



If I should forget...

Riva Lozanski-Bogolmonaja



Riva's sister Basya

I was born in Butrimantz. My sisters - Basya, Tsila and Nehama - were born in Butrimantz. Our mother, Dora Itskowitz, was also born in Butrimantz.

If you take the road from Butrimantz to Klidzenys, you will find two large mass graves. You should know that almost everyone who participated in these murders was also born in Butrimantz....

Our parents were married in 1911. My father, Dov Lozansky, was born in the Ukraine in a town near Kiev called Chipovich, but after the marriage, he moved to Lithuania.



Nehama

My youngest sister was named Nehama after our father's brother Nehemye. Nehemye lived in Kiev. He came to visit us once after a pogrom in Kiev. To his great misfortune, he had seen six of his cousins die. When he returned home, he died too. He was not even thirty.



Riva in high school

Nehama had a very strong will and she was really striving for education. We were all educated. Basya even completed high school; I went through seven years; and Tsila, six. Only the first four years of schooling were free. The rest cost quite a large sum of money.



Dov Lozansky

Our father said, "All the boxes in our store are empty. They stand there simply for appearance. It's shameful. Without money we cannot help with your education. I want Nehama to learn to sew."

Nehama did not listen.

"I won't live if I cannot go to school."

She even tried to poison herself. But still there was not enough money for her tuition.

Only the Lithuanian high school was free. In order to attend, however, it was necessary for the student to have a good knowledge

of Lithuanian, so Nehama decided to enroll in the fourth grade of the free Lithuanian elementary school.

The Jewish kids would follow her, yelling, "Goye! Why do you write on Saturday?"

The rabbi of the shtetl found out about Nehama and called to see her. The girl cried a lot and brought a note from the principal of the school saying that Nehama didn't write on Saturdays, but only listened. The rabbi accepted the note and let Nehama find secret ways to get to school.

A year passed and our family became even poorer. If Nehama had lived at home and gone to school in our own town, we would have had enough money, but the Lithuanian school was in Visokidvor. Our father could not afford this.

That was when Nehama decided to employ her cunning. The new school year had just begun, and the ten-year-old girl was getting restless. Father was preparing to go to his friend, a Polish woman named Rasohatski, to buy some apples for the winter. Rasohatski lived not too far from the school in Visokidvor. Nehama successfully convinced Father to allow her to go with him. No one noticed that she took along a bag containing her school uniform.

When they reached their destination, Father went to negotiate a price for the apples. Nehama remained in the wagon. When Father returned, she was gone.

Next to Rasohatski's house there was a lake in which carp were bred. Father, who started to panic in a while, called Rasohatski and told her that he thought Nehama had drowned. Rasohatski called her laborers, and everyone was frantically trying to figure out where Nehama could be.

People were dragging nets through the lake when one of the workers

said, "I saw a red-headed girl change into a school uniform in the garden. I think she was heading toward Visokidvor."

Father untied the horse from the wagon, jumped onto it and made it race as fast as it could. As soon as he reached the town, he discovered that some people had seen the red-headed girl. They also told him she had gone to see the principal of their high school.



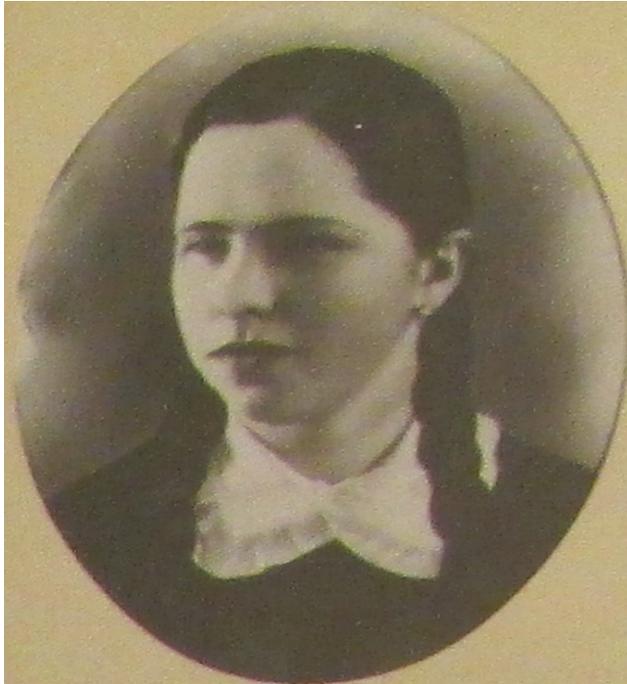
Dov Badash

Father couldn't speak Lithuanian. He couldn't speak Yiddish very well either. His native tongue was Russian. In order to communicate with the principal in Lithuanian, he was fortunate to locate a Butrimantz friend, Badash.

Nehama was sitting behind a desk, filling out an application. As soon as she saw her father, she ran toward him and started begging him to let her stay.

At the same time, the principal was saying to Badash, "I have never in my life seen a child who wants so much to learn that she's willing to work to compensate for housing and food."

The principal was so deeply touched by this girl that he allowed her to stay in his own house. Nehama, in turn, studied hard, helped the principal's two small children with their homework, and even made time to sew some pretty doilies and pillowcases for the owners of the house.



Nehama Lozanski

Within a year and a half Nehama started to rent an apartment from her new friend, Farber.

The tuition was waived for students who received very high grades. Father didn't have to pay for Nehama even once, and he never sent her any money to help with her living expenses. I still can't figure out how she managed, but every holiday she would walk almost sixteen miles to our house, laden with gifts.



Kaisiadorys high school

After Nehama completed four years of study, she moved to Kushidar in order to develop her education further. Here the fourteen-year-old Nehama organized an association that helped young Jews from poor families. She was funding it with some of her own money which she earned by doing various things, including tutoring and sewing clothes for these same children.



Basya and BenZion Dantsig

In 1940, under Soviet rule, Nehama was elected into Komsomol, the Communist youth organization. When our eldest sister, Basya (whom our parents forced into marrying BenZion Dantsig, a well-established man who sold lubricants and kerosene), was to be sent with her husband to Siberia,

Nehama petitioned for them. She went to the district committee.

"My sister is from a very low-income family," she said. "She was forced to marry mostly because of financial problems. She feels it's her responsibility to help her parents."



Basya and her Gordonist friends in Merkinė

As a result, Basya and her family remained in Kushidar. It would have been better if they had been sent away....



Gordon members

From the age of sixteen I was a member of Gordon, a Zionist organization that provided work for the youth. In our chapter they gave many lectures about Palestine and taught us Hebrew language and Jewish history. Gordonists learned traditional dances and frequently played ping-pong. There were special literary evenings as well as many concerts. We had about seventy members in our group, some twenty of whom emigrated to Palestine. I too had the opportunity to go, but I decided not to leave my family.



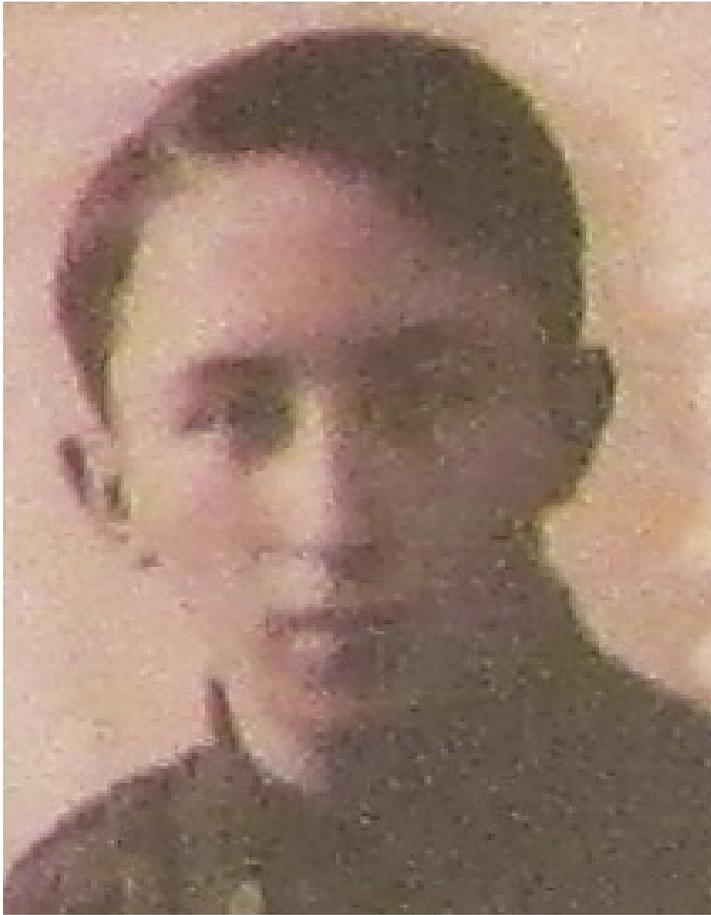
Peisach Rudnik

Our instructor, Peisach Rudnik, emigrated right before the war.



Hillel Sheinker

Most of the youth who went left the soggy swamps of Lithuania to turn the Palestinian desert into a blossoming garden. Hillel Sheinker, one of our Gordonists, died of sunstroke shortly after moving to Palestine.



Moshe-Dov Kabachnik

We were all born in Lithuania, but we knew that our true homeland was Palestine. We were not wanted here. The primary focus of Gordon was to prepare us to make aliyah. Another youth organization that worked in conjunction with us was Beitar, which included mainly older kids. There were about sixty members of Beitar. The leader was Moshe-Dov Kabachnik. He died in Kovno during the early days of the war.



Binyamin Boyarsky, Moshe Badash and other volunteer firemen

Just before the war a small group named Hashara was formed in Butrimantz. The leader was Binyamin Boyarsky. Hashara's goal was to train Jews to work the land. Usually the training lasted only until they received the documents permitting them to emigrate from the country.



