

# Essays by Holocaust Survivor Solly Ganor

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## Short biography of Solly Ganor, the author of *Light One Candle*

Solly Ganor was born on May 18, 1928 in Heydekrug, a small town near the East Prussian border, where most of the inhabitants spoke German. He was the youngest of three children of the Genkind family. His father Chaim Genkind was from Minsk, white Russia, and his mother Rebecca Genkind-Shtrom, came from a family that traces its origin in Lithuania to 1756. His sister Fanny was fourteen years older than he, and his brother Herman seven.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the Genkinds moved back to Kovno (Kaunas), where they had a very large family. The family soon established itself in a new business, and Solly had to adjust from his native German tongue to Yiddish, Lithuanian and Hebrew, that most Jews in Kovno spoke.

In the introduction of his book, Solly described his youth:

“Kovno, Lithuania, is a little-known spot on the map for most Americans. It looms large in my memory, however. It is where I spent the greater part of my childhood, and where a large part of the story that follows takes place.

Kovno was a lovely city of nearly 120,000 people. More than thirty thousand Jews lived and prospered in the town, my family among them. For many years, Kovno was one of the few places in Europe where the Jews were able to live nearly autonomously, and they built a strong community. Its Yeshivas [Jewish religious schools] attracted students from all over Europe. Its professionals and scholars and merchants played an important role in the town's economy. Its cultural life was diverse and sophisticated. There were four Hebrew high schools and one in Yiddish in Kovno. Several Yiddish newspapers and a Yiddish theater, was part of the Jewish culture. Most of the Jews of Kovno were Zionist. I remember my childhood as a very happy one.”

On Hanukah 1939, Solly met by chance, the Japanese consul to Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara. The Genkinds were among the first to receive a life saving visa from Chiune Sugihara, but when the Soviets entered Lithuania their Lithuanian passports became invalid. They were caught by the Nazi invasion and spent three years in the Kovno ghetto, where most of the Jewish inhabitants were killed in various Actions and deportations. Having survived all the actions, they were deported to German concentration camps in the spring of 1944, on the eve of the Soviet army reoccupying Kovno. Solly's mother and sister were sent to the Stutthof concentration camp near Danzig, while he and his father were sent to a satellite camp of Dachau, known as Lager X [Camp 10], near the German town of Utting.

Solly's mother died in Stutthof of typhoid fever, while his sister Fanny survived and was among the Jewish women who were shipped out by the Nazis on boats to the Baltic Sea where they were going to be drowned. Solly and his father worked in Lager X under the most appalling conditions.

Hard labor, starvation and beatings were their daily rations. Many died and at the end of the war, the rest were sent on a death march from Dachau to Tyrol.

Thus the remnants of the once glorious Lithuanian Jewry, died from starvation, exhaustion and freezing weather and their bodies lay strewn about where they fell and were shot. This tragedy took place at the end of April 1945 on the picturesque roads of Bavaria.

Solly Ganor survived the death march, and was liberated by a unit of the 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion of the US Army. The unit consisted of Japanese American soldiers. Ironically, many of these soldiers volunteered for military service from American relocation camps. The person who saved him was Private Clarence Matsumura, who in 1992 was reunited with Solly in Jerusalem.

After his liberation Solly spent some time with the American army where he worked as an interpreter for a US Army intelligence unit that was identifying and prosecuting Nazi collaborators hiding among the Displaced persons.

Solly's father who survived the Death March, married a Canadian woman, who was in charge of United Nations Relief Agency (UNNRA) in the Munich area. Solly was supposed to have joined them in Canada.

On May 15, 1948, when the State of Israel was declared, Solly decided instead of going to Canada, to join the Israeli Defense Forces and fought in the war of Independence.

After the war, in 1949, he joined the fledgling Israeli merchant marine, where he eventually reached the rank of captain.

In 1960, he was accepted by the London University, where he studied English Literature and languages. In 1963, he returned to Israel where he married his present wife Pola. They have two children, Daniel and Leora, and three grand children. After returning from England Solly was offered a job to manage a textile factory belonging to Pola's family and in 1977, they moved to La Jolla California.

By 1984, their daughter Leora became 18 and went back to Israel to serve her two years in the army. The Ganor's returned to Israel the same year. Solly spends most of his time lecturing as a witness to the Holocaust throughout the US, Germany, Japan and Israel.

The book *Light One Candle* has been translated into German and Japanese. In Germany and Japan, Solly's book has been widely circulated, and is now recommended reading for high schools. In Japan, some high schools even produced a play based on his book.

Recently Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel recommended Solly's book *Light One Candle* as educational reading on the Holocaust. This endorsement by Elie Wiesel, whom the survivors consider as their spokesman, is very gratifying for Solly.

Recently, Solly reflected, "I feel I have finally fulfilled my promise to my perished friends and family to tell their stories. I have finally lit 'One Candle' for them."

Solly's articles on the Holocaust and Israel has become widespread on the Internet. His website can be visited at: [solly ganor remembrance](http://sollyganorremembrance.com)

## Solly Ganor's Diary

I was born in Heydekrug, Lithuania, on May 18, 1928, the youngest of three children. My sister Fanny was fourteen years old when I was born, and my brother Herman was seven.

For my eleventh birthday, my brother Herman brought me a present. It was a diary. It was a handsome book embossed in gold and the cover simply said, "Diary."

"You are the writer in this family. Write down the events to come. Some day it may be an important document." He smiled when he said it, but his eyes were very serious. It was September 1, 1939, the beginning of World War II.

His words were prophetic, yet it took me more than fifty years to bring myself to publish my diary. It is called *Light One Candle*, and it was published in 1995.

During the dark hours of World War II, in the ghetto, in the concentration camps, before our liberation, we prisoners often talked about the remote chances of our survival. We made a pact among ourselves that those who would survive the war would tell the truth about what happened. We knew that the world had to be informed. When I survived the war, I knew I was obligated to speak on behalf of the millions of people murdered, and especially the million and a half Jewish children whose voices were silenced.

There are those who can't understand why I waited so long; fifty years is, after all, a very long time.

The answer lies, as with most Holocaust survivors, the fear, or rather the abhorrence, to expose to the public the terrible things that were done to us, by the Nazis and their European collaborators.

There were those who couldn't understand our silence, and thought that it implied shame.

Behind our backs they called it: 'the silence of the sheep that went to the slaughter'

It never occurred to them that what we went through was so terrible, so utterly horrifying, that it made it psychologically impossible to deal with. We simply went into denial. I was among those survivors who wanted to get on with their lives.

When I enlisted in the Israeli army in 1948 to fight in its War of Independence, I adopted a new identity. Since I came with a group of Canadian volunteers, I registered as a Canadian.

A special event changed my silence. It completely changed my life and it remained so to this day.

