



The Latvian Jewish Courier

JEWISH SURVIVORS OF LATVIA, INC.

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LATVIA, JULY 2014 by George Schwab

My annual trip to Latvia coincided with numerous events relating to the Jewish community: in Riga the Shamir-organized March to Life; the Jewish community's commemoration of the hundreds of Jews burned by local Latvian collaborators at the Choral Synagogue soon after Riga fell to the German invaders; in Liepaja (Libau in the German), the World Reunion of Liepaja's Jewish Community celebrating its founding 215 years ago; commemorating the thousands of Jews slaughtered; dedicating the Alley of the Righteous Gentiles, and an affirming of life finale.

RIGA

While I was in this architectural

gem of a city, the sun bathed its buildings most of the time. In the morning of July 4, we gathered at the old Jewish cemetery (which is no longer sacred ground) for a March for Life commemorating the Jews murdered during World War II. At this solemn event, organized by Shamir, with Latvian dignitaries present, we publicly and in silence reflected on the Jewish tragedy, saying at the end Kaddish. From the cemetery, we all walked to the Choral Synagogue by way of the Riga Ghetto.

There, Arkady Suharenko, head of the Jewish Community of Latvia, officiated during the commemoration at which Latvian dignitaries, including, among others, the country's president, Andris Berzins; Douglas Davidson, U.S. Department of State Special

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our current Memorial/ Yizcor will take place on November 9, 2014 at 12:00 Noon in Park East Synagogue, 163 East 67th Street, New York.

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Envoy for Holocaust Issues; Hagit Ben-Yaakov, Israel's ambassador to Latvia; Elie Valk, head of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel; Margers Vestermanis, historian, and myself.

I had been asked to speak at

both memorials. With variations on a theme, my remarks focused on the need for the remaining survivors to put pen to paper about their experience during World War II. To professional historians eyewitness accounts constitute primary source of evidence -- something that pseudo-historians largely dismiss as unreliable. A task of the professional historian is to properly contextualize the evidence and professionally correct inconsistencies.



Official events aside, I had the opportunity, both in the United States and in Riga, to discuss with U.S. and Latvian officials as well as with Mr. Suharenko the issue of restituting the communal Jewish properties to the rightful owner – the Jewish community. Resolution may at last be at hand because of certain developments: Vice President Joseph Biden on a visit to the Baltic States had made clear that the issue of the Jewish communal properties in Latvia had, once and for all, to be resolved; the presence of an American military contingent in the country as a result of developments in Ukraine; and the large ethnic Russian presence in Latvia. In short, the confluence of these factors has apparently led the Latvian establishment to conclude that it could ill-afford to antagonize the United States and has thus apparently decided to resolve the Jewish communal

property issue.

While in Riga, I visited the Schmerli cemetery where my aunt and uncle are buried. I also spent some time visiting the Eleonora Schwab Library and the museum at Skolas Street Community Center. Sheila Johnson Robbins and I hosted a luncheon for former Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga and her husband Dr. Imants Freibergs at which we discussed, among other issues, the relevance of NATO. On the same day, Sheila and I attended the Independence Day celebration at the New American Embassy. We also spent time with the noted archivist Rita Bogdanova and met with Rabbi Barkahan. Together with Dr. Barbara Lau of Munich, we visited the Rumbula killing grounds near Riga where my brother and many members of my family were killed.

LIEPAJA

In contrast to Riga, Libau was severely damaged during the German invasion in June 1941. Libau was militarily important to both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany because its ports never froze. After the war, during the second Soviet occupation, the town was rebuilt not in line with its original splendor but in accord with the nondescript Soviet totalitarian style.



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The world Reunion of Libau Jewry gathering between July 7 and July 9 was organized and overseen by Ilana Ivanova, director of the Liepaja Jewish Heritage Foundation, which receives significant support from the the Sergej Zaharin family, Selwyn and Raymond Haas, Ilya Segal, Sheila Johnson Robbins, the Seligmans, and myself among others. The reunion had two components: the commemorative and the celebratory.

