jewish holidays, dancing, singing, art therapy, and other activities) were a meaningful and routine part of their life. The programs created a sense of belonging and unity for them.

To support clients in a time of isolation and help them cope with the loneliness, some activities have been provided online: rb.gy/bmxifw. Online activities were divided into two groups: sessions focused on maintaining health (sessions with physiotherapists, presentations about healthy sleep patterns, personal care, oral care, vaccination, nutrition, skin changes and diseases, first aid, etc.) and sessions focused on Jewish holidays and traditions (sessions with the Rabbi about Jewish history, traditions, religion, art therapy activities, etc.). All the sessions, lectures, and events were available without a time limit to provide flexibility for clients and to make sure they have unlimited access to them. This program gave clients a feeling of belonging and unity in a time of physical isolation, and provided relevant content focused on Jewish tradition, maintaining health, and entertainment.

Jewish Family Services Jewish Family Services is a vital welfare center program supporting around 250 children in the Jewish Community. The program offers different forms of assistance depending on need including welfare, social work, preventive and educational activities, etc. We believe Jewish children have the right to live in safe conditions where they can properly develop physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. The Welfare Center also supports several high-risk groups particularly—families with special needs, those living in chronic poverty, and those in need of temporary assistance.

There are three main challenges that our clients in the Jewish Family Services program face: difficult financial situations, major health problems, and low social adaptation.



Food packages prepared for shipment to clients of the center.

Food packages contain vegetables, canned meat or fish, corn or peas, different types of cereals, pasta, tea, jam, and more to provide balanced nutrition. They contain household goods and items for personal hygiene, as well.

HESED, THE RIGA JEWISH COMMUNITY WELFARE CENTER (continued)



The Jewish Family Services center provides children with computers for remote learning

We provide a wide range of programs to assist them. Our efforts focus on covering basic human needs such as food, nutritional support, medical care, and relief from freezing temperatures. Other activities focus on managing social isolation, loneliness, and psychological support.

Areas of need often intersect as families confront multiple issues. Some children come from broken or dysfunctional families and/or suffer from

disability, disease, or parents' unemployment. Families in which a member has been diagnosed with a disability are treated as a separate group. These clients need extensive support with different types of approaches, depending on whether the child or a parent has a disability. There are a variety of special needs programs provided to support them.

With the implementation of remote learning in schools in October 2020, support for students and families schools needed to be addressed quickly and effectively. It is extremely hard for both children and parents during this time. More than 30 families requested various kinds of assistance to ensure continued learning.

Extended social isolation, paired with cold and dark winter days, add up to mounting stress and pressure. Children are at home all day long, often with no social or recreational activities available. Tensions between family members grow. People are anxious because they are afraid of getting ill, losing their jobs, and generally stressed about their family members' health. Many of our clients need psychological support to cope with the current situation and remain stable and adjust. As a response to this need, we organized psychological support groups, as well as individual sessions both for children and parents.

With more people being affected by the crisis, there will be a greater need for professional job training, retraining, and coaching. Both educational and vocational programs are provided for parents and children to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, and tools to become more socially successful and be able to break the cycle of poverty.

Volunteer Movement Development The need for volunteers grew considerably in 2020 and the community responded. When the state of emergency was announced in March, Welfare Center clients were a high-risk group. Unfortunately, the government was not prepared with an immediate response to improve the situation for these individuals. The Welfare Center stepped in and came up with *Zelos*, an online application for recruiting volunteers.

Various tasks were listed on *Zelos* during the countrywide state of emergency, and volunteers selected a task to

complete. They delivered hot lunches, food and medicine, and helped our elderly clients with other tasks. Volunteers also helped children with their online studying and homework. Currently we have a pool of about 40 volunteers who are ready to get involved when a need arises.

Elderly volunteers who are Welfare Center clients themselves participated in performing some tasks for the Welfare Center, which both supports the center and is a meaningful experience for these volunteers as well.

We are planning to continue developing the volunteer program to involve even more community members. We are working to align community goals with the interests of volunteers, so that participation is meaningful and value is added both for the organization and the volunteers.

Fundraising and Sustainability Efforts We have been working in close partnership for more than 30 years with various organizations and foundations.

We are grateful to the Claims Conference for providing immense support and funding to Holocaust survivors.

