



The Centropa Lithuanian Reader Volume 1 The World we Knew

Stories from our Lithuanian interviews
2005–2007

Interviews conducted
by Zhanna Litinskaya

Centropa's Lithuanian interviews

Volume I: The World We Knew

Centropa was founded in 2000 with a specific goal in mind—to use new technologies to preserve European Jewish memory. By the time we began, there were already video interview projects with Holocaust survivors being carried out by American and Israeli organizations. They preserved on video tape the stories of how Europe's Jews came face to face with modern man's single greatest crime—which had been directed at every one of them.

Our task was different. We never used video in our interviews. Instead, we asked 1,200 elderly respondents still living in fifteen European countries to share with us their old family photos, and tell us stories about their lives while looking at those snapshots (and documents). We were not specifically seeking stories of how their families perished. We wanted to know how they lived—before, during and after the Holocaust. Our interviewers audio-taped their responses; then transcribed every word. More than forty masters' and doctoral theses have drawn on the original language transcriptions in our collection—thus far. For the rest of us, most of these stories have been translated into English, and can be found on Centropa's website—along with 22,000 annotated photographs.

Our goal was to preserve stories, because as these last time witnesses leave us, they have been taking with them stories only they can tell.

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That is why our Baltic interviews are so important. Our Kiev-based team of interviewers, headed by Zhanna Litinskaya, traveled to eight cities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and sought out seventy Jews still living there. All interviews were conducted in Russian; they were ably translated by Nina Larychkina.

In Lithuania, Zhanna interviewed twenty-six elderly Jews. Only three of them recounted

Stories of growing up in the "big" cities of Vilnius or Kaunas (Vilna or Kovna). The others described life in small towns, often of around 5,000 residents, of whom, half were Jewish.

In his landmark study, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*, literary scholar David Roskies states that after the Holocaust, we have been cut off from the world that produced the great Yiddish story tellers like IB Singer, Sholem Aleichem, Der Nister and others.

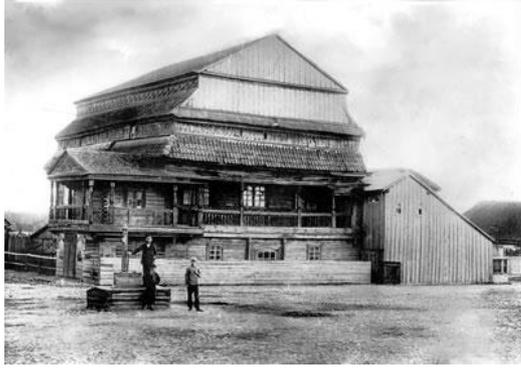
That is true, but it is precisely what makes this particular collection so interesting. Almost every Lithuanian Jew we interviewed came from Yiddish speaking households. If they did not grow up orthodox themselves, their grandparents were observant. And they spent their youths in small towns and in shtetls where stories were told, tales were spun. As soon as you begin reading the excerpts we selected here, you will know you are in the presence of real story tellers.

We have chosen twelve of our Lithuanian interviews and divided their stories into three separate readers—before, during and after the Holocaust. The pre-Holocaust section (this volume) is divided by theme, such as My Parents, About My Town, School Days, At Work, Religious Life.

The book we hope to produce, in eBook and printed form, promises to be a compelling and deeply moving publication. One does not need to come from Lithuanian Jewish stock to feel how powerful, lively and tragic these stories are. Or, to put it another way, these are not stories about 20th century history. These are stories about what the 20th century did to these twelve Lithuanian Jews.

Feel free to contact me, and I hope you enjoy reading through these excerpts.

Edward Serotta (serotta@centropa.org)



About my town

Dobre (Most) Rozenbergene Jurbarkas



(This is me on my cot at home, 1933)

All of my ancestors and I were born in the small Lithuanian town of Jurbarkas, in the western part of Lithuania, not far from the border with Germany. Jurbarkas stands on the river Neman. During my childhood, ships navigating between Jurbarkas and Kaunas were the main means of transport.

Jurbarkas was a small town with a population of approximately five thousand people. As I recall, about half of them were Jews, most of them residing in the center.

The stores owned by Jews were concentrated there. I remember textile stores owned by a Mr Polovin. His daughter Golda kept a vegetable store, where our family used to go to buy things.

Small shops and ateliers were in the center. They belonged to Jewish craftsmen: tailors, cobblers, hatters, glaziers. There was a gorgeous Catholic cathedral in the heart of Jurbarkas. Catholics - Lithuanians and Poles - went there.

There were several synagogues - a large wooden and a large stone synagogue. Usually my parents went to the stone synagogue. There were several small synagogues apart from the big ones.

**Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene
Zagare/Sialiai**

Zagare was a small town bordering on Latvia, with the population of about 5,000 people. In my childhood, half the town's population had been Jews. There were rich, middle-class and poor people, of course.



(This is my passport picture, 1953)
(no prewar photos of herself)

The Jewish stores were concentrated in the heart of the town. I remember a store carrying mostly hardware. There were also manufacturing shops and bakeries. There was a hotel in front of Broide's inn. It was owned by a Jewish man, Mr Krits. One of the best apothecaries was in the building of his hotel and it was owned by a Lithuanian.

One of the best photographers was a Lithuanian. The most famous people of the town were photographed by him.

Most of the Jews were workers and craftsmen. There was flax processing factory in town. Some of the craftsmen processed wool there was mill at Svete River. It belonged to the Shruls brothers. They also built a dam, which brought electricity to town.

There two synagogues in Zagare - Nae Zagare («the New») and Alt Zagare («the Old»). There was a rabbi in Zagare. His name was Riv. He was a very respectable man. Not only Jews sought his advice, but Lithuanians did as well.

There was no sewage in Zagare; only outhouses. All of us had wells in our yards, and water pumps looked like a miracle to us. I liked to pump water or just watch other people do that.

**Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene
Prenai**



(With my husband Kalmin Zak, 1947)

Prenai was a small town with the population mostly consisting of Jews. Its Jewish population lived in the center and the Lithuanians just outside the center. The town was beautiful, clean and neat.

There were small stores in the center, which belonged to Jews. There were also craftsmen workshops - tailors, cobblers, glazers, clock menders. There was a smithy out of center, where a Jewish smith was working. There were synagogues in town as well. I do not remember how many. As far I can recall there was a large two-storied stone synagogue.

**Sarah (Klug) Rutkauskene
Zelva**



(This is me at the age of one, 1919)

Our town of Zelva was situated on a river bend. On one of the hills stood the town and on another one was a village, where Jewish families lived. As a rule they were

tradesmen and craftsmen. There were the stores in the downtown. Some of them sold manufacture goods, other groceries and pharmaceutical products. There were workshops here- tailors', cobblers', hatters', glazers' and joiners'.

Jews and Lithuanians not merely got along, but they were friends and trusted each other. Often, Lithuanians and Poles could not pay for the products purchased in the stores. So their surname and the amount of the debt were entered in the book and in the autumn after harvesting, the debtors were supposed to come to the store and pay back the debt. Nobody was dishonest. It was a system based on trust.

On Sabbath we could not even light a match, to say nothing of stoking the stove. After our big luncheon, everybody took a rest. I liked reading books.

Sometimes the whole family went for a walk. Usually people strolled along the bank of river Zelva, where the Lithuanian village started. There were a lot of trees, including the fruit ones. In spring they blossomed, making the air fragrant. It seemed like Eden to me. Families came here all dressed up, just like it was supposed to on Saturday.

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



(This is my picture in 1935 in Siauliai)

On weekends our whole family went out together. There was a very nice park in front of our house--shady and beautiful.

There was a chestnut alley not far from it.

I was very active and sociable. The girls liked me, and my friends and I went for walks in the park. We gave each other hugs. Sometimes we went to cafes to eat ice-cream or go to the movies.

There were two movie houses in Siauliai at that time. There was the Lithuanian Drama Theater. I liked to watch performances there. I liked everything, connected with the theater and the stage. My dream was to become a ballet-dancer. I loved amateur performances. I danced on the school stage, played the grand piano and accompanied singers on the piano. I felt like fish in the water.

**Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova
Vilkaviskis**



(With my family, 1935)

I was born in the small Lithuanian town Vilkaviskis [about 150km from Vilnius], 14 kilometers away from the border with Russia and Poland. I was only nine, when World War II [see Great Patriotic War] was unleashed.

I had to go through such horrors when I was young that those experiences practically obliterated almost everything that I had before: my childhood, my happiness all vanished. That's why I have vague reminiscences of the pre-war times, but in spite of that I would like to leave behind some sort of trace of my family.

I remember our little town with its one-storied houses, surrounded by beautiful green trees. The streets went down to a small river: Sheshupa, where children used to have fun on a small beach.

When my father came home from work, he put me on his neck and took me outside. If he met some of his acquaintances he used to boast around, 'Ranana, say international!' and like a parrot I repeated the words without understanding the meaning.

My mother and I often strolled along the central square. At that time it seemed so big to me, but in fact it was a small square surrounded by one-storied stores and shops. Sometimes we went to Grandfather Solomin's store, and at times to Grandfather Kleinstein's bakery.

I enjoyed plump warm rolls but my mother shook her head when I took the rolls straight from the shelves of the store. The problem was it was next to impossible to make me eat, something I would regret later.

**Shahne Berznitskiy
Veisiejai**



(With my family, 1925)

All my ancestors are from a town called Veisiejai. In the period of the 1920s-1930s, when I began perceiving the outside world, there were about a hundred Jewish families there, numbering a little less than a thousand people.

It seemed to me that nearly all of them could fit in one large synagogue, where almost all Jews got together on Fridays, Saturdays and on holidays.

The synagogue was on Synagogskaya Street. It was a large and spacious two-storied log-house of simple construction, like most buildings in Lithuania.

It wasn't spared by the fire in the middle of the 1920s. At that time more than half of the buildings burnt down to the ashes. Religious Jews put money together and built another synagogue.

There was a large Catholic cathedral in the heart of the town as most of the population of Veisiejai consisted of Poles. The town also had Lithuanian and Jewish inhabitants. There were stores, workshops and groceries not far from the cathedral in the central part of the town.

They belonged to Jews, as most of them were craftsmen - tailors, cobblers, glaziers and retailers. Most of the stores in town were owned by Jews. There was also a Jewish intelligentsia - the dynasty of the doctors Kuklyanskiy, teachers of the Jewish school, insurance agents.

There was no lawyer in town, but a Jewish man called Levinson had an unfinished juridical education and he helped writing letters or filing a claim when needed.

Jews were in the trade business as well. The town stood on the bank of a big lake, where there were a lot of good fish.

I spent summer with my friends. I walked around the town barefoot. We went to the lake, to the forest. We picked berries: bramble and bilberries. Then mushroom season came and we went to the forest again.

I had a lot of friends. Most of them were Jewish guys, but some of them were Lithuanians and Poles. We got along very well. Kids didn't differentiate between nationalities, they merely had friends.

**Zalman Kaplanas
Jurbarkas**



(with my parents Etl and Moshe Kaplan,
1930s)

I was born in Jurbarkas, which was built on the river Neman. Back in the Middle Ages fortifications were built for the defense of cities. Thus the frontier town of Jurbarkas, bordering on Germany was built. [Lithuania was bordering with Germany until the end of WWII, when Eastern Prussia was divided up between Poland and the Soviet Union. The previous Lithuanian-German border today separates Lithuania from the Kaliningrad territory, a part of the Russian Federation].

An ancient citadel stood in Jurbarkas and there was a beautiful park in the town. A small park not far from the Jewish lyceum was called Tel Aviv by local people—it's where Jewish youth got together.

There was a large Catholic cathedral in the center of the town, though half of the population of Jurbarkas consisted of Jews - the total population of the town was five thousand.

There were several synagogues, two elementary Jewish schools - in one of them subjects were taught in Hebrew, in the other one in Yiddish - and an amateur Jewish theater. In the early 1920s a private Yiddish

lyceum was founded, where the children of rich local and out-of-town people studied.

Jurbarkas Jews were involved in craftsmanship and commerce. They were cobblers, tailors, hatters, glazers, cabinetmakers etc. The only photography studio in Jurbarkas was owned by a Jew called Levinas.

There were brilliant dedicated doctors among the town's Jewish intelligentsia. Doctor Karlinskiy was the one who stood out. He treated both the rich and the poor. He gave medicine to the indigent. He went through the villages and assisted everybody who needed help no matter what nationality they were or what social strata they belonged to.

In the first day of the Great Patriotic War, the Lithuanian Polizei, who served the Germans, came to us. The doctor was making his rounds in the town hospital, the only one in our town.

His Lithuanian colleague reproached the police and tried to stand up for the Jewish doctor. He said that Karlinskiy had recently rescued his little son. The Polizei just sneered and pushed the doctor aside. Doctor Karlinskiy was doomed like his Jewish patients. He was shot during the first action against Jews in Jurbarkas.



Our house

Dobre (Most) Rozenbergene Zagare

I remember my childhood well. We lived in a large two-storied house with two entrances. The left one was occupied by our family, and Mother leased the second half of the house. In the late 1930s her cousin moved in there.



(This is me on my cot at home, 1933)

There were four large rooms on the first floor of the left wing of the house; a large dining room, called a salon by my mother. Her friends came to see her on the weekend. They had coffee or tea with cakes, did some handicraft, and had a chat about their children, and the problems they had.

The room was covered with a velvet cloth. Velvet curtains matched the table cloth. There was a small coffee table in the corner by the fireplace. My mother usually had her afternoon coffee there. In the evening a fire was made in the fireplace. Arm-chairs with matching velvet upholstery were by that small table.

My parent's big bedroom was next to the dining-room. There was a large carved bed in the center of the room with the tester. There were a small bed-room and a room, where my maternal grandmother Elke lived. My brother was independent since childhood. He occupied one of the rooms on the second floor. There was a large kitchen on the first floor with a stove. The stove was stoked with firewood. The stove was also used for cooking. On weekdays Mother and Grandmother didn't even get close to the stove. The food was cooked by a

a housekeeper, a Jew. That old lady - I can't recall her name- had worked for us before the Soviets came to power and was very loyal to our family.

Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene Zagare

I vividly remember the house, where I spent my childhood. It was a small house for two apartments- the smaller one was occupied by two disabled people Meer and Golda. Meer was deaf and Golda was blind. My parents worked hard and there were three rooms in our apartment. Mother's workshop was in the largest room, with three sewing machines; one for mother and the other two for her apprentices.

There was a large wooden table, used for ironing and two large pig iron presses. They were heated with coals. They took them to the river as we did not want any sparkle get on a fabric. There was no running water in our house.

It was fun at home. Mother joked and sang. I liked to spend time with her apprentices. I remembered two sisters- Itele and Etele Spits best of all. They were beauties with long eye lashes and huge eyes. Both of them were killed during a big action in October 1941 in Zagare when grandmother and Basya also died.

Apart from the workshop, There were two more rooms- a small room with the door with the exit outside and parents' bedroom with a large bed and a small cot for me. The kitchen door was opening to the garden. Both apartments were heated with the Russian stove, which was stoked by our neighbors. There was an oven in the kitchen for cooking.

Our yard was neighboring with the baker Oliferiy Mitrofanov. The pretzels he made were the best and we bought them. Oliferiy was an old believer, a kind person and my parents were friends with him.

I played with his daughter Valya. She was

Starting to speak good Yiddish like me.

When I was to go to the Jewish kindergarten, Valya went with me as there was no other place for her.

Iosif Yudelevichus Kaunas



(My father Abram Yudelevich, I, my brother David and my mother Taube, 1934)

Since early childhood my brother I had been close. We were called - Dodya and Osys, pronouncing our names separately. I remember the apartment where I spent my childhood. There were five rooms in it- one room was after another. The first two rooms were occupied by father and his law practice: one room was a reception, where his clients and visitors were waiting for him, and another room was father's office. Father's secretary Kozlovskiy was at the reception desk. Father's customers sat on the leather couches waiting for my father to receive them.