In April 1992, a man by the name of Eric Saul telephoned me from Jerusalem. It was a fateful call. What happened next was what I consider 'my second liberation'.

Eric Saul, a historian from San Francisco, came to Jerusalem with a group of Japanese American army veterans of the famed 100th/442nd and 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. Among them was a man who, at the end of World War II, saved my life. This man was Clarence Matsumura.

He was the young soldier who found me at the end of World War Two lying in the snow, barely alive.

It was May 2, 1945. I was with a group of Jewish prisoners on a death march from Dachau to the Tyrol Mountains. With the American Army very near, the Nazi guards led us to a forest clearing where we were to be shot. But when they heard the American Army approaching, the guards ran away leaving us to our fate. It snowed heavily that night and the snow covered the half-dead marchers completely. It was there that Clarence Matsumura with his three Japanese American friends found me. He saved my life by simply getting me hot broth.

Our miraculous reunion after almost fifty years brought about a catharsis in me. Our reunion in Jerusalem had almost a miraculous effect on me. When we met face to face, I broke down. I cried for a very long time, with Clarence and Eric Saul trying to comfort me.

I hadn't cried since the day of my liberation in 1945.

The catharsis of meeting my liberator was like a second liberation. It changed my life in more than one way. I began to lecture on the subject of the Holocaust, in many countries, but most importantly, I finally published my wartime diary and it has been translated into many languages.

I hope that my account of the Jews of Kovno will fulfill my promise to my family and friends to tell what happened to us.

## **My Hero, Chiune Sugihara**

There are times when we should speak not only of our enemies who wish to destroy us, but also of those who risked their lives and careers to save our people.

I want to tell you of a hero, the hero of my childhood; he was the Japanese consul to Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara.

In the summer of 1940, he issued visas to thousands of Jewish refugees against the express orders of his government. He is not only my hero, but is the hero of forty thousand Jewish souls who are alive today because of his selfless act to save them from the gas chambers of Auschwitz. I was a living witness to that rescue event and I wish to share it with you.

Several years ago I was invited to celebrate the reunion of Jewish survivors with the their rescuer's wife, Yukiko Sugihara. The reunion took place in New York's Town Hall. That day the biggest storm of the year hit New York and the rain came down in buckets, but the Town Hall was packed full with Sugihara survivors. The storm was not going to keep them away from meeting Yukiko Sugihara, who came all the way from Japan to meet us. There were many emotional speeches that evening, including the one by Yukiko herself, but the one that really touched us all was the short speech of a thirteen year old boy.

He came to the stage with a bunch of flowers in his hand, kissed Yukiko on both cheeks and said: "Mrs. Sugihara, Your husband saved my grandfather and grandmother, and because of that I am here today and so are forty thousand descendants of the people to whom your husband issued visas. Thank you, Mrs. Yukiko Sugihara for granting us all our lives."

The fifteen hundred people who attended the event stood up and gave the boy a standing ovation.

Recently, I received an invitation to come to Hawaii where I would be reunited with Mrs. Yukiko Sugihara. I can safely say that her husband is my hero since I was as an eleven-year-old boy, when I first met him and he declared himself to be my 'uncle.' Chiune, Sempo Sugihara was among the first to be recognized by Yad Vashem, as a Righteous Gentile (*Ish Hassid Umot*) for saving thousands of Jewish people from the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was Chiune Sugihara who was among the few who risked his career to save Jewish refugees, lining up at his door. The greatness of this man was

the fact that against the orders of his superiors he granted visas and he didn't turn away a single person who came to him for help.

Thousands of Jewish people besieged every day the foreign embassies trying to obtain visas. They went to the Americans, the Canadians, the Australians and more, but the overwhelming majority was turned away empty handed. No one wanted to save the Jews from Hitler. Irony would have it that an ally of the Nazis would risk his career to save Jews, whereas the West refused to help them.

In July 1939, the Japanese consul Chiune Sugihara with his family arrived to my hometown of Kovno, Lithuania. They took up residence in a house not far from where we lived. It became the Japanese consulate, an event that received hardly any attention. One of my uncles actually expressed concern, as it was well known that the Japanese were allies of the Nazis.

"Nothing good can be expected from the Japanese," he said to my father. How wrong he was.

To go back in time and visit the world I knew as a child is easy. All I have to do is close my eyes and I can see it clearly. Please, join me and I will take you the world I knew as a child and only lives in the memory of the few survivors still alive.

Kovno, Hanukah 1939

I know and love every nook and cranny of this town. Slowly its familiar details emerge in my mind. The golden cupola of the Chor Shoul, our loveliest synagogue, takes shape in the distance. Then Niemuno and Vilnius Streets, and Rotushes Square, lined with its massive stone houses which had probably seen Napoleon on his march to Moscow.

December 1939. It is Hanukah again, the Festival of Lights. I am eleven years old. I collected quite a sum of money from my family as Hanukah gelt. We have some refugees in our house, Mr. Rosenblat and his daughter Lea. I had to give up my room for them, and sleep with my brother Hermann, an idea I wasn't crazy about. My mother saw my resentment and made me feel guilty. That was my undoing, because the same day several ladies showed up asking for donations to help the refugees. On impulse, I gave them all my gelt.

The next day, a new Laurel and Hardy movie were playing and I was dying to see it, but my pockets were empty.

I had only one hope left, my aunt Anushka. She ran an elegant shop of imported gourmet foods for her rich clientele and she also catered to foreign embassies.

It was cold when I sat out that afternoon, but I was dressed warmly. The snow felt crisp under my boots and shimmered white in the afternoon sun. It was Hanukah, and all along the streets menorahs shimmered in the windows of the Jewish houses, and Christmas trees glowed in the homes of the Christians. Aunt Anushka's shop window was decorated with a string of colored bulbs, and a contraption attached to the door played a merry tune when you opened it. It was a gift from some inventor friend of hers. Somewhere in Poland, World War Two had started, but here in Lithuania life continued as if nothing had happened.

When I walked in, she was serving an elegantly dressed gentleman. "Ah, my dear nephew is here for his Hanukah money, I bet." She said in Russian, smiling at me.

"Come here and meet his Excellency, the consul of Japan, Mr. Sugihara," she added. I suppose I was staring at him. He had the most interesting slanted eyes. I approached him slowly and extended my hand.

"How do you do, Sir" I said politely.

He solemnly shook my hand, returning my open scrutiny, and then smiled. There was humor and kindness in those strange eyes, and I immediately warmed to him. As my aunt Anushka went to the cash register, Mr. Sugihara took a shiny coin from his pocket. "Since this is Hanukah consider me your uncle." He said extending the coin. I hesitated for a minute. "You should come to our Hanukkah party on Saturday." I blurted out as I plucked the coin from his hand. "The whole family will be there. Seeing as you are my uncle." I added. That Saturday, Chiune Sugihara and his wife Yukiko came to our home to attend our party. It was at the party that Mr. Rosenblat, the refugee who lived at our house, out of desperation approached Mr. Sugihara and asked him whether he would grant him a visa.

