

Zalman Kaplanas With His Friends



This is me, Zalman Kaplanas, the one dressed in the gray suit. The children and relatives of those who perished in Jurbarkas are next to me. All of them came from the USA and Canada to commemorate their perished kin. The photo was taken in Jurbarkas in 2003.

In 1944, while I was in evacuation, my school comrade, a Lithuanian guy named Markovich, brought me a letter from Jurbarkas. His relatives wrote me a detailed letter, saying how my relatives perished. On 3rd July 1941 my brother Mendel was shot in the Jurbarkas cemetery together with 350 young Jewish people. Father was shot with the group of Jews in August. He had to dig a grave for himself. My dear mother, whom I loved best of all, was sent to Kaunas ghetto, where she died on 28th September 1941 during a big action. I was grieving. I was in a terrible mood. One thing to deem your loved ones to have perished and quite another thing is to know about that for sure. I was alone in the whole world.

I've always been biased against the Soviet regime. That's why I approved of the breakup of the Soviet Union and the foundation of the independent state of Lithuania. My wife and I are currently members of the revived Jewish community of Lithuania. We celebrate all Jewish holidays. I am a member of the military community of Jewish War Veterans. I often go to Jurbarkas, to the place where my kin perished. Only five Jews, born in Jurbarkas before World War II, remained in Lithuania. We founded a club. Now there is a group of the second generation there – children of native Jurbarkas Jews who are currently residing abroad. We also established a charity fund, where donations from Jurbarkas Jews are collected. We put up a monument at the place where Jews from my town were shot by the Fascists.