At that time my father was one of the most famous lawyers on civil cases in Kaunas. There was a large desk in father's office with a lamp and ink well, a small adjoining table for negotiations and book shelves containing the works on jurisprudence, books by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and regulation documents.

There was a large dining-room behind father's office. There was a large round dining table, the one we are sitting now, arm- chairs, chairs, beautiful carved cupboard, bedroom furniture and children's furniture used by brother and I. Of course,

there was a kitchen, but I cannot recall my being there.

There were servants and a cook in the house so there was no need to go in the kitchen, as the food was served in the dining-room. The servants changed with time and the only maid I remember was a cook- Lithuanian lady Elya. She treated us very good and cooked tasty food. Mother only ran the house, giving orders. Sometimes she went in the kitchen to make some corrections.



(This is me and my brother David with toy-doggy, 1931)

We, children, had the governesses. Our first governess was a Russian girl Irina. She was very kind and tender. I loved her a lot.

Later on, when my older brother became a lyceum student, I was taken care of by the Froebel lady [15] Doba, a young Jewish girl.

One of her duties was to take strolls with me. We both loved movies, so we went to see them but agreed not to tell Mother, as she would not have approved. We also went for ice cream, and decided not to tell Mother about that, either.

Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene Shakai and Kaunas

Grandparents had their own two-storied stone house. There were several rather small, very cozy rooms. I slept in a smaller room on the sofa. My room was next to

grandparents' bedroom.

There was a dining-room, with the kitchen nearby—and a large stove stood in the middle of the kitchen. Something was constantly cooking. Our housekeeper, a Lithuanian lady, cooked mostly during the week. She also helped grandmother with house chores.

On the eve of Sabbath and on holidays grandmother did not let anybody approach her kitchen. There were separate dishes for milk and meat. God forbid you would confuse a knife or a fork from the milk side or the meat side! There was a time when Granny threw away a fork I used the wrong way.

There were a lot of Jews in Siauliai - merchants, businessman, intelligentsia: doctors, lawyers, teachers of Jewish schools. There were two synagogues in the city. The first place we lived in was near a large two-storied synagogue, located in the vicinity of the train station. My father went to the synagogue at that time and took my brother and me with him. I liked to see my father change in the synagogue. Usually he was funny and kind. When he put his tallit on, he looked older and stricter.

There was an old building of a confectionary in front of our house. So it smelled like sweet caramel on our street. There was a military unit and an orchestra in the yard of our house. My brother and I enjoyed listening to bravura marches and waltzes they played almost every day.

Our own apartment was rather small, consisting of two rooms: my parents' bedroom and the room I shared with my brother. At first, father didn't make that much money in Siauliai, as my mother did the house chores and cooking.

Soon Father was given an apartment near the brewery. The office of the brewery was located in the former mansion of some respectable countess. It was a beautiful two-

storied building with a yard, fence and a gate. There was a 24-hour security guard by the gate. It was closed for the night and the guard would walk around the yard with a dog and didn't let in any outsiders. The office of the brewery was on the first floor together with the small premises of a music school. There were several apartments for the employees of the brewery on the top floor.

We had a four-room apartment. My parents purchased new furniture. There was a beautiful carved cupboard in the drawing-room as well as a table, chairs and a sofa with silken upholstery. The bedroom furniture was made from nut wood - a wide queen-size bed, mirror, dresser and large wardrobe with a mirror. There was not too much furniture in the small dining-room: a table with chairs, a small round table, where the telephone and address book were placed. Mother embroidered very well and she decorated the room with embroidered pictures and cushions and white starched laced table-cloths.

Father started making pretty good money and we felt it. We acquired a beautiful grand piano made of mahogany. Mother played it. My brother and I were taught music at home. Besides, I had an English tutor, who came over to us. We had a housekeeper: a Russian lady, Nina, but my mother, a great cook, didn't let her cook without her guidance. She spent a lot of time in the kitchen. Food was cooked on primus stoves - there were several of them in the kitchen. There was also a stove, where Mother baked different pies, cakes - tartlets, rolls and all kinds of desserts. I still consider her cake 'Napoleon' to be the acme of culinary art. Mother cooked Jewish and Ukrainian dishes. She made wonderful borscht with garlic pies, vareniki [a kind of stuffed dumpling] with meat stuffing, curds and potatoes. Puffy meat patties were always served with broth.

We had all kinds of modern novelties in the kitchen. In that period of time people

started canning food. Father bought a German apparatus with jars and glass lids. Mother made stewed fruit and canned them. Then she put them in a special boiler. We had a fridge in the kitchen: a special crate, where a metal box with ice was put. The ice was brought from the brewery. When it melted, more ice was brought again in a couple of days. There was a special cooler for pickles in the cellar. Father made them. He salted tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage in large barrels and stored them in the cellar.

Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova Vilkaviskis

I had a happy childhood in Vilkaviskis in a very nice house, with overwhelming love. My father got a pretty good job as a school headmaster. He was a well-known and respectable man. He was a member of the municipal self-government along with other honorable citizens. My father was the only Jew among them. He was a member of the Shaulist organization [see Shaulist Council].

I vaguely remember our house. It was a well-built one-storied wooden house. Of course, there were no conveniences: sewage, running water. We had an outhouse. As for the rest, it was a true European house. There were four large rooms, namely, drawing-room, my parents' bedroom, my father's study, and the children's room.



(This is my father Moses Kleinstejn with me by my grandparents' house, 1934)

I remember a beautiful tiled furnace in the drawing-room which made the house pleasantly warm. The furniture in the drawing room was grand. It was carved ebony custom-made furniture. There were lovely velvet curtains on the windows. The table cloth was also from the same material as the curtains.

I enjoyed spending time with my mother most of all. My mother was a true lady. She stopped teaching at the lyceum after getting married. Of course, she looked after the house and sometimes she took me for a walk. These were the happiest moments for me.

**Shahne Berznitskiy
Veisiejai**

I was born in Veisiejai on 15th May 1913. I remember myself at the age of five or six. We lived in the house of Grandfather Aaron. Grandmother Haya-Sura changed places: either she stayed with us or at Rohl's place. I remember our old house in Veisiejai. It was a large log house where the logs grew darker with time. There were three or four rooms in the house. Our family was large, so three or four children slept in one room. The solid wooden furniture went with the style of the house. My father inherited it from Grandfather Aaron. Our house burnt down during the fire. It happened in the late 1920s during the time when the synagogue burnt down as well. Father built the house on the same place. It was smaller than the previous one, but it was made from brick.

There was no running water in the house. The well, from where drinking water was taken, was rather far away. Usually the girls soaped the linen at home and then took heavy buckets with linen to the lake for rinsing.

**Zalman Kaplanas
Jurbarkas**

After their wedding my parents rented the apartment in Jurbarkas, where I was born

on 28th May 1921 and spent my adolescence. My mother gave birth to my younger brother Mendel there in 1926.

This old well-built wooden house is still there. Two stories of the house were residential and the third storey was a garret. The house was adorned with a carving. The house was owned by a Jewish family, who leased the apartments and our flat had small rooms on the second floor. The rooms were modestly furnished. There were a table and a beautiful, carved cupboard in the largest room, the so-called drawing-room. There was a large, carved bed with a laced cover in my parents' bedroom. The smallest room was the children's.

**Rafael Genis
Telsai and Rietavas**

We had Father's butcher's shop on the first floor of our house. The animal was slaughtered and then taken to my father. He took it, cut the carcass into pieces and got it ready for sale. At first, he had an assistant. When we grew up, that became our job.

There was about one hectare of land by our house and we helped our parents to work on it. We grew herbs, onions, carrots, potatoes, cucumbers and tomatoes-- to have enough for the family.



(with my family, 1928)

We also had a cow and a horse. Father loved horses - he fed and cleaned his favorite

himself. Thus, we had our own milk, curds, sour cream and butter.