Mr. Sugihara was puzzled by this request. Why would a Jewish person wish to go Japan, knowing that the Japanese were allied with the Nazis.

At this party, the Sugiharas met many of my uncles and aunts and through them other Jewish families. When Mr. Sugihara heard that I was collecting stamps, he invited me to come to the consulate.

I would go to the Japanese consulate quite often, to collect stamps and get some tea and Japanese cookies from his wife, Yukiko. I would play with their older son, Hiroki, even though he was much younger than I.

It was only six months later that we found out what a true humanitarian we had for a friend, when he began giving out visas to anyone who came to his consulate. We were among the first to receive the visas, but unfortunately we couldn't use it, because we were Lithuanian Citizens, and when the Soviets occupied Lithuania, our passports became invalid.

Thus, we were caught in Hitler's killing machine and most of my family perished. But I always remembered my 'uncle' Chiune Sugihara. He was like a lighthouse in the sea of darkness that surrounded us during those days in Lithuania.

## **George Kadish – Zvi (Hirsh) Kadushin – Photographer with a Hidden Camera in the Kovno Ghetto**

Photographing daily life in the Kovno Ghetto was an extremely risky venture. The Germans strictly prohibited it. George Kadish took every opportunity possible to document life in the ghetto. The result constitutes one of the most significant photographic records of ghetto life during the Holocaust.

George Kadish was born Zvi (Hirsh) Kadushin in Raseiniai, Lithuania, in 1910. After attending the local Hebrew school, he moved with his family to Kovno. At the Aleksotas University, located in one of Kovno's suburbs he studied engineering in preparation for a teaching career and joined the rightist Zionist movement. Before the war, he taught mathematics, science, and electronics at a local Hebrew high school. His hobby, however, would have the most significant impact on his and others' lives. He developed an interest in photography and even began building his own cameras. He designed a hidden camera for use on his trouser belt.

Acquiring and developing film secretly outside the ghetto was as perilous as using his hidden cameras inside. Kadish worked as an engineer repairing x-ray machines for the German occupation forces in the city of Kovno. Once in the city, he bartered for film and other photographic supplies. He developed his precious negatives at the German military hospital, using the same chemicals he used to develop x-ray film. He smuggled them out in sets of crutches.

The subjects of Kadish's photographic portraits were varied, but he seemed especially interested in capturing the reality of the ghetto's daily life.

In June 1941, witnessing the brutality of the initial Nazi actions, he photographed the Yiddish word *Nekoma* ("Revenge") found scrawled in blood on the door of a murdered Jew's apartment. Camera in hand, or whenever necessary, placed just so to record subjects through a buttonhole of his overcoat, he photographed Jews humiliated and tormented by Lithuanian and German guards in search for smuggled food, Jews dragging their belongings from one place to another on sleds or carts, Jews concentrated in forced work brigades. Kadish also recorded activities at the ghetto's food gardens and in schools, orphanages, and workshops.

In addition to depicting the severe conditions of ghetto life, he had an artistic eye for portraiture, the desolation of deserted streets, and the intimacy of informal, improvised gatherings.

Kadish's last photographs taken inside the ghetto are those recording the deportation of ghetto prisoners to slave labor camps in Estonia.

In July 1944, after escaping from the ghetto across the river, he photographed the ghetto's liquidation and burning.

Once the Germans fled, he returned to photograph the ghetto in ruins and the small groups who had survived the final days in hiding.

Kadish recognized early on the danger of losing his precious collection. He enlisted the assistance of Yehuda Zupowitz, a high-ranking officer in the ghetto's Jewish police, to help hide his negatives and prints. Zupowitz never revealed his knowledge of Kadish's work or the location of his collection, even during the "Police Action" of March 27, 1944, when Zupowitz was tortured and killed at the Fort IX prison. Kadish retrieved his collection of photographic negatives upon his return to the destroyed ghetto.

After Germany's surrender on May 8, 1945, Kadish left Lithuania for Germany with his extraordinary photographs. In the American Occupation Zone, he mounted exhibitions of his photographs for survivors residing in displaced persons camps. Kadish later said that his photographs were his revenge.

The photographs of the Kovno Ghetto that appear in this exhibition were taken by George Kadish. Many of these images were printed directly from Kadish's original 35mm negatives. Kadish died in 1999 in Florida. His photographs are a tribute to his heroism in telling the story of the Jews of Kovno.

## **Our Lithuanian Neighbors**

Over breakfast Father held a family conference. We all agreed that it was too dangerous to remain in Kaunas. As frightening as the Russian police were, the Nazis were scarier. And no one had much confidence in the Soviet forces. We had heard plenty about the German blitzkrieg, and seen the Russian army for ourselves. In Kaunas, the Soviets' lumbering pre-war tanks had been dubbed "tanks of fifty." It took one man to steer, we joked, and forty-nine to push.

It was decided. We would make a run for the Russian border. The Soviets had long since confiscated all private automobiles, so we would have to find transportation, but even if we ended up in Siberia, it would surely be better than life under the Nazis.

The phone was dead. Father and Herman went down the street to speak to Uncle Itzhak. They returned with grim news. The Russian army was evacuating the town full speed, jamming the outgoing trains. Even if we managed to get on, the Germans were bombing the tracks, and the chances of getting through were slim. There was no other public transport. We would have to reach the border on foot.

There was even worse news—a new threat from an unexpected quarter. Even with huge numbers of Soviet troops still in Kaunas, gangs of Lithuanians armed with rifles and revolvers were roaming the streets. They called themselves "Siauliai," or "Patriots," and although they occasionally fought the Russians, for the most part they were robbing and beating up Jews. Our neighbors had turned against us, and the Germans hadn't even arrived.

With this urgency upon us, we had a last, strange family meal at home. Mother behaved very oddly, insisting upon her best china. She moved stiffly about the room, setting the table and switching on the crystal chandelier. The Rosenthal dishes gleamed under its sparkling lights. Father stopped his protests when he saw my mother's tucked in chin, a sure sign that nothing he said would move her. What was she thinking? We sat around the big mahogany table in silence, surrounded by the heavy blue drapes, the family pictures and paintings, the knickknacks and embroidered pillows—all the secure, familiar things that were part of our lives. It all felt eerily unreal to me, and sad, like the last meal of the condemned. Mother even served wine.

I remember going to my room to take a last look at all I was leaving, and slipping my beloved copy of *The Mysterious Island* into my knapsack.

### **Schrecklichkeit (Terror)**

Several of the Lithuanians disappeared and returned with some spades. They handed them over to the Jewish men and told them to dig their graves.