Riva as a child

The Jews were not the only residents of Butrimantz. There were also large numbers of Lithuanians and Tatars. In nearby villages there were many Poles. We were all generally friendly and neighborly toward one another. Many Jews had friends who were of different nationalities. I remember, for instance, all sorts of people attending weddings. Among my father's close friends I recall Vaitkavichius and Ruskauskas, who later turned out to be willing assistants to our

destruction.



Butrimonts Jewish elementary school students celebrate the Purim festival. Director Dovas Vineckis stands at the right.

Many of the Lithuanians who lived in our town were able to speak Yiddish well. In the beginning of the 1930s, when hooligans from surrounding towns tried to create a pogrom, every person in Butrimantz stood up to stop it, whether they were Jews or not. The men got sticks, some even axes. To everybody's surprise, even Vinetsky, a director of a local Jewish school, went running down the street with a shovel in one hand, holding up his eyeglasses with the other. The villains were defeated that time. They ran away as far as they could, until the summer of 1941....

In June 1941 I was offered a job in a military retail store in Oran. They offered me an apartment too. I accepted. On June 18, a Wednesday, I returned to Butrimantz to pack my things, and the following Monday I was to start my job. But on Saturday, June 21, an officer came to our house.

"Pack your things immediately," he directed. "You're coming with us to Oran to help empty out a store."

My father was against it.

"I cannot allow her to go alone with those soldiers."

I was permitted to remain at home.

On Sunday morning my father left for Kushidar to find Nehama, but in an hour he came back, extremely distressed.

"The Germans are bombing Alyta!"

That day, not far from our town, a Russian plane was shot down. The injured pilot was able to escape by parachute.

At nine o'clock in the morning the Russian army started to crawl up to Vilna. Yankel Tsafnas' son, who was still going to school at the time, jumped into a car and drove off without saying farewell to anyone, escaping the claws of death.

My father was a lumberjack. He knew the forests around our shtetl, as well as some of the people who lived there. We would have been able to reach Russia before the retreating army. Some of our friends - Shimelewitz, our neighbor, and Gordonist Dov Shtukarewitz - came to our house, trying to convince my father.

"We'll gather our families and take the shortcut through the forests to Russia. Will you be our guide?"

Father refused. "Have you ever seen a Jew who would disregard his own children and think only of himself?" he replied. "Three of my daughters are not with me at this time. I'm not going anywhere without them."



A member of the Sheinker family

We went to seek advice from the relatives of Tevie Sheinker, my sister Tsila's husband. The Sheinkers were wealthy and highly educated.

"We are not much interested in politics," they told us. "We farm our own land and always will. No one will interfere with us."

Many people decided to hide in the forests for three or four days in the hope that the Russian tanks would come and expel the Germans. We too started to get our things together and stack them on a wagon.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when, as if parading, without a single bullet shot, a column of German troops marched through

Butrimantz.

Everyone was frozen with terror.

We took our valuables, including a cow, and left with our neighbors, Shilar and her five children. Shilar's husband had been sentenced to prison under Smeton's rule, and eventually died there. Also in our group was the family of Komsomol member Ratsin and a young Lithuanian woman named Kaminsken who had moved to Butrimantz with her Communist husband after the establishment of Soviet power in Lithuania.

We traveled a short distance into the forest but did not hide. After leaving our wagon by the side of the road, we lit a fire, fed the children and waited.

At nine o'clock that night many motorcyclists with white patches on their sleeves appeared in Butrimantz. On entering each Lithuanian and Polish home, they warned everyone not to allow Jews to hide on their property.

One of the Germans noticed us, rode by fairly close, and shouted loudly for us to go home.

We weren't afraid of our own neighbors. In time of peace we didn't feel any antisemitism. Fish, as we all know, rots from the head, and Smeton was a friend to the Jews. There were, however, individual antisemites.

Lebanauskas came running by not far from where we were stationed.

"Stay away from Jews, Kaminsken," he warned the Lithuanian woman among us. "You'll get yourself killed! Come to our house."

Kaminsken left. All of a sudden we heard gunshots and voices hollering, "You should have known better than to marry your Communist husband!"

Kaminsken dropped all her things and ran to hide in the woods. She didn't stay with us from then on. She returned to her native village in the Daug region.

Once again we gathered all our possessions and went farther away, moving in the direction of Ratsin's residence and our Polish friend Botkewicz. We had other friends in the same vicinity, including Rasohatski, whose grandparents had been friends of our grandparents.

Botkewicz led the eleven of us into the small shack outside his house. That night the local Jews and Poles met beside this hut. They sat there and talked.

At about midnight Rasohatski's sons returned from Butrimantz.

"They are forbidding us to allow Jews in our houses and have threatened to burn them down if we don't obey," they warned.

"You understand yourself, of course." Botkewicz sounded very depressed. "I'm sorry but I can't let you stay here."

In the morning he fed us and took any valuables Father wanted him to save for us. They said farewell to each other, hugged and cried.

We then had no place to go but home. On the way we encountered numerous tanks and soldiers.

As we were heading toward our neighborhood, we met Nehama. Her last day in her final grade in high school was June 20, and the war had caught her on her way home. The Russians had invited her to go with them, but she wanted to be with her parents.

On the evening of June 22 everything was closed in Butrimantz. The Lithuanians started breaking into stores and stealing anything they

could get their hands on.

Nehama took a place in line because she wanted to find out if people still remembered her. Now she spoke Lithuanian very well, and in addition to that, she had light hair. They didn't recognize her, and they gave her a pair of shoes. That was when she decided to go find us.

Father stopped the wagon before entering town and went to see if any of the Jews had returned. That day most Jews were hiding in the homes of their Lithuanian or Polish friends. But it soon became clear that all of them would have to leave, many without their belongings. They weren't just told to go home, but were relieved of their possessions. This was the first organized crime against the Jews.

We rode down empty streets. Windows, doors and any other entrances to the houses were locked. Most of the Jews decided not to go into their houses but instead to hide in their yards.

There weren't any Germans around. Lithuanian "activists" were governing the place. These activists were members of the "Front of the Lithuanian Activists," an organization whose goal was to free Lithuania from Communists and Russians. During Soviet rule in Lithuania in 1940-1941 the "Front" was an underground organization. At the beginning of the war the activists took care of organizing things for the Germans, and later the Germans mobilized many of them into police. Special military units were formed from the activists - groups who destroyed Jews. The distinguishing mark of the activists was the white patches they wore on their sleeves.

Among the activists were Savitscas, the teacher; Pelyonis, who under Smeton's power had been the chief of police; Proshkus, Joseliunas and Potinskas from Gerulay; Asakavichius from Plasauninkay; Urbanavichius; Stoshkus; the Cosco brothers and Strumskis from Butrimantz; Sinauskas, former Communist from Klidzenys.... But who can list them all?

Their first victim was a local simpleton, Shimon Nagin. Joseliunas and a policeman dragged him into the yard of the butter factory and killed him.

For two whole days we sat in the fields and didn't appear in the streets at all. Tsila joined us. She and her husband, Tevie, had just returned home from helping some Russians evacuate.

Jews were driven out of the better homes in the center of our town. My father's former so-called friends Ruskauskas and Vaitkavichius posted big signs on all the other Jewish houses, indicating in both Lithuanian and German that Jews lived there. Activists went to these houses, telling the Jews that they were not allowed to walk on sidewalks or leave the town, that they must wear yellow stars, and that they could only walk the streets between eight o'clock in the morning and six o'clock at night.

Potinskas announced to everyone, "I can kill anyone without being punished for it."

The one store open to Jews was operating only during certain hours. We knew that unwarranted punishment and beatings were on the way. Many people in our town were already going hungry. My family was saved only by our cow and garden.

Zlata Reznik was the first one to convince me to go to the store that was open to Jews. I agreed. It's not as frightening when you go with someone. We went barefoot. During this time Jews were forbidden to wear shoes in Butrimantz.

When we arrived, there was already a waiting line for the rotten fish that was being sold. The clerk, Koskenija, was scandalous.

"My oh my, so many kikes at once! Where did Joseliunas go? I'm sure he'd love to have some fun with you girls!"

We became frightened and ran away.

Jews were trading their scarce food with one another. Their supplies were very low. We shared our cow's milk, which was badly needed by our neighbor's children, and some cucumbers from our garden.

My father spoke sorrowfully, "It's very sad to see my former friends behave like this. I've spent my whole life with them, and now they rob my house and laugh, if not spit, in my face."

"Don't make me stay here," Nehama said. "I want to go where people don't know me. I don't look like a Jew. I'll teach children or something. I managed on my own when I was small. I can surely take care of myself now."

I convinced her not to leave.

"What about us? You know Lithuanian so well and you're so pretty. Even when enemies look at you, they start speaking kinder words. What would happen to Father? You know he doesn't speak any Lithuanian."

By persuading my sister Nehama not to leave, I myself put her to death. I still cannot forgive myself for that....

On the seventh day of occupation all the remaining Communists, teachers and educated and respected men were arrested, and most of them were put in prison. Some were released. The rumor was that only those cooperating with the Russians were held and sent to work in Alyta.

It was true. They were really sent to Alyta, but not to work. They were sent there to be shot. A few were released on the way there. However, they were taken back in a week. No one ever saw them again.

Through these temporarily released people we heard about the death of the teacher Arpahsander. His legs were aching. His friends Berl Vinetsky and Litvin were supporting him by his arms. Finally, the guards grew tired of this. They pulled the teacher out of the crowd and shot him.

A few days later a large convoy of Russian POWs was taken through Alyta. They were barefoot and naked. They were severely beaten. All the guards were Lithuanian activists; none of them were German.

Among the prisoners were some of our friends, Jewish Communists from Anushishok. The prisoners were stopped to rest near the butter factory.