Our house was big, but we mostly used four rooms on the second floor. Apart from the bakery and the butcher's shop there was a kitchen on the first floor. The only electric bulb was in the kitchen. There was not enough electricity for the town in the prewar times. When it got dark, candles were lit in other rooms.

The whole family - ten people - got together for breakfasts and lunches. Mother made a rule for everyone to have meals together at a certain time. If someone skipped lunch, they didn't get anything. Mother didn't have time to serve meals separately to us.

We had simple food, but it was nutritious and plentiful. There was meat at home, though we mostly ate the parts that couldn't be sold - like heads and legs. Mother often cooked meat in jelly. There was a large platter with potatoes in the center of the table and each of us could take as much as we wanted.



Religious traditions

Shahne Bernitzkiy Veisiejai

On Friday evening we got together at the table and waited for Father to come back from synagogue.

Mother lit the candles when the first star appeared in the sky and Father said a prayer over the challah and wine and then we started our meal.

The dishes cooked for Saturday lunch were taken by my mother to the Jewish bakery owned by Rohl's husband. All neighbors took their pots with chulent there. Chulent is a traditional Sabbath dish made of meat and potatoes. In the warm ovens of the bakery the food stayed warm until Sabbath day.

When Jews were on the way from the Sabbath service in the synagogue, they went to the bakery to take their chulent home. Father liked it when we, the boys, went to the synagogue with him. When I was a child, I often carried Father's prayer book. After the Sabbath feast my parents went to the chestnut alley.

Jewish families got together there to sing songs. They sang separately, but sometimes also in chorus. In summer

we went boating. Those festive Sabbath days were light and joyful. I will always keep them in my heart.

When I turned 13, I had my bar mitzvah. I got ready for that in advance. Father hired a teacher for a couple of weeks who was teaching me how to properly put on the tefillin. He also taught me several prayers and a passage from the Torah. All relatives got together in the synagogue and I went through the ceremonious bar mitzvah ritual, marking my adulthood.

Since that time I went to the synagogue with my tallit and tefillin like my dad. He made sure that we went to the synagogue. We were young and not always willing to go there, but the times were different. I cannot say I was truly religious.

My brothers and I were just obedient sons. I wouldn't have dared to disobey my father.

I also remember Channukah. It was a favorite holiday for all children. First, we didn't have to go to school for eight days. We played with the spinning top, and ate scrumptious potato latkes.

Secondly, adults gave us channukah money. On that day we went to see Grandfather Velvl and Grandmother Mihle and they gave us money. There was a chanukkiyah in our house. It was a special candle-holder, where a new candle was lit every evening. Those candle-holders were put on the window-sill. Chanukkiyahs lit the dark December nights in our small town.

After Father's death Jewish traditions were still observed in our family, holidays were marked. But we children gradually digressed. We were attracted by a new life, new ideas and prospects. While Father was alive, we regularly went to the synagogue and prayed with him.

After his death each of us started going his own way. At that time I had my own political views. Since my adolescence I was a member of the Zionist organization Maccabi. I decided to get ready for repatriation in Palestine.

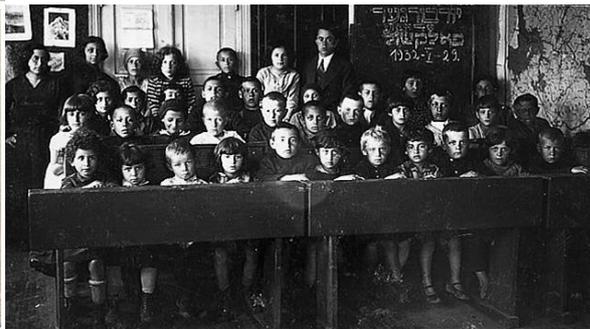
Back in that time many young Jewish people left for Palestine to build the Israeli state. My brother Isroel shared

my beliefs. He and I joined Hashomer Hatzair, which prepared young people for repatriation.

My brother and I went to a small town called Jonava. A Jewish kibbutz was founded there. We stayed there for a year and a half. We learnt how to till the land and grow different grains, work on the farm and other practical work. I liked the way of life in the kibbutz. It was a commune. We received no money, but we lived together and had similar clothes and felt like a stalwart team.

In 1936 my training was over and I was ready to repatriate to Palestine. I didn't manage to leave, as I was drafted into the Lithuanian army that year.





School

Frieda Shteinene Zagare

I went to school at the age of six. It was a Jewish public school in an old building not far from two synagogues, Alt Zagare. Our school was on the first floor. Our class was huge and noisy.

We got the noisiest during religious classes. An old Jewish man with a long beard held these lessons. Nobody listened to him and one boy even dared to pinch his beard.

The worst imp in our class was this red-haired boy, Shita Kikler. He always got it in the neck from the teachers, and almost all the time he was constantly standing in the corner.

I do not even remember what I learnt in that school for a year, so I went to another school in the second grade. This school was

open due to rabbi Riva asking people to financially support it.

Here there were wonderful teachers-- Shleiman, Tangu, teacher Geringer. They were experts and kind people. Unfortunately, all of them died during the occupation of Zagare. I did well at school, especially with the arts. The teaching was in Yiddish, and we spoke it at home as well. That is why I learnt it. At any rate, I still can speak, read and write in Yiddish owing to my classes at that school.

Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene Prenai

Grandpa, who was still alive at that time, dreamt that I- his favorite granddaughter- should get a good education, and he insisted that I should enter lyceum.



(This photo was made in 1947 when I returned in Kaunas from evacuation)

There was only one lyceum in Prenai, a state Lithuanian lyceum. Most of the students were Lithuanian but there were a few Jews. Apart from me there were two Jewish girls in my class and we Jewish kids were treated fairly. We were taught Jewish religion by the teacher who came to us from a Jewish school.

There was a really good relationship between teachers and students. I had never heard any reproaches concerning my

nationality and my best friends were Lithuanians.

We often strolled in the park, went to the cinema, which I loved.

I went there almost every Saturday and came home rather late and went to bed quietly not to wake up grandma. But by the way she was breathing I always understood that she was not asleep, but was waiting for me to come back.

At that time I also made friend with some Jewish girls. They were members of youth Zionist organization in Prenai. There was a small kibbutz and the ladies got ready to depart for Israel. One of my friends took me to the underground komsomol meeting. I liked those people very much as they spoke of equality, brotherhood and gave me a warm welcome. There were couple of times when I stealthily attended their meetings, but I did not join komsomol.

**Sarah (Klug) Rutkauskene
Ukrmerge**



(as a student of Jewish lyceum, 1931)

When I was five, Father hired a private teacher for me. She taught me the rudiments of Jewish literary - alphabet and reading. I had been taught at home for two years and then father took me to the cheder. I know that only boys went there and I still cannot understand how father could convince the teacher to let me study there.

The fact was that I was the only girl in the class of ten boys. I sat at a desk separately from them. I did very well and was quick to learn. I studied there for three years and by the age of three was very fluent in Hebrew. When I went to the synagogue, everybody was surprised to see a little girl like me reading prayers in Hebrew. My father took special pride in me. He often bought newspapers in Hebrew, took them home and enjoyed my reading them.

When I turned 10, father took me to Ukrmerge, where I entered Jewish lyceum. Subjects were taught in Yiddish, and I had to learn a lot of new things. At first I lived with my grandparents Jasinskiys', who had moved to Ukrmerge a long time ago. In about two years my parents sold their house and moved to Ukrmerge. It was the time for my younger siblings to study so they decided to be closer to children. Grandparents were elderly and got irritated with children's noise and rattle, so in about two years they moved out.

I loved studying. It was easy for me. I had a lot of friends among my classmates. We marked Jewish holidays in lyceum, staged performances, where I took an active part.

I sang well, often took part in amateur concerts.

As compared to Jelva, Ukrmerge was a bigger town with the population of 12 thousand people, most of whom were Jews.

There was a Jewish theatre, different organizations, in general the life became very interesting. The youth took part in different youth Zionist organizations. Beitar was the most active. The organization was rather bellicose and I did not take part in that movement. I entered Hashomer Hatzair - «young guard», which called for buying of Jewish lands and revive Jewish state in a peaceful way.