Besides the wounded there were four men in the group. One of them, an elderly man with glasses, froze in terror. The taller of the Germans went up and put the barrel of his gun to his chest.

“Pick up that shovel and start digging,” he said coldly. When the man did not respond, he shot him. The force of the bullet at such close range spun him around. His wife let out a terrible wail and threw herself on his body. Their five children stood around them, gaping in disbelief. It happened so fast.

My mother was so shocked that she cried out loud. Luckily the condemned Jews cried out at the same time so no one heard her. She struggled to rise, but Herman forced her down.

The other three men began hastily digging into the sandy soil as if their life depended on it, which it did, if only for a few more minutes. The Lithuanians were passing around a bottle of vodka and jeering at the Jews, who were unused to menial work and awkward with the shovels. “Well, you lazy Jews, you are finally doing an honest day’s work. Too bad it will be your last!” The two Germans stood aside and smoked, quite aloof, and refused when the Lithuanians offered them the bottle.

“Perhaps when you land in your Jewish paradise they will let you inside the gates if you show them your fresh calluses,” another Lithuanian piped up, and the others joined in laughter.

When they were satisfied that the grave was large enough, they told the Jews to undress. Realizing that their last hour had arrived they began to cry, some begging for mercy, some praying. A few loudly repeated the “Shma Israel.” Then the taller German stepped up again and shot one of the diggers, and the rest hastily removed their clothes. We could smell sweat, urine, and feces. We were witnessing the ultimate distress of people who are about to die a violent and shameful death.

When they were down to their underwear, the German told them to line up in front of the pit, but the Lithuanians wanted them to strip, especially the women.

“No. They will stay in their under-wear,” the tall German said.

“Let the men have their fun. They’ve earned it,” the Lithuanian officer persisted, smiling at the German. He spoke German quite well.

“I said no!” the German snapped. “I know what I’m doing. It’s psychologically undesirable for the men to see them naked, especially the children. Many good men simply lose their nerve. Better to leave these *untermenschlich* in their ridiculous underwear. You understand me?”

The Lithuanian looked doubtful, but didn’t argue the point.

I will never forget the German’s little lecture. He had enunciated clearly, as if giving a speech, and I heard every word. It gave me my first insight into the Nazi killing machine.

They shot Rachel first. She was still seated at her husband’s side, performing her strange ritual, bending down to her husband’s body, then lifting her arms up to heaven in a silent cry.

The shorter German came up behind her, and at the exact moment she raised her arms he deftly brought up his Luger and shot her in the neck. There wasn’t a single wasted motion in the execution. The Lithuanians gave him a respectful look.

Then the rest began shooting. I closed my eyes and covered my ears, but the terrified screams of the victims, especially those of the children, still haunt my nightmares. It was intolerable. I was about to bolt, but Herman held me down, hissing in my ear not to make a sound. Mother had passed out entirely.

When they were finished they hauled the trembling farmer from his house and told him to cover the grave with earth. “Make sure they don’t walk away,” the officer laughed. Then he added sternly, “Next time you try to hide Jews we’ll bury you with them. Understand?”

“Yes sir, yes sir. I’ll never hide Jews again as long as I live,” Kazys answered, crossing himself several times.

After they left he fearfully approached the ditch and looked down at the bloody bodies. We could see the shock spreading over his face. Then he put a hand to his mouth and retched.

The massacre of these people at such close range, where we could see, hear, and smell every minute of it, went through me like a branding iron. I was a normal thirteen-year-old boy brought up in a sheltered environment, and

suddenly I was plunged into a world where anyone who felt like it could hunt me down and kill me.

*Where books are burned in the end people will be burned, too.*

- Heinrich Heine

*I would like to tell the story of my hero, a man who during the Holocaust sacrificed his life to save mine. This event is especially painful for me to remember. To this day I still feel guilty, and feel responsible for his death. Too long have we survivors been maligned as the sheep that went to the slaughter. There were thousands of heroes who fought the Nazis, as partisans in the woods, in uprisings, like the Warsaw ghetto uprising, even uprisings like the one in the death camp of Sobibor. These people were fighting impossible odds, against the brutal Nazi war machine. But there were also different kinds of heroes, heroes of immense moral courage, like my math teacher, Shmuel Edelstein.*

### **Kadish for my Teacher**

On February 18, 1942, the Germans ordered all books in the ghetto to be turned over to the authorities. Anyone caught with books after the deadline would be executed. The people of the book, as we Jews had been known throughout the ages, were to be separated from our ancient companions.

Nearly everyone complied with the order and began delivering their precious books to the assembly point. It snowed the night before the deadline, and the ghetto was covered by a thick white blanket the next morning.

My mother had tears in her eyes as she helped me load her beloved books in my home made sled. The load consisted of ten volumes of Russia's best authors, all bound in red leather with gold embossed lettering. Tolstoy, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Pushkin, Gogol--the thoughts, passions, ideals, and feelings of literary giants were in those books. It was a wedding gift from her brother Jochil. I felt deep compassion for my mother. She had never quite recovered from my brother Herman's death. Mother rarely smiled these days. Like me, she escaped from her grief by reading. She would sit almost motionless for hours, only moving two fingers to flip the pages. And now they were even taking her books away. "Keep them Mommy," I wanted to tell her. "We are all going to be killed anyway. You might as well enjoy your books while you can." But I kept my silence.

Mother found it difficult enough keeping in touch with our terrible reality. But I never took the books to the assembly point. Cooky and I found an old abandoned house with an attic at the outskirts of the ghetto, which was made

off limits to the ghetto inhabitants. When no one was around, we sneaked in all our books and many books of our neighbors who were glad to get rid of them.

We had several hundred books by now in Yiddish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Russian and Hebrew. I became obsessed. I wanted more and more books for our library and the only place to get them was at the German assembly point where the books were delivered. The assembly point was two-story house and the man in charge was Mr. Grodnik, a friend of my father. He was only too glad to accept us volunteers, as the delivered books had to be sorted out and brought up to the upper floors for storage. At a later date, the Germans came with lorries to pick them up.

We worked there for three days and managed to steal about five hundred books. It was a risky business, but life wasn't worth living without books. By the time we were finished, we had about a thousand books, in various languages. There were the classics of all the nations.

French, Russian, German, English, and American classical authors. We were only fourteen years old, but we were avid readers and read a book a day. Some of the books were hard to understand, but we soon got used to the classics. I think that I got more than my education from these books.

For a while we managed to keep our library a secret, but soon it somehow got out and boys came to us for exchange. It seemed that many youngsters had the same idea and hid the family books.