For other projects (Adults and Elderly in Need, Jewish Family Services, and Welfare sustainability projects), the JDC's role is central. The JDC has proven to be an invaluable partner not only by providing generous funding but also sharing expertise, ideas, and resources.

We are pleased to be partnering with organizations such as the Gunilla & Werner Guters Stiftelse Foundation, the Heckscher Foundation, the Baltic Jewish Forum, Uniting History Foundation, and others. These invaluable partnerships with various foundations and organizations enable us to continue providing support to Jews in need in Latvia.

This year, the Hesed Center worked hard to reach a higher level of sustainability through its welfare fundraising campaigns, crowdfunding, and more. The crowdfunding platform *Tolam* (<https://tolam.jews.lv/>) was launched in 2018. It is now a sustainable platform that enables the Hesed Center to reach and support even more Jewish individuals in need. Currently, we are planning to develop the platform further to allow it to serve the community at large and cover the community's other needs as well.



Sabina Bairamova. The main directions of her work are community development and fundraising

This year, we have made steps that will be crucial toward successfully developing the Hesed Center in the future and will impact the center's future ability to provide efficient support, attract funding, and ensure its long-term sustainability.

By Sabina Bairamova, Chief Development Officer

JOHANNA SPECTOR: ETHNOMUSICOLOGIST

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.



Spector, Johanna, née Lichtenberg (March 23, 1915, Liepaja – January 14, 2008, New York) was an ethnomusicologist and a former prisoner of the Liepaja ghetto and a series of concentration camps. She was born and raised in Liepaja in an aristocratic Jewish family. Johanna and her older brother, Naum, enjoyed an upper-class childhood in Libau (Liepaja), Latvia, where she was educated at home by private tutors, who included Hebrew in her studies. She graduated from a Jewish

high school in Liepaja, a conservatory in Vienna, and then from the Vienna Music Academy (*Staatsakademie für Musik and Darstellende Kunst* in Wien, Austria). Johanna returned to Latvia before the war.

After the Nazi invasion, she, together with other members of her family, was placed in Liepajas ghetto, and in 1943, relocated to Kaiserwald. In 1944 she was again relocated, this time to Burggraben, a sub-camp of Stutthof, where she participated in the infamous “death march.” During the Holocaust, Johanna Spector lost her husband, brother, and parents. She was liberated by United Kingdom troops in May 1945.

Right after liberation, she remade the songs she heard in the ghetto; and in 1947, she published a collection called *Ghetto und KZ-Lieder aus Lettland und Litauen*, which became very popular in Vienna. In the same year, Spector immigrated to the United States where she decided to devote her life to the research of Jewish music. She received her doctorate degree in 1950 from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, and obtained a master’s degree in anthropology in 1960 from Columbia University in New York City. She was a research fellow at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem (1951-53), and taught in Jerusalem’s Rubin Academy of Music. Until 1957 she spent half the year in Israel, undertaking fieldwork on the Yemenite, Kurdish, and Samaritan communities.

In 1954 she returned to New York and joined the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). From 1962 to 1985 she served as founding director of the JTS College of Music’s ethnomusicology department, devoting her career to discovering and preserving rare Jewish musical traditions from far-flung corners of India, Persia, Yemen, and other little-studied communities.

According to friends, Dr. Spector always seemed happy and was full of laughter. Despite her tragic past, she knew how to enjoy life and made sure that you enjoyed it along with her. At the same time,

she was principled. Deeply religious, her tenets in life were molded by her profound belief in God’s word. She was also unbending: a determined lady who would not tolerate action that violated her principles.

Professor Spector is the author of several books as well as many articles in encyclopedias and professional journals. Her last professional activity was as producer of documentary films about the music and culture of Eastern Jewish communities, which were forgotten and undervalued in the West. Her earliest film *The Samaritans* (1971) was followed by *Middle Eastern Music* (1973), *About the Jews of India: Cochin* (1976), *The Shanwar Telis or Bene Israel of India* (1978), *About the Jews of Yemen, A Vanishing Culture* (1986), and *Two Thousand Years of Freedom and Honor: The Cochin Jews of India* (1992).