"If you wish, you may bring them water and bread," said one of the guards.

A twelve-year-old Lithuanian boy, Borisas, brought a bucket of water and a few loaves of bread. An old Jewish woman, Baile Shoufer, also brought them bread. Her husband and children had been killed several days earlier; they were

Communists. The guards knocked out the old woman's teeth and drove her together with the others.... They put a bullet in her head before they left town.

The sight of prisoners being driven through the town was quite common. They looked dreadful.

The activists once caught a Russian fugitive dressed in peasants' clothing. They cut out his tongue and set him free in the town. They wanted to see who would dare to feed him.

Nehama took a bucket, put a piece of bread in it and left it by the well. The poor man saw her, understood everything, and picked up

the food. Toward evening Joseliunas and his assistants took their prisoner outside of town and ordered him to dig a big hole. They buried him alive.



Shoshana Mazovsky, standing, with friends

Jews from Poon were brought to the Butrimantz ghetto. Among them was Mother's sister Mazovsky and her husband, daughter Shoshana, and her twin grandchildren.



Rachel Mazovsky

The Mazovskys had five children in all. Two of them - their son Monyas and daughter Rachel - left for Palestine prior to the war. The Mazovskys also had twins, Mendel and Eliahu, who were over six feet tall. Eliahu was recruited into the Lithuanian army. He served in Oran. Most of the soldiers deserted after hearing about the war. Together with a group of fleeing Lithuanian soldiers, Eliahu headed for home. He was killed by them near his house. Eliahu was twenty years old.

In June 1941 Mendel married Roza, an orphan who had been brought up by a church pastor named Radziavichius. The clergyman took a substantial portion of Mazovsky's property and helped hide Mendel and his wife. Radziavichius was an active Shaulist member. In fact, it was he who had organized the Shaulist group, whose members willingly shot Jews on command. However, Radziavichius hid Mendel, Roza and their two children born to them while in hiding until the end of the occupation. He fed them with whatever he had. At night Mendel would go to his Lithuanian friend Baranauskas to ask for food.

Baranauskas was killed by hooligans after the war. Mendel and his wife and children were killed by the clergyman himself, either because he was afraid that the Jews would expose his alliance with the Shaulist coalition or because he didn't want to part with everything he had acquired from these people. Along with Bolis Narkevichius and Jonas Kasparavichius, the clergyman Radziavichius hacked the poor family to death. The three murderers split their heads open with axes while they were sleeping. It happened three days before the city was liberated. Pastor Radziavichius' kitchen maid had witnessed the massacre. She told me about it three years later.

Shoshana married Itzhak Kushelewitz from Eznasa. They loved each other very dearly. On June 22 Eznasa's activists dragged away Communist Kushelewitz to be shot. Shoshana, carrying her six-month-old twins, ran after them. Itzhak was brought to the Jewish cemetery, set beside a grave and shot in front of his wife and babies. Shortly afterward, they returned Itzhak's jacket and boots to his widow.

Shoshana put on the clothing. She ran to a nearby lake and jumped into the water with her children. She was rescued by a policeman who happened to be passing by. After that, Shoshana went to live with her parents in Poon. The poor woman went insane. She acted ecstatic to have her husband's clothing. She kept on wearing his jacket and boots, and she kept on laughing....

Mazovsky's sister, taken to compensate for one of the fallen German soldiers, was shot in Allots during the first days of the war. Mazovsky begged the rabbi to allow him to kill himself. "What is there for me to live for?"

By this time Leonardas Kaspariunas had been appointed chief of police. He was not known in Butrimantz. People said that under Soviet power he had been the accountant for the Alyta food service as well as a member of the Communist Party. In independent Lithuania he had been a commander in the army.

Butrimantz literally died out. The Jews were in hiding. The farmers from surrounding villages remained at home. The smaugiks confiscated anything of value they could find. (Smaugiks were members of special troops, much like storm troopers, formed from the activists. The Jews and many Lithuanians called them smaugiks, which in Russian means "to take one by the throat and strangle him.")



June 24, 1941



June 24, 1941

June 24, 1941



The town became a resting site for the German troops. For their amusement they cut off old men's beards. They forced the rabbi to burn his Torah and to break windows in the synagogue. Balchunas, a Lithuanian Communist, hid one of the scrolls and gave it to me after the war. It is still in my possession.



June 24, 1941

One day all the Jews were instructed to gather in the town square at eight o'clock the following morning. We all appeared in front of Dvogovsky's building, the only two-story structure in Butrimantz. Kaspariunas had turned it into the city hall.

I still cannot comprehend how such an educated man could command a bunch of bandits and could steal and kill....

Surrounded by policemen, the oppressed, misled Jews lamented, "The people with whom we have lived as neighbors for decades now

run into our homes, strip us naked and shoot us...."

In the evening there appeared the commandant of the German forces, his next-in-command, and a few soldiers with dogs. They read their announcement in two languages, German and Lithuanian:

"Lazy Jews never worked a day. They don't even know how to work. They must learn from the hard-working people of Lithuania.

Beginning tomorrow the Jewish youth shall start working for free for their Lithuanian masters. They should act thankful that they will not have to pay for such an opportunity to educate themselves."

I knew the German language. I had studied it in school and had read many books in German. Besides, it is very similar to Yiddish. I understood every word before they translated it into Lithuanian.

"What can the Lithuanians teach us?" I asked a nearby officer in German. "I've worked since I was a little girl. Look at my hands."

The commandant smiled. "Very good then. Since you already know how to work, you'll be my translator."

Many farmers from the various neighboring villages arrived. Activists divided up the youth evenly into work units and assigned them to the farmers.

"Leave right now. Tomorrow you'll start working."

I regretted having opened my mouth and tried to sneak away with the others who were going home, but the officer saw me.

"Are you deaf? I told you to be my translator."

I was brought into the yard of the Sheinkers' house, where the commandant was staying. My frightened mother remained nearby. I refused to enter the house.

"Mr. Commandant, a young lady cannot stay in the same room with

the soldiers. Please appoint me to another job."

An aide brought a chair for the commandant. The officer sat down.

"Do you like German rituals and customs?"

"We Jews don't have any rights, sir. I can't tell the truth, and I don't want to lie. I would rather not answer your question."

"I give you my word that nothing bad will happen to you. I want to know what you think."

"You sorted people out. Before your troops invaded Butrimantz, the only thing sorted here was the flour. People were judged by their level of achievement in life, by their level of education. The blood is all the same whether it's mine or yours."

The commandant asked other questions. I replied to them. And then very quietly, as if to himself, he said, "At home in Germany I have a daughter your age. I would be happy if she turned out like you."

Then he added, "Tomorrow at ten we have a meeting with the Lithuanians. Those fools can't understand German. I want you to translate for me, both orally and in writing."

On our way home my mother and I saw German soldiers with dogs ferret out Jews hiding in yards. They forced people to open doors to their homes. They were checking everywhere for Jews.

When I arrived home, my sister and I started to wash up. As I was changing my clothes, the front door opened and one of the commandant's aides entered. I grabbed a robe and wrapped it around myself.

"Please don't be afraid," the German said quietly. "I'm ashamed of our behavior."



Riva's mother Dora

My mother invited him to our table and treated him to whatever we had - bread and milk.

The German sat down but said, "I want you to eat some of it yourself first."

"Are you afraid that we'll poison you?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, but I must do this during times of war."

After he ate he started to tell me about himself. His name was Hans Yohaim Pliushka. He was twenty-nine years old and married.

"The commandant asked you to come to the meeting at ten o'clock tomorrow," he said. "Don't go without me. If he tries to touch you, I'll shoot him. We are moving out of here fairly soon. I'll finish him off anyway - he's a wicked person."

In the morning, looking through my window, I saw someone in a German uniform hop over the fence into our yard. We jumped up from our beds, frightened. Our lives were full of fear, and it was very hard to get used to it. The man was Pliushka, carrying a bag under his arm.

"You can go now. I'll be nearby. If anything happens, scream."

He gave my mother the bag containing some food.

"I'll try to find more food for you," Pliushka said. "Just keep quiet. Otherwise, there'll be a lot of trouble for you and me."

In about ten minutes I saw him near the city hall building where the meeting was scheduled to take place. The square was full of horses that were brought from surrounding areas.

I was told to write notes in both German and Lithuanian, addressed to the owners of the horses. The commandant distributed these notes personally. The farmers, most of whom I knew very well, refrained from looking into my eyes.

The commandant told me to come and work for him every day. There were notes and conversations of Germans and Lithuanians that needed daily attention.

The following day Pliushka came again.

"Don't go to the commandant," he said to me. "If you'll be needed, I'll come and get you. Also, none of you should even go outside. The Lithuanians have the right to kill you. If you need to buy anything

from the store, tell me and I'll bring it."

"There's a rumor that the Jews are getting slaughtered," I said. "Is that true?"

Pliushka didn't say anything except, "You should hide and be very careful. I was in Poland, and I saw many Jews suffering. Hide as well as you can. Our army is planning to take Moscow in only two weeks. I don't really believe that. It's very likely that all of us here are going to be forced to fight. It would be really bad for you then...."

Soon he came again for the last time, bringing six pounds of butter and a piece of soap.

"We just received an order," he told us. "Tonight we have to go and join the battle. If I ride by your house singing, you'll know that Moscow was not taken. Go and hide now because the Lithuanians are going to do everything they can to destroy you."

When he said goodbye to us, he started to cry.

We didn't sleep that night. At three o'clock in the morning we heard the roar of engines and looked out of our windows. Pliushka, sitting atop one of the vehicles, was singing loudly.

In the morning it all became clear: the Germans were forced out.

"All Jews must stay at home," we were told. "No one is allowed to leave. On August 20 everyone from fifteen to sixty years of age must go to the square. If you don't, you'll get shot."

