



The Centropa Lithuanian Reader Volume 3 The Soviet Decades and after

Stories from our Lithuanian interviews
2005–2007

Interviews conducted
by Zhanna Litinskaya

Postwar

Lithuania's Jewish communities were devastated during the Holocaust. There was not a synagogue—out of uncounted hundreds—that had not been either badly damaged or wholly destroyed. This includes scores of exquisite eighteenth century wooden synagogues. Jewish cemeteries dating back centuries were plowed under, their stones ground into gravel.

Destroying buildings is one thing. Wiping out whole communities is another. Ninety-five percent of Lithuania's Jews were murdered. As we have seen in the previous volume, we know that an enormous number of Lithuanian citizens carried out the crimes, and they did this while the Germans looked on. In the ensuing decades, as witnesses came forth, as researchers combed German SS and Wehrmacht archives, the culpability of the local citizenry became clear to all. But not to nationalist Lithuanians, who would never stop equating Jews with Communists. Not then, not now.

As we will read in the first set of stories in this volume, we see that the Communists did come to Lithuania and the rest of the Baltics at war's end, and they would stay until 1990. It is therefore worth reviewing Lithuania's sad twentieth history. All three Baltic states had been corraled inside the Russian Empire until 1918. Between the two world wars they achieved a long cherished dream of independence.

That lasted until May 1940 when the Soviet Army invaded the Baltics, nationalized everything they could, and sent tens of thousands of citizens—Jews and non-Jews—to the gulag. Little wonder that in July 1941, so many Lithuanians saw the invading Germans as liberators. No Jew felt that way and suffered horribly.

When the Soviet Army returned to Lithuania in the fall of 1944, the one-party state rolled back in with it. In the first few years of Soviet occupation, whole factories were dismantled, laid onto heavy train transports, and shipped into the Soviet Union; there were more mass arrests; freedom of speech was forbidden, and the all but unworkable Soviet-style economy was saddled onto this mostly rural land.

The personal stories you will read in this section are all heartrending, but they show the stubborn determination of the few Jews who returned at war's end to start life over. During these early years of Stalinism, our respondents made their way in society, although few actually said how they could live in a land where so many of their neighbors had carried out such unspeakable deeds. But this is no different than those Jews who returned to live in Frankfurt, Vienna, Budapest or Zagreb.

These excerpts take us from their arrival in their home towns after the war through their finding someone to marry, having children, and creating a life for themselves. A final set of chapters tells us of their lives today.

**Shahne Berznitskiy
Vilnius**



(Me and my family, 1950s)

Here's how I got married after the war. The story begins even before the war, in the late 1930s, when my brother Isroel got married. I liked his wife, a Jewish girl named Charna and they lived in Kaunas, where Charna gave birth to a boy, Aron.

Iosif made evacuation arrangements for the families of our brothers Isroel and Yankel - Golda with little Liza and Charna with little Aaron, who was only a couple of months old then. They were saved, but my brothers were not allowed on the train, as there was an order for all able-bodied men to stay and defend the town. Isroel perished in the Kaunas ghetto shortly before its liquidation.

After the war, I had to think of my personal life as well. I liked some Jewish girls, and I also had some pals, with whom I spent some time. None of my temporary girlfriends aroused such deep feelings or affections as I felt for Isroel's widow, Charna.

In the postwar years we lived in one apartment and Charna treated me like a brother. She also had suitors. I liked my nephew Aaron, Charna's son. I didn't want Charna and Aaron to leave our family, so I proposed to her.

My action corresponded to Jewish traditions: the younger brother should marry the widow of the elder brother.

Charna agreed and in the late 1940s our marriage was registered. Charna [nee Pressman] is two years younger than me.

She is from the Lithuanian town of Moletai [60 km from Vilnius]. Charna's parents, her brothers and sisters - I only know the name of her younger sister Nehama, as we keep her picture - perished during the occupation in Moletai.

**Dobre (Most) Rozenbergene
Kaunas**



(Me and my husband Sholom Ruvim
Rozenbergas, 1950s)

In July 1945 Leya and I came to Kaunas from the fascist camps. First we were given a place in a dormitory. Several people lived in one room. In a couple of days we met our friend from the camp - I can't recall her name - and she took us with her. People who had to go through the camps found their property precious, they valued human life and tried to assist each other the best way they could.

That lady had two rooms and she gave one to us. Leya found a job. She was waiting for her husband to come back from the front. It turned out that Yakov was alive.

I was yearning to go back to my native town and in a while my aunt took me to Jurbarkas. Our house wasn't destroyed, but it was occupied by Lithuanians, and we had to wait for it to be vacated while they made other arrangements.

I was sheltered by our neighbor, Abu Fales. He and his wife Chiena and their children remained in the occupation. His loved ones perished, but Abu was miraculously rescued by local Lithuanians.

Abu treated me like his own daughter. I stayed with him for a couple of months and could stay there as if I was his daughter. He married for the second time and his second wife was Miriam. She also lost her family and they suggested adopting me. I was seventeen. But I loved and remembered my parents, and couldn't betray the memory of them. I understood that I had to start a new adult life—on my own.

Suddenly, everything happened almost at once. The house was vacated and I was summoned to the municipal ispolkom [15] and given the permission to live there.

I still wonder why they didn't house any other families with me, as the house was so large. But they didn't.

Then the son of my parents' good friends, Sholom Ruvim Rozenbergas, came back from the front lines. I had known Sholom before the war, but since he was five years older than me, and we didn't have anything in common then. After all, five years is quite a big gap between youngsters.

Now, as the two of us were lonely, we were attracted to each other. First, we had recollections and memories that bound us. Then we fell in love. In the middle of 1946 we got our marriage registered at the regional marriage register.

Of course, we wanted to be wed under a chuppah, but there was neither a synagogue nor a rabbi in Jurbarkas. During the occupation, the Fascists made Jews destroy

the synagogue with their own hands, stone by stone, and then they shot them right there.

My husband Sholom was born in Jurbarkas in 1923. His parents and his sister Pesya perished in the occupation. He was in the front lines, serving in the 16th Lithuanian division. He was awarded many orders and medals. He came back to his native town with the rank of sergeant-major.

Sholom didn't have any special education. He went to school in Kaunas before the war. He was a very gifted man. First he found a job at the canteen, later he was appointed for management positions. He became a member of the Communist Party. When he was to join it, he sincerely believed in the Party.

I didn't work at that time. In 1947 I gave birth to a daughter and named her after our mothers, Brocha Mere, and in 1948 I bore a son and named him after my father Motle. At first, our life was hard—like it was for everyone then.



(This is me with my daughter Brocha Mere and my son Motle, 1950s)

My husband was the only one who worked in our family, as I took care of the children. I went to work, when the children were a little older. In 1950 I sold half of our house and bought a cow with that money. Now our children had milk. Life was getting better and we weren't going to leave Jurbarkas.

My husband worked as a deputy chairman of the district administration of the

Consumer's Council. He was a very honest, decent and literate man, so the leaders appreciated him.

When anti-Semitic campaigns commenced in the country, we were also affected by them. It turned out that my uncle Iosif from the USA was looking for me. He wrote me a letter, saying that he was old and couldn't come for a visit, but he was willing to help us. Iosif started sending us parcels. At that time any relationship with capitalist countries was unacceptable, especially for Party members.

My husband was called in front of the municipal committee, where he was reminded that his wife came from a rich family. Sholom got away with a stringent reprimand, and he was fired. He was unemployed for an entire year and only after Stalin's death [1953] was he offered a job in another town.