Dr. J. Spector speaks to colleagues in Madras, India in 1961

Professor Spector also gathered a collection of more than ten thousand recordings of religious and folk music from the various communities she studied. A large part of her collection is at the National Archives of the Hebrew University. As the foremost expert in the field, Dr. Spector was a member of numerous prestigious professional associations: the American Anthropological Association, the American Musicological Association, the International Council of Folk Music, and others. In 1971, she helped to found the Society for the Preservation of Samaritan Culture and was the president of the Society of Asian Music from 1974 to 1978.



INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

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Left: *The cover of the famous collection, Ghetto und KZ-Lieder aus Lettland und Litauen, prepared by J. Spector immediately after her liberation and published in Vienna in 1947*

Right: *The list of songs included in this collection*

Dr. Spector won numerous awards: The Gold Eagle for documentary films *About the Jews of Cochin, India* (1979), *The Shanwar Telis or Bene Israel of India* (1979), and *The Jews of Yemen, A Vanishing Culture* (1986) and the Margret Mead Award for *2000 Years of Freedom and Honor, the Cochin Jews of India* (1992).

By Ivar Brod

Translated by Alan Solovey

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE

In the fall 2020, the American Jewish Committee conducted the Jewish Film Festival in Westchester/Fairfield and in Stamford. Both events were held virtually in October-November 2020. The festival, which is celebrating its 18th anniversary, is one of the largest regional AJC festivals to date.



One of the films was *The Mover* (in Latvian, *Tēvs Nakts*), a 2018 Latvian drama directed by Davis Simanis, Jr. The film is based on the story of Zhanis Lipke, a Latvian dock worker who saved more than 50 Jews from execution by secretly moving them from the Riga ghetto during the German occupation of Latvia during World War II. He sheltered them in a bunker under the barn of his property and transported them to safety with the help of his family and friends.

At the Haifa film festival in Israel in 2019, *The Mover* was recognized as the best foreign film.

The film presentation was followed by a discussion organized by Myra Clark-Siegel, Acting Director of AJC Westchester/Fairfield, with the participation of Ambassador Andrejs Pildgovichs, a permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations. They covered a wide range of issues associated with Latvia's history and current events, including the ongoing partnership between Latvia, the United States, and Israel. It's a tradition for organizers to ask diplomats to be post-screening speakers for films that AJC sponsors at this Festival.

Afterwards, Ms. Clark-Siegel also spoke with Semyon Ginzerman, a representative of Jewish Survivors of Latvia, and learned that JSL President David Silberman, now living in New York, was the person who first met Zhanis Lipke in Latvia in the 1960s and recorded the memories of the Jews he rescued. Later Mr. Silberman wrote a book about Lipke titled *Like a Star in the Darkness*, which has been translated into English. The book became the basis for all subsequent publications about Lipke and producing the film. After the end of the pandemic, AJC Westchester/Fairfield intends to invite David Silberman to speak at its next festival.

Thursday at 6 p.m., the director of the foundation, Ilana Ivanova-Zivtson, invites members to Skype conferences, which are part of the lecture series "Our Roots." The series introduces participants to different regions of Jewish Latvia and neighboring countries, along with little-known pages of Jewish history.

The lectures aroused great interest. Special guests included Ilya Lensky, director of the museum Jews in Latvia, who reported on the Jewish history of Courland and Maya Millere-Ose, a historian from the Zhanis Lipke Museum, who spoke about the tragedy of saving Jews in Aizpute.

On February 25, 2021, participants celebrated the Jewish holiday of Purim and read excerpts from the Megillat Esther. On March 8, they talked about Jewish women and their heroism throughout the centuries, starting with Esther, who saved the Jews of Persia through her bravery and dedication.

Participants in these online sessions are confident that with their regular communication, they help each other to survive the difficulties of the pandemic, learning from the experience and wisdom of their ancestors.



Dudu Fisher has been filmed at Rumbula

In January and February of 2021, the finishing scenes of two documentaries were filmed: The creators of both are two young men from the Baltics—Eugene Levin from Latvia and Jeff Hoffman from Lithuania. Levin, is not a professional filmmaker. For many years, however, he dreamed of bringing to life a story that he had heard as a child from his grandfather, Mozus Berkovich, a native of the town of Akniste in Latvia. It was a terrible story about how, in July 1941, his grandfather's schoolteacher, their Latvian neighbor, organized the murder of 175 Jews in Akniste, including 19 members of the Berkovich family. Mozus himself escaped that terrible fate, because his father had a strange feeling that tragic day and sent him away from home with orders not to return. Mozus Berkovich spent his final years in Newton, Massachusetts. He died in 2013 at the age of 92.