The opening ceremony was attended by survivors, descendants, relatives, and friends who hailed from near and far, including Australia, the United States, Canada, Israel, Germany, Russia, Riga, and, of course, Libau. The ceremony was held at the Jewish Community Center on Kungu Street. Ilana briefed attendees on the work of the Foundation, the labors involved in maintaining the Jewish cemetery, and activities at the center, which focus on the schooling of the young. Attendees were then invited to view the names on the Memorial Wall, and the impressive number of photos that adorned the walls that evoked warm prewar memories. The evening culminated with a festive dinner at a nearby hotel at which Raymond Haas welcomed the participants.

On the following day, a memorial service was held at the Jewish cemetery – which the foundation meticulously maintains. It also restores graves, including those of my grandparents – the Schwabs. In her remarks, Ilana also reminded attendees of the work that



Professor Edward Anders has done at the site. Before ending the memorial visit, Michael Gilad – son of Jule and Jenja Goldberg – warmly recited Kaddish and El Moleh Rachamim prayers. Later in the day, the mayor, the Honorable Uldis Sesks, hosted a reception that was followed by the dedication of a memorial plaque at the site where the imposing Choral Synagogue once stood. The evening was largely devoted to the presentation of two recently published books: Ethel S. Davis’s *Latvia’s Haunting Secrets* and Fanny Pavlova’s (née Genton) *I Am from the Holocaust*. These works materially contribute to the growing literature about the significance of Liepaja’s prewar Jewish community as well as its historical importance to the Jewish people of Latvia and of the world.

Highly emotional can best describe the Light Tower and Shkede killing ground visits on the following day. The “Alley Among the Righteous Gentiles” commemorating the 26 heroes who defied the German murderers and their local collaborators was dedicated. These individuals proved that even in indescribably horrendous circumstances humane instincts can triumph. Ilana orchestrated the event and spoke about the work done by Edward Anders.

Other speakers included prominent government and local

officials, the Israeli ambassador, Selvin Haas, Serge Zaharin, and myself. I again focused attention on the need of survivors to put pen to paper. Also, as at the Light Tower, at Shkede, we silently and solemnly reflected and communicated with those we loved and had lost in December 1941 when thousands were shot in cold blood. Michael once more recited Kaddish and El Moleh Rachamim prayers.

Affirmation of life best describes the farewell dinner party that followed. In the old Libau tradition, such occasions are incomplete without music. Accordingly, professional musicians and singers performed – spontaneously followed by performances of the audience. The very lively and fun event even had guests jumping to their feet and dancing the horah between the tables – also accompanied by Israeli songs and music.

WE THANK ALL WHO SENT MEMBERSHIP DUES, AND THOSE WHO MADE ADDITIONAL DONATIONS TO SUPPORT OUR ONGOING WORK, AND REMAIN ACTIVE MEMBERS.

IF YOU HAVE NOT YET SENT YOUR DUES, PLEASE DO! PLEASE ALSO CONFIRM YOUR MAILING ADDRESS. WE WILL NO LONGER SEND OUR *COURIER* OR ANY CORRESPONDENCE TO UNCONFIRMED/UNRESPONSIVE MEMBERS.



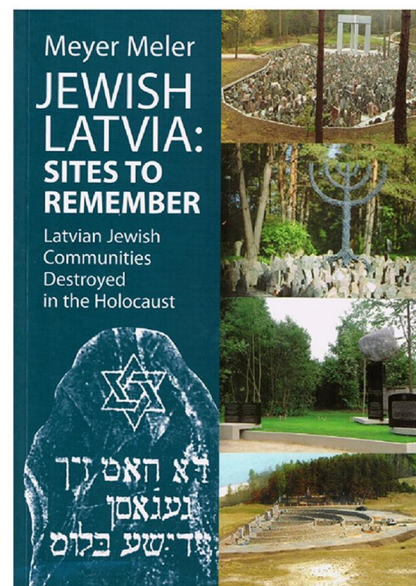
The last issue of *Courier* included an insert with information about a book by M. Meler, ***Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember***, which was published in English.