Sholom was transferred to the small town of Sakiai, not far from Kaunas. I sold the second half of the house and we moved to a new place. Sholom became the chairman of the district administration of the Consumer's Council in that town. We were provided with lodging right away: a half of a good house. The children went to school and I had a chance to start working. I went to work for a small bakery as a baker. I worked there for six years.

Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene Zagare and Siauliai

Having worked for two years under assignment, I came back in Zagare, where I started teaching Russian. I did it for several years.

Father often told me that he saw my former classmate at work and found him very pleasant. Once he invited him for dinner on one of the Jewish holidays. It was Boris Steinas, a guy from our prewar class.

I did not pay attention Boris at school because he was skinny and tall, with a

protruding Adam's apple. He behaved improperly and cut classes. I didn't like guys like that.

Now I saw a good-looking, confident young man. We had lunch together, and after lunch we looked at old school pictures and reminisced about our school, in the days before the war. In couple of days Boris came to visit once again.

Boris and I had similar fates and family stories, and we enjoyed spending time together. We fell in love.

On 31 December 1959 Boris and I registered our marriage. We had wedding rings. Mother made a fashionable navy blue dress. We had a festive dinner at home, attended by our relatives throughout Lithuania.

After wedding I went to Boris in Siauliai. At first we lived in a small two-room apartment, in couple of years we moved to a new apartment from the Consumer Council, which was built by Boris's office, when he was in charge of Siauliai branch. Then we got a four-room apartment. I worked at school as a Russian language and literature teacher. I was always respected by my colleagues and students. I was offered to join the party for several times, but I was not willing to. Any way I had no choice- the soviet teacher was supposed to be the member of the party and I had to. Though, I was not an active communist, and did not take any leading positions there.



(Me with my students, 1962)

Boris and I are polar characters "ice and fire", but our principles were alike. In businesslike issues husband was the leader, in other day-to-day things I was the head. In 1960 our daughter Rita was born and in 1963 - Lana.

Unfortunately my father did not live to see his granddaughters. He died in 1961. The town leaders, communists, were at his funeral, so we could not make them Jewish. Though, we put him in a shroud and a suit on the top. When nobody was around we read a Jewish prayer over him. He was buried in Siauliai as it was decided that mother would also live here closer to us Boris helped her with a small apartment. In 1962 grandmother Mina passed away.

Mother helped me raise my daughters. We had a good living. Husband made pretty good money and I also had an income. Every year daughters went to pioneer camps in Palanga, we went to sanatoriums using trade union vouchers. We also did not forget about cultural life. We read all novels, went to the theaters, cinemas. Later husband was given a garden. Then he bought a car and we started traveling all over Lithuania. We also went to Russia.

In the 1970s when Jewish immigration was somewhat easier, my best friend left, and I also started thinking of that. Then more of my closest friends were leaving.

Boris and I talked about it. But Mother was not willing to go because father's grave was here. My Mother-in-law could not leave either. Besides, my sisters Nina and Anna were single and we were responsible for them. So we gradually gave up an idea to leave.

Both daughters were good students. They did not bring any problems for us. Elder Rita had dreamt to become an investigator since childhood. Being Jewish it was hard for her to enter the university in Vilnius, but she succeeded. Rita managed to become an investigator and now she is in charge of the special department at strict penal camp.

From the very beginning, her private life was not a success. She married Jew Erenburg and gave birth to a son Gedeon. They had a bad living, quarreled often. When they divorced, we took our grandson in Siauliai and raised him. Gedeon finished institute and works for Lithuanian representative office of Pigeot company. Then Rita married Balzaris Alfonsas. Now she is happy. They have two kids- son Egidios, born in 1986 and daughter Samantha, who is studying in the final grade of the secondary school. She wants to become a lawyer.

Our younger daughter Lana followed in my footsteps and became a teacher having finished Siaulia Teachers' training institute. She could not work as a teacher and started looking for another job right after the first year of her work. Lana is currently working for a private company. She has not private life. She is single, living by herself in her small apartment.

**Iosif Yudelevichus
Kaunas**



(Me and my family, 1957)

Those first postwar years were hard. Our family did pretty well, and father worked as a lawyer and made pretty good money. Brother was given the certificate of secondary education in evacuation. He finished school pre-term. I had studied for a year in Kaunas and finished school. That year I joined Komsomol, I was not eager to be involved in social work, but I had to do it for me to enter institute. I was not attracted by communistic ideology. I was always fond of art and could draw, so I entered Kaunas construction institute, the architecture

department. Later on the institute was reformed into a polytechnic. I got the specialty of the architect and I worked with layouts. During my first years after graduations I made designs for agricultural businesses in Lithuania. I traveled a lot and communicated with people.

We had a calm life and tried our best not to get any attention from the authorities. Father worked a lot and met with his colleagues after work to play poker and just chat. Very often the company of lawyers kept late hours in our place, well past midnight.

But in 1950 father got into trouble. I do not know if it is connected with anti-Semitic campaign [Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'], launched in USSR at that time. Someone sent a letter to the KGB saying that father owned shares of foreign capitalistic companies.

He was called by KGB and interrogated. Father explained that before war he really owned shares of German Sanitary Engineering Company, because he was their representative. Father was called in KGB again.

He was called by the investigator who told him that his defense was done in a wrong way and that he did not choose the right clients as an attorney.

Even worse, in early 1950s father submitted document for getting a permit to go and visit his brother Isaac in Israel. The response was negative. So Father was getting extremely nervous. In 1950 he had a first heart attack, which I'm sure was caused by all this. In 1955 father died. His death was easy and sudden, but too early- he was only 60 years old. He was buried in Jewish cemetery in Kaunas, but since he lived and died an atheist, without any rites.

Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene Kaunas

In 1946 I went to Kaunas. Leya met me at the train station. It reminded me of our

meeting in Klaipeda. Now were laughing out loud as both of us managed to survive. She took me in her room. Leya was a housekeeper of some well-off people and lived in a small room for a maid in their apartment and I stayed with her. We talked non-stop.

We had to live, so I started looking for a job. Nobody wanted to employ me as I did not have a place to live and no Kaunas residence registration document. It was written in my documents that I was permitted to live in Kaunas, but nevertheless they did not want to register me. My sister and I had to go to many officials to have me registered. I found a job before I got the registration. I went to work as a waitress in a restaurant. It was the only place where one could be employed without having residence registration. The work was very hard. I had to carry heavy trays all day long, but in those hard starvation times the opportunity to eat at the restaurant kitchen made up for all other trouble. I even managed to bring some food home for Leya.

In fall Leya married Vilnius Jewish man-- Moshe Finkelstein. I stayed in a tiny room by myself.

A couple of days after Leya's departure, I saw Shakalis, my old boss, sitting at a table in the restaurant. He had taken me into evacuation; I owed him my life. He said that he was not pleased that I was working as a waitress, but I said there was nothing I could do about that.

When I finished working that evening, he walked me home and told about himself. He had been in the front lines and was captured. His wife, having received the message that he had disappeared, married a Russian officer right away.

When Shakalis came back to Lithuania after war, he wrote her a letter. But she wrote him and said that she was happy in her second marriage and asked him not to disturb her anymore.

Shakalis overcame all those hardships very bravely. We became friends again, but there was no way we could have a close relationship. I respected my former director, but he was much older than me.

In a while Shakalis found himself a good match. He married a pretty Lithuanian lady and lived with her in Kaunas for many years.

Shortly after meeting with Shakalis I met my future husband. We were introduced to each other by a former inhabitant of Shakai, my father's pal.