When Eugene Levin met Jeff Hoffman, they discovered that they had similar family histories. In Hoffman's case, it was not the Nazis, but his grandparents' Lithuanian neighbors who murdered the Jews of the town. Unlike Levin, Hoffman is a professional filmmaker. With their meeting, their dreams of creating a film about the history of their Jewish families during the



Atklātais sabiedriskais fonds "Liepājas ebreju mantojums"
Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation

Given the Coronavirus emergency, the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation has refocused its work online. For several months now, together with its partners the Uniting History Foundation and the Liepaja Jewish Religious Community, they have been holding regular online conferences. Not only do community members participate but former residents of Liepaja who now live in Riga, Berlin, Moscow and Israel also join in. Every week, about 15 community members attend online meetings with Eduard Kaplan, who reads the Shabbat chapters of the Torah. Every

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)

Holocaust began to come true. The result of Hoffman's and Levin's collaboration are two documentary films—*The Baltic Truth* and *The Unsung Heroes*. The films' narrator is internationally known Israeli cantor and stage performer Dudu Fisher, who, like Hoffman and Levin, has roots in the Baltic states. One of the films also includes an original musical score that Fisher sings.



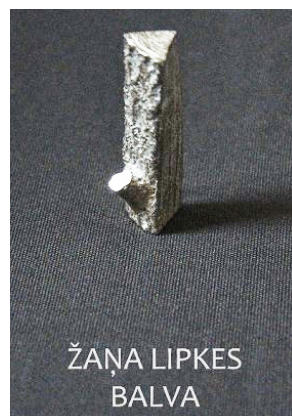
Memorial stone dedicated to the Jews murdered in Akniste

All three had a burning desire to tell the world the truth (that is where this word in the title of the film comes from) about those terrible events.

Significant parts of the filming took place in Latvia, Belarus, and Lithuania in the areas where the executions took place. In Latvia, they filmed in Akniste, the hometown of Mozus Berkovich. It turned out, coincidentally, that a memorial stone to the victims of the Holocaust was unveiled in Akniste while they were filming. Later the team also shot part of the film in Rumbula at the site of mass executions.

Luckily, the filming, interviews were completed just before Latvia closed the border with Lithuania because of COVID. Dudu Fischer, a religious Jew, said, "God helped us."

The films' creators plan to begin showing the film to audiences by the fall of 2021.



The Silver Log badge, established in 2018 by the Zhanis Lipke Memorial, will go to Aizpute this year to the descendants of the Dzenis-Pukis-Shuster family, who hid Jews at the latter stages of the war.

The story began in the fall of 1943. It was then that Karlis Pukis offered shelter to four Jews who worked in a peat factory—brothers Leib and Shleime Uzdin, a resident of Riga named Isak Kheifets, and a Lithuanian Jew Joseph Ber-Getz.

Karlis learned from his brother Zhanis, who served as a clerk in the police office, that the Jews were going to be sent to a concentration camp in Riga and decided that they should be hidden until the end of the war. At first, all four were hiding in the attic of the house of Karlis and Zhanis's mother-in-law, Ieva Dzene, in the old Aizpute castle. When the weather got colder, they set up a bunker under the chicken coop in the house next door to

Janis Schuster. Karlis even suggested that local residents order tailoring services, bearing in mind that the work would be performed by Jews. Sadly, one of the neighbors talked, and the police began an investigation. By the time the search was conducted, the Jews were hidden in a new location. However, the police found the bunker and detained Ieva Dzene, her daughters and sons-in-law, who lived in the house. Having received a message about the arrest of their rescuers, all four Jews fled into the forest, where locals were hunting. Hearing shots, the Jews thought they were about to be arrested, and committed suicide.

The fate of the saviors was also tragic. Gerhard Schuster was shot. The Pukis brothers, Janis Schuster, Karlis's wife Elsa and her mother Ieva were sent to the Stutthof concentration camp by the Nazis. Of these five, only Elsa Pukis survived and returned to Aizpute. Later, in the papers of the arrested Ieva Dzene, a document with an exceptional entry was found. It gave the reason for the arrest as sympathy for and help to the Jews. Today the family receives words of gratitude and a symbol of honor from the Lipke Memorial.