There were very few people who dared to ignore the order. Nehama was afraid someone would remember that she had been in the Komsomol.

Miliunsky, a shoemaker, who was the leader of the ghetto, said, "The

smaugiks know everyone who fed any of the Russian prisoners and everyone who spoke at Russian gatherings."

Early in the morning he came to our house.

"Everyone must go. If Nehama doesn't show up, we'll shoot the rabbi. We know she's here with you."

By using the word "we," he was referring to the executioners.



Nehama came down from the attic.

"No one needs to get shot because of me. Here I am. Shoot if you wish...."

From the balcony of the two-story building, Leonardas Kaspariunas, chief of police, divided the large crowd that had gathered since early morning. It was one o'clock in the afternoon. Police surrounded the square. Kaspariunas yelled out names of the youth, and they stepped aside.

Our surname was called.

"Is Nehama here?"

My sister took a step forward. They led her away. She blew us a kiss and yelled, "Riva! They are going to kill me today. Please save my high school graduation certificate and my uniform. I gave my life away for them."



Binyamin Boyarsky

The rest I remember only vaguely. About a hundred young people were selected. Among them was Binyamin Boyarsky, the organizer of Hashara. The others were set free.

The youth were taken into the inner yard of the city hall. Pavka Sobolevsky inspected everyone, took away rings the girls wore and removed their earrings as well. The youngsters thought they were going to work in Alyta.



Kabachnik and Slobodsky family home



Estera Kabachnik



Libe Leja Kabachnik



Dov Slobodsky



Meir-Nohem Kabachnik

Again, a few of the Jews were set free. Nehama asked one of them to tell her boyfriend, Meir-Nohem Kabachnik (nephew of Dov Slobodsky), the following: "I saved your ring. With it I shall die...."

After the war, an Alyta Jew, Itzhak Lifshitz, who later moved to Israel, remembered:

"I, along with a few other Alyta Jews, was sent to a forest to dig holes. We were told to step aside when we were done. A crowd of naked, beaten-up and tortured people were forced to stand in front of the holes. These were Jews from Butrimantz, and I knew every single one of them. They were all shot down at the same time. Among them there stood Nehama...."

Back in Butrimantz no one knew what had happened. In the morning everyone was sent to work. Neighbors and friends tried to calm people down, following the executioners' instructions.

"Don't panic. They are all alive. We saw them ourselves."

Gitsavichius came to me and said, "Your sister is working on a road with the other POWs. They're all alive and well and have plenty of food."

That night my mother and I went to the Parankava village to see Volkovichiene, Nehama's high school teacher. It was thirty miles there and back. We could smell that something was wrong. We offered the teacher a lot of money and begged her to get Nehama out of Alyta. She promised to help but didn't take any money from us. We didn't believe her, and we were right: there was nothing she could do.



My sister Tsila went to Kaspariunas. This was very dangerous. If he would have liked her, he wouldn't have let her go. He already had six girls in his house.

Kaspariunas refused. "Your sister was one of the Komsomol organizers in her school and spoke at many meetings. She deserves this."

The next night we decided to go to Liutsius Konstantinowicz, a Pole who was also a teacher at the same high school. Our mothers were good friends. We hoped that he, an educated and respected man, would help us.

Konstantinowicz did not hesitate to tell us that Nehama had been killed.

"Don't look for her any further," he said. "The youth of this town were finished off. Nehama was shot by Proshkus from Gerulay."

For some reason we believed him right away.

The Jews of Butrimantz suspected that a tragedy had occurred. They wandered around dirty and neglected.

"We can't live like this!" they often yelled to each other. "We must hope for the best!"

Men with white patches on their sleeves circulated rumors that everything was well.

When everyone's hopes were down, there was always someone, like an old lady, running around and telling people, "Don't believe anything you hear! I just spoke to my Lithuanian friend and he said everyone is alive and healthy."

And once again the people would start wondering.

My father did not want to live without Nehama. His face was bloated, his eyes bloodshot. His youngest daughter was the pride of the family.

Back in June our friends Nachum Kassel, his daughter Batya and son Meyer had moved in with us. They were chased out of their house in the center of town. We spent those August nights together. None of us could sleep, and we talked until sunrise. To us every clap of thunder was a bomb exploding. Whenever we heard the sound of an engine, we prayed that it was the Russian army coming to save us.

On the night of August 21 our town lit up with projector lights. Someone came knocking at our door. I jumped out of bed and, wearing only my pajamas, ran to the window to see who it was.

"Who is it?" I called.

"Open the door immediately," someone growled. "Police!"

"Hold on. I'm getting dressed."

"Open the door! We've seen it all tonight."

Kaspariunas, Erushavichius, Joneika and Stoshkus ran into our house. With them was Miliunsky, the ghetto leader.

Kaspariunas took a seat. The rest of them ordered the men in our house to face the wall.

"Put anything of value on the table!"

A rifle was pressed against my chest.

"Open the dresser!"

I gave them the keys.

The policemen emptied the dresser and stuffed anything they desired into their bags. Then they searched everyone individually. They found Batya's money sewn into her jacket. They placed her next to the wall along with the men. Then they were all led out of the house. They were in their nightclothes and were not even allowed to get dressed.

My mother and I started to pack food for them, but Kaspariunas laughed.

"A piece of bread will be enough for them."

"They're not leaving Butrimantz," Miliunsky added. "You'll be able to visit them tomorrow."

From our porch we could see the Badash family being taken out of their house.

When the policemen left, I went to look for my mother. She was lying on the floor in the bedroom, unconscious. I revived her, then went out to check on what was happening in our neighborhood.



Dvora Volpiansky

I met Dvora Volpiansky. She was crying loudly. She had been left alone. Her three brothers had been taken away. The same was true for the rest of the town. All the men were gone.

I heard a frightening cry and turned around. Joseliunas was dragging

Shimelewitz down the road by his feet. Bleeding profusely, Shimelewitz was yelling, “Nekome!” ("Vengeance!")

Joseliunas hauled him to the yard next to the prison. He threw him into a previously dug hole and buried him alive.



Rabbi Vitkind

The arrested people, a hundred men and fifteen women, were brought to the prison yard. Rabbi Vitkind had his beard torn out. All were

stripped naked, their hands were tied with wires, and they were walked to Alyta. My mother and I followed.

On the wagon at the rear of the crowd sat the injured people and the elderly. My mother and our neighbor Pitelewitz ran up to the wagon to give them some bread. My mother was struck with a horse whip on her head. I helped her get up and tried to calm her, but she didn't hear me. She had gone deaf in one ear.

Our rabbi had a tall cylinder-shaped hat on his head. The police had made him and a shoemaker exchange hats. This gave them great joy and delight as they laughed heartily.

We returned home. Later we learned about the fate of our dear ones. Alyta already had holes in the ground for these people.

Before they were shot, they were forced to write letters back home claiming they needed more bread and clothes. We received such a letter, delivered by the policeman Vaitkavichius, who was an old friend of Father. It requested cigarettes, clothing and food.

"You can send a package to your father if you like," Vaitkavichius said. "I'll take it to him."

A group of neighbors gathered from nowhere and asked if they could send something with him as well. Vaitkavichius did not refuse. He accepted everything people gave him - money, food and many other things - and he took the offerings directly to his house. On his next visit to Butrimantz, Vaitkavichius brought us all thank-you notes.

Uhlyavichius, another policeman, was busy doing the same thing, promising to deliver articles to people long since buried in the mass grave.

We had believed Vaitkavichius when he told us that our family members were still alive, and we greatly appreciated his gestures.

Many of us even hid much of our belongings at his place.

That night Juozas Asakavichius took Aron Kuts out of his house and shot him. Since Kuts's sister cooked for Kaspariunas, he allowed her to discreetly bury her brother in the Jewish cemetery at night.

The following morning, in the presence of everyone in the town, they arrested Asakavichius for trying to rule the town himself - a demonstration of their sense of justice. Within two hours, however, he was roving the streets again.

The only Jews left in Butrimantz were the helpless women, children and the aged. No one tried to resist the forces. All quietly awaited their time to die. We, of course, knew that something terrible was going on, but had trouble believing it.

A few Butrimantz Jews had been able to hide successfully. Among them were my sister Tsila and her husband, Tevie Sheinker. They had found safety in Tevie's parents' house, which was very large; it had eight rooms. The youth slept at the far end of the house, close to the rear exit. When the police came, they were able to escape into the yard and hide. But there were very few such people. Most went numb from constant terror.

There was no one left for the Germans to gather into the labor force. On August 29 about seventy Jews were brought from Poon to Butrimantz. They were given temporary shelter.

The following morning the Germans announced their orders. "Everyone must assemble in the town square. You will be given better homes on Klidzenys Street. Anyone not complying will be left without a place to live."

Tsila, Tevie and I went to hide in the potato fields.

Mother protested. "My friend Dobl Badash lived through a very

dangerous operation on her skull just before the war," she said. "She and her little daughter are the only ones alive from their whole family. They might be left without a home. I must help her move."

Mother went to the square with Badash. Again the police surrounded the people and selected the ones destined for Alyta. All the youth from Poon were chosen, along with some people from our town - those who had been singled out by the Lithuanians.

Vaitkavichiene pointed her finger at my mother.

This crowd, like the ones before, was taken into the interior yard of the two-story building. The people remained there until it grew dark.

At midnight the officials received them in pairs. There were horrible screams and protests. Later my mother told me what she had seen.

"Jews were thrown to the ground and had their heads kicked. They were folded in half and tied up with wires."

Moshe-Egudu Mazovsky was injured so seriously that his own mother didn't recognize him.

As Moshe Goldberg was dragged outside the yard, he was screaming, "Bastards, what are you doing? I spent my whole life working together with you. We were friends. Why do I deserve to be tortured like this before my death?" He was shoved into the crowd with the rest of them.