He took the guy to the restaurant where he sat there watching me. When we got acquainted, we felt warm feeling towards each other right away. On the first night my new acquaintance saw me off home, but being a decent girl I did not ask him in. We had stayed on the threshold for a long time. A few days later, we went for a walk and told each other about ourselves and our stories.

His name was Kalmin Zak. He was born in 1925 in Shakai, which is not far from Shaulai. There were eleven sons and one daughter in his family. All of them were hiding, and all of them but Kalmin had been shot during the occupation.



(Me with my husband Kalmin Zak and elder son Jakov, 1951)

Kalmin even saw his mother and his siblings taken to be shot. Later on Kalmin happened to be in the ghetto, from where he was sent to a concentration camp in Germany. He was lucky to survive.

He managed to come back to his motherland, Lithuania, where nobody was waiting for him.

Our fates were alike. I was so lonely. Kalmin and I started seeing each other. I was very strict, I did not let him kiss me or even touch my hand. We had several dates and Kalmin proposed to me and we got married shortly.

He bought wedding rings and Leya made a dress for me, which I wore for our marriage registration ceremony. I took my husband's name. Later on when I was getting a new passport, the lady who was issuing it made a mistake and my last name as Jakiene, not Zakene. Thus my last name is Jakiene.

Both of us were raised Jewish and decided to wed according to Jewish traditions. Kalmin and I were wed in chuppah in Kaunas synagogue. Before that I dipped in mikvah. In postwar times we were one of the few couples who were brave enough to marry in a traditional Jewish way.

We had a wedding party at home, where my sister Leya and her husband, some distant relative of my husband and a pal who introduced us, were present.

Soon I got pregnant and my husband insisted that I should leave my work. I became a housewife and stayed that way. My Kalmin was an ordinary worker and worked for a glazer's shop. In Soviet times he made pretty good money, and Kalmin was a very kind person.

He always gave me his salary and never asked me to report to him. I was rather economical and we lived comfortably. We had not lived for long in my small room. Soon, my pals helped us get a small apartment in the old part of the city. Later on, in the 1970s, the house was demolished and we were given the apartment in the district where we are still living.

In summer we rented a dacha either in Palanga or in Prenai. We also went to the resorts, e.g. to Druskenkai, where we had

mineral water. We had never owned a dacha. Husband bought a car in the early 1960s and we went on vacation by car. We almost did not go to the theaters. I enjoyed reading. I read a lot of books of Russian classics, Jewish and European authors.

In 1947 I gave birth to my first son, whom I named Yakov. In 1952 our second son was born. We named him Gerts after my father. My husband and I managed to preserve a true Jewish spirit, which was raised in us, and we imparted it to our boys.



(My sons Yakov and Gerts, 1960)

Yiddish was spoken at home and our sons got to know their mother tongue since childhood. We also tried to keep Jewish traditions the best way we could, though it was very hard in Soviet times. I tried observing kashrut- at any rate I never mixed milk and meat food, and I certainly never had pork at home. I failed to observe Sabbath, as Saturday was a working day- Kalmin had to work, the boys had to go to school.

I tried not to do anything on Saturday though- no laundry or cleaning. We marked holidays- Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Shavout, Simchat Torah the way it was done in grandmother's house.

My husband and I attended synagogue on holidays. We were members of Kaunas Jewish religious community. We raised our children Jewish- both of them went through brit milah, then they were bar mitzvahed at the age of 13. They identified themselves as Jews since childhood. We told our children

how their ancestors died, and Jewish tragedy at Great Patriotic War, we always took them to the place where their relatives were executed.

As for politics, our family was never interested.

Sarah (Klug) Rutkauskene Kaunas

When our son was born, Benis was relocated in a small town on the bank of Baltic sea Klaipeda, where he was assigned the chairman of municipal Ispolkom. I went with him. We also were given a wonderful house and servants. Benis worked very hard, he never shared his troubles with me. I only could hear about Lithuanian resistance, sabotage, which were set up by them.

Benis got an ulcer for being nervous. He needed fresh dairy products. At that time high officials were prohibited to have their own husbandry. My husband addressed to the central committee of the party with the request to keep a cow. His request was satisfied and we bought a cow. We had fresh milk and I learnt from my parents how to make butter, curds and other things.

My husband found my father using national security channels. He got settled in Krasnoyarsk. There he met a woman, a Jew from Latvia. They lived in civil marriage. He had a good life there.

My father got a cancer; in 1951 he died. I sold the cow and sent Janina to Krasnoyarsk. I could not go myself because of my children. Sister was late as father was buried in the common hospital grave.

In 1947 my husband was transferred to Marijampole, where he was also the head of municipal authorities. Shortly after our arrival, there was a dreadful story, which changed our lives completely. There was a coming Lithuanian holiday, for which people baked pancakes. The employee of social department invited all employees for dinner. My husband was also invited.

Benis came home and said that we were invited for dinner and had to get ready. I was pregnant with the third baby and said that I was feeling unwell. Then Benis also refused to go there. I tried to convince him saying that he was supposed to mark national holiday with the Lithuanians, but he insisted on staying with me. It saved his life. At night there was a telephone call it was the head of state security committee [KGB]. He asked where Benis was. I was surprised and said that he was at home. It was a pitch dark night and Benis was asleep. Then I heard that person say to somebody: «Benis is alive». It turned out that at night the house where his colleagues got together, was attacked by gangsters and everybody was killed. The hostess and even small children, who were at home, were killed.



(My husband Benis Rutkauskas, me and our sons Romualdas and Andrus, 1956)

I was taken to the hospital as soon as I went home. Parturition started because of the stress. I gave birth to a son whom we called Andrus. Commission came from Moscow. Husband lost his job right away. He was constantly being interrogated as he was the only survivor, which looked suspicious to the soviet regime.

By that time he was in black list. In about a year he was reprimanded by the party for not mentioning the leading role of comrade Stalin in his speeches. He was reminded of that. Fortunately, husband was not arrested

or repressed. I think it was protected by the first secretary of central party committee Snezhkus, who had known Benis since the times of underground communism.

My husband was not restored in his position as he was forbidden to hold high positions. Benis was very worried but I told him that the most important was that he was alive, our son was born and we would go on.

As soon as the party circles, one of the party activists from Panevezhis gave husband a call. He offered him a position of the brewery manager. So, we left for Panevezhis. Here we rented an apartment.

Benis ran the brewery so well that it became one of the leading enterprises though it was with losses before. We had stayed there for two years. In 1949 Snezhkus called my husband and told him to come to Vilnius. Collectivization commenced, and again they needed people who were dedicated to the communist party. Benis was appointed the chairman of municipal ispolkom in Sirvintos, and we moved there. Since that time we often changed the places of residence. Benis was also appointed to manage crisis. The children and I were traveling with him. I had never been the member of the party, but I always listened to what my husband had to say, supported him, gave him advice. In a word, I was a real friend to him.

When in 1950s the struggle with cosmopolites started, I was afraid that husband would get into trouble for his wife being a Jew. In Lithuania Jews were treated much better than in Russia. There many party activists were married to Jews. Even Snezhkus had a Jewish wife. We knew about doctors' plot [19] and of course understood that it was tosh.

When Stalin died in 1953 my husband did not cry. Moreover, we even smiled stealthily. Divulgement of Stalin's cult at XX Communist party congress was for Benis as a breath of fresh air after being in the marsh. My husband was transferred in

Jonava in 1956 where we stayed for four years. I had always been a housewife. I raised the children. I always had a baby-sitter and housekeeper, whom I supervised.

