

## Benis Rutkauskas



This is my husband Benis Rutkauskas. The picture was made in Kaunas in 1944.

My husband Benis (full name Benedictus) Rutkauskas was born in 1904 in a small Lithuanian hamlet not far from Vilkovishkis. He was a peasant. He was involved in politics at a young age and became the member of the underground communist party. At Smetona's regime in 1929 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 11 out of which he underwent. He was liberated by the soviet regime. Upon his release, he was sent in hamlet for recuperation. Thus, we met there. Within the

first two week Benis did not know that I was a Jew as I looked like a Lithuanian and was fluent in that language. I had to show the document for him to believe me. When he looked at it, he said that he did not care.

On 12 December 1940 Benis and I registered our marriage in the state marriage registration authorities. We had no wedding, no rings. We were happy to start a new life. Benis held as high position - he was in charge of the communications department of Kaunas oblast, he was a respectable man and the member of the communist party, but he did not want to enjoy any benefits. We rented a room. I did not work. Shortly after wedding I got pregnant and I had very strong toxicosis and I felt unwell.

Husband found out about the unleashed war right away. There was no time to wait for organized evacuation, as it was clear that fascists would enter Kaunas soon. Benis quickly organized our departure. I was in the driver's cabin as I was 6 months pregnant. Benis and Janina got in the truck body, where the luggage was placed. We were one of the first to leave on 22 June 1941. We asked to send us farther in the rear, and the arrangements were made for us to take a train. We were helped to get on the locomotive train, packed with the fugitive, heading for Tartar republic. I vaguely remember the way. My husband told me to take a side berth. I was asleep almost most of the time.

We got off at Kuchmar station, which was not far from Kazan [Tatarstan, about 800 km to the East from Moscow]. We settled in a small room in the house of the locals, who treated us very kindly. Sister took care of house, and husband went to work. Here we lived two month and a half until I bore a baby. My girl came into the world in late August 1941. Husband wanted to call her Lena after Lenin, but her name was accidentally written Lina. We decided that it was also a nice name as Lina means flax in Lithuanian, we still call her that name. when the daughter was born, we moved to the village Mamafe, not far from Kukhmar. It was easier to survive in a village at that time.

The four of us lived together until the New Year of 1942. Janina and my husband worked in kolkhoz , and got skimpy trudodni. Our life was hard like it was with most fugitives. Husband and sister also got bread cards for working people and I was given 200 gramps as I was dependent. Janina and Benis gave all they could to me as I was a nursing mother. Benis was eager to go in the lines. He volunteered to join 16 Lithuanian division as soon as it was founded. He was a rank and file in the artillery. In January 1942 he went in Balakhna, where the above-mentioned division was being formed.

At first Benis was at the leading edge, and in 1944 he was appointed to attend officers' courses in Ufa. Straight from there he was sent in the army ,which was liberating Lithuania. Husband was liberating Kaunas- there were battles at Green Mountain [editor's note: one of the Kaunas districts], and entered the city with the leading units. On the first day upon liberation of the city he was assigned the chairman of the municipal ispolkom.