Rabbi Vitkind with his two sons



Rebecca Vitkind, the rabbi's wife



Mira and Golda Vitkind

The rabbi's two daughters, Mira and Golda Vitkind, were brought out. The girls tried to cover themselves as best they could with a few kerchiefs. Joseliunas grabbed their kerchiefs and pushed them off the porch completely naked.

My mother was able to escape. She climbed over the fence when the guards weren't looking.

The people who couldn't walk were thrown onto wagons. The rest were organized into columns and walked out of Butrimantz.

When everyone had left, my mother crept out of the field where she had been hiding and headed toward home.

Tsila, Tevie and I had spent that whole day in the Sheinkers' yard and waited for our mothers to return.

Chaya Sheinker came home in the evening.

"They have already selected the people bound for Alyta. We should go to the ghetto."

She didn't say anything about my mother and I was afraid to ask. I could feel that something was wrong.

Tsila and Tevie went to hide with their relatives in another village. I headed for the ghetto to look for my mother.

Feiga Yanovitsky, a friend whom I met on the way, said, "Your mother was taken."

Which meant Alyta...certain death....

When I heard this, I vowed to find my mother and not to leave her, whatever happened. Feiga tried to stop me, but I was far too determined.

Near the synagogue, where the police stored the stolen goods, a pastor was loading furniture onto a long wagon.

"Do clergy steal as well?" I asked a Jewish woman standing next to me.

"Are you crazy!" she answered. "You think these people steal? He's just saving it for us. He'll return it. He does believe in God, you know!"

The pastor didn't use the stolen goods very long. Right after the war he was put in jail, and his home was given to an old couple. The furniture suited them well.

I tried to leave the ghetto, but the guards wouldn't let me. I ran to Miliunsky's house, but no one was home. On a dresser in his house I saw a heap of packages, belongings and letters that were dated August 20. That was the day the youth of Butrimantz had been taken

to Alyta.

Miliunsky had offered to deliver anything which the relatives wanted to send. People parted with their most valued possessions. Among the items was Batya's watch.

I wanted to run away from there but met the owner on my way out. I fell to my knees, begging him to tell me where my mother was. Miliunsky was so drunk that he had no idea what I was talking about.

I went over to Leah Pertzikowitz. Her husband Itzhak had been taken along with my mother. Her children - Koppel, Israel, Feivel, Sara, Malka, Sonya and Gita - had already been killed, except for one son, Zalman, who was brought to Germany by accident. He was freed by Americans and later moved to Israel.

"Yesterday in Yezna all the Jews were destroyed," Leah said. "Our fate is the same. You can't help your mother and you'll only get killed. Don't go to Miliunsky anymore."

From Leah's house I went over to the Shevahs, the musicians. Twenty families were gathered in there. Each one of them had only one or two members left: the result of several mass actions that had already occurred against the Jews. There wasn't any room for me, however, as the place was packed. The floor was crowded with pots, candleholders and pillows.

Mrs. Shevah, the only one left alive in the family except for the elders, came out to see who it was.

"We can't say no," she said. "Where will she go? I'll share the bed with her myself."

I climbed onto the bed and lay down. All I could see was an image of my mother, desperate, lonely and awaiting death.

Suddenly, a knock came at the door.

"Is there a young lady hiding in there?"

Miliunsky had sobered up and realized that he had seen me.

One of the older Shevahs got an idea and told me to lie down under his bed sheets, piled a lot of stuff on top and lay down on it all.

Miliunsky opened the door and marched into the room, which smelled of twenty perspiring bodies. He glanced around quickly and left the house.

I couldn't sleep and sat down on the window sill. Everything was quiet.

In the morning there was a light tap on the window. I opened the door to find Itsik Pertzikowitz.

"Don't cry, daughter. Your mother and I ran away. Go on, run now. You'll find her in one of the neighborhood yards."

The sun had risen and there weren't any policemen in sight. I made my way home through the fields. I found my mother in our backyard, her hair down, an insane look in her eyes. I started to cry and tried to shake her out of it. She didn't say anything. I took her hand in mine, like a child's, and walked her over to the ghetto.

We found safety in the house of Rashl, the servant of the rabbi. I decided we couldn't remain there for long and we ran to hide in the woods. The chances of being able to live through this, however, weren't much greater out there....

After the war I found out that eighty Jews had run away, but only ten had survived....

We had a shortage of food, but we traded our possessions for it. I gathered up anything of value we had left after the thefts and hid it in Rashl's attic.

My mother and I went around the town trying to find worthy Poles to whom to entrust our belongings. Some people came to our house to offer their services.

"Leave the things with me. I'll give them back to you after the war."

They knew what awaited us....

If you gave everything to one person, you'd be turned over to the authorities: everyone was aware of that. We decided to distribute things among various people. Maybe someone would be honorable enough to actually save some of our belongings.

The pastor from Poon came to Butrimantz with his lover, Zosei. They went to the Mazovskys' house and then to ours.

"Your Aunt Mazovsky trusted me and gave me all her possessions. You should do the same. I'll save it for you."

"We don't need anything. They'll kill us anyway. We would be grateful if you'd save my mother and me."

The pastor didn't answer. He packed his cart and left.

From August 29 until September 9 we did not spend a single night in the ghetto. We stayed with the Gitsavichius family. They treated us very well, fed us and calmed us down.

"Nothing will happen to you."

Later these people became willing executioners.

I did not know at the time that my sister Basya was dead. She died in Kushidar on August 28.



Basya, Itzhak and BenZion

Rodlinski, Basya's former housekeeper, told me about that when we met after the war. She described how Basya had walked through the whole town to her death with her three-month-old son, Itzhak Yehuda, in her arms. Tugging at her skirt were her six-year-old daughter, Rivka, and four-year-old son, Aharon. Basya's husband, BenZion Dantsig, was shot on his way back home. His father, Avraham, was burned in the synagogue, along with other wealthy Jews and organizers of the local communities.

At the Gitsavichius' home I located a newspaper. In an article entitled

"Lithuania - for Lithuanians" I read: "The Jewish problem must be dealt with." Next to it there was an article with a similar theme: "We must get rid of the Communists, Russians, Poles and Gypsies."

I did not want to think about the fear these messages were emitting. I was sure the Russians would come to save us.

We believed what we wanted to believe.

We saw the Leshinkasovs, whom we had known for a long time, place our tablecloth over their table. We saw them hang our curtains on their windows. They were even wearing our clothes. They had taken all these things to save for us. Can it be that even our good friends cannot wait until we die? I wondered.

"Aren't you afraid of the Germans?" I asked Juozas. "You've worked for the Russian militia in Vilna since the 1940s."

"I washed my guilt away with my own blood. In the first days of the invasion I killed two Communists with whom I lived in the same room."

He pulled out a record player, wound it up and we heard the sounds of "Clouds Over the City."

"If a militia worker becomes a policeman by his own will, he is forgiven. I'm going to enlist with the police."

My mother and I became frightened and left that house. We were starved and drenched in the rain. We went to the ghetto to see if anyone was still alive and perhaps to find another set of clothes.



Dr. Gabay

On our way to Butrimantz we met Dr. Gabay. He was looking for a place to hide his wife, two children, his ninety-year-old mother, a blind brother, and his relatives, Yaakov Fink and his son.

“Where are you going? Run! Kaspariunas told me that he's going to kill anyone still alive tomorrow. He let me go because I've been treating him for rheumatism. He said, 'Run, if you can. I'm not going to look for you,' he promised.”

We went to the ghetto. Next to Rashka Pruss's house, on Smorgonsky's patio, sat my aunt Mazovsky with one of the twins in her arms, exhausted from crying. The second child was in Shoshana's arms. I asked them to give me one of the twins. The activists didn't

yet harm women with children. They saved them for last because they realized it was difficult for them to escape with children.

"No," Mazovsky said, "I'll go to my grave with both of them."

"The child will be of no help to you," said Shoshana. "Everyone in Yezna is dead already. My husband had such nice nephews there. They're dead too. No one in Yezna was spared. Every single one of them was buried in the fields."

My mother stayed with her sister Mazovsky, and I went to Rashka Pruss's place to change. I removed my wet clothes, hung them up to dry and put on clean ones.

All at once through the window I saw activists chasing Shoshana and the other women.

The door to the house opened and several guards charged inside.

Until this day I cannot understand how I managed to be behind the door, hidden from them. The room was quite small.

Leaving the door open, the activists went straight to the next room.

"Get yourself ready!" they ordered Rashka and her very old mother.

"Leave me alone," begged Rashka. "Who will deliver food to my husband and children whom you took away?"

"Stop! They had enough to eat. In fact, so did you!"

The house became empty. The door was still open. There was a secret exit in the kitchen leading to the attic. I ran up as fast as I could. The whole attic was full of bags, both Rashka's and her neighbors'. I wanted to hide under them initially, but then realized that that was the first place the bandits would check. After all, these

bags were what they came for.

I ran downstairs. The house had another exit. I fled outside into the yard. My mother, thank God, was standing right there. I grabbed her arm and we ran to Klidzenys Street.

That September turned out to be very cold. As we ran past someone's house, I raced inside and snatched the first warm thing I saw - a tablecloth. I threw it over my shoulders.

Both of the ghetto streets, Klidzenys and Tatarys, were surrounded. There was nowhere to go. We were swept along with the crowd. At the front were Kaspariunas and Germanavichius. Erushavichius and some others were on horses. We headed toward Klidzenys.

We walked about a mile and a quarter.

"They must want us to dig up potatoes in Pivashunai," said Pitelewitz. "I heard they already dug a place to store the vegetables somewhere nearby."

"Riva, get revenge for us!" our neighbor in line whispered to me. "You'll escape this, I know."

"Let's do it together."

"No. My Dvorele is with me. I can't leave her. I won't get far with the baby either."