We liked to mark holidays at home- our and children's birthdays, memorable dates. We marked no religious holidays neither Jewish nor Lithuanian. I did not like marking soviet holidays. There was no use in that as we always were invited somewhere. We often marked them in the town theatre or at some companies. Benis got the invitations and I accompanied him.

**Liza (Abramson) Lukinskaya
Siauliai and Vilnius**



(This is me, 1947)

Soon after my parents arrived I went to my hometown, Siauliai, in order to get some documents in the archive as I didn't have a birth certificate and school certificate. The first person I saw when getting off the bus was Eduardas Kudritskas - my friend from childhood and my calf love.

He was happy to see me alive. We had a long talk. Eduardas saw me off and came to Vilnius a couple of times to see me, hoping we would be together. But it turned out to be quite different.

There was a Soviet military unit not far from our house. My brother met three officers and invited them to come over to us. One of them, Colonel Vladimir Lukinskiy, a tall handsome man started courting me. I didn't mind his courtship as I liked Vladimir very much.

It wasn't that I forgot about my husband whom I loved, just being young... ???

Vladimir Lukinskiy was younger than me. He was Russian, born in Leningrad in 1924. Vladimir came from a rich family. His mother Katerina was from a noble family. She raised her son in a wonderful way. Vladimir was well-read, educated, loved opera and classical music.

We fell in love and Vladimir proposed. All of a sudden Father opposed it. He was flatly against my marrying a non-Jew.

Once in the winter 1946 I invited Vladimir for lunch. He brought canned food products and firewood. Back then, it was really hard to find those things.

When Father found out that Vladimir made all those presents to the family, he put everything in the garbage can. I told my fiancé the way it was. He reacted calmly to that and invited me to a restaurant. Here he ordered all kinds of delicacies: caviar even!

Since that time Father started turning out Vladimir, whenever he came over. Then when Father went on a very long business trip I decided to have a talk with Mother, woman to woman, and told her about our love. I thought she would understand.

Mother said that I could marry Victor under one condition-- 'over her dead body.' So I then took my nightie and left home without anything else. In spite of the fact that it was my apartment, I left everything there, even my food cards, for my mother.

Vladimir and I rented an apartment and moved in there. Once in the evening after work we were passing by my house. Mother was standing on the threshold. 'Dinner is ready,' she said to us both. Thus, Mother accepted Vladimir.

When Father came back from the trip, Mother told him that I was living with Vladimir.

Then Father collected all the presents he had brought me, Mother took some linen, a table cloth, a pile of dishes and they came to see us.

Since that time Father and Vladimir became as thick as thieves. My husband never remembered how my parent gave him a hard time at first.

I insisted that Vladimir should be demobilized from the army. I didn't want to be an officer's wife and spend all my life on the road. He was demobilized and found a job. Our marriage remained unregistered for a while.

The red-tape Soviet laws demanded either the documents on the divorce with Olkin or his death certificate. I didn't even have the marriage certificate, issued by the Judenrat, as I buried all the documents when leaving the ghetto. I had to walk from one office of a dignitary to another and finally we were permitted to get our marriage registered. It happened in 1946.

In 1948 I gave birth to a son and named him Alexander. For a while my son and I were living with my parents. When our son turned seven months my mother-in-law - my father-in-law had passed away by then - exchanged her apartment in Leningrad for an apartment in Vilnius and we moved in with her. Our apartment was in the heart of Vilnius, consisting of two rooms and a kitchen. One room was taken by my mother-in-law and the other by my husband, son and me. My mother-in-law was a wonderful, clever and kind woman. She accepted me and loved me like her own daughter, helping me in everything, especially in raising our son.

My husband was a member of the Communist Party. I didn't join the Party as I had been in the occupation. At that time it was disgraceful. After my son was born, I kept working at the secret department for a while and in the early 1950s, when state anti-Semitism was rampant, I was told to quit my job because I wasn't a Communist. I

found a job as an HR inspector in the Lithuanian Consumers' Council. At that time my husband was called to the military enlistment office and drafted into the army for the second time. He was to be sent to the border with China, but he was lucky. He met his friend from the army in the military enlistment office and he offered my husband to go to Leningrad to teach at some courses for officers.

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My father lived for 82 years and died in 1969. My mother invited an old Jew from the synagogue and he read a prayer for my dad. I couldn't have my father buried in accordance with the Jewish tradition - without a coffin. I couldn't picture that my father would be in the earth. Father's funeral was secular. My mother died in 1986, she was buried next to my father at the Jewish cemetery of Vilnius.

My brother's family did well. He worked at the Lithuanian symphonic orchestra and his wife was a singer at the Opera and radio. My brother was afflicted with cancer and died at the age of sixty. His wife left for Israel. She never remarried.

**Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova
Vilnius**



(Me with my friend Liza Kabatner, 1950)

The leading Soviet squads were ahead of us, and the Soviet field hospital wasn't far from the hamlet of the Strimaitis'. My mother and I often went there to help out the wounded. My mother broached a conversation with one of the employees, he was really astounded to hear my mother's good

Russian. My mother told one military man our tragic pre-war story. He advised us to go to Vilnius. Mother knew that nobody was waiting for us in our native town--no house, kin, friends, and the mere streets of our town would make us go back to our previous life and hurt the wounds in our hearts once again. So we knew we'd just go to Vilnius and start a new life.

We walked through an empty city, surrounded by annihilated houses and apartments, wherein people had lived, planned, hoped, loved and envied. We could take any empty apartment. We inhabited a house on Georgievskiy Avenue, which later became Stalin Avenue, and is currently Gedemin Avenue. There were doors which separated the apartments in the long corridor. We got a three-room apartment. It was well furnished.

There were sets of dishes in the cupboards, and some garments in the wardrobes. We felt miserable. We were illegitimate intruders. Then the employees of the communal organization went to all the apartments and made lists of the things in the house. We were supposed to pay some money for the furniture and dishes, but were totally broke. We were given all that for free. One of the guys turned out to be rather kind. He said, 'Well, use the things earned by your tribesmen. Let them have peace in Heaven.' He gave up on us and left.

My mother found a job as a cashier in a canteen. In September I went to the fifth grade of a Russian school without knowing any Russian words, but by the end of the fifth grade I wrote dictation better than anybody else.

At that time, my mother and I were indigent. It was the time of the food card system. Once a week we went to get the scarce products with our cards. We were starving now as opposed to during the war.

After some months, my mother was stricken with tuberculosis. She was in the hospital and as if ill luck would have it I got sick as

well. I had either jaundice or dysentery. It was strange that during our wandering days in the war time, we didn't even catch a cold. Our organisms must have had a protective mechanism in the days of ordeal. My mother's state was very bad. She had the caverns and was between life and death. My mother's brothers assisted us. They sent penicillin, which was in deficit in the USSR at that time and my mother was getting better. People stayed for many months in the hospital because of tuberculosis.

I was sent to an orphanage. It was called Jewish as there were a lot of Jewish children, who had lost their parents. Here I joined the Komsomol and became the leader for junior schoolchildren: pioneers [see All-Union pioneer organization]. I enjoyed studying and absorbed the information like a sponge. I had a thirst for knowledge during my meanderings and I liked to take care of the pioneers, teaching them verses and songs, playing games, helping them with studies. I was fed pretty well. It was warm and cozy. The teachers treated me very well. They sympathized with the orphans. I had spent a whole year at the orphanage while my mother had stayed in the hospital. When she was discharged, I went back home.