We are proud to say that author Meyer Meler received the highest honor of the Latvian Republic — The Order of Three Stars — on May 4, 2014; otherwise known as Latvia's Independence Day. The president's decree states:

"Public figure and Holocaust Historian, Meyer Meler, is awarded the Order of Three Stars for his enormous personal contribution to the study, documentation and preservation of Latvian history, so that it can be passed down to future generations."

M. Meler has been studying the Catastrophe of the Latvian Jews for many years. He published a map of the Holocaust in Latvia, along with a book ***Jewish Cemeteries of Latvia***.

Jewish Latvia: Sites to Remember has 1,075 photos and 200 maps, and is 480 pages in length. You can order the book from Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc. c/o David Silberman, 64-14 137th Street, Flushing, NY 11367. The cost is \$40.00, which includes shipping by registered mail; please make check payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia, Inc.; delivery takes 2–3 weeks.



The Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia has established a website: www.smerli.lv. Use this site to search for any burial place in the database of Shmerli cemetery; you can also order and pay for the services for the care of the grave.

A JEWISH WOMAN FROM LATVIA TURNED OUT TO BE THE IDEAL OF AN ARYAN CHILD

American professor Hessa Taft, whose photo as a six-month-old was used in Nazi propaganda as that of an ideal Aryan child, turned out to be Jewish; her parents, Latvian Jews, had temporarily settled in Germany.

We first learned about this from Hessa, who told her story in a book of memoirs by Latvian Jews who survived the Holocaust. *Muted Voices* was published in New York some years ago. At the end of June 2014, this 80-year old woman gave a few issues of the *Sonne ins Haus* (*Sun in the House*) magazine, which was published in Germany with her baby photo on the cover, to Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Israel.

“Today I can laugh about it all. But if the Nazis knew 80 years ago who I really was, it’s possible I wouldn’t be alive today,” said Taft in an interview.

Taft’s parents, Jakov and Polina Levinson, both talented singers, left Latvia for Germany in 1928, settling in Berlin to continue their education in the Akademische Hochschule für Music. They planned to pursue careers in classical music. After Nazis came to power, Hessa’s father lost his job at the opera because he was a Jew; he was forced to become a traveling salesman, selling his wares door to door. In 1938, he was arrested, then freed, and the family fled—first moving back to Latvia, then France, Cuba, and, finally, in 1949, to the United States.

Hessa was born in Berlin in 1935—a time when widespread pogroms against the Jews were prevalent throughout Germany. Polina Levinson took her six-month-old daughter to the renowned Berlin photographer Hans Ballin who took the now-famous photo. After a few months, Levinson was stunned to see Hessa’s photo on



the cover of a Nazi magazine published in Leipzig, with a caption stating that this was the “ideal Aryan child,” whose photo was chosen from a hundred submissions by the top photographers of the time. Later, the photo also appeared on greeting cards.

Hessa’s mom, still reeling from shock, was afraid to be seen with her in the streets for fear that a passerby would recognize the child and would know that the “ideal Aryan child” was, in reality, a daughter of a Jewish family.

“Mom went to the photographer to ask him why he would send in the photo without her permission,” remembers Hessa. “He said that he did it to prove a point. Knowing that we are Jews, he wanted to prove that the Nazi race theory is worthless, as even the leaders of the Third Reich would not be able to tell apart a Jewish child from an Aryan one.”

In the United States, Hessa studied in Barnard College, going on to earn her master’s degree in biochemistry from Columbia University. She taught at Princeton University, while also raising a family.

Based upon articles from the Washington Post, Haarez and other papers.

News from Riga

Riga, July 4, 2014 — The main event of the Holocaust Memorial Day was organized by the Council of Latvian Jewish Communities and the Riga Religious Jewish Community near the Gogol Shul memorial. President Andris Berzins of Latvia, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkevics, Chairman of the Riga Duma Nils Ushakovs, other Latvian officials, and foreign diplomats attended the ceremony. Speeches at the memorial meeting were made by ghetto and concentration camp survivors Margers Vestermanis, a historian, and George Schwab, a professor from New York. Also speaking were the Israeli ambassador to Latvia Hagit Ben-Yaakov, the U.S. Special Envoy on Holocaust Issues Douglas Davidson, and the chairman of the Union of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel Eli Valk.