People in the crowd were crying and groaning. For amusement, the guards beat them up along the way.

With my mother's hand in mine, I attempted to reach the edge of the group in order to run away.

Suddenly there appeared another squad of white-badged soldiers

with rifles, moving in the opposite direction.

"Which way to Visokidvor?" I asked one of the men in Polish.

The drunk Lithuanian swung his hand in the direction.

I made my way into the ditch at the side of the road, and my mother followed. We later climbed into the nearby bushes and sat there, waiting for everyone to pass.

At midnight it became very cold. We huddled together for warmth. Then came the sound of gunshots and the barking of dogs....

Juozas Karpavichius filled me in on what happened that night. Just before the war he had drawn a poster: Smeton running to America. The Lithuanians remembered that and forced him to shovel dirt on top of dead bodies.

First the men were killed. They were placed at the edge of the hole, facing it, and shot in the back of their heads.

Germanavichius' wife stripped the women naked. Despite their pleas, she forced them to remove even their underwear. She didn't want anything to be wasted. The women were ordered to lie on top of the dead bodies in the big crater. That was how the executioners discovered there wasn't enough room for them all.

Joneika, a policeman, jumped into the hole to see if he could compress the bodies further. The women grabbed him by his throat and hair. The crater was about thirty-three feet deep. The Lithuanians had to throw a rope down for him.



Chana Reznik

The second hole was quite close to the first one. There the children and elders were buried. Among them were Chana Reznik and Itsik Sheinker's wife. These two women were on the verge of delivering babies. Itsik's wife gave birth beside the mass grave.

The shots were fired. Screaming from agony and terror, the people were pushed inside.

Astrauskas had a board with nails protruding from it. He would stick children onto it and shake them off into the crater.

Germanavichius' wife was busy handing out drinks and refreshments to the executioners. Barrels of beer stood under the trees beside the

spectators of this bloody show. One of the observers fell unconscious.

They didn't shed many bullets on the children. Usually they buried them alive. In some places the ground was still moving two days later....

At the last moment someone saw one of the buried children climb out of the grave. The little boy was badly wounded. He struggled to get away from that place. The murderers waited until their target moved away, and then they opened fire.

After the massacre, the executioners divided up the stolen goods and went on their way.



Pesè Baver



Sara Baver

The Jewish people who remained alive were Miliunsky and his wife; Kaspariunas' horsekeeper, Tsvi Mostowitz; Yoshe-Leizer Meiowitz and his wife; and the whole harem: two girls from Poon, fifteen-year-old Mina Goldberg, two sisters (I don't remember their names) and Asna Baver. They were all very beautiful women who had been hand-picked by Kaspariunas for his "harem," as it was called. Asna's father, Aron Baver, was not killed either.



Civje and Guta Goldberg

Mina Goldberg was taken hostage by the policeman Lapinauskas. He lived with her until the beginning of September. Then someone in Alyta gave him away.

Lapinauskas told Mina to go for a walk, but he advised her not to put on her coat. Mina understood what he meant and begged him to spare her. Lapinauskas paraded the girl through the village to a reserved place in the cemetery. He pushed her into the hole and shot her.

Pavka Sobolevsky cut the girl's head off and bashed out her gold teeth.

The sisters were able to run away at the end of September.

The rest were finished off in the Butrimantz Jewish cemetery on October 1.



Shoshana and Aron Bayer

Aron Bayer could have run away. Asna had warned him but he refused to go.



Aron Bayer's children

"I didn't die with the rest of them," he cried. "Then I would at least be lying among the respected people. But now - with Miliunsky..."

Asna had cautioned us as well. On September 8 she went to the ghetto.

"Run away! Tomorrow they're going to kill the remaining Jews."

Kaspariunas hid Asna until November. That month her fate turned to share the worst with the rest of them. Hiding in the woods, we didn't know any of this....

In the morning we set off toward the Polish villages. There weren't any Poles among the smaugiks. However, the order to forbid Jews from entering one's home was heard all around Butrimantz. We were not even allowed to come close to the houses.

Nonetheless, a friend of our family, Rainis, welcomed us inside. We stayed at his place for a few days, but he became afraid he would get caught helping us.

Thereafter, we went to the home of Voveris. His wife was an old friend of my mother. When she used to visit her husband while he was serving a sentence at the Kaunaska prison, she would always stop at our house.

Voveris himself had invited us to his place during the first days of the war. We thought he wanted to relieve his guilt.

This wealthy Pole had been in prison for a brutal crime. His wife gave birth to twins when he already had a daughter and two sons. Voveris boiled the newborns in a pot and fed them to the pigs. A boy on the street had witnessed this. Voveris killed him as well and buried him in the nearby forest. He planted a tree over the grave, but it wouldn't grow. This helped the local people find the body.

"You once said we'd be welcome in your house," we reminded Voveris. "We're freezing and wet from the rain. We have no clothes, and we're starving to death."

"Well, all right. You can go into the shack in back and hide in the hay."

Voveris' wife took the wet tablecloth off my head.

"You're going to get killed anyway.... I'll be able to go to bed tonight feeling good."

Later Voveris came into the shack.

"Where's your horse and teapot?"

"The horse is at Yankowski's," I said and bit my tongue for telling him the truth, but it was too late.

Every night during the whole week Voveris and his son returned with wagons loaded with possessions confiscated from the Jews. Usually they were accompanied by policemen who spent entire nights drinking with Voveris. We were terrified we'd be discovered.

On the sixth day, Voveris' wife came to us.

"My husband and son are getting drunk. I heard them planning something very bad. They think you have gold with you. You'd be better off if you left."

In the daytime one couldn't get very far. We knocked on Montfil's door in the same village. To go to Lithuanians for help was dangerous.

But Montfil fed us, gave us money and started to cry.

"You're going to die out there."

He didn't keep us for long. He had three children and his wife was against it. We spent the evening at his place, then went into the woods. We slept on the ground, warming one another with our body heat.

In the morning a young man wearing a military uniform found us. That's the end, we thought. He's going to shoot us right here.

Instead, the man said, "I know you and I'll help."

He was Ignatsi Shestakowski. His village, Parankava, was fifteen miles from Butrimantz. In 1939 he had been ill in a hospital in Kovno. When he was discharged, he didn't have any money for the trip back; neither did he have the strength to walk home. At the bus stop he met my father, who brought him home and let him spend the night. In the morning he put the Pole onto Boyarsky's bus, paid the owner five lit, and sent him on his way.

Ignatsi told us all this while we were still in the forest. He walked us over to his brother's house, but Mihal was at the market. His wife made us comfortable in their home.

"I can't promise you anything," she told us. "I don't know if I can convince my husband."

We hoped for the best. After all, we endangered their lives with our presence. Spending the day in the warmth of a house was wonderful.

In the evening Mihal returned. His wife knelt down and put her arms around his knees.

"Mihal! Please allow me to let two Jews I found stay with us. They're freezing and hungry."

"All right, but only for a short time."

Happy, she came to us.

"He said yes! The war will be over in a few days. The Russians are getting closer. We heard it on the radio. The American Jews will pay a lot of money to those who helped to hide Jews."

We soon understood that this woman protected us because she was a good person and not for a reward.

Mihal's wife gave us hot water to wash ourselves, served tea and invited us to share whatever food she had.

I kept crying, remembering my sisters, but soon I realized: It's me I should cry over, not them. They've already experienced everything that could happen to them. Only God knows what's in store for us.

We hid in the haystacks. Every day Mihal's wife would bring us bad news from the market.

"Everyone in Butrimantz is dead."

"All the Jews in Anushishok and Visokidvor were destroyed."

Groups of "protectors" formed. Their job was to catch any Jews who hadn't been killed yet. At night these protectors eavesdropped on conversations inside the houses.

Interesting, I thought. Why do these murderers call themselves "protectors"? From whom are they protecting the people?

One day the owners of the house went to dig up potatoes and left me inside. To express my gratitude, I washed the windows, made the beds and cleaned up the rooms.

"What have you done!" the owners exclaimed when they returned. "Don't you realize they'll know there are Jews in our house? We never wash our windows. We never make the beds either. It's not our style of living. Don't do this again."

Very soon a neighbor came by and alarmed the Shestakowskis.

"They're searching every single house in the neighboring village. They're going to come here next."

The Shestakowskis discussed this among themselves and decided to make a safe place for us.

"We'll dig a hole, as though for storing potatoes," Mihal said. "If neighbors ask, we'll tell them just that, but if that happens, you won't be able to hide there anymore for they would understand that it's really a bunker."

Mihal started working on the hole. He made a lid for it and covered it with mud. Air entered the hole through pipes that extended out quite a distance. No outsiders questioned Shestakowski about it.

It was very hard to breathe in the hole. We perspired terribly. We even undressed but it didn't help much. The owners gave me a book they had, but for some reason it was in German. I read it all from cover to cover, using the tiny rays of light that filtered in through the pipes. Reading distracted me from the misery for a while.

The town slept quietly that night. We were let out of the hole to breathe and wash. We sat beside the fireplace to dry, watching the window to see if anyone was coming. If someone would have entered the house unnoticed, we wouldn't have been able to reach the hole in time.

Our saviors barely ate anything; we ate even less. In the morning we would have a boiled cabbage with a piece of bread; at night, a few

potatoes.

We tried to think of a way to show our gratitude to these people. I wrote a note to Yankowski, the wealthy Pole who had our horse and some of our other belongings.

"Please give the horse to Mihal Shestakowski."

Mihal returned empty-handed.

"Voveris went to Yankowski's place with a note he claimed you gave him, Riva," Mihal said. "He probably wrote it himself. He wanted Yankowski to pay him for the horse.

Yankowski didn't believe him, but Voveris threatened. He got the money in the end."

A week later Yankowski arrived in person. He brought a large supply of potatoes and flour and begged Shestakowski to keep us hidden in his place for as long as possible.