My mother was bonded with the family I started with my husband. She didn't have friends. She didn't go to synagogue. Before, my mother wasn't religious and after the war she didn't want to hear of God. Even if she had believed in God, after she lost her husband, son and relatives she didn't any more. However, she always fasted on Yom Kippur and bought matzah on Pesach. I think she did it because she was used to it. My mother was getting more and more ill and couldn't help me anymore. In 1964 she died. She had a secular funeral in the city cemetery in Vilnius without any Jewish rites being observed.

Zalman Kaplanas
Vilnius



(This is me, 1950s)

I was transferred to Vilnius, where the capital regiment was formed from those who remained in our former regiment. In the lines I was offered to join the Party on multiple occasions. I honestly said that I was raised in bourgeois Lithuania and wouldn't be able to give my life for Lenin and Stalin. A long time ago I made up my mind not to enter the Party.

We settled in Vilnius, where military squads were positioned before the war. The regiment commander gave me and my orderly a separate house. It was a small wooden house on Kostyushkas Street. My lodging was primitively furnished - two iron folding beds, a table and a chair. I used to have no luxury during the war. I celebrated the Victory Day, 9th May 1945 here, in Vilnius. Finally, on 26th January 1946 I was demobilized from the army in the same rank I had after having finished military school.

I was in high spirits. I had a place to live. The house that the regiment commander gave me still belonged to me. I was to study at university and have a good job. I was offered the position of deputy head of the municipal Ispolkom owing to my fluency in Russian. But things turned out to be quite different. I met a friend who offered me a job in the forestry vocational school as a civil defense teacher.

I resisted for a long time. I didn't want to work at the vocational school as a teacher with a certain schedule. I wanted to have time for my studies.

[Although I didn't really want it] I was assigned to be a defense teacher at a vocational school. My task was to establish a rigid discipline as there were bandits in the forests at that time, and students, who mostly came from villages and hamlets, were influenced by them.

In a couple of weeks there was an apple-pie order in the vocational school and the students didn't only obey me, but also other teachers and the director.

I had to combine work at the vocational school with daily studies at university..

In a year, in 1950 I was again appointed the acting director of the vocation school at the collegium of the ministry. I couldn't be appointed director as I was a Jew, and besides I didn't belong to the Communist Party.

It was the period of state anti-Semitism. Almost every day 'rootless cosmopolites' were stigmatized in the papers, which said that they were looking for ways to do harm. At that hard time when Jews were fired no matter what position they had, I became the acting director of the vocational school. Since 1950 the commissions from Moscow came to the vocational school on a frequent basis. Many people couldn't abide by the fact that I was a good director.

I moved into the vocational school. I locked my apartment, where I had a relative comfort. I lived in my office, slept on the leather couch. Back at that time such couches were the attributes of the offices. Many people burned the midnight oil trying to copy Stalin.

My position became shaky.

In the full swing of anti-Semitism, during the Doctors' Plot, at the beginning of 1953. The auditor came to the vocational school intending to fire or arrest me. But he couldn't find a reason. It was a terrible time. It was impossible to read those loathing articles about Jews being criminals and

murderers. All people with common sense understood that it was libel and provocation. But still it affected the public opinion. People became suspicious. The Jews in the street were looking around feeling harassed.

Fortunately - and it's not a slip of the tongue, I mean it - fortunately for me and for other millions of people, the tyrant died on 5th March 1953. I didn't mourn over his death, but I didn't show my joy either. By that time I knew a lot about the true persona of Stalin and repressions. Every morning I listened to Radio Free Europe in my office, BBC and other western radio stations. It was impossible to black out these radio stations in Lithuania and the voice of Anatoliy Goldenberg, the BBC announcer became dear to many Lithuanian households.

As for my personal life. A wonderful girl, Sheina Volpe, lived with her mother not far from me in the house of their remote relative, my former front-line comrade, Avrum Volpe.

I met her in his house. Sheina was born in 1928 in the small town of Kronis, not far from Kaunas, into the family of a merchant, Moses Volpe. A couple of days before the war the Volpe family came to their relatives in Kaunas. They were caught in the war and became inmates of Kaunas ghetto.

Moses, Sheina's father, was shot during one of the first actions. Sheina, her mother, aunt, and cousin were taken to a hamlet by one of their acquaintances, a Lithuanian called Bronis. For two years the three of them stayed in a hole under the shed sized 2.5x1.5 meters.

The hamlet where Bronis lived wasn't far from the highway Kaunas-Vilnius. There was a pond where the Fascists washed their horses and watered them. If somebody had checked the shed, where the Jews were hiding in the cellar, not only the Jews would have been killed, but also the whole family of the host.

When the Soviet Army liberated the hamlet, Sheina and her relatives were on the brink of emaciation.

Aunt Mery was the one who suffered the most as her toes were frozen and she was severely afflicted with rheumatism so that she wasn't able to walk. First Sheina and her mother Sarah lived in their town. Then their distant relative, my comrade, suggested moving to his house, not far from mine on Kostyuskas.

I liked Sheina at once. She was a pretty Jewish lady. We had a lot in common: our childhood and adolescence went by in one little town, our kin perished during the occupation.

Besides, I wanted a family: to have holidays and traditions. In 1955 Sheina and I registered our marriage in the state registration office, but we didn't have any party on the occasion. Sheina moved into my apartment. In 1956 she gave birth to our first-born. We named him after my father, Moshe.

At that time there was the first Israeli-Arab war for independence in Israel [Editor's note: It was the Suez Crisis taking place in 1956, the Israeli Independence War was eight years earlier.], and everybody knew the name of Moshe Dayan, the one-eyed Israeli general, though Soviet propaganda depicted him as a symbol of the 'international belligerent Zionism.' If there was an article devoted to unmasking the 'Israeli aggressors' his picture was always published. When the newsreel of that war was presented, Dayan was always there. He was vituperated at all party convocations, meetings of the workers and lectures.

When I came to the state registration office to register my son, I was told that such a name didn't exist, but I was persistent and named my son Moshe. However, I had to be persistent in pushing for them to agree to put the name Moshe on the birth certificate of my son. I demanded that they show me the official stamped document where it was

written how to name children, and which names were banned. Of course, such a document didn't exist.

I said that such names as Stalina [derivative from Stalin], Oktiabrina [derivative from October Revolution] and other similar names weren't listed in any book, nevertheless I personally knew some people with such names.

In 1961 Sheina gave birth to our second son, who was named after Emmanuel, one of my mother's brothers, who was helping our family.

First, we lived in my house. It was hard. We had to carry water in buckets and warm it to bathe our son. Upon receiving the apartment our life was getting gradually better. By that time Sheina had graduated from the Chemistry Department of Vilnius University and was employed by a military plant. She worked there for a few years. After I resigned from vocational school I started working for the Design Bureau of the Light Industry and then for the Light Industry Ministry as an advisor on financial issues. I was well paid. My wife earned good money as well. We had a comfortable life. We could afford good food and beautiful clothes. I still think what suit to put on and pick a tie to match the suit. In the summer time we went to the popular Baltic spas or to the Crimea and the Caucasus.

**Rafael Genis
Telsiai**



(This is me, 1947)

My trip to Lithuania took four days and I had to change trains twice. I didn't care if it was a locomotive train or not, all that

mattered was that it should go to Lithuania. Thus I reached Siauliai and from there I took the shuttle to Telsiai and walked to Rietavas.

I couldn't recognize my town, as all buildings were burnt down, including our house. My neighbor told me of the horrible things done to my family.

I couldn't stay in the house built on the foundation of our old nest where we had been so happy. The Lithuanian was worried that I would turn her out, but I wasn't going to do that. I went down to the cellar and found apple and other jam, which my mother had made. It was still good. I showed it to the lady, told her to eat it and left.