Cooky and I both began attending trade school in carpentry. One day I was approached by Mr. Edelstein who was officially a carpentry instructor, but on the quiet, he also taught us mathematics and other subjects, which was strictly forbidden by the Germans. He asked me point blank if I could get him some textbooks, especially in mathematics. Strangely enough, I did steal some textbooks and brought them to the attic. Cooky was furious with me for doing it. "This is what I risked my neck for?" he yelled at me.

Mr. Edelstein was a kind man whom everyone liked. He was rather shy and always smiled. He came from a small shtetl where his whole family with the rest of the Jews was burned alive in a synagogue. Yet he taught us to believe that the good will triumph over the evil, and we shall all return to our beloved land of Israel. He was a true idealist and an ardent Zionist and tried to impart these ideals to all of us. He had no relatives, and like nearly all single men, he 'adopted' a family that had no working male at his head. Mr. Edelstein lived with a family of five. He was especially fond of the twins, who were eight years old and were always hungry. Like many others, he would often trade with the Lithuanian guards, clothing for food.

The next day I smuggled in the geometry book and gave it to him. He was so delighted that he gave me a big hug. "Do you know what a treasure this is? Look! It is in Hebrew and was printed in Tel Aviv. Where on earth did you get it?" He then put in a bag full of clothing he was carrying to trade with the guard at the gate. That afternoon when we left school, I passed him at the gate, where he stopped to trade with the guard. Suddenly I heard the guard shout. He sounded drunk. "You want more food for the junk? What are that you got hidden there, Jew boy. A book? I can shoot you for that! How would you like that for extra food?"

I was about ten yards away and turned to see what was happening. A German military car stopped at the gate and an SS officer stepped out and wanted to know what was going on. I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach.

Mr. Edelstein stood ashen faced while the guard showed the book to the SS officer. The German turned the pages slowly, then demanded to know where Mr. Edelstein had gotten that book. I couldn't hear Mr. Edelstein's answer, but the German slapped him a few times and shouted: "Don't lie to me, you filthy Jew! And is in some kind of a code! Who is your contact? Where did you get this book? Tell me or I will kill you!"

I stood frozen in horror as he and the Lithuanian began beating my teacher. Any minute, I expected Mr. Edelstein to point a finger at me; but instead of that, he made a barely perceptible gesture for me to go. With that I found my feet and started running. I was turning into a side street when I heard a shot. I looked back to see Mr. Edelstein fall to his knees. The German put his pistol to his head and fired again, and Mr. Edelstein fell over and lay still.

I stayed home from school the next whole day. My teacher was murdered and it was my fault. Finally Cooky came over and tried to cheer my up, but I was inconsolable. Me and my stupid books! For the first time, I realized the danger I exposed everyone to with my foolishness. I wouldn't listen and now my teacher was dead. To this day, I remember his feeble gesture waving me away from there. All he had to do is point in my direction to save himself, but he wouldn't do it. He was buried in the ghetto cemetery, only a short distance from where he was shot. Except for the family he lived with and a few of his pupils, including Cook and myself, few attended his funeral. A violent death was such a common occurrence in the ghetto that no one paid any attention. There was no funeral, as all religious practices were forbidden by the Germans. Only the twins, who saw in him a father, cried bitterly. Who would provide for them now? I just stood there stunned, unable to utter a sound, until sprinkles of rain and a blackening sky sent everyone scurrying for shelter.

For the next ten days, I didn't go to the trade school. I didn't care if they threw me out. I spent most of the days crying, and in self-recrimination. Cooky came several times trying to console me, and even brought me a book. But I told him to take it back. I swore I will never read another book in my life." Take it back, these books are the cause of murder and destruction," I shouted at him.

The head master who knew of my distress, gave me some time, but told Cooky that if I didn't show up soon, he will have to report me, and I would be sent to work at the air port, the worst possible working place in the ghetto.

I finally went back, and much to my surprise, neither the teachers nor the pupils connected Edelstein's death to the book I gave him. And if they did, they didn't say anything. Cooky and I spent more and more time up in our attic hide out, reading or discussing what we read.

One day Cooky took out an old bible we had among the Hebrew books. "I think we should say Kadish for Mr. Edelstein." Cooky said after some hesitation. I looked at him in astonishment. Cooky's parents were both agnostic and brought him up that way. "I know what you are thinking, but he did get killed because of our book. I think he would have wanted someone to say Kadish for him." Cooky explained with some embarrassment. And so I wrote down the words of the Kadish on a slip of paper and the next day, after school we stopped by the cemetery and said Kadish for him at his unmarked grave. Strangely enough, I felt better for it, I continued to visit and tend Edelstein's grave in the months to come. When the weather warmed, I planted some peas there. To my surprise they grew into bushes and eventually bore fruit, which Cooky and I shared. I knew that Mr. Edelstein wouldn't mind.

*If I needed a reminder why many Holocaust survivors live in Israel and cling to it with heart and soul, despite the endless wars and the suicide bombings, this recent journey supplied us with the answer. The flight from Tel Aviv to Munich lasts less than four hours, but my memory takes me back fifty seven years, when I was a teenage slave laborer for the Nazis in one of the outer camps of Dachau. Towards the end of the war, they were so desperately in need of labor that the Nazis reluctantly gave up the idea of gassing all Jews, irrespective of their gender or age.*

*They continued to gas women with children and old people, but those whom they considered still capable of work, were temporarily spared. They even coined a phrase for those of us: "Vernichtung durch Arbeit"--"Annihilation through Work." In fact, they starved us and made us work twelve hours a day at hard labor, condemning us to a slow agonizing death.*

### **Kadish for Zelig**

There were in all eleven outer camps of Dachau, where in nine months more than fifteen thousand Jewish slaves, out of a total of thirty thousand, died of starvation, hard labor and beatings by the German supervisors and the SS guards. I was in an outer camp of Dachau, known as Lager X (Camp 10), near Utting, a picturesque little town by the Amersee. Before the war writers and artists used to live there. I was told that the famous Kurt Weil lived there before Hitler came to power.

In July 1944, with the Soviet troops approaching the Kovno ghetto where I was imprisoned for three years, the Nazis transported us halfway across Europe to Bavaria. There, near the medieval town of Landsberg and surroundings, Hitler decided in the last phases of the war to build gigantic underground factories where the jet fighter Messerschmidt ME262 was to be built. This was Hitler's promised secret weapon that would sweep the American and British planes out of the German skies.

We, the half-starved Jews of Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary were to build these gigantic factories, and perish while building it.

The construction sight was called Moll, named after the owner of the building company, Leonard Moll. I will never forget the day when I first laid eyes on it. We were driving from Utting in a truck, to deliver a load of potatoes. In our camp, it was known that the Germans were building some kind of underground factory, and we heard terrible stories about it. We traveled for what seemed like an hour along a tree-lined dirt road. Darkness had fallen, and in the distance we could hear the low grinding roar of heavy machinery.