In Daugavpils, where Jews before World War II accounted for more than one-third of the population, flowers were laid by Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma.

On July 4, on the 73rd anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Latvia, about 200 people took part in the fifth memorial march, Steps of the Living, from the old Jewish cemetery on Liksnas Street to the Gogol Shul monument. Participants included the Israeli ambassador to Latvia Hagit Ben-Yaakov, deputy ambassador of the United States Tom Richardson, diplomats from Germany, Russia, Belarus, delegates from



Jewish communities in Israel, the United States, and Germany. After the march, a memorial wall honoring the 25,000 European Jews deported to Riga and killed was unveiled at the Riga Ghetto Museum.

On July 1 in the Great Hall of the Riga Jewish Community and on July 4 in the courtyard of the "Corner Building" (former KGB headquarters), a performance was given in Russian and French of the drama *It's High Time to Pack*, which shows the life of a Jewish family in Riga in 1939-1941. Judith Magre and Valentina Varela, the well-known French actresses, and popular Latvian actors Juris Zhagars and Juris Kalnins were featured; the performance was accompanied by Klezmer music.

Restoration of the so-called Green Synagogue, the oldest wooden synagogue in the Baltic countries, has started in Rezekne. The \$1 million cost will be met mostly by European foundations. Once restored, the building will be used as a tourist information center and an exposition hall for the Jewish

cultural heritage exhibition. In his speech at the opening ceremony, Lev Sukhobokov, chairman of the Rezekne Jewish community, said that the renovation is scheduled to be completed in 2015.



On May 13, the Embassy of Israel in Riga organized a celebration to commemorate the 66th anniversary of Israel's independence. A welcome address was delivered by Hagit Ben-Yaakov, Israel's ambassador to Latvia. The concert program was offered by the Max Goldin Jewish Heritage Society. Popular Israeli songs were performed by Vlad Shulman, Int Teterovsky, and the *Balsis* young men's choir.

The Žanis Lipke Memorial, opened in Riga by the presidents of Latvia and Israel in 2013, has been awarded the Kenneth Prize by the European Museum

Forum. It has also been proclaimed one of the three museums in Europe that best promote the conservation and popularization of historical memory. Soon after its opening, the museum had become one of the most-visited tourist spots in Riga.

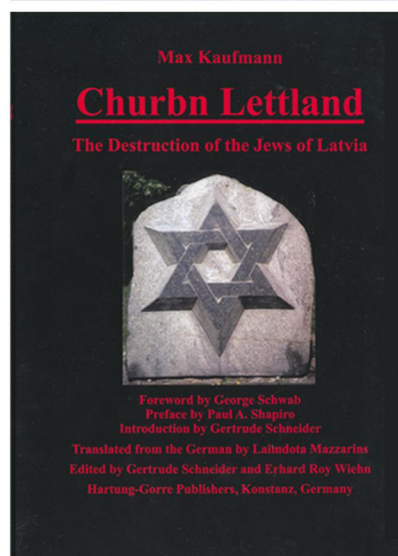
On June 30, a memorial plaque commemorating prominent Soviet, Latvian, and Israeli documentary film director Herz Frank (1926–2013) was unveiled in a ceremony in Riga. The project was sponsored by the Charity Foundation of the Rietumu Bank (Latvia). A film director and a scriptwriter, Herz Frank was one of the most creative and most famous Soviet and Latvian cinematographers, making classic documentary films, and winning countless international prizes; he was one of the founders of documentary filmmaking in Riga. The ceremony was attended by leading Latvian cinematographers, by Herz Frank's colleagues, friends, and family.

On July 4, 2014, in the Jewish community house at Skolas Street, an exhibition of the works of Felix Nussbaum (1904–1944), a German artist killed in Auschwitz, opened to the public. He spent the last years of his life in a refuge in Brussels, documenting the Holocaust in art.