Leading Latvian media reported that director and screenwriter Boris Frumin will soon receive Latvian citizenship in recognition of his cultural contributions to Latvia. On the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia, the Parliamentary Commission on Citizenship applied to the Latvian Citizenship Administration with the proposal. Frumin, currently a professor at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, wrote the script for the film *Blizzard of Souls* (in Latvian *Dvēseļu putenis*), based on a novel by the Latvian writer Alexander Grins.



Blizzard of Souls follows 16-year-old Arturs and a troop of Latvian riflemen during the First World War as they first fight the Germans and then for an independent Latvia. Frumin himself called this film, directed by his student Dzintars Dreiberģis, the Latvian *And Quiet Flows the Don*. Frumin was born in Riga in 1947 and raised there. In 1972 he graduated from the Directing School of All-Union State University of Cinematography (VGIK), studying in the workshop of Sergei Gerasimov. Before emigrating to the United States in 1978, he released three films in the USSR, one of which, *Errors of Youth*, was shelved by the censor and only completed and released in 1989. During the Perestroika years, he released two more films at LenFilm. In subsequent years he was repeatedly invited to Latvia to conduct master classes with young filmmakers. Frumin's films have repeatedly won prestigious awards at film festivals in Mannheim, Rimini, Vyborg, and others.

NEWS FROM LATVIA AND ELSEWHERE (continued)



Screenwriter and director Boris Frumin

Work on the *Blizzard of Souls* movie lasted more than four years and cost in excess of two million euros. In addition to the actors, about 2,000 extras were involved in the crowd scenes. The film was received with great attention in Latvia and aroused much interest among viewers in the United States and Western Europe. The film is shown in cinemas both in its original language and with subtitles—English and, in some viewings, Russian. This film is Latvia's entry in the Best International Feature category, among others, at the 93rd Academy Awards (Oscars) in 2021.



Hanna Vater at the opening of her exhibition in Manhattan

Starting March 3, 2021, in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, the Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery (547 West 27th Street) is hosting a solo exhibition of the artist Hanna Vater. Vater, who was born and raised in Riga, graduated from the Art Academy of Latvia with a Master's Degree in Painting and Teaching of Art in 1986. She immigrated to Israel with her family in 1990 and moved to the United States in 2002. Vater currently resides in

Hershey, Pennsylvania.

In her work, Vater prefers painting still lifes, landscapes, and figural compositions. As the artist herself says, she admired the French impressionists, their ability to catch the light and convert it into a unique artistic code, which intensified her interest in painting. From early childhood, she was inspired by the beauty of Old Riga. Ancient history and the modern life made up her imaginings and triggered her artistic senses. "My family roots,"

Vater said, "lay amid German culture and Russian-Jewish heritage. I have always been emotionally tied to the local Latvian coloristic master vision, tiny and gentle color transformation with no visible borders."

Over the years, Vater has taken part in more than 10 art shows in Latvia, Israel, and the United States. The current exhibition will run until the end of March.

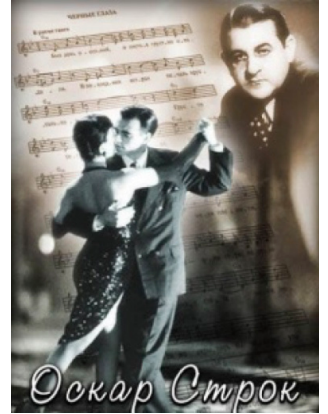
Tango Between the Lines (in Russian, "Tango mezhdru strok"), a play based on the work of the famous Riga playwright Alexei Scherbak premiered on February 19, 2021 at the legendary Vakhtangov Theater in Moscow.

Tango Between the Lines is a fantasy in two acts set to the music of the "king of tango," Riga's own Oskar Strok, who composed melodies full of love, tenderness, and passion. In the USSR, Strok's music was banned as ideologically alien—"an example of decadent bourgeois art." People still knew and loved his ardent foxtrots, sentimental waltzes, and hot tango rhythms, although they did not suspect who composed them. The human heart needs passionate feelings. Oscar Strok had them, and he knew how to generously share them with people.