The din increased just before we emerged into a huge clearing lit by the glare of floodlights. The road dropped into a vast excavation, and from it rose an enormous concrete vault, bristling with vertical reinforcing rods so that it looked like some monstrous hedgehog. Narrow railroad tracks curved towards the opening.

The installation was a half-cylinder of concrete, 1,300 feet long and spanning more than 275 feet at the base. It rose some 95 feet into the air at the top of the arch. Under the glaring lights, cranes and bulldozers moved into and around its mouth. Scores of tractors, trucks, and other heavy equipment created an ear-shattering roar. Along the sides, scores of prisoners stood on platforms handling huge flexible hoses that spewed wet cement into the spiked grid work, while others moved about with shovels and buckets. Everywhere we looked we saw what looked like thousands of men in striped uniforms moving about the compound, carrying lumber, iron rods and sacks of cement.

It was like an enormous, evil hive. Even as we watched, we heard inhuman screams coming from above. The men who were maneuvering the huge hose had lost their grip, and the pipe began writhing about, spewing concrete in all directions. The men desperately tried to seize it, but it whipped and flailed and knocked several men off their feet. One after another they fell screaming onto the spikes, while the hose poured hundreds of pounds of concrete on top of them. The scene I described took place towards the end of 1944.

The men I saw fall into the concrete are still entombed in its massive construction to this day. Among the men who slaved on this project was my childhood friends Uri Chanoch and Chaim Konwitz, Avraham Fein, Monchik Levin, and many others. Fifty-eight years later we had returned to “Moll” to say Kadish for these men.

One of the men entombed I knew personally. His name was Zelig. I never found out his last name, but I knew he was from a small town in Lithuania. He was one of the “human horses” who were engaged in pulling a food cart from the village of Utting to a German worker’s kitchen. I too was a horse, and in all we were four teenagers who were given that job.

The German kitchen was near the site where we were slaving at hard labor, a place known as Dyckerhof and Wydman. (Dyckerhof and Wydman, by the way, is one of the largest construction companies in Germany today.) At that stage of the war, gasoline became a very precious commodity, and we the Jewish slaves, were used as ‘horses’. Make no mistake, being a “horse” was a coveted job in the camp, the alternative was to carry hundred pounds of cement on your back, or iron rails to build tracks for the trolleys. There was another advantage in being a “horse” the cart we were pulling was filled with

food for the kitchen, and we always managed to scrounge a crust of bread or a bowl of soup in Utting.

Zelig was an ardent Zionist and always talked about how he would work the land of Israel if he ever survived the war. "If I will ever survive this hell and get to the land of Israel, I will kiss every grain of sand, and work twenty four hour a day to build it up," he would say, and he would say it with so much longing in his voice that it had an effect on all of us.

But his wish never came true. He fell into the roof of "Moll" and became entombed with the others, by sheer mistake, and I was there to see him fall. I will never forget his screams as he fell to his horrible death. Fifty-eight years later we stood quietly reciting Kadish for the dead and I spoke to Zelig of the land of Israel that he loved so much, and like Moses, never got to see it.

Yes, Zelig, I want to tell you of the true miracle of Israel, that puts to shame the miracles of the Bible. Yes, Zelig, I survived and saw your beloved land. I still remember the mountains of Carmel rising from the morning mist, as our ship approached Haifa.

We were a ship full of penniless Holocaust survivors, and we all sang (what was later to become our National Anthem) the Hatikvah (the Hope) with tears in our eyes. No sooner had we landed on its shore, as we were called to defend the newly proclaimed land of Israel. Five Arab armies descended on us trying to strangle us at our birth.

I will never forget the moment when I was given a rifle and was told by my commanding officer: "This is your land now, defend it with all you have got, for you will never have another chance to have your own country."

And defend it we did, Zelig. Many of us died, some of them the last sons of once glorious Jewish families of Europe, but they died for the only cause worth while fighting for. I was only sorry, Zelig, that you couldn't be there by my side fighting for the land you loved so much. With the onslaught of the combined Arab armies, the world gave us a week to survive and what is more, no one lifted a finger to help us. The Arabs were to finish what Hitler had started.

So what else is new? But the world didn't reckon with one small thing, Zelig. We were not the defenseless Jews anymore. We were now back in our homeland fighting for the resurrected State of Israel. Against all odds we won the war, and set out to prepare the ground for another million penniless refugees. Jews, who escaped with their lives from the Arabic countries, where they were robbed of their properties, possessions and money.

And soon another million arrived from all over the world, and another million, from Poland and the Baltics.

From six hundred thousand in 1948, we grew into a population of two and half million within a few years of the creation of the State. Ironically, when the Jewish Agency asked for seventy-five thousands certificates to save some Jews from Hitler's gas chambers, the British claimed that the country couldn't absorb such a vast number of Jews. That was the infamous White Paper.

The fledgling state soon ran out of money to buy the basic needs for the swelling population. We lived in tents and ate what the small agricultural settlements could provide us with. It wasn't enough, but we weren't starving.

Very soon, we began to build a healthy democratic society, creating wealth by our brains and hard work, as the country had no natural resources. Soon Jews from over fifty countries full of enthusiasm came to help build the State of Israel. Our population grew even more, and despite the predictions of international experts, that no country can absorb so many millions without an economical collapse, Israel continued to develop in every field. The Jews, who hadn't tilled the land for two thousands years became experts in agriculture, achieving internationally unprecedented results.

Ironically, the stereotyped Jew, the merchant, the so-called money lender, the usurer, went all over the world to teach agriculture and know-how in many fields. What is even more ironic, we became experts in warfare. "The people of the book," as we were known for two thousand years, soft and cowardly, as proclaimed by the anti-Semites, soon learned to become experts in that field as well. The fact is that in 1967, we stunned the world by defeating the combined Arab armies in six days.

The Arab countries, unwilling to accept their defeat in the battlefield, and unwilling to accept us in their midst, launched war after war, trying to eliminate the State of Israel. Every time they suffered crushing defeats, despite their superior numbers and new-technology weapons the Soviets supplied them with.

Today we are a modern society of six million people. The country that once was a mosquito-infested swamp land, or dry desert land, blossomed into a modern society of six million people. From nothing, we created a land that not only boasts of the highest standards in every field of achievement, but also developed one of the highest high-tech industries in the world. We export per capita in dollars more than any other country in the world. And we did it all with hard work, brains, and guts.

Yes, Zelig, I always admired you for your love of that distant land called Eretz Israel. I never believed that I could have such emotions for any land. Today, after having fought for it in four bloody wars, and after spending a lifetime in helping rebuild it, I can finally say that I do share your feelings for the land of Israel. Yes, Zelig, you can be proud of us. We, the survivors of the Holocaust, have risen from the ashes of Europe and helped create the miracle of Israel.

Never again will they line us up defenseless before the gas chambers of Europe!