I couldn't stay in Rietavas and left for Telsiai. Here I met my old boss, Mr Shilenis, who also told me many things. He worked for the regional Ispolkom, and helped me very much. I was given an apartment - with a large room and a kitchen. I was ready to accept any job. First, I was asked if I knew how to make sausage. They brought me a cow and I made the sausage myself. I was given money and went to Klaipeda.

In 1948 I started working in the road department of the Ispolkom as an engineer of asphaltting the road Telsiai-Plunge.

In 1948 I entered a college in Kaunas. Upon graduation I entered the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute. Both educations were extra-mural. Having experience in construction, I started working as an engineer at a commodity base in Telsiai and worked there until my retirement.

A Lithuanian, Vaytrikele, who was sitting at one desk with my sister Tsilya, was the inspector at the party committee. She asked me if I kept in touch with my relatives in the USA. I said that I did and mentioned that I had recently got a letter from them. My case wasn't discussed for a long time, they turned me down and I made no further attempts.

Nevertheless, my colleagues always had a very good attitude towards me. I had excellent organizational skills and they valued me. I never noticed anti-Semitism in all those years, neither at work nor beyond it. In 1953 when Stalin died, I was only happy for that, I knew what he was worth since I had been put in the cart with the peoples' enemies during the war. I understood how much trouble that person had brought.

In 1953 I met my fate. At that time I was working in the road department and we were building the road Klaipeda-Kaunas. I was in the town of Linkuva rather often as we had a machinery site there. Once I was driving in a car and saw a girl walking along the road. She asked for a lift. She told me her name was Constantia Beryute and she was Lithuanian.

Her house was about five kilometers from Linkuva. I gave her a lift and went to work. When I was driving back I saw her standing there again. The lady said that she worked as a maid in Linkuva. Then I saw her again, and even drove her home.

This is how we met. I liked her instantly and I came to meet her parents. They liked me at once though they were Lithuanians and I was a Jew. They didn't even think of my nationality. I took the young lady to Telsiai and we had our marriage registered. We have been together since then.

Constantia was born in 1932 in Linkuva. She came from a simple farmers' family. They worked hard for a living. Constantia was an only child. She only finished elementary school before the war, then there were no opportunities for studies. She found a low profile job to help out her parents.

In 1953 we had our marriage registered in Telsiai and started our life in a poky apartment. It was always neat and cozy. At times in the morning when the breakfast was being cooked in the kitchen, I woke up and thought that there hadn't been a war and soon my mother would come in and

wake me up. It was the first time over those 13 years when I didn't feel lonely and it was a wonderful feeling to know that you were needed by someone.



(with my wife Constantia Genene, 1960s)

We had a good life. There was an air of trust and understanding. There were no conflicts. On the weekend our friends came for a cup of tea. We talked about life. We celebrated mostly birthdays and the New Year. During the Soviet time there were no religious traditions in our life.

I got a plot of land in downtown Telsiai, designed my house and managed the construction project. A big and cozy house was built in the course of several years and when it was finished the whole family moved there. We made the furniture, windows, doors and curtains ourselves. It was good that I grew up in a family where I was taught everything by my kin. It was the time of high deficit. I am still living in that house with my wife.

In 1954 our son was born. We gave him a Lithuanian name -Petras. My wife didn't work as she had a lot to do about the house. Our son demanded a lot of attention, but I wasn't a good help here as I was almost blind.

We had a big husbandry. We had chickens, a cow, a big garden, where Constantia grew

all the necessary vegetables for the family. She made such a beautiful flower bed in front of the house! All the neighbors came to see it and asked for young plants.

Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova
Vilnius



(This is a picture of me in the orphanage with the group of classmates in 1947)

When I started the tenth grade, I found out that I was one of the candidates for a gold medal. [The gold medal was the highest distinction in the USSR for secondary schools.] But things turned out to be different. I was a serious girl on one hand, and on the other hand I was romantic and prone to be infatuated. I didn't go dancing as it was considered frivolous for a girl of my age and it was disapproved by the social opinion and headmaster of the school. Once, my friend talked me into attending a dance pavilion in the park. It was a disaster. We met two soldiers in the park. One of them was Russian and the other was a Buryat. One word led to another and one dance led to another and Matvey Malkhanov, the Buryat, and I couldn't part.

He was a very interesting person, erudite, polite and well-bred. In short, we fell in love with each other and soon became very close. When Matvey asked my mother for my hand, she went berserk and didn't want to give her consent. Matvey obviously wasn't a Jew, and he had a rare and unusual appearance. Not only my mother, but the whole Jewish Vilnius was against it. But nobody could do anything about it.

When the two of us went to the state marriage registration office I was pregnant

already. I had to transfer to the evening school, and finished it the same year without a gold medal of course. In 1951 I gave birth to my son, Alexander. I lived with my mother. By that time she liked my husband very much and they called a truce. She couldn't help loving him. He was a wonderful and kind person.

Matvey was born in 1928 in Kacha, Novosibirsk oblast, Krasnoyarsk [Russia, 4000km from Moscow]. In 1947 he was drafted into the Soviet army. His unit was in Lithuania. Thus, he turned out to be in Vilnius. Matvey's parents didn't meet me before we got married. He only wrote to them that he had met the woman of his dreams and gotten married. After a few years we went to his motherland. They welcomed me like their own daughter. They always treated me and our children very well.

Less than a year passed and I decided to go on with my education. In 1952 I entered Vilnius University, the faculty of Russian Language and Literature. It was easy for me to pass the entrance exams. I didn't feel any bias towards me as a Jew. I wasn't touched in the years when Jews were fired, tried in court, even in the period of the flagrant state anti-Semitism [see Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'], when the Doctors' Plot was storming. When Stalin died in 1953 I cried just like most of the people around me. My husband told me that I should rejoice, and not mourn as he knew many exiled in Siberia and saw terrible Gulag camps and understood better than anybody who Stalin really was.

Our life was getting better. Having demobilized from the army, Matvey went to work as an engraver at a plant. Before the war, he finished an arts school in Novosibirsk [today Russia]. He had 'golden' hands and refined taste. The plant gave us a room in the remote district of Vilnius. The room was in a communal apartment. We shared a common kitchen with the neighbors. At first, it was pretty hard. In the morning we took our son to the

kindergarten. I had to study. My mother helped me. At night my husband got up to

take care of Alexander. Everybody gave me the opportunity to study.

Life in Lithuania today

In this final section of our Lithuanian reader, we have included eight stories—four by men, four by women—all of whom you have met in the earlier sections of this report. Our interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2006, and as of this writing (summer of 2012) most of these respondents have passed on.

This section of the Centropa Lithuanian Reader tell us about what life has been like since their children had grown up, gone off to university, and moved away to start families of their own. We have edited out some of the more personal aspects of these stories, as nearly all of these people expressed loneliness and ill health.

Ill health strikes most of us in old age, but to be growing old and alone as a Jew in Lithuania is particularly sad. After all, these people have taken us through their entire life stories, and have painted for us vibrant pictures of their lives prewar, their remarkable stories of survival during the Second World War, and they have told us of how they put their lives back together after the war.

They are the last of their kind and we shall not see their like again. In referring to the introduction in the prewar reader, these are the last Jews who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s either speaking Yiddish, or hearing it in their families. These are the Lithuanian

Jews who have regaled us with stories, and as you will read, their stories continue even well into old age. This, then, is the final chapter of this project.

