

Rafael Genis



This is me, Rafael Genis, near a marble memorial on the place of the former ghetto in Telsiai. I put four of those memorials on each corner of the ghetto. Seven thousand Jews died there in 1941-1944. The photo was taken in 1999. All my kin, Grandpa Nakhman, Father, Liber with his family and Isroel, were shot in the first days of the occupation of Telsiai. On the day when the war broke out, my brother Liber and his wife Ida with their baby daughter ? about two months old ? came to see my parents. The lady said that she noticed the tail of the column, where Liber and Ida with the stroller, were walking. The Fascists took the stroller away and it was rolling on the curb. My brother darted after the stroller and the Germans shot him right away, then they shot the baby. There were about 14 places out of town where Jews were executed. I don't know exactly where my kin perished. Father's sisters Chaya Riva and Channa also perished. And my brother Dovid, who was studying at Telsiai yeshivah, was shot in Rainai along with 300 rabbis. My mother and sister Tsilya lived a bit longer. One lady, who crept out from the pile of corpses told me about it later. They were in the ghetto in Telsiai. Lithuanians often went there to hire people. One of them wanted to take Tsilya and save her that way, but my sister clung on to my mother and didn't agree to part with her. Then a furious Fascist shot both Tsilya and my mother. Even though I was almost blind, I worked for many years. I retired in the early 1990s. Though since 1945 I have been getting a pension for the disabled, it is miserable. All those years my wife and I had been going to the places where Jews were executed to 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 scraping through. 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.