"My daughter got to like your dress," Yankowski said. "That's what the potatoes are for. The flour is for the coat...."

We were so happy!

"All the Jews in Kushidar were shot," Yankowski told us. "Basya was among them. Jews are getting slaughtered throughout the whole continent. The Germans said they won't leave a single one alive."

After that, Yankowski returned about once every month. He always brought a lot of food and gave it to the owners. Our rations remained unchanged, however. We could barely wait until night to get out of the hole and go to the washroom.

During the half year that we spent in the bunker, my mother and I

grew emaciated, like walking sticks.

For reassurance, the Shestakowskis decided to prove to the neighbors that there was no one hiding in their house. They left for three days to visit their friends in another village and asked a few neighbors to look after their children.

We were given a jug of water and a loaf of bread. The entrance to the hole was covered with more mud. For three days my mother and I remained quiet, not saying a word. Our stomachs ached. There was so little air that we almost suffocated. Three days in a grave was a terrible experience.

The Shestakowskis returned on time. The neighbors didn't suspect anything. Our lives went on.

At night we slept near the fireplace. One night, in a dream, my mother was visited by her father, my grandfather Itzhak.

"Get up, daughter. Go welcome your guest. Your daughter Tsila is coming."

Mother sprang up from the floor and ran to the window.

"Tsila! Tevie! Come this way! We are right here, alive!"

Had she gone crazy? I wondered. However, there were shadows of two people outside the window.

The owners woke up to see what was going on. They opened the door and there stood Tsila and Tevie.

"That's my daughter and her husband!" my mother cried loudly.

"All right," Mihal said, "bring them inside."

From that day on there were four of us in the bunker. Two sat on small chairs and two lay on the floor; then we switched. Every day we begged God to save us.

In Alyta the Germans captured thirty Russian soldiers and forced them to dig a hole, after which they were stripped and frozen to death. The Golombewski brothers, who helped many Jews hide, were caught and shot.

This last incident scared us all. The risk of getting caught was very great. Many Jews who were sheltered by other people were forced out. We prepared to leave, but Shestakowski stopped us.

"Where will you go? You'll get caught no matter what. You won't be able to stand the torture, and you'll give us away. We'll all die."

Jews who were captured were now interrogated before they were killed to find out in whose house they had hidden.

"If I were alone I wouldn't be so afraid," explained Shestakowski. "I have to watch out for my children. I don't know what to do. Letting you go is just as frightening as keeping you here."

That evening the Shestakowskis discussed our fate. We could hear everything they said, even the whispers. They decided that they had no choice but to drop the stove on the hole and bury us right there.

From then on we lived with even more fear each day....

I don't blame the Shestakowskis for anything. I understand how hard the situation had become for them. Sometimes we meet up with them even now. I've never reminded them about that evening. I have been grateful to the Shestakowskis my whole life. They saved us and kept us inside that first winter of the war - the coldest and most frightening one.

They didn't hurry with their plan. The Shestakowskis were just not capable of killing a human being.



Tevie

Once, the owners left to celebrate Easter at their brother's house. Tevie opened the lid of the hole and we all escaped into the forest. The four of us, with barely any threads on, roamed through the snow-covered fields....

Tevie led the way to the Maldanis home. Alfonsas Maldanis had purchased land from the elder Sheinker and had served in the army

with Tevie. He allowed us to hide in his part of the forest.

"People chop down trees all the time in the government-owned woods. You'd get caught there for sure."

During the day, when it wasn't as cold, we slept huddled together on the ground. At night we tried to keep ourselves in motion by walking.

Sometimes one of Maldanis' brothers would bring us some food, leaving it at a prearranged spot for us to pick up later. It was usually soup or boiled potatoes. Of course, we weren't receiving all this free.

Risking our lives even further, we sometimes wandered over to Raetsky's place. The first time we went there he gave us a loaf of bread and told us to come back for our things in a few weeks. He probably believed we wouldn't live that long, but explained that our things were in another village.

The second time, Raetsky's wife sent the dogs out on Tsila and Tevie. That was when we asked Maldanis to write a note to Raetsky, asking that he return our belongings. After a while we actually recovered some of them.

Once, Maldanis invited relatives from Rudiskes to his house. They ate and drank, then started talking about Jews.

"There are some hiding in our forest too," Maldanis told them. "But can we be held responsible for the forest?"

They decided to reveal us to their guests. They brought out bread and liquor, and offered us friendly advice.

We were hungry all the time. We must have made a horrible impression on them. I, for instance, spent most of the war in a single dress.

Once, awakening from sleep, we saw bicycle tracks in the snow. As it later became clear, the German Gubert had seen us but didn't give us away. He didn't even tell Maldanis.

Then we were shocked by another horror. Tsila gave birth to a dead baby and became very ill. For about a year she couldn't walk, and Tevie carried her on his back.

We met Yankel Bernstein from Butrimantz. Lebovich from Parankava had helped him hide. But, like us, Yankel retreated into the forest after the Golombewski brothers were shot.



Dr. Gabay (at right) with his wife Chana in Alytus.

We talked with Yankel about our family members who were no longer with us. He told us about Dr. Gabay. His ninety-year-old mother and blind brother were still in the ghetto. They weren't able to

run away. Gabay had left them poison before he went into hiding.

"Drink this if they find you," he told them. "It won't hurt when you die this way."

That's what they ended up doing. The Shaulists found the corpses.



Survivor Renana Gabay



Survivor Shalom Zeev

Gabay and his wife, their four-year-old daughter, Renana, nine-month-old son, Binyamin, and Yaakov Fink and his three-year-old son, Shalom Zeev, went to Yankowski. The children were taken to Vilna by a young woman named Janina Zienowicz, a relative of Yankowski. Janina and her sister Helena cared for the children until the end of the war.

Gabay and his wife and Fink hid at Yankowski's friends' house until the end of 1943. The neighbors discovered this and reported them. The Germans came with dogs and searched the place but didn't find anyone. That day Gabay's wife went insane. She was moved to the Vilna ghetto along with her husband and Yaakov Fink. Later she died there.

The children were saved by the Zienowicz sisters. After the war Dr. Gabay and his children moved to Warsaw. Shortly thereafter, the

Gabay family emigrated to Palestine.



Survivor Yaakov Fink

After the war Yaakov Fink went to claim his son, Shalom Zeev, but the bewildered, weeping child was afraid of leaving the only family he knew – the Zienowiczses.

Eventually, Yaakov Fink abandoned his efforts to retrieve his son and emigrated to the United States, where he had several sisters. Within months after his arrival in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1948, Fink was diagnosed with cancer. He continued to write to his son, urging him to join him in America. But the boy, whose name had been changed to Wilhelm Zienowicz, could not be persuaded to leave his adopted family. Yaakov Fink died in 1953. Wilhelm relocated to Warsaw, where he later married and had three children.

Fink's wife, Zlata Riva Menkin, a doctor, had died in a typhus

epidemic in 1941, shortly before the Germans invaded Lithuania. The fate of their daughter, Tanya, five years old at the time, is not known. It is speculated that she may have been sent to her mother's family in northeast Lithuania after her mother's death; others claim she died with the children of Butrimantz and lies in their mass grave. A third story is that she too had been a hidden child and disappeared into a new identity.

The spring passed. In June Maldanis' wife came running to us.

"Alfonsas is gone. Go hide! The forest is already surrounded."



Yankel Bernstein

This was the second day of the search for lost Jews. Just as we hid behind some bushes, we heard the voices of smaugiks. We were ready to run but remembered Yankel Bernstein. We awoke him and ran toward the entrance to the forest. Fortunately, Tevie had an excellent sense of direction so he knew exactly where to go. Suddenly he yelled, "Riva, look to the right!"

I turned and made eye contact with one of the smaugiks who was lying with the others surrounding the forest.

"Run!" yelled Tevie.

I grabbed Bernstein by his sleeve.

He resisted. "Let go!"

A shot was fired. Bernstein fell to the ground.

I turned around and saw Tevie and my mother running back into the forest. I went after them. Tevie soon realized that we were trapped, surrounded. We turned around and ran toward the fields until Tevie led us to the Chertovo swamp.

"Step only on the tough mounds," he cautioned. "If you miss, you'll get sucked in."

We jumped from mound to mound. The swamp was beautiful at this time of year, with flowers everywhere.

Leaving our footprints behind, we ran deep into the swamp before we stopped to catch our breath.

We heard the sound of horses' hoofbeats. Tevie went to find out what the animals were doing there and returned very pale.

"The Germans have horses and this swamp is surrounded."

Somewhere at the edge of the swamp the soldiers found an escaped Russian POW and Yankel Kovalsky. They shot them on the spot.

We had no way out and spent the rest of the day hiding in that swamp.

At night Tsila and Tevie went to the Maldanis home to check on the situation. On the way they met Gemaitis, a farmer from Eigerdonis. He had seen us running into the swamp, but when the authorities had asked him, he replied, "No, I didn't see anyone."

The Maldanis family were practical people. That night they partied with the local policemen. Tevie knocked at the door. The owner stuck her head out and said, "The smaugiks are here."

Later we were told how the policemen had tortured the wounded Bernstein. They wanted to know who had fed him. They chopped off his fingers one by one, but he didn't give anyone away.

We returned to the forest. Anely Dulsken stumbled upon us in the tall bushes. She had often helped us with our garden, so we knew each other very well. Mother was eating bread, and the rest of us were lying on the ground, resting.

Anely became frightened when she saw us.

I grabbed her knees and cried, "Help us, please. We are very hungry!"

She told us that she would take us to her mother.

In about half an hour she returned with a loaf of bread. That evening she took us to Sakavichius' house in the Eichunai village. They too had some of our possessions. In exchange for these, we asked for bread.

Sakavichius' wife was sleeping in my night shirt. At the sight of me, she jumped up.