This performance is about each of us, about our childhood, our love, betrayal, about our fears, ups and downs, about everything that is human life. Set to the live music of the orchestra, the actors sing, dance, and portray complex and simple human life.

The play was first staged at the Riga M. Chekhov Russian Theater in March 2012. Directed by Igor Konyaev, Yaakov Rafalson played the role of Strok. This performance is still in the repertoire of the Riga Theater. (The *Courier* talked about this production in December 2018.) The Moscow production was directed by Natalya Kovaleva, with Eldar Tramov in the title role. The play is dedicated to the memory of Faustas Latenas, who died in November last year, a remarkable Lithuanian composer who worked on many theater productions. It was he who began work on the production of *Tango Between the Lines* at the Vakhtangov Theater.

Compiled by Ivar Brod
Translated by Mariya Taukule



Vice President of our JSL society, the patriarch of former ghetto and concentration camp prisoners in Liepaja (Libau), Riga and Stutthof, Professor George D. Schwab has prepared for publication his memories of the late 1930s, the Holocaust, and the postwar years in ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR: FROM LATVIA THROUGH THE CAMPS TO THE UNITED STATES.

Professor George D. Schwab kindly agreed to publish excerpts from these memories in the *Courier*. In the current issue, we conclude Chapter IV — "Street Boy."

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY

Apparently some staff members were suspicious of my Jewish heritage and thought that I was perhaps a German in disguise. I was asked about my background, wartime whereabouts,

and eyewitnesses at Blankenese who could identify me as a survivor, something I was immediately able to provide.

On several occasions during my weekly conversations with mamma, she mentioned that after we were reunited, in the not-too-distant future, she hoped that we would join our relatives in the United States who expected us. On learning that my plan was to go to Palestine, she assured me that, once reunited, we would jointly decide what would be best for us. One day I was informed by Selma and Charlotte that I would shortly be reunited with mother, but because U.S. military vehicles had to obtain permission from Soviet authorities to travel in the Soviet zone of occupation, the reunion could not take place immediately. The month of my departure was finally set for May 1946, and it was Selma in U.S. military uniform who accompanied me in a military vehicle with an American military driver.

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY (continued)

In the course of that drive, which took many hours, I began to wonder whether reunification would spell the end of my independence. As a man of the world, I would refuse to live the way I lived back in Latvia—be under control of a strict governess and a relatively strict mother, both of whom would supervise all my activities, especially piano lessons, and, above all, make me to go to school. It suddenly occurred to me that living with mamma might not be such a good idea after all.

At last we arrived at Naumann Street in Schöneberg, a very nice working-class district in the center of Berlin; it was in the American sector and not bombed out. Selma and I walked up the stairs—mamma was waiting at the door. In the hallway, mamma and I exchanged kisses. To introduce the new me, I asked an unexpected first question: What is the nightclub situation like in Berlin? Apparently not startled by the question, mamma replied: It is an interesting question. As a woman alone in Berlin, I could not investigate it. Now that you are here, we will be able to explore it together. Disarmed by mamma, I was satisfied with the answer.

In the coming weeks, mother showed me around the Berlin she knew. I was eager to see where aunts Tanya and Hermine lived in the Charlottenburg district of the city—respectively on Oliver Square and Bleibtreu Street immediately off the Kurfürstendamm, the city residence of Aunt Hermine and Uncle Xavier. The official residence of the embassy was in Krumme Lanke, a suburb. Grand aunt Marta had lived for a while in Grunewald, also a suburb.

Although parts of Berlin were bombed out, sections on the Kurfürstendamm near the zoo were relatively intact. There we went to cafés and movies, sometimes two or three a day. We also visited the Chancellery, which was heavily damaged, and even went into Hitler's office. In the same area near Potsdamer Square and the Brandenburg Gate, we viewed the semi-destroyed ministries of Propaganda and Air Force. Seeing Berlin, especially in the context of a largely destroyed evil capital and a former brilliant city where the devil revealed himself to be a coward and took his own life, was a dream come true. As survivors, mamma and I walked with our heads high and joyfully watched the so-called German Übermenschen in rags, begging for food and cigarettes and scrounging in search of cigarette butts. Although we could not bring back those we loved, at least we could see the Germans get what they deserved for their passionate support of Hitler and his fellow criminals.