My younger brother Leibl and sister Yanina also entered lyceum. Though, my parents

paid minimum fee for us - 30 litas per month, it was rather large amount for our family. I had studied there for five years and decided that I was adult and it was the time for me to help my parents.

Liza (Abramson) Lukinskaya Siauliai

I understood Yiddish as my father spoke it with me. There was a Jewish school by the synagogue and my brother and I went there. I went to that elementary school in Siauliai for two years and all subjects were taught in Yiddish.

When I grew up a little, Father made arrangements for my brother and me to be transferred to the Jewish lyceum. Here I started studying a language that was new to me: Hebrew. It was a very prestigious institution.

Then Father wanted me to get a better education so I then started in my third language, in the Lithuanian lyceum.



(This picture was taken by my father in 1929, when I entered the training course in lyceum in Siauliai)

When I became a student of the Lithuanian girls' lyceum I was mostly in a female environment. And I was the only Jew in my grade. I was friends with Lithuanian girls:

Polina Uskaite, Gribaite, Lukasheite. We were friends for ages. My classmates, both Lithuanian and Russian, treated me very well and paid no attention to my nationality. There was only one teacher, Vishinskine, who was an ardent anti-Semite. Even during the classes that had nothing to do with ethnicity she was blaming Jews for all kinds of trouble.

When I was a senior student, I started seeing boys. I went out with a Lithuanian boy, Eduardas Kudritskas and I fell in love with him. At home I even started bringing up the subject of marrying him. But my parents said they would marry me off only to a Jew.

My brother Abram didn't do very well at school. Starting from the fourth grade Father transferred him to a Yiddish lyceum where it was easier to study. But Abram had a talent for music. He started playing the accordion, the piano. In 1938 he was drafted into the Lithuanian army and he served in a musical squad in Siauliai.

I succeeded at school and in 1938 I graduated from the lyceum ranking among the top students. I wanted to become a doctor but decided to enter the Biology Department.

I parted with Eduardas and left for Kaunas. Soon I forgot about him. Puppy love goes by very quickly. I settled at the place of my Aunt Fanya, my father's sister. The first years flew by like the wind.

In that period Fascist youths appeared in Lithuania and a terrible incident took place at our institute. In a chemistry lecture, some Fascist youths demanded from a Lithuanian professor, who was holding lectures for two faculties - Chemistry and Technology-- to make Jewish students take separate seats in the back. The professor refused and said that all students were equal at his lectures. There was a terrible scandal, the professor had a heart attack and was taken to hospital immediately. Neither he, nor the rector of the institute conceded to those gangsters.

**Ranana (Kleinstejn) Malkhanova
Vilkaviskis**

In the period 1935-36 a new Jewish school was built in Vilkaviskis and my father got a spacious apartment from the school, as he was the headmaster. This apartment was even better than the previous one. There were five rooms, instead of four. Now my brother and I had separate bedrooms. Secondly, there was even indoor plumbing and central heating. In this house there were maids as well who took care of us and the house. Our apartment was on the school premises.

I liked looking at the schoolchildren. I envied their school uniforms and bags, which they carried with pride. I started running into the classroom to take a seat at a desk and listen to the teachers. My father couldn't punish me. He never raised his voice at me.

I became a schoolgirl at the age of five. I made friends with the Jewish schoolgirls and my life became more interesting. By summer 1940, I had finished the second grade of the school.

**Shahne Berznitskiy
Veisiejai**

At the age of six I went to the Jewish elementary school, which was in two rooms of the synagogue. All subjects were taught in Hebrew: geography, biology, all kinds of songs and stories.

We also studied the Lithuanian language. I did well and the four school years were easy for me. I wanted to go on with my education after finishing elementary school.

There was no Jewish lyceum in Veisiejai, just a Jewish elementary school. So I entered the Lithuanian pre-lyceum school. It was easier for me to study as compared to other Jewish guys, as I didn't merely learn Lithuanian at school lessons, but I had learned by communicating with people because I had worked in my father's smithy.

My studies lasted four years. Having finished that school I went to Lazdijai, as there were no other institutions in Veisiejai. There I entered the state Lithuanian lyceum.



(This is a group picture of my class of the Lithuanian lyceum in Veisiejai, 1930)

For the time of my studies I never felt a bad attitude towards me. There was no anti-Semitism, none whatsoever. During the theological class we also studied the rudiments of Jewish religion. I lived in the place of my aunt Lyuba. She treated me as her own child.

**Zalman Kaplanas
Jurbarkas**

In 1927 I went to the Jewish elementary school. All subjects were taught in Hebrew, and I was well up in that language.

Yiddish was spoken at home as well as in the household of both grandfathers; I learnt Hebrew very quickly at school. Thus, I was fluent in both languages in my childhood.

Here I met my first friends and my bosom friend Joseph, or Josele, as we called him tenderly. We spent time together after school, wandering through the beautiful park Tel Aviv.

When we finished school, my parents decided that I should go on with my studies. Unfortunately the Jewish private school wasn't affordable for my parents, so I entered the state Lithuanian lyceum, having passed entrance exams rather easily.

There were different nationalities in the lyceum. There were a lot of Lithuanians and

Jews. Teachers treated us all very well. Back then, Jews were protected as there were Jewish senators in Lithuania. There was even a department on Jewish issues in parliament.



(This is a group photograph of my class in lyceum, 1939)

All subjects were taught in Lithuanian. The only subject we were exempt from was the Bible studies [Christian religion class]. Saturday was a school day and Jews as well as other students were supposed to attend classes. Nobody was exempt from studies [in the Lithuanian lyceum] on Sabbath.

Some Jewish children weren't allowed [by their parents] to attend classes on Sabbath. But acquiring knowledge was a priority for our family. Paying tribute to traditions came second.

At that time a lot of political parties and groups were emerging in Lithuania. There were underground Communists. There were only five of them in the town, and everybody knew who they were. There were several Zionist organizations such as Betar, Maccabi, representatives of the Revisionist Zionism movement etc. Our family was apolitical. Both my mother and father were politically dispassionate.

I was an excellent student, displaying more and more interest in history and philosophy. One of the teachers in our lyceum, a Catholic priest, who taught Lithuanian language, differed from others by his extreme left, even Communist views.

He had to conceal his beliefs as at that time Lithuania was ruled by an extreme nationalist party. The teacher trusted me for

some reason and asked me to buy daily newspapers for him. There were three daily newspapers in Lithuania at that time, the pro-government 'Echo Lithuania,' the Catholic 'The Twentieth Century' and the social democratic 'Izvestiya' [Editor's note: It is unlikely that a Lithuanian newspaper had a Russian name (Izvestiya was a major Soviet paper). Since the interview was conducted in Russian it is possible that the interviewee drew an analogy with the Soviet paper.]

Europe was contaminated with Fascism. Fascist organizations appeared in Lithuania, even in Jurbarkas and in our lyceum. On 23rd March 1939 the German army captured the Klaipeda district, the so-called Lithuanian coastland. Hitler came to Klaipeda, which was very close by.

It was a big shock for Lithuania, and young Fascist guys felt they were now free to do as they pleased. There was one event that I will never forget.

Two weeks later, on 4th April, my best friend Joseph came to the lyceum. He and I were the only Jews in our graduation class. There were 18 boys and three girls. I was friends with one of them, a Lithuanian, Elena Taimati. Joseph and I usually sat at the second desk.

On that day our desk was taken by two members of the Fascist party. They pointed to the last desk for us to sit there. Joseph and I kept on standing. When our history teacher came in - a pious Catholic spinster - she understood what was going on. She took her register and rushed out of the room.

She came back with the director of the lyceum, Bronis Lesas. He was an elderly man, a Lithuanian nationalist, who during tsarist times had fought for recognition of the written Lithuanian language, banned in Russia since 1864. At the end of the 19th century he was arrested and was sentenced to eight years of penal servitude. He was pardoned in 1904.