We should add that although it is but a shadow of its former self, the Lithuanian Jewish community is extremely active today. They maintain a lovely community center and have youth activities, a front line soldiers' association, a ghetto survivors' club, and regular cultural meetings. There is also the Sholem Aleichem Jewish School, and its director, Misa Jakobas, has been the engine that has kept it going since it opened in 1990. Not all its students are Jewish, but everyone receives a strong dose of Jewish history and culture. It is known for its academic excellence.

Our Vienna team visited the school in 1999, and when we returned in 2012, we met some of the students we'd met a decade ago. While this is not empirical, we can report that the dozen students we met were studying medicine, law and science in university. None of them speaks Yiddish. But at a pub in the old city center, they did hold forth late into the night with tales of going to school and summer camp, of going abroad to study and staying in touch with friends. That makes them very much like most college students today, but we detected a certain flair in their stories. Perhaps that last flickering flame hasn't quite died out.

**Iosif Yudelivechus
Kaunas**



(This is me in Jonava, 2004)

I am currently living in bourgeois Lithuania and I am happy with that. I treated the Soviet regime as something negative and temporary, so I took my country's independence in 1991 as something long-awaited and positive.

Recently I became the member of Jewish community, not because I started being religious, but out of solidarity. There are so few Jews, and there are getting fewer of them in Kaunas, and in Lithuania in general. That is why we have to stick to each other, to learn Jewish culture and history.

I make my contribution the way I can. The first thing I decided to do was to find people who saved my relatives - uncle Isaac, his wife and daughter. I met uncle Isaac in the 1960s in Leningrad. He came there from Israel and was still scared to come to Kaunas. Uncle invited me in Leningrad and we met couple of times. He was constantly saying how grateful he was the people, who rescued him. Uncle asked me to do my best to find them. It was impossible in Soviet times.

In the 1990s I found two brothers who saved him on the island and other people who saved our family. I plead for them to be recognized as righteous among the nations, some of them posthumously.

I enjoyed doing that. I spend a lot of time in the archives, meeting people, helping them find those who saved Jews in Lithuania. Owing to my modest work, many people became famous and got recognition and gratitude from the state of Israel.

This is my last hobby and it is the most important thing I've done in my life. Besides, I help out community members with some legal issues. I was raised in the lawyer's family and was taught how to make applications and claims. I also do it voluntarily.

**Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene
Kaunas**



(My husband Kalmin Zak and me, 1990s)

Neither I, nor Kalmin, were the members of communist party, or komsomol. Our children Jakov and Gerts did not want to join the pioneers or komsomol. Of course, all of us were aware of the things going on in the country. We treated Stalin's death in 1953 like the death of the tyrant.

We also knew about doctor's plot and persecution of the Jews. We personally were not affected by that, but still we worried for other Jews. I remember we were happy when the state of Israel was founded and we followed the events taking place there and rejoiced in their victories.

We were not thinking of immigration though. Our life here was good. Nobody hurt us. We had our rights and we felt at home. Besides, as I've said before, the best is the enemy of the good.

My elder son Yakov finished school with straight excellent marks. Then he served in

the army in Riga. That period of his life was hard, but not only because of the anti-Semitism and imparity for the juniors, he was simply not very used to the strict discipline. Then he finished Kaunas economic institute and became an economist. Jakov married a Jewish girl, Rita. In 1971 he and his wife left for Israel. He found a job of the economist. He is working at the military plant from dawn till night, but he feels happy.

My grandson Arnold was born in Israel in 1980. Rena became a writer in Israel. I have not read her works, but I know that she is rather famous. I do not know what Arnold does for a living. In Jakov's words he is fond of music. They live in Tel Aviv. Jakov and his family observe Jewish traditions, go to the synagogue.

My younger son Gerts is also truly Jewish. He married a Jewish lady Eugenia. She is a music critic and loves her job. She goes to the theatres, concerts. Recently Gerts exchanged his apartment to live in one building with me. Gerts has a sport education. He graduated from Kaunas sport institute. He is a football referee now. His children- 19-year old Ari, and 13-old Dova, Gerts raises Jewish. They had their brit millah and their bar mitzvahs, too.

Now Gerts is the chairman of the Jewish community in Kaunas and the chairman of Jewish charity organization, which helps elderly and feeble Jews in those hard times. Gerts is trying to observe kashrut, to mark all Jewish holidays in accordance with our traditions.

In 1995 my lovely husband Kalmin died at the age of 70. We postponed the funerals for several days as we were waiting for our son to come from Israel. He was buried, when Jakov arrival. Kalmin was taken to the synagogue, where our relatives and close friends said good-bye to him. The rabbi read a prayer and he was buried in accordance with Jewish rites. There is a place for me next to my husband's grave at the cemetery.

I am by myself since then. My sister Leya became a widow in 1980s. Now her health is very poor. She is living in Vilnius with Arnold. We cannot talk on the phone often, as it costs a lot of money, but still we keep in touch and know what is happening with each other.

My brother Meishe, who in the early 1950s came back from the Soviet prison camps, settled in with us. In a while he married a Jewish lady by the name of Sarah. They had two children- Channa and Shloime. Unfortunately, his years in the ghetto, then the Soviet prison camp undermined my brothers' health and he died in 1975. His elder daughter Channa is living in America and his son Shloime is living in Kaunas with Sarah. We meet with them on Jewish holidays at my place.

My son, with his family, comes to me on holidays to be with me. I try to cook delicious Jewish food the way it was done by my grandmother.

I did not feel any joy out of breakup of the Soviet Union, we had never felt bad attitude to us, at work and in other situations. My sons did not complain of being reproached either. Now Lithuania regained independence. I think now the life is tougher - people are not pleased, finding fault with each other - Lithuanians are not happy with Russians, Russians- with Jews. All kinds of neo-fascist organizations are emerging. The life became harder. The medicine, utilities, education have become expensive. We got used that all of that was free. During Soviet times it was easier to get by with the pension we were paid, but now the old people cut and contrive having nobody to help them.

Now I get a small social pension as I did not work. I get 233 litas (editor's note.: about 90 USD). I had five infarctions.

Recently, I have spent three weeks in two hospitals. My son comes to me three times a day to put drops in my eyes, as I have glaucoma and cataracts. He is the best sitter

in the world. He does laundry and cleaning, buys medicine, goes shopping. I do not know what I would do without him.

I am trying to be the best friend for my son. He asks me for advice and it is important for me to be useful for him in some way.

Our Jewish community is also helping me. The nurse looks after me. They give me some money for the medicine, give me products that I need to have. When I felt better, I used to go to the community for all kinds of events, holidays, meetings with interesting people. I used the library.

I do not go anywhere over the past three years as I am sick, but I know that I am not forgotten.

Now, before Rosh Hashanah I received a greeting card from the community and a basket with food. Soon there will be Yom Kippur, the day when the fate of all Jews for the coming year is decided.

Now I am not fasting as I am too sick for that, but still on that day I will ask God to give wellbeing and health to my children and grandchildren. I will also ask to prolong my life, as I know that my son will feel bad without me.

**Sarah (Klug) Rutkaunesene
Kaunas**



(This is me, 2005)

My children became true Lithuanians, patriots of their country. They know that their mother is a Jew, respect my past and commemorate the perished. They are pure

Lithuanian in their conscience. Romualdas, who was friends with Jews most of all, was in Israel as he was invited there by his Jewish friends. They even paid for his trip. When he came back, he said it was like paradise there, but he wanted to live in his motherland.

I remained by myself after my husband's death. I don't really have my own friends any more. I communicated mostly with my husband's friends. But I am not needy. I get a large pension 905 lita for my husband [editor's note: about 350 dollars].