Rest in peace, my friend Zelig, rest in peace.

## Purim in Dachau

They arrived from Auschwitz in several groups. Each group counted about twenty people. Of course, they didn't look like people. They looked more like walking skeletons. They had triangular faces with pointed chins, and sunken cheeks. Even the lips had shrunken to thin blue lines. The only prominent feature were their eyes; they were unusually large and with a strange sheen, almost luminous. They were known in concentration camp slang, as 'Muselman'. That was usually the last stage before death. They spoke Yiddish with an accent, which to us Lithuanian Jews sounded strange. They told us that they came from the ghetto of Lodz through Auschwitz, before they were sent to our camp.

Our camp was known as the 'Outer camp of Dachau, number 10' and it was situated near the picturesque town of Utting, by lake Amersee. Our camp was in the middle of a small forest with surrounding green meadows and beautiful landscapes. I remember the day when we were brought there, I thought to myself, 'How can anything bad happen to us among all this beauty?' I soon found out that the beauty was in the landscape only. The Germans in charge of us were sadists and murderers. The Lodz people fell into the same deceptive trap. They thought that after Auschwitz, our camp looked like paradise. Most of them died soon after their arrival, from hard labor, beatings and starvation, still they preferred to die here than in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was from this group that we heard the incredible stories of gas chambers, and crematoriums, where thousands of our people were murdered every day. Some of them told us that they were standing naked before the gas chambers when they were suddenly ordered to get dressed and were sent here.

By March 1945, there were only a few of them still alive. One of them was known as the 'Chaim the Rabbi'. We never found out whether he was actually a rabbi, but he always washed his hands and made a *bracha* (blessing) before eating. He knew the dates of the Jewish calendar, and also knew all the prayers by heart. From time to time when the Germans were not looking, he would invite us to participate in the evening prayers. Our Jewish camp leader, Burgin, heard about him and tried to get him easier jobs. Most people died when they had to carry a hundred pounds of cement sacks on their backs, or other chores of heavy labor. He wouldn't have lasted a day on a job like this. He once told me that if he would survive he would get married and have at least a dozen children.

Around the middle of March, we were given a day off. It was a Sunday. The camp was covered with snow, but here and there the first signs of spring was in the air. We heard vague rumors of the American break through into

Germany and a glimmer of hope was kindled in our hearts. After breakfast, consisting of a slice of moldy bread, a tiny piece of margarine, and brown water, known as 'Ersatz Coffee', we returned to our barrack to get some extra sleep. Suddenly we noticed 'Chaim the Rabbi' standing in the snow and shouting "Hamman to the gallows! Hamman to the gallows!" On his head he had a paper crown made of a cement sack, and he was draped in a blanket which had cut out stars from the same paper attached to it.

We stood like petrified before this strange apparition, barely able to trust our eyes, while he performed a dance in the snow, singing: "I am Achashwerosch, Achashwerosch, the king of the Persians." Then he stood still straightened himself out, chin pointed to the sky, his right arm extended in an imperial gesture and shouted: "Hamman to the gallows! Hamman to the gallows! And when I say Hamman to the gallows, we all know which Hamman we are talking about!"

We were sure that he has lost his wits, as so many did in these impossible times. By now there were about fifty of us standing gaping at the "Rabbi," when he said: "Yiddn vos iz mit ajch! Haint is Purim, lomir shpilen a Purim shpil!" "Fellow Jews, what is the matter with you?! Today is Purim, let us play a Purim *Shpil* (game)!"

Then it dawned on us that back home, a million years ago, this was the time of the year when we children were dressing up for Purim, playing *draidlach*, and eating '*Hommen Taschen*'.

It took the 'Rabbi' to remember the exact date by the Jewish calendar when Purim was. We hardly knew what day it was. He then divided the roles of Ester Hamalka, Mordechai, Vashti and Hamman among the onlookers. I was honored to receive the role of Mordechai, and we all ended up dancing in the snow. And so we had our Purim Shpil in Dachau. But that was not the end of the story. The "Rabbi" promised us that we will get today our 'Shalach Manot,' and we thought that it was hardly likely to happen. But, miracle of miracles, the same afternoon, a delegation of the International Red Cross, came to the camp. It was the first time that they bothered about us. Still, we welcomed them with open arms, because they brought us the "Shalach Manot" the 'Rabbi' promised. Each one of us received a parcel, containing, a tin of sweet condensed milk, a small bar of chocolate, a box of sugar cubes, and a pack of cigarettes. It is impossible to describe our joy! Here we were starving to death as suddenly on Purim, we received these heavenly gifts. Since then, we never doubted the 'Rabbi' anymore. His prediction also came true. Two months later 'Hamman-Hitler' went to the gallows, and shot himself in Berlin, while we, those of us who were still alive, were rescued by the American army, on May 2, 1945. I lost track of the 'Rabbi' on our 'Death

March', from Dachau to Tyrol, but I hope that he survived and had many children as he always wanted. I always remember him when Purim comes around, for the unforgettable 'Purim Shpil' in Dachau.

## **Premonition**

December 25 [1944] was my father's birthday. Christmas Day, for the Germans. We got the day off and were permitted to stay in camp. It had snowed all night, and in the morning the camp and the woods were covered with a beautiful thick white blanket.

We received some extra coal and wood that day, and inside our underground barracks it was nice and warm...

That afternoon most of the inmates took naps. I had been asleep for about an hour when I was awakened by Father, who suddenly cried out in his sleep. He bolted upright in the bunk and said, "Your mother just died."

Then he began to weep. His face was ashen and he kept repeating "Rebecca." I tried to calm him and told him it was just a nightmare. He shook his head.

"You don't understand. I was there standing by the bunk. I saw Fanny applying a cold compress to her head. Then I heard Fanny cry out and I knew that she was dead. My life's companion, my sweet Rebecca is no more."

By the expression on his face I saw that he actually believed this. My heart filled with sorrow for him. I scarcely believed in such supernatural phenomena, but I felt a certain uneasiness all the same.

Later, he told me that when he was young he was a traveling salesman for a time. He was somewhere in East Prussia when he had a dream that his father had died. He saw him lying on a large white pillow with the whole family surrounding his bed. He even remembered where each of his brothers and sisters was standing.

At that time he thought that it was just a dream, but when he returned home, he found out that his father had died the same night he had the dream, with his sisters and brothers around the bed just as he had seen them.

"I was there. Don't ask me how. And I was with your mother today."

Then he said, "We might as well say Kaddish, son," and started chanting the ancient prayer for the dead.

"Ithgadal Veihitgadash ... Shmei Rabo - - ."

"Stop it! Stop it!" I shouted, aghast. "Don't do it, Father! Don't bury her before she is dead! It was just a dream, for God's sake!" I started crying and

shaking him, but he paid no attention to me and continued his chanting. Unable to bear it, I ran outside.