Our director was a member of the leading nationalist party. That elderly man stood by the first desk, where my friend Elena was sitting, slammed his fist on the table, and cried out that Fascist escapades and Hitler's ideas wouldn't have a place here while he was headmaster. He had those boys leave our desk and told us to sit there. The whole class sat still. Elena was looking at me with her eyes full of tears.

Nothing like this had ever happened to me in my life. And I still remember those creeps and the humiliation I felt at that moment, and will remember it till the end of my days.



(me and my relatives, 1930)

I regret to say that when the Soviets came in 1940 Bronis was arrested. I went to the district committee of the Party and told them about the case when he had stood up for me, and I was there to stand up for him. But they didn't care...I suppose he was shot, and probably as a pro-fascist, which was absurd.

That very year, 1939, I finished lyceum and went to Kaunas University. Elena left with me, too. There our paths diverged. Soon she married one of the leaders of the governing party - a Lithuanian with the last name

Gashke. I entered the Economics Faculty of the university. I lived with Mother's sister Dina Shabashevich.

In November 1939, upon the signing of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the annexation of Polish lands, Vilnius became the capital of Lithuania again, and the university was transferred there. On 15th December my mother and I, her favorite eldest son, came to Vilnius. My mother rented me a room from an elderly Jewish lady and paid for bed and breakfast. My landlady was rather poor like most of the Jews in Vilnius.

Zalman Kaplanas Vilnius

On 15th December my mother and I, her favorite eldest son, came to Vilnius. My mother rented me a room from an elderly Jewish lady and paid for bed and breakfast. My landlady was rather poor like most of the Jews in Vilnius.

It was the happiest period in my life - my student's years in Vilnius. Soon I met the Vilnius Jewish elite. Shailik Kaplanskiy, my fellow student, the son of one of the leaders of the Bund in Vilnius, introduced me to his family.

Their house was like a real salon, where the most enlightened Jews of the city got together. Vilnius was a true Jewish city, the center of Jewish culture. Shailik's mother received me like her son. The entire Jewish intelligentsia got together in Shailik's house: the Jewish theater, writers, scientists - the employees of the Institute of Yiddish Language and Culture.

There was a large table abundant in hors-d'oeuvres, meat dishes. The simmering samovar was in the middle of the table. Having tea there, at that very table, taking in everything around me, that was one of the best times of my life.

The start of my studies went by in a flash. In June 1940 I came back to Jurbarkas on

holidays. The town hadn't changed during my absence. On Saturday, 15th June, Joseph and other Jewish guys went to the forest for a picnic on the occasion of our reunion. There we saw two large trucks filled with chattels and trunks. Women and men were in the car and we showed them the way to the border, which was 10 kilometers away. When we came to the city, we saw the Soviet frontier squad. Thus, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Lithuania had been annexed to the Soviet Union.

Rafael Genis
Telsiai



(with my sister Tsilya and brother Liber,
1928)

I went to school at the age of seven. The school was combined with cheder in our town. It was located near a large synagogue. We were taught prayers and compulsory subjects. I didn't enjoy studying at the school because our teachers were very strict. We were taught by two men - Balek and Shreder - who were focused on discipline and at times used a metal ruler on us. I was a good student, especially in Math.

I went there for four years and then got transferred to the town Lithuanian lyceum. Both Lithuanians and Jews went there and we were very friendly. I don't remember a single case when I'd been hurt by someone.

There were Lithuanians among my friends,

who came over to our place. They were good to me. I was one of the top students at the lyceum and was often praised. The monthly tuition fee was ten litas. The full course was eight years and I wanted to finish it, but after my second year Mother said that it was enough paying for me as it was the time for me to start working and bring in some wages for the family. We were well-off and the family could afford my tuition, but nobody wanted to argue with Mom. By that time my elder brothers were working, having finished Jewish school. First, they helped Father and then they started learning some craft. Only the eldest, Dovid, wasn't working. He was eager to become a rabbi and went to a yeshiva in Telsiai.



Work

Dobre Rozenbergene Jurbarkas



(This is my brother Isroel and I,
I was three years old, 1931)

Our yard was big. There was a huge shed, where peasants - suppliers - put their grain. Usually Father and his assistant sat at the table by the shed and entered all his trading deals in a large logbook.

When the deal was closed the Lithuanian peasants came to into our house, where Mother and Grandmother treated them to a

lavish dinner. They often kept late hours, telling Mother about their families.

At times they asked my mother for advice as they fully trusted her judgment. Mother asked villagers questions regarding our farm animals.

We had a small kitchen-garden and an orchard, where my mother, grandmother and the housekeeper worked. Mother kept poultry - hens and turkeys - in a separate coop. We also had a cow and Grandmother

made fresh butter and sour-cream herself. Our house had a nice forged fence. There was a small hut, where a Lithuanian woman - the guard - was on duty.

Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene Zagare

I remember how I took lunch to my father. He worked as a cobbler at the shop owned

by a Jewish man, and later by a Lithuanian. Cobblers were sitting on the stools covered with leather and they wore leather aprons as they worked—even in the hot days of summer, when they didn't even wear a shirt under their leather aprons. Father was very strong and I remembered his sinews and muscles bulging when he was working.

**Geta (Ushpits) Jakiene
Shakai**

There was a churn in the shed. It was grandfather's business and peasants from the neighborhood often came to us to make oil from sunflower seeds. Grandpa was constantly busy, especially in sunflower season. At that time there were big carts in the yards just waiting for him.

There was also a spinnery, where grandma spun yarn from sheep's wool.

Those who arrived sat around a big table in our kitchen. There were Lithuanian, Poles, and Russians and Grandma found a place for everyone.



(with my husband and elder son Jakov,
1951)

Those people delivered their load to grandpa, then went to the market and to stores while grandpa was processing their raw materials.

On that day grandma boiled a lot of potatoes in the large pot and then all people ate it with some really tasty herring.

Once, one of the new-comers gave me a piece of ham. Grandma looked at me in such

a way that I threw it away as if it were a burning coal. It seemed to me that my arm was defiled. I was only four and I remember it to this day.

[After she finished school]

I stayed in Shakai and soon I found a job in the office of Transportation Company. I was fairly skilled as I had almost completed my lyceum education. I also had short-hand and typing skills. I liked my job, and the director of the office was a Lithuanian man, Mr Shakalis, who treated me very well. He was ten to fifteen years older than me and was like a father to me.

I was too young to understand the feelings of a mature man. Later I learned that Mr Shakalis was infatuated with me. But later, even after I spurned him, he saved my life.

His wife lived in another city, and once he suggested taking a walk in the town park with me after work. I replied that if I went for a walk with him, the whole town would know about it, and they would gossip. So I declined.

**Sarah (Klug) Rutkauskene
Ukmerge**



(with my mother Riva Klug and sister Janina
Klug, 1936)

Apart from our house, father owned some farm land in the village. He hired Lithuanians to work for him and paid them upon harvesting. They had very good relationship because Father paid them well. When the peasants were in Zelva, they called on us where they could always be accommodated and fed.

On his plot, Farther and his helpers planted wheat, rye, potatoes, carrots, cabbage, beets.

Father also planted clover and other feed grains for the cattle, and there were several cows in the shed and their milk was rich and fatty. They produced enough for our family and for mom to make some wonderful things—like butter, sour cream, cheese and curds. We kept most of it, and some of the dairy products were sold to our regular customers—not just to anyone.

Mother also bred the poultry. There were a lot of hens, turkeys and geese. Once mother asked me to count them. When I reached 40, I was lost.

Father also had horses, which he loved. A Lithuanian man helped father with the husbandry. Living with the Jews, this Lithuanian man learned Hebrew so well that he even helped the children do our homework—in Hebrew!

Mother had a Lithuanian cook, who learned how to cook good Jewish dishes under mother's supervision. Mother's kitchen was very large, and there was a large stove in the center of the room. It was used for cooking and baking. Mother baked her own bread as she used to say that bread from the stores was not recognizable as bread.

Shahne Berznitskiy Veisiejai

My maternal grandfather, Velvl Fleisher, was a very good fisherman. He was born in 1846. With time he became the manager of a large fishing cartel, consisting of over 50 people.