I must say that I felt I was missing something in my life—in a moral sense--and now in my old age, I have come back to my roots. It is as if I received a call from my childhood.

I started going to the synagogue, marking the Jewish holydays, and praying. It was so easy and natural to come back to the world of values that had been so dear to me in my childhood.

There is a Jewish community in Kaunas. It was opened in early 1990s. I am an active member of it and I get some help from them. In the 1990s, I regularly went to the synagogue.

But that was when I was healthier. The last time I was there was on Pesach four years ago. My daughter Lina also goes there, she orders prayers for our kin, buys matzah on Pesach.

My children come to me on holidays, paying tribute to my Jewish roots.

I pray daily now, just as I was taught by my father. I guess I had never forgotten about my roots. Those strong values were planted in me long ago.

Now I read the Bible every day and I recollect my childhood, our town, my parents and the Jewish world I grew up in. Today I turned 89. My children, grandchildren and great grandchildren have

visiting me since early morning. They love me, and it makes me happy.

**Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene
Siauliai**



(Me and my husband Boris Shteinas, 2006)

In Lithuania, we find positive things in our independence. Now our Jewish community, which was established before the soviet regime, has been revived, and my husband Boris became the chairman of Siaulia community. I help him with everything, edit his speeches, reports, make arrangements for the holidays, assist in negotiations with the sponsors. Nina is also with us. Almost every day she comes to the community.

I often cook Jewish dishes using my grandmother's recipes. We keep the traditions; we truly celebrate the holidays and try to make a better life for Siaulia Jews in such uneasy times.

My mother died in 1985. I left my job after that as I had to raise my grandson. My sister Nina also helped me. She became a teacher and was a headmaster at her school. She remained single. She adores my grandson Gedeon. My younger sister Anna also remained single. She graduated from Vilnius university. She had worked in commerce for many years. Then she worked in private companies. Now Anna is retired. She is living in Vilnius. I am bonded with sisters. We talk over the phone every day and see each other often.

We had a pretty good living during the soviet regime. That is why when Lithuania gained independence and Soviet Union

broke up [1991], it was a shock for us. It seemed to us that our life collapsed. There appeared anti-Semitists meetings, where communists and the Jews were blamed for all the bad things that happened. It was both in day-to-day life and in press. But with time, it eased.

**Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova
Vilnius**



(With my family, 2002)

I always keep in my heart the people who saved my life. I've kept in touch with my rescuers for many years. Now the parents [Strimaitis] and their daughter Mildei, with whom I still keep in touch, were conferred the title 'Righteous among the Nations' by the museum Yad Vashem.

The Lithuanian family of Mamra, who had been sheltering us for a long time as well, was exiled by the Soviet regime. My mother and I exerted every effort to find them, but didn't succeed.

In 1991 [actually in 1990] Lithuania gained its independence [see Reestablishment of the Lithuanian Republic]. Many of us were shocked at the way Russia acted against the independence of the Baltic countries. Me, I was never a communist. Being born here and living among Lithuanians, I've always supported their right for independence. Moreover, I remember my wonderful life during my childhood, when Lithuania was independent.

In fact, although I was formally retired, I worked a lot and even performed simultaneous translations during the first seating of the Lithuanian government. That was an honor.

Unfortunately, all our hopes weren't realized. Many of those whom we elected didn't live up to our expectations, but we have to think positively.

One of the best things about our independent Lithuania is the revival of Jewish life. There's a wonderful Jewish community here in Lithuania. There's also the Jewish state school and Jewish state museum.

I became an active member of the community. I'm a volunteer of the social department and member of the [Lithuanian] Council of the Ghetto Prisoners. I didn't become religious, but I gladly go back to the Jewish traditions. I take part in the Jewish holidays in the community.

**Shahne Berznitskiy
Vilnius**

I am old as the hills, but I'm still healthy, energetic and young in my soul. I'm a very active person and I'm not ready for eternal peace yet.

Since Lithuania became independent, we - having lost belief in communist ideas, a huge multinational socialist state - gained independence and the freedom of choice.

The most important is that Jewish life has been revived in our country and many people found themselves. During the postwar period, I, an active member of the Communist Party, couldn't have dreamed of marking the Sabbath, not working on Saturday, eat matzah on Pesach. Now I have all that.



(With my family and friends, 2005)

I'm an active member of the Unified Jewish Community of Lithuania. I sing in the choir of the community. I dance in spite of my age. I take part in all events, mark Sabbath and all Jewish holidays. I'm constantly busy. I have a lot of friends among the Jews of the community and non-Jews as well.

Apart from social events, I take care of the orchard that was planted by my late wife, Charna and I.

In fact, I met a wonderful Russian woman, Kira, on a bus. She is also keen on horticulture. She and I go to my orchard, and to the Jewish cemetery, to the graves of my family. I plied Kira with a love for Judaism. In fact, she studies Judaism and celebrates Sabbath with us on Friday.

I visited my brother Iosif in Israel. He is the only person, connecting me with my childhood and the past. My brother and I are bonded. We keep in touch in spite of the great distance. I hope to be able to go to Israel over and over again to see my brother.

**Zalman Kaplanas
Vilnius**

Emmanuel is quite a different son. My son Emmanuel is devoted to his mother. In 1995 Emmanuel immigrated to Israel. He found a very good job there. But in 1997 my Sheina, who had spent her adolescence in a damp basement, got severely ill. She was afflicted with rheumatism since adolescence and now it has returned in a very bad way.



(Me with Sofia Rabinovich, 2000)

She was operated on her knee joint. In 1998 she had to go through a complicated oncological operation. I've always been there for my wife. Emmanuel called from Israel every evening asking how his mother was doing. He also sent money, medicine and came for a visit on holidays.

Three years ago Emmanuel came back to Vilnius. I'm a very elderly man and it is hard for me to look after my sick wife. Now Emmanuel lives not far from us and calls on us every day to spend time with his mother. My Sheina is weak not only physically, but also suffers in other ways. Sheina doesn't want to see people, especially those who have known her young and beautiful. She has destroyed all her photos. I've loved Sheina all my life and would never leave her.

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.

Rafael Genis Telsiai



(This is me with the bishop of Telsiai, 2006)

Even though I was almost blind, I worked for many years. I retired in the early 1990s. Even though since 1945 I have been getting a pension for the disabled, it is pretty miserable.

All those years my wife and I had been going to the places where Jews were executed so we could commemorate them. I thought of how to mark those places and put the monuments there. Besides, I couldn't feel indifferent towards those Jews, who survived the war, and now are barely scraping by.

I decided to found a Jewish community in Telsiai and went to Vilnius to see the chairman of the United Jewish community of Lithuania, Alperavichus. He supported me. The community was founded in 1993 with me as a chairman.

According to the law on restitution we were given back the former premises of the prewar Jewish community. I sold that house and used the money to help poor Jews. Actually, the community is based in my house. I am the bookkeeper. I distribute the sponsors' aid coming from the Joint.

We celebrate Sabbath and Jewish holidays. I fulfilled my task: I put the monuments to the perished Jews on the places of their execution. I mostly used my savings for that as well as the money from the sponsors, collected by the relatives of the perished.

My Constantia is the best helper in all community activities. On Sabbath and on holidays she cooks a treat for the whole community and the Jews join us in celebration. We chat and recollect family stories. We celebrate holidays according to the tradition. I feel under the weather lately and I have to look for a successor as I understand that I have heart trouble and had an operation recently. I hope that my successor will be Petras, who will come back to Lithuania and help me.