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Dear Members:

A few years ago we sponsored the publication of English and Russian translations of Max Kaufmann's book *Churbn Lettland—The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*, updated with commentaries and photos. Both editions are available by mail. If you are interested, please make out a check for \$20.00 (which includes handling and postage in the USA) payable to Jewish Survivors of Latvia and mail it to the address listed on page 2. Please specify whether you would like English or Russian edition!



The German Felix Nussbaum Society organized the exhibition (a special initiative by Margers Vestermanis) to honor the museum, Jews in Latvia.

On July 23, the great singer Michael Alexandrovich would have turned 100 years old. In honor of this anniversary, a festival of Jewish music was held in Riga—organized by the Max Goldin Jewish Cultural Inheritance Society. Read about activities tied to Michael Alexandrovich's anniversary on the Internet: www.ebrejukultura.lv.

On Monday, August 4, a rally organized by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia voiced support for Israel. The rally was attended by about 150 people—members of the Jewish community, guests from Israel, as well as numerous representatives of non-Jewish organizations and the Christian community. People brought posters in Latvian and other languages: "I love Israel," "Hamas threatens the entire world," "Israel has the right to self-defense," and other wording. A raid siren was sounded at the beginning of the rally—a sound now often heard in Israel.

Compiled by Ivar Brod



TO ART FROM BUSINESS: JOSEPH HIRSHHORN

By Ivar Brod

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.

JOSEPH HIRSHHORN (1899 – 1981) was a financier, entrepreneur, collector, and philanthropist. He was the twelfth child born to a poor family in Dzhukste near Jelgava (then Mitau); his father died when Joseph was very young. In 1906, when pogroms began in Latvia, his mother took the children to America, and they settled in Brooklyn, New York. At the age of 13, Joseph began to earn a living as a newspaper peddler. In a year, he began working as a courier on Wall Street and soon moved on to become a broker for the company that would later become the New York Stock Exchange. A keen memory and an exceptional understanding of the stock market enabled him to make \$168,000 in his first year; by the mid-1920s, he had made his first million. By this time he was already a member of the executive boards and the president of a few financial companies. His incredible business acumen helped him anticipate the devastating stock market crash of 1929 that led to the Great Depression. On September 29, a month before “Black Tuesday,” he left Wall Street with \$4 million still in his account. He then decided to invest in uninhabited territories in Canada. He hired the best geologists, bought shares in coal mining companies with mines in British Columbia, and began mining in the area. Once again, he speculated favorably: most of the mines yielded gold. In the late 1940s, at the start of the nuclear era, Hirshhorn, again following geologists’ advice, bought vast land

holdings in the province of Ontario and began prospecting. After some time, *Time* magazine reported that just two of Hirshhorn’s mines had yielded as much uranium as 600 U.S. mines, and the entire area contains 20 percent of the uranium reserves in the Western world. Later, experts estimated that Hirshhorn’s activities contributed more than \$30 billion to the Canadian economy. Hirshhorn is included in the list of distinguished individuals in the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame in Toronto and a street in Elliot Lake, Ontario was named after him.

By the end of 1950s, when Hirshhorn had accumulated approximately \$100 million, he decided to leave the world of business and fully devote himself to collecting art and philanthropy. He returned to New York and bought estates in Connecticut and Florida and a villa on the French Riviera. His interest in art was sparked early in his youth when insurance companies sent his family free calendars with reproductions of paintings by great artists. He purchased his first pieces—two engravings by Durer—when he was still a stock broker. Gradually, he amassed a significant collection, including many works by the French Impressionists and the American



Abstract Expressionists. His collection includes paintings by Matisse, Renoir, Degas, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Ben Shahn, and sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Henry Moore. Pablo Picasso was his close friend. The climax of Hirshhorn’s career as an art collector was his decision to donate a collection of 6,000 nineteenth- and twentieth-century paintings and sculptures to the American people. In 1966, Congress passed a special act directing that these artworks be housed in a wing of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., directly opposite the National Archive. The museum and sculpture garden were opened in the autumn of 1974. In its first year, this first museum in Washington dedicated solely to contemporary art welcomed more than one million visitors and soon became one of the six most-visited museums in the United States.



MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART III:

(continued from previous issue)

I said, "Meine Herren, die parole weiss ich nicht" ("Gentlemen, I don't know the password."). They thought that I was a partisan and aimed their weapons at me. I quickly blurted out my problem. Luckily, one of the soldiers had seen our truck and confirmed my story, so they led me off to their headquarters.

A German corporal who had been sitting by the telephone jumped to attention and barked, "Heil Hitler!" when he saw me dressed in the military uniform. I replied, "Grüsse Gott" to match my role in disguise. I asked the corporal to connect me with the Gestapo headquarters in Porkhov. He dialed and the call was answered by the Obersturmführer Greif. I reported to him about our accident and asked him to send us some oil. He promised help and ordered me to wait for it where I was. I replied, "Zum Befehl, Herr Obersturmführer!" ("Yes, Sir Obersturmführer") just as a German soldier would have.

My situation became quite precarious when a few German military men came into the room where I was waiting. One of them, a corporal, asked, "Woher sind Sie?" ("Where are you from?") I didn't know how to answer, so I said, "Raten Sie." ("You guess.") He said, "You sound like someone from around Köln." Well, if I admitted being from somewhere in Germany, I would have been caught lying, so I said, "No, I am from Riga." "Really!" he exclaimed, "And what are you doing here?" I explained that our unit was involved with construction projects in Porkhov and, in turn, I asked him what they were doing here. He replied that they were fighting partisans. "Where do they come from?"

I wondered out loud.

He arose from his chair, beckoned me, "Mensch! Komm mal hier!" ("Man, come here!") He opened the door leading to the adjacent room, and I saw the bodies of a few dead German soldiers on the floor. I repeated my question about the partisans. He led me to the window, handed me his binoculars and pointed with his finger toward a village on a hill. "That's where they come from, the village of Kozenogovo." I continued to display my ignorance by exclaiming, "How do they dare to raid the area of your garrison?" but I was thinking to myself that I now had the best confirmation of Kozenogovo's reputation.

At that moment, I heard a motorcycle outside the house—the oil delivery for my truck. I bade the Germans farewell, hopped on the bike, and was taken to our truck in the forest. After Pudan filled the engine with oil, we picked up the timber and returned to Porkhov by nightfall.

I told Sheinkman and Zalmanson about my adventure that day—they could hardly believe how outrageous it was, but it did enforce our determination to escape. We had only to work out specific plans, but the events that followed impelled us to accelerate our strategy.

Within about a week after my forest adventure, a man from our group, Mendelevich, disappeared. He was a shoemaker from Lithuania and older than most of us. He used to talk about fleeing before it would be too late. The Germans were inquiring about him—a sure sign of coming reprisals.

On the day after Mendelevich's disappearance, Obersturmführer

From the memoirs of Mordukh "Monia" Gleser. Transcribed by Max Michelson. Translated by Leonid Pukshansky. In the last installment, Gleser was sent from the Riga Ghetto, where he smuggled arms for the resistance, to a work detail in Porkhov.

Greif and several SS soldiers walked into our barracks early in the morning and announced that some of us would be returned to Riga. Zalmanson and I got very nervous (Sheinkman was out on a job) because our escape plans would be ruined if we were selected for the transfer.

Greif pulled a list from his pocket and read off about twenty names; Zalmanson, Sheinkman, eight craftsmen, and I were not named. What a relief! The designated individuals were mostly the older ones who lacked trade skills.

Greif ordered all Jews to pack their belongings. We asked the departing comrades to give our greetings to our relatives and friends in Riga, wished them luck, and they boarded a truck waiting for them with SS guards on it. Those of us who stayed were marched from the barracks to the Gestapo building where we were put into a single room on the ground floor. We were not sent to work that day.