Between May 1946 and February 1947, the month we left for the United States, mamma convinced me to accompany her to a performance of Pagliacci with a world-renowned tenor from Italy whose name, I believe, was Beniamino Gigli. To my great surprise, I immensely enjoyed the performance. The story of the clown, the music, and the singing captivated me. Nearby on the Friedrich Street in the Soviet sector was a well-known café where, according to mamma, a famous gypsy violinist by the name of George Boulanger played Roma music, which, she thought, I would enjoy as well, and she was right. I began to re-evaluate mamma and gradually came to the conclusion that she was much more "with it" than I had given her credit for in Latvia.

To help me forget the horrors of the war, including the nightmares that haunted me for years, mamma did not mind accommodating me and my newly awakened passion for ex-

ploring what Berlin still had to offer. On the constructive side, she suggested that we visit the DP camp in the Berlin suburb of Schlachtensee. There she had a few friends she wanted me to meet. Among others, we met Max Kaufmann of Riga whom I remembered from Libau and the Riga concentration camp. He was writing a book on the Jewish catastrophe in Latvia and extensively interviewed mother and me about our wartime experiences. It was published in Germany in 1947 under the title *Churbn Lettland: Die Vernichtung der Juden Lettlands* (Churbn Lettland: The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia. 2). On visiting the DP camp's school, I saw a good number of boys and girls of all ages with whom I thought I could be friends and did not mind to apply. Thus, I was surprised that the head of the school placed me in the highest grade, despite the fact that I was the youngest and still quite illiterate. Nevertheless, I was looking forward to this new experience—learning, of course, was not uppermost in my mind.

Daily during the week I commuted to Schlachtensee. More subjects were taught, and, even though we learned Hebrew, the students were not excessively exposed to preparing for illegal immigration to Palestine. That is not to say, however, that Palestine as a destination for us Jews was removed from consideration. Aliyah to Israel was much talked about, followed by talk of leaving for the United States. Mamma, remembering how impressed I was by American movies before the war, reinforced this by not talking about the United States excessively, but inviting me to accompany her to American movies, which I loved, especially those depicting the skyscrapers and other wonders of New York. I also admired the tempo of the people.

To my astonishment, students took school seriously. When once I lobbed a spitball at the teacher, I was reprimanded by him as well as by my peers. Because I was eager to get back to town to continue exploring Berlin with mammy and visit friends who lived in town, especially the Kahns who resided with their young daughter Edith on Friedrich Street in the Soviet sector, I rarely participated in the variety of cultural activities offered at the camp.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed my classmates, especially the three well-dressed older Polish girlfriends who appeared very sophisticated and spoke mostly Polish with one another: Renia Laks, Rachelka Feigenbaum, and Tunia Rybak. Like me, they enjoyed what Berlin had to offer. Considering myself a man of the world, I saw no reason why we should not combine forces and enjoy things together. On several occasions I asked to join them on their exploits in town. I remember Renia, probably seventeen at the time, snickering at this nearly fourteen-year-old jerk, as she called me, with whom she and the other two would have nothing to do socially. Others I became friendly with included Feliks Freidenreich, Roma Lichtenthal, Itzke Lewin, Arnold Kerr, and the Zycer brothers.

School was tolerable. Most enjoyable were class outings to Sansoucci in Potsdam, the castle of Frederick the Great, the Berlin zoo in the center of town, visits to museums, and the theater where we saw Schiller's *The Robbers* and Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. I was overwhelmed by the music.

Although still thinking of going to Palestine, I began to waver under the influence of American movies, my cousins in the U.S. telling us that they had applied for visas and paid the Joint

ODYSSEY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR – STREET BOY (continued)

Distribution Committee for second-class tickets for us to cross the Atlantic aboard one of the Queens. In the meantime, parcels of food, clothing, and letters with dollar bills continued to reach us. On several occasions, mamma said that there was no future for us in Europe or in Palestine, where we had no relatives. Repeating from time to time the proverb that “a man without an education [Bildung in the German embraces education and culture] is no man,” she told me that in the United States I would receive a proper education under normal circumstances. At the same time, mamma promised that once I reached twenty-one, I would be able to decide whether to immigrate to Palestine or not.

Although I was conflicted, New York did exert a strong pull. I also felt responsible for my mamma who, I knew, had suffered enormously during the war. We all had been brought up to always smile “no matter how deep the hurt may be.”