My Grandfather Vevl knew the behavior of fish, where it was in summer and where it hid in winter, and almost all the time he could determine the time and place for angling.

Grandfather was probably the most experienced fisherman in Veisiejai, as two competitors - fishing enterprises - tried

hard to hire him. He had a rather big boat, a solid wooden vessel, which was on the bank, near my grandfather's house.

Velvl lived in a small wooden house, which he had built when he was young. It consisted of three small rooms and a kitchen with a stove, which was used for heating and cooking. When I was a boy, only Grandfather and Grandmother Mihle Fleisher and their elder daughter Esther lived in the house. The rest of the children were scattered all over the world.

Then there was my father. Since my childhood I liked to visit my father in his smithy. There were more smiths in town - my father, and then Mr Leizer, Shmuel Bolushanskiy and Leib Aenakh.

Each smithy was at the corner of one street in the central part of the town. Smiths made good money as they had a lot of work, especially on market days: Tuesdays and Fridays.

On those days a lot of people came into town from adjacent farmsteads. Lithuanians and Poles came to sell milk, curds, sour-cream, meat, vegetables and buy necessary goods.

They also went to the smithy. Some of them had to order horse-shoes either for their own horse or for one on sale. In winter there were orders to fix sleighs and in summer for carts. In a word, there was a lot of work for the smiths.

There was no rivalry among the smiths and no adversity—really, just friendship. Father often marked Sabbath and holidays with his fellow-smiths.

They got together for lunch and went to the chestnut alley on the square, not far from the cathedral, and sang old Jewish and modern Bund songs. I went there with my mother and brothers. Mother crooned away with father and I listened, enraptured.

I still remember one of those songs [the interviewee is singing in Yiddish and translating into Russian]: 'The smith is standing by the furnace, doing his work. The sparkles are flying around. He is thinking of a bright future. Life shall be good. He is gleaming with perspiration, but he does not feel sweat streaming down his forehead and eyes - he is singing a song about a bright life.'

At the age of six or seven I started helping my father with work: hold the horse's leg or some bigger metal part. I enjoyed looking at the funny sparks, flying from the anvil. Father seemed to me like a warrior from a fairy-tale.

My elder brother Yankel was father's apprentice. Father often harnessed his horse and traveled around to other towns, mostly to Seirijai and sometimes to Lazdijai. That's where Father purchased materials for his work: metal of different shapes. Father usually loaded the whole cart and took the materials to his smithy. When he ran out, he was on the road again.

I learned how to speak Lithuanian in the smithy. I also understood Polish. Only Yiddish was spoken at home and many Jews in our town didn't even know any other language. Lithuanians and Poles often came to my father, so I learned the language rather swiftly while communicating with them. It helped me when I entered the Lithuanian lyceum.

Liza (Abramson) Lukinskaya Siauliai



(This is my father Isaac Abramson, 1938)

Father was a representative of the owners of the Guberniya brewery. This company is still an important brewery here in Lithuania. Father was gifted in languages. He was fluent in Russian and Lithuanian, and he knew Polish and German, too. He had a lot of responsibilities: starting from concluding contracts with stock houses and stores and up to quality control of beer. Siauliai was the second city in Lithuania after Kaunas in terms of population and importance. It was multinational, and I think 30-40 percent of the population was Jewish.

Zalman Kaplanas Jurbarkas

Our family lived modestly. We didn't starve, but we couldn't even think of luxury. As far as I remember, Grandpa Morduchai tempered justice with mercy and accepted our family and I became his favorite grandson.

However he gave my father a cold shoulder in a way. After all, Father had eloped with his daughter, and Grandpa didn't help us financially, and didn't involve my father in his business.

Father dealt with catering and retail sales of essential commodities. He purchased goods from the peasants and resold them for whatever he could get.

Here's what was in my father's store room: a barrel with kerosene, a sack of flour, matches, soap. Father also sold herring, which he brought from hamlets in big barrels by shore-line fisherman.

One barrel of herring cost a certain amount of money. Father sold herring by weight to customers, so it was profitable for him. Father's earnings were enough for our modest living: food, a festive meal on Sabbath and Jewish holidays and decent clothes. Besides, Mother's brother Emmanuel was assisting us. When he settled in America and got a job there, he sent us money sometimes.

Rafael Genis Rietavas and Telsiai

I didn't know my maternal grandmother. She died long before I was born. However, I knew my maternal grandfather very well. His name was Nakhman Maoerer. He was a tailor. He knew how to make and remake men's, women's and children's garments. In the summer Nakhman lived in the small town of Gargzdai, not far from Klaipeda. Grandpa also had a farm where he planted cucumbers. Nakhman liked working on the land, being out in the fresh air, and so he stayed in Gargzdai until it got cold. In the fall, usually in late September, Grandpa moved to Rietavas and stayed with us until the spring.



(My Family and I, 1930s)

Grandpa was religious: he had a broad and thick beard and wore a kippah. He never stayed idle in Rietavas. He would make, remake and mend clothes all winter long. Nakhman was an expert in leather, and

peasants brought him the leather, from which he made coats and jackets.

Grandpa worked in a separate room, where a Singer sewing machine was placed, as well as presses and a flap table. Grandpa also slept in that room.

Very often rich Lithuanians picked him up and took him to their place, where he would work for several days, making clothes for the whole family. In such a case, he took his Singer sewing machine in his hands and just gave its stand to the customers to carry.

During this period of time he also fixed our clothes: for my mother, father, me and other kids. Our relatives from the USA often sent him parcels and money. He shared their contents with us, while he was staying at our place.

Grandpa Nakhman lived until the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War and would have still lived longer as he was very robust, which wasn't common for people of his age. He was shot in Telsiai in the summer of 1941 along with many other family members.

As I said before, Grandpa grew cucumbers in the town of Gargzdai. My mother's elder sister Golda also lived there with her large family. Golda's husband, Liber Rupel, sold the cucumbers harvested by Grandfather.

He put the cucumbers in the horsed cart and went across Klaipeda crying out: 'cucumbers, cucumbers!' He also took the whole cart to Rietavas, where he purchased strawberries and other berries and took them to Gargzdai and Klaipeda.

There were times when he brought small smoked fish from Klaipeda. So in general, you could say he had a trading business.

Golda was also very entrepreneurial. She had her own horses and came to the markets with a big cart and loaded it with all kinds of goods.

Golda went from town to town, supplying

goods to her customers. Golda and Liber had many children. Before the war, their elder daughter Entle worked as a nurse in Telsiai. When the war broke out, she joined the Russians and was a nurse in the lines. After the war she married a Russian officer and lived with him in the town of Pavlovsk, Rostov oblast [today Russia].

Golda and her other other children: sons Abba and Meishe and daughter Aza - I don't remember the rest - were shot in Gargzdai in the first days of occupation.

...

I was always attracted by the mechanics. There was a locksmith workshop in our town and it was owned by a Lithuanian by the name of Shilenis.

He did all things needed in the household. He also made car parts, and parts of different gadgets. Shilenis was odd, but he was a liberal man. His wife was very religious and went to the church. He was not just an atheist, but a bellicose atheist. On market days, when Lithuanians came to town, they went to church. At times he would get on somebody's cart and hold ardent speeches, preaching the non-existence of God, and saying other blasphemous things. There were cases when he got beaten up.

Father arranged my apprenticeship with him. They made an agreement that I would work for him for free for one year, whether I learn something or not. I turned out to be very skillful and in a month I was able to do rather complex locksmith jobs. In three months I told Shilenis that I would not work for free any more. So he gave me 60 litas. When I took money home and gave it to my mom, at first she cried out that I must have stolen it. I took her to Shilenis and had him confirm that he gave that money to me. She was very happy and kissed me. Since that time I received 60 litas per month and gave it all to my mom.

I worked with Shilenis for three years. I

became a good locksmith and I was also particularly good with engines. There were cases when customers didn't go to Shilenis, but directly to me. And yet my boss bore no grudge and valued me as a worker. I made money and felt confident. There were both Jews and Lithuanians in this company. We went to the park, to each other's place, to the cinema - a small wooden building, to the dancing party which we were looking forward to every Sunday. There was a football field on the square and we often played football.