Our hearts were heavy with worry about the fate of the comrades who were taken and what lay ahead for us and, alas, our premonitions were sound. The truck with the SS guards returned in less than three hours—much too soon to have made a round trip to Riga. The Jews were not there, but their belongings were. There could be no doubt that the Jews from the truck had been killed, and the same fate was awaiting us in the not-too-distant future.

We related the events of the day

MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART III:

continued from previous page

to Sheinkman when he returned from his work shift, and the three of us, Sheinkman, Zalmanson, and I, agreed that our only chance of survival was to flee as soon as possible. We decided to keep our decision secret from the rest of the Jews, as they had previously refused to consider an escape anyway.

We doubled our precautions lest we raise suspicions among the Germans, the guards, and our fellow Jews. Three or four weeks passed, and it was now early October, 1943.

One day, Obersturmführer Greif ordered me to get a helper and go to unload coal from a railroad car that was located about two kilometers from Porkhov. I thought immediately about getting Sheinkman and Zalmanson and fleeing, but Zalmanson was on a different job. I dropped the idea, and only Sheinkman and I went to the railroad. When we came back to the square completely covered in coal dust, Greif started laughing, "You look like real niggers!"

That gave me an idea to ask Greif for his permission for us to go to the Russian bathhouse on the opposite bank of the river. He looked at me suspiciously and said, "Remember, Walter (which is what he called me for no logical reason), "Nobody has ever able to escape from us!" I assured him that such an idea had never occurred to me. He directed the guards at the gate to let us out and ordered us to be back in two hours, maximum. Sheinkman and I ran to our room, presumably to get soap and towels, but our true purpose was to get Zalmanson. Luckily, he was alone in the room, having just come back from work. We put on as many clothes as we could. I had my Soviet passport that

I'd managed to keep hidden, and each of us had a fake pass from the Gestapo.

We passed through the gate on the way out without incident and started walking toward the bridge. A young Russian woman, a known German collaborator, came toward us. She looked at us and asked, "Where are you going, little kikes?" I answered that we had been given permission to go to the bathhouse. When we crossed the 30-meters-long bridge and I looked back, she was still watching us to make sure that we really were going to the bathhouse. We entered the bathhouse's backyard, climbed over the back fence, and started walking quickly in the direction of the village of Rechitsa.

THE PERILOUS JOURNEY

To reach the road to Rechitsa, we had to cross another bridge in the opposite direction, this one smaller than the first and located about 1.5 kilometers from the bathhouse. We traversed the bridge and found ourselves in front of a German hospital. A German soldier standing by the hospital called us over, which scared us to death. Luckily, he suspected nothing; he only needed our help in loading a movie projector onto a truck. We did that and left him quickly.

We walked in the direction of Rechitsa at a fast clip, diving into a ditch when German vehicles passed us on the road. We reached the Yemelianovs' hut at dusk. I went in by myself lest we frighten them by coming in together. The whole family was there, including Gennady, who had been released by the Germans by then. The Yemelianovs understood immediately that I had escaped.

They became quite apprehensive when I told them there were two more escapees with me. No wonder the Yemelianovs were under suspicion by the local police. Nevertheless, Gennady took us up to the attic and brought us a meal and some additional food for our journey. When it became completely dark, we bade each other good-bye and Gennady led us to the woods.

We walked together for about seven kilometers and stopped. There Gennady gave us directions, embraced us, and then turned to go home. We were now on our own. The directions were not helpful and it wasn't long before we were quite lost. We continued to wander around until dawn when we caught sight of a village. Our thoughts were that this might be the first village that Gennady mentioned, but we were unsure and decided not to chance going there. This proved to be a wise decision because, as we learned later, Vlasov's soldiers happened to be there at that particular time.

We continued walking for another five or so kilometers, wound up in a bog area, and barely got out of it. Completely exhausted, we needed to rest and spent the night in the woods. Thanks to the Yemelianovs, we had enough food to sustain us. In the morning, we saw a hut in the distance, approached it carefully and found someone distilling hooch in the cellar. We got directions for Kozenogovo, thanked him, and proceeded on our way.