Unknown to me, mamma had registered us with the Joint to leave for New York. Late in the year, they notified mamma that we were scheduled to leave early in 1947. We assumed that we would board one of the Queens either in France or in England. The news of embarking from either country was exciting, and my passion for leaving for Palestine receded. I informed my classmates of the latest developments and learned that Renia Laks, her sister Chris Lerman, and brother-in-law Miles Lerman (future chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.) had received identical notices.

As it turned out, the Joint did not honor the tickets purchased for us to sail on one of the superliners. As we later found out, the difference in cost between sailing on a luxury liner and troop transport was considerable, the Joint, in an effort to aid as many refugees as possible in reaching the shores of the United States, lumped us in with the rest. Thus, in late January, together with the Lermans and Renia, we boarded a passenger train for Bremen. There we were placed in a transit camp only to learn that our trip had been postponed because of a coal miners’ strike in the United States. Using this opportunity to visit friends in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp, Mr. and Mrs. Lerman set off, leaving Renia with us. A few days later the news reached us that we were about to embark. Mother, in the absence of the Lermans, took it upon herself to persuade the authorities that Renia had been left in mother’s custody and had to sail with us no matter what. After permission was granted, the Lermans returned, breathless, just in time before we all sailed together for New York.

Aboard the S.S. Marine Perch, Miles and I bunked together, as did mamma and Chris. Renia was placed with a younger group of girls. The stormy weather on the Atlantic caused the ship to roll right and left and the front to descend between the waves that smashed onto the deck—we all were seasick. In tran-

quil moments, we met on deck. The night before our arrival in New York in February, I was determined to stay on deck all night as rumor had it that the lights of New York were visible for tens of miles out to sea. That was not the case, and so it turned out to be my first disappointment. When we finally docked in the afternoon at a Hudson River pier in the West 40s, I was disappointed once more: the West Side Highway was poorly lit, the street under it looked dilapidated and had hardly any lights, no skyscrapers in sight, and the terminal was cold and not very clean. We parted with the Lermans, vowing to stay in touch, and disembarked.

To our great surprise, we were warmly welcomed by Aunt Ida Schonberger (née Firkser), whose first husband Bernhard Schwab, had fallen victim to the influenza epidemic that followed the Great War. Her second husband, an American citizen, died while they were on a luxury cruise from the United States to Europe. Also at the pier were Raya (née Taub and a relation by marriage) and Gustav Smith, a German Jew who had come to Libau after Hitler’s accession to power and married Raya in Libau. The couple had immigrated to the United States shortly before the outbreak of the Second World.

The taxi trip on the West Side Highway to Brooklyn was a disappointment as well. I missed seeing skyscrapers and the reputed lights of New York. The bridge to Brooklyn was spectacular though. But the trip to Brooklyn’s Borough Park section was unbelievably dull: no tall buildings, nondescript small houses, and poorly lit streets. Arriving at Aunt Ida’s three-story townhouse, we were heartily greeted by Aunt Ida’s third husband, a lovely and warm rabbi. His world, as mother told me, was different from mother’s and mine as well as from that of Aunt Ida’s in Libau and those of her two worldly husbands. We were also welcomed by Aunt Ida’s daughter Ellen Licht (née Schwab) from her first marriage, her husband, Barney, and son Bernard. They occupied the second floor of the townhouse. For the next six weeks, the large living room on the main floor did double duty: a living room during the day and our bedroom at night.

That same evening we were visited by Aunt Ida’s sister Marcia Schwartz, originally from Libau, whom mother knew well, and her husband, Bernie, who was in the clothing business and presented me with an Eisenhower jacket that I proudly wore for years. Aunt Ida’s son, Harry Schwab, came over, as did Rabbi Schonberger’s daughter Gerri and her husband, Leo, also a businessman. They planned to introduce us to a Manhattan restaurant we would surely enjoy. We also had welcoming letters with enclosures from cousins Manya and Nuta. I soon forgot my disappointments, welcomed the warmth with which we were received, and looked forward to exploring New York.

By George David Schwab

We are deeply saddened to inform you that on February 17th, 2021, our dear colleague and friend Yefim Shteynfeld, a member of the JSL Board and the author of many *Courier* publications, died as a victim of COVID-19 at the age of 73. We extend our deepest condolences to his family.