Food

Frieda (Beitler) Shteinene Zagare

There were a lot of dishes in our big kitchen- two sets or various dishes and utensils for meat and milk dishes. We marked Sabbath together. Usually grandmother Chaya and Basya came to us on Friday. Grandma closed her eyes and lit candles saying a prayer. The next day we went to the synagogue together- father, grandmother and I. Mother went there only on big holidays.

We came to us from synagogue and enjoyed Sabbath dishes. There was a Sabbath challah in the middle of the table, Mother or grandma baked it in our oven. Sabbath chulent, which was prepared on Friday, was taken in a pot to Oliferiy. All neighbors signed their pots and he put it in the oven which was still warm after baked pretzels.

Gefilte fish was another Sabbath dish, which we loved. Grandmother and father sold fish, so there was plenty of fish at home and we enjoyed it.

Sometimes we ate chicken soup with noodles or chicken pelmeni.

We often made minced herring. We had a special big cutting board and a knife to chop it. We cut the herring and added onion, apple, eggs and white bread and dressed it with sugar and vinegar. Or here's another way.

Mother made her own herring and sweet and sour fish. The herring was preliminarily soaked. Carrot and onion are put in the bottom of the pot and put fish on the top, pour a little water to cover the pot and add salt.

Sweet and sour fish was cooked as follows-

when the water boils, they put a little bit of raisons, spices -sweet, black

pepper, bay leaf and add lemon at the end. Such dish was a cold appetizer.

We loved teiglakh. It was a desert made from honey and sugar. There are several recipes. First they make the dough, whisk 6 eggs with one spoon of sugar, then add a little bit of ginger and oil and flour enough for neither soft nor hard dough.

They make small forms (like dates) and boil them in the syrup mixing cautiously as the dough is very capricious (it can burn or fall off).

They also made imberlakh. Two kilos of grated carrots are put in aluminum pot for boiling. In a while, 2 kilos of sugar, one table spoon of ginger, orange skin are added and boiled on low fire for a long time.

It should be stirred from time to time. By the end it should be mixed intensely until the mass would not come off the walls of the pot. Then the cutting board is watered and hot mixture is put there, rolled and cut in rhombuses. Those things are to be dried for 4 days. Mother often made imberlakh, especially in wintertime for preventive purposes.

Every day we ate soup obligatorily. In winter it was a milk soup and in summer vegetable of milk and vegetable soup, the latter was the tastiest.

Chanterelles (type of mushrooms) were boiled in milk, then potatoes, carrots, cabbage and some herbs were added. The soups were dressed with noodles. In winter barley or oat soups were also made.

Grandmother often made tsimes. She boiled

noodles in large pot, then added cinnamon, chicken fat, whisked eggs and roasted them . That dish was mostly served with chicken broth.

Good lavish dishes were cooked in our family as parents made enough money for that. There were hard times, and we just ate fried potatoes and made soup from cheap herring, potatoes and carrots. There were times when we ate only rye bread with chicken cracklings or with vegetable oil.

Grandmother Chaya made the best tsimes. The most scrumptious was from plums. Here's how you make it.

It is cooked from fatty meat, usually the breast, boiled for a long time until it softens. Then potato and dried plums are added. All those things are roasted in oven for an hour and then add burnt sugar, which makes the dish look brown.

They also make carrot tsimes. Though, there was another sequence for that dish. First carrots were boiled, then pieces of meat of fatty hen, onion and spices were added. Flour or kneydles (from flour or from potato) could be added in tsimes. Very often stuffed chicken poultry neck was added in tsimes.

They took either chicken or goose neck and stuffed it with flour, fat and cracklings, fried or raw onion, spices and boiled it in the broth for a while. When the neck was cooked half way through, it was put in carrot tsimes with potato kneydles. It was a real treat.

On Pesach aunt Basya cooked her specialty dish- cabbage rolls. They were special. They were brown with tasty spicy sauce. Of course, there all mandatory dishes for Pesach on the table- matzah, eggs, bitter herbs etc. according to the hagada. The first seder was carried out by father. By the way he read the four traditional questions and he answered them himself as we did not have boys in our family

Liza (Abramson) Lukinskaya Siauliai and Kaunas



(with my mother Feiga Abramson, my father Isaac Abramson and my brother Abram Abramson, 1933)

My parents weren't religious, though they kept up the traditions. Meat was bought only in kosher stores. Chicken and other poultry were always taken to a shochet. Sometimes Mother bought a tidbit-pork ham. She kept it in paper and gave it to my brother and I when nobody was around so that the neighbors wouldn't see. When I said that we couldn't eat pork, Mother gave me a surprised look and said, 'Where do you see pork, it's ham!'

Jews and Lithuanians pre war

Sarah (Klug) Rutkauskene
Ukmerge



(This is my family picture, 1935)

Grandfather's house was directly in front of the Lithuanian cathedral. There was a padre's home about ten meters from the cathedral. His wife and children lived there. Unfortunately, I do not remember the padre's name. I remember that he had a brother Petras. In 1917 or 1918, Polish army was billeted in our town during World War One. They plundered both Lithuanians and Jews.

Once grandfather heard the cries: «Benuleki (that was the way grandfather, father and his brothers were called), help!». Father and grandfather took what was at hand—a spade and a club, and darted to padre's house. There was the priest's wife on the threshold, crying out as a Pole was going to cut her fingers, since she could not take her rings off in panic.

My grandfather hit the guy with a club and

the second was trying to run away, to get more Polish soldiers.

So then Grandfather ran to the Jewish cemetery right away to hide among the tombstones, but he was caught by the Poles. Father took a horse and rode to the village to get help. Some strangers - both Jewish and Lithuanians- ransomed Benjamin.

When the Poles retreated, there was a calm period. During the service the padre at the pulpit told his parish that my father and grandfather saved him and he owned his life to him.

Knowing that we did not have a large land plot, the padre cut a big land plot from the church and gave it to father. He also asked the Lithuanians to build the house for us-people started brining timber, oaken boards.

The Lithuanians built a nice large wooden house for several months. Father did the finishing. When the house was finished, the padre noticed that there was no room for the husbandry and gave another land plot for that, probably it was half a hectare up to road, where there was a room for the well and garden.

There was a shed and a land plot with the clover for the cattle. There were nice sheds for fire wood, coops, sheds, stables. Our house was very large , consisting of four rooms and a huge kitchen. There were some more premises in the upper storey, which father leased. The cell was the house length. Since that time father and padre had become friends.

When mother made gefilte fish, father always invited the padre, as he adored that dish.

When I was 11-12, I started liking music. There was neither theater nor concert hall in our town and the only place where I could hear music was a cathedral. I often came in during the service. At times I would stand by the cathedral listening to the organ. In a while the neighbors told my father about it. I had had independent character since childhood and said that I did not listen to the service, but to the music and I was not going to reject that pleasure just because old Jews did not approve of it. Father kept silent and I think he agreed with me.

...

My father was a very respectable man. His was kind not only to all Jews, but also to Lithuanians, Poles. Nationality did not matter for him. I remember such a case. Once there was a funeral procession passing by our house. There were people from Lithuanian hamlet, located about 12 km away from Jelva. A young was to be buried. They said he had cold beer after bath, got pneumonia and died.

His wife and several children left after him. The procession went to the cathedral, where Lithuanian cemetery was located. In 20 minutes I was that the procession was going back with the cadaver. I ran after the father and he came up to those people. It turned out that a poor widow did not have time to pay for church service and funeral of her husband and the padre did not even let them inside.

Father asked them to wait. Then he took a platter and put 5 litas there (it was pretty big money for that time). Then he called on the neighbor, who also put some money there.

In an hour or two father collected a considerable amount -200 litas and gave it to the widow. The procession headed to the

cathedral. After that the widow knelt down in front of our house and said the words of gratitude. She tried to return the rest of the money (about 50 litas), but father said that she would need it for her children.