As we were walking along a path in the woods, we noticed some suspicious signs of recent traffic: a German ammo clip, a German first aid kit, etc. Evidently, someone



MY JOURNEY TO THE PARTISANS, PART III: Restitution

continued from previous page

dropped these things inadvertently, possibly the Germans. Sheinkman calmed me by pointing out that those things could have been from partisans who used some stuff captured from the Germans. Nevertheless, we increased our vigilance.

We soon came upon a village on a hill and agreed this could be Kozenogovo. We started climbing the hill and encountered a pair of peasants working by the road. I addressed the man, "Greetings, old man! Do you happen to know a woman named Turnova in your village?" He replied harshly, "Never heard such a name. Don't ask no more." As I turned around, I overheard the woman whisper to the man, "Be careful! They are the German spies!" I realized that their suspicions were probably prompted by my appearance, since I was dressed in a German military uniform. I removed my field-service cap, returned to the peasants, and introduced ourselves openly, "We are not spies, we are Jews who escaped from the concentration camp, and we are trying to join partisans."

They snapped, "We don't care who you are! We don't know partisans or the Turnova woman." Just at that moment, a woman came running from the village, shouting, "Run! The Germans are coming!" Indeed, we saw the Germans driving horse-drawn carts hard in our direction, and we ran for our lives. We were lucky that the Germans had just regular dray horses that couldn't run fast, so we were able to reach the woods before the Germans could catch us. With each of our steps, the ground in the woods was getting soggy and soggy until we had to stop at

the thick undergrowth that surrounded the bog. We had no more energy and feared getting stuck in the quagmire. It seemed we were doomed, caught between the quagmire and the Germans who would undoubtedly kill us. My friends were in despair, and Boris Sheinkman reproached me, "Monia, what have you gotten us into?"

We heard the clatter of hooves nearby, and then it stopped. A German voice pronounced, "Pass mal auf. Das muss nur eine Spähgruppe gewesen sein. Die ganze Bande muss tiefer in Sumpfe stecken." ("Look, this must be just a group of scouts. The whole gang must be farther into the bog area."). The Germans, not daring to pursue us farther into the bog, stayed at the edge of the woods until dusk and then moved out. We waited quietly until late into the evening. I declared to my comrades that I was going back to Kozenogovo, pulled myself out of the marsh little by little, and started again toward the village. My friends were doubtful about my plan but, lacking a better one, followed me.

We were climbing the hill when we saw a large group of villagers running downhill. Evidently, they had seen the Germans chasing us and then retreating. Now the villagers were eager to learn what had happened to us. They greeted us with sympathy, obviously understanding that we had escaped the Germans—although they had no idea that we were Jews. We informed them later.

We were brought into one of the huts where we were able to wash ourselves and clean the coal dust and marshy dirt from our clothes. A tall, slender woman entered the hut.

In our last issue, we published the letter Acting President David Silberman wrote to President Andris Berzins of Latvia. Margers Krams, foreign affairs adviser to the president, replied; his letter praises the ongoing dialogue with the Jewish community about the "last phase of restitution . . . of the remaining heirless property." David Silberman's reply follows:

April 2, 2014

Mr. Margers Krams
Foreign Affairs Adviser to the President
The Chancery of the President of Latvia
Ratslaukums 7
Riga, Latvia. LV-1900

Dear Mr. Krams,

Thank you for your letter of March 4, 2014. We, the Jewish Survivors of Latvia, appreciate the spirit in which it was written.

The rapid and imaginative ways that the government of Latvia has addressed the restitution of immovable properties belonging to private claimants has been exemplary. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the restitution of the communal properties rightfully belonging to the Jewish community.

Notwithstanding the fact that said properties legitimately and legally belong to the Jewish community, that issue has been permitted to be politicized. In the positive spirit of your letter, we, the Jewish Survivors of Latvia, trust that the government and parliament will, at last, make a determined effort to rectify this regrettable situation by doing what is morally right.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

David Silberman
Acting President

TO BE CONTINUED