"Give me your jacket!"

The jacket had been given to me by one of the farmer families.

"What are you doing?" her husband interrupted. "She'll practically be naked."

"She doesn't need clothes. If she won't get caught today, she'll get caught tomorrow."

I tried to defend myself.

"At least you have a roof over your head. I spend all my time outside."

"Be quiet! There are police nearby. If I call them, you won't need anything anymore."

I left her house wearing only my dress. The saying is true: If a camel asks for antlers, he'll get his ears cut off as well.

Anely was very gracious and took us to her mother's house. And that was where we spent the winter.

I don't think there was a place in these villages where we didn't try to hide. We looked for spots with as few people around as possible. In the summer we often hid in the rye fields. Of all the shacks in which we hid, I remember Ivanowski's most clearly.

Once, after the war, a Pole gave us a lift to Butrimantz. When we passed Ivanowski's shack, he said, "That's my shack. In the winter Russian soldiers stayed in it. When my wife and I came to the shack in the spring, I saw the body depressions in the hay and figured it out."

I had never seen Ivanowski around the village before.

"We stayed in that shack," I told him.

We knew that no one would be coming there until the spring, so we

hid in the hay. We were hungry and thirsty all the time, with only one bottle of water per day for everyone. We ate snow and went outside at night for our body needs.

Tevie and I would go to the neighboring homes to ask for bread. We skirted around the main roads, avoiding the "protectors." People spoke to us without their lights on; otherwise, it was dangerous.

We arrived at the house of one of our friends.

The man shook his head.

"Do you want to kill me? The whole village knows that Jews come to my place."

Tevie was surprised.

"No one saw us."

"You wear those heavy army boots. Everyone around here wears normal shoes. They can tell by the imprints in the snow."

We would have been very happy to wear regular shoes, but we did not have any. Wrapping our feet with pieces of cloth and pushing them into boots was all we could do to save them from freezing.

Thereafter, however, we started to wrap the cloth on the outside of the shoes too in order to avoid leaving tracks.

Ivanowski and his son would come to the shack a few times a day. While they got their hay for the farm animals, we would remain as quiet as we could. Once my mother coughed. The boy jumped up and yelled, "Did you hear that? There must be someone in here."

The father laughed.

"Are you trying to fool me? That was just the wind."

At the end of the third week, gunshots were fired nearby during the entire night. In the morning Ivanowski came into the shack alone.

Tevie greeted him with these words: "I'm going on my way. My wife and her sister are staying with some nice people. I know that you are a good person too. You won't do me any harm. I slept here last night and heard the shootings. Do you know what they were?"



Leia Strage



Leia's brother

"Five people went into the public sauna," Ivanowski told Tevie. "One of them was a Butrimantz Jew by the name of Strage. They were seen. Activists drove up to the building. Among them was your old friend Rachkiss. The sauna was set on fire and everyone was beaten up. I won't tell anyone about you. Just get out of here as fast as you can."

That night we all left.

In the summer of 1943 we decided that we should split up into pairs. It was easier to hide that way. My mother and I hid in the rye fields. Tevie brought us food at night.

Once, two farmers who were reaping the harvest appeared in the field. One of them, Jugris Janushauskas, a drunk and rebel, saw us and grew pale. My mother and I, bruised and emaciated, must have looked like characters out of a nightmare.

"Don't go anywhere," he said. "I'll bring you some food."

Soon Jugris returned with his own dinner - bread and milk.

"I would bring more, but my partner would know what's going on."

I asked if he could bring more food for us the next day. I thought: If he brings something, that means he pities us and probably would not give us away.

The next morning some women arrived with food. They were Jugris' daughter, his partner's wife and two other women whom we knew.

As we started to eat, the partner's wife whispered to me, "You'd better go away. I'm afraid Jugris will report you."

I looked at Jugris' daughter and spoke too loudly:

"I don't believe your father could give us away!"

The girl turned to the partner's wife and yelled, "My father is at home, you hear! Your husband is the one who left for Butrimantz this morning! You don't think he went to the police, do you?"

When they left, they were still arguing.

We had to leave this place as well. It was dangerous to go anywhere in the daytime, but we had no choice.

After walking about fifty yards we stopped under a leafy tree that concealed us. Suddenly we heard gunshots coming from the site we

had just left.

Two people appeared right near us: Stelmahavichius, a policeman from Butrimantz, and Liutsius Konstantinowicz, a teacher. The teacher's suitcase swung a few feet from my leg. Thank God they didn't see us! Stelmahavichius would have shot without blinking. He was solely responsible for many of the deaths around there. For amusement, he fired his gun into the field.

Wandering from place to place eventually led us to Shwabowski's house. A candle was burning on his window sill, and we heard people talking in Polish. We took the chance and knocked.

I asked the owner if we could go into the shack to warm ourselves for just a few days. I offered anything we had and promised to bring more later.

We were allowed to sleep in the haystacks. Once a day the owner's wife brought us some food. Almost every day we had rotten vegetables and a few handfuls of snow from behind the building where everyone went to relieve themselves. My mother made a pair of stockings for the lady, and my sister sewed some other garment.

At that time the Russian army got so close that a battle erupted.

One morning, when most people hid inside their homes, we went out into the street for the first time.

"Look at the sky!" We were so happy. "Look at the red stars on those airplanes. We have reached the end of it!..."

A Russian soldier stopped us in the forest. Judging by our shocking appearance, he understood immediately that he was witnessing the last of the Jews. He took us over to the lieutenant, who happened to be a Jew. He became very excited.

"Thank God at least someone has survived!"

We were given food, but we felt too self-conscious to eat in front of everyone. The lieutenant told the others to leave us alone and gave us some money before he left.

"I want the first money you receive to come from a Jew," he said.

We decided to go back to Shwabowski's and wait for Tevie. He and Tsila had gone to Yankowski to find out what was happening.

The good news awaited them.

"The Russians are in Butrimantz!"



Tevie Sheinker

The people with whom Tevie shared the good news did not seem very happy. Some of those at whose houses we had left our belongings didn't even want to talk to us. Only Trotsky gave Tevie a new hat and a loaf of bread.

In Butrimantz all the Jewish homes were occupied by the activists. When they realized they wouldn't be staying there long, they removed decorations and pictures from the walls in order to sell them. We discovered that later.

While we were waiting for Tevie at the Shwabowski house, they had a guest, Kvedaravichius' youngest son. "How shameful!" he yelled. "You kept Jews in your house. It's because of you they survived. I

killed someone from their family. Just before she died, she screamed, 'You'll never build an independent Lithuania atop our blood!' I'll show them right now if we'll build it or not!"

We charged outside and ran until we reached the Yankowskis' gate. The owners didn't even recognize us. They thought we were a couple of homeless people.

I started to cry.

"Don't you remember us? We're the Lozanskys."

The Yankowskis cried too when they discovered who we were. They invited us in, but we refused: we were just too dirty.

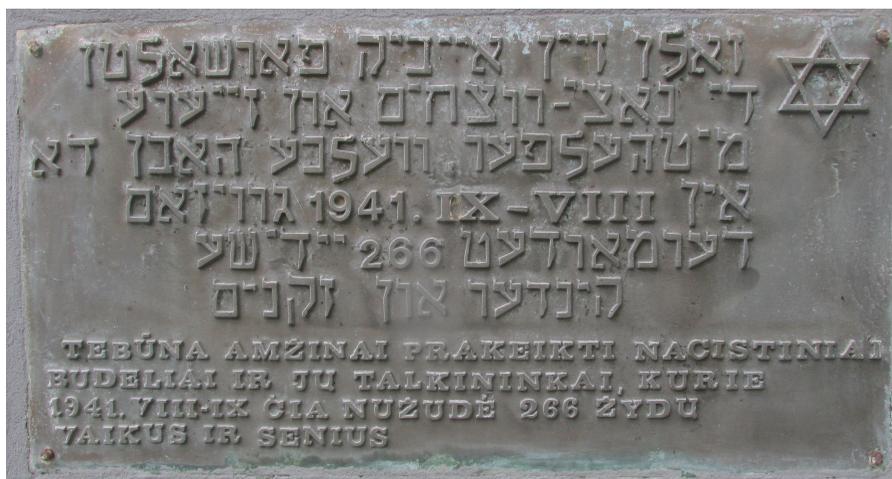
The woman brought us clean clothes, and we went to the swamp to wash ourselves. Mother fetched water in a fish pail and poured it over me.

I threw off my dress, and Mother picked it up. It is now in Israel in the exhibit "Poison For Your People."

Names of Towns: Yiddish - Lithuanian

Wherever possible, the Yiddish names of towns have been used in this book. Their corresponding Lithuanian names are included here. In those instances where no Yiddish equivalents could be found (for names of tiny villages or settlements), the Lithuanian names are used.

Allots	Pren - Prienai
Alyta - Alytus	Radvilishok - Radviliskis
Anushishok - Oniskis	Ritova - Ritavas
Birshantan - Birstonas	Rudiskes
Butrimantz - Butrimonys	Serhai - Sierijai
Chertovo	Stoklishok - Stakliskes
Daug - Daugai	Troki - Trakai
Eichunai	Vilna - Vilnius
Eigerdonis	Virbaln - Virbalis
Eznasa	Visokidvor - Aukstadvaris
Gelein	Yanova - Jonava
Gerulay	Yezna - Jieznas
Kalvaria - Kalvarija	Zhezmir - Ziezmariiai
Klidzenys	Zhusli - Zasliai
Kovno - Kaunas	
Kushidar - Kaisiadorys	
Mariampole - Kapsukas	
Memel - Klaipeda	
Meretsh - Merkine	
Oran - Varena	
Parankava - Parankava	
Pivashunai	
Plasauninkay	
Polangen - Palanga	
Poon - Punia	



Notes on this Edition

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