It was quiet outdoors. Very few inmates were about, but in the distance I could hear the drunken voices of the guards singing Christmas carols. I looked up into the brilliant blue sky and I prayed once more to a cruel, merciless God. Grant me only one request, I begged, and I will never bother you again. Please, let Father's dream be just a dream.

...I kept glancing over at Father. He had withdrawn deep inside himself, and hardly answered me when I talked to him.

Finally he turned around and looked at me for a long time. His gaze was clear and steady. "Don't worry about me, son. No one in the world can take away the wonderful years I spent with your mother. Nor the beauty of her person. I know she is gone, but she will live within me forever. That is how one has to look at it and that is how one can live with it," he said quietly. I was still bewildered by his conviction that Mother was dead, and now it sounded to me like he was trying to rationalize something that couldn't be rationalized. But if that gave him strength to deal with the situation, who was I to argue with him? Father was made of stronger stuff than I had realized.

My mother died of typhoid fever in Stutthof on December 25, 1944. My sister Fanny, who survived the war, was applying cold compresses to her brow when she died.

I hate things that I can't explain rationally. This remains one of the unexplained mysteries of my life.

## **Private Clarence Matsumura Remembers Liberation Day**

'Toward the end of the war, when we'd finally broken the Siegfried Line and the Germans were in retreat, three of my buddies and I pulled into a German village called Waakirchen. There was a hill there that was covered with artificial trees. These things looked like they were made of two by fours. They had painted 'em green and laid them all out over this hill, which looked like it was man-made, too. Grass was growing on it, but there were no ravines or any natural markings like that. We went around and discovered a tunnel with a great big wire fence across it. There were all kinds of people in there, staring through the fence. We were staring at them, and they were staring back at us, Orientals in U.S. Army uniforms. It took us a few minutes to realize these were not German workers, but prisoners. Polish, Hungarian, all different nationalities. Inside the tunnel there was a railroad track, with bunk beds all lined up and down one side. Down the other side piles of all kinds of machine parts were laid out. An assembly line ran on the tracks, and it looked like they were putting together 88 millimeter artillery pieces. Anti-aircraft pieces, famous for their deadly fire.

'These people in the tunnel were afraid to come out at first. We couldn't really talk to them, because nobody seemed to speak English. We more or less figured out what they were doing because we recognized the gun parts. Finally we located a few doctors and lawyers who could speak English, and they explained. The prisoners weren't starving like those we found later, but they were happy to come outside into the air. They had been in that tunnel for so long.

'We didn't know anything about slave labor camps then. We didn't know what the hell was going on.

"There were four of us driving around in a weapons transport, mostly on Hitler's autobahns and at highway speeds. Sergeant Mas Fujimoto was driving, and old man Tanaka, acting as observer, was up front, and then there was David Sugimoto, the radio operator, and me. I was there as a repairman. We were acting as forward observers. The Germans were retreating so fast then that our infantry could hardly keep up.

"Later on we came to a really peaceful-looking town. It was called Dachau. I had never heard of it before. Right in the middle of town was what looked like a big factory, with a high fence all around and a big brick smokestack in the middle. Before we ever reached it we noticed the odd smell. You just can't describe it, but you never forget it. The smell of decaying human flesh. There were dead corpses all piled up everywhere in there. A lot of them in striped uniforms, many of them naked. This thing is right in the middle of

town, and there are dead bodies all over the doggone place. I was very shook up. I kept trying to figure out what the heck is this doggone thing?

“We went out into the town, with some men from the battery who could speak German, and started interrogating the townspeople. ‘Where are the soldaten? The guards? Where did they go? Did you know there are all kinds of dead people in there?’ Right in the middle of town, and the townspeople claimed that they didn’t know anything about any of this. Then someone told us the soldiers had marched a lot of prisoners out of town several days ago. And that a day or two later the last of the soldiers came around and took all the townspeople’s animals and bicycles, and just took off.

‘We took off after them, following the road the townspeople pointed out. Farther along, toward some other villages, we started finding people along the roadside. Almost all of them were wearing black and white striped uniforms. I don’t know how any of them could stand on their feet. They were nothing but skin and bones. They couldn’t speak. Most of them were lying on the ground, many of them unconscious. We were supposed to be chasing down the SS, but these people were starving. They were lying out on the cold ground. We said let’s get them into someplace warm, get them some food. We put them into Gasthauses, we put them into barns. We got them inside and got them blankets, gave them water and food, but the rest of our guys kept bringing in more and more people. They kept finding them along the roads. Pretty soon we ran out of places. We went into the villages and got the Germans out of their houses and brought these prisoners in. We put them in their beds, on their sofas, wherever we could make them comfortable. The Germans didn’t need the doggone houses. These people needed the houses.

“The first thing we got them was water. But the thing was, a lot of them couldn’t swallow. They were starving, but only the strong ones could eat or drink, and many of them had lost their teeth from scurvy. The really weak ones couldn’t even swallow water. You could give it to them, but it didn’t do any good because it just wouldn’t go down.

“We contacted our mess crew to find out if there was any way they could make the mush they fed us in the morning. We took powdered eggs and whipped them up with water and then added more water to make them really soupy. But only the strong ones could eat it. Nothing we tried seemed to work on the others.

“I remember holding these people up and trying to feed them broth. The word came down that we shouldn’t try to feed them solid food because we would only harm them. Give them broth, they said, let them drink if they can, give them mush if they can eat it. We were doing that day and night for

several days. We didn't know what else to do. All we could do was clean them up, give them blankets, try to get some broth down them, spoon by spoon. The strange thing was, there were only men there. I don't think I saw any women. But unless you undressed and bathed them you couldn't really tell. They were so emaciated you couldn't tell whether they were men or women.

“Did I talk about it with my family, with the other Nisei ? No, I didn't talk about it. How could anyone understand who didn't see it? It's not that easy to talk about. It affected all of us. It took us a long time to get over that doggone thing. We couldn't understand why people had to g-o and do things like that to other human beings. You really can't explain how it is, when you've got all these people, so many of them, and you're trying to help them and they're dying, right there in your hands.’

- PFC Clarence Matsumura, 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion

## **Solly Remembers His Liberation**

Finally the order came to stop at a small clump of woods. I found a spot under a tall pine and wrapped myself in my wet blanket. I was alone now, the last of my group. Out of all of those who were better and braver and smarter than I, I was alive. Why me, God?

The snow continued to fall, covering everything, including me. I fell asleep. During the night I could hear shots. The guards must have been firing at the sleeping prisoners. No one had the strength to try to escape now. I was too exhausted to care.

I awoke with a start. It was well past dawn, and the sun had emerged from the clouds, glittering on the white fields around me. There was something else, something strange that immediately alerted my senses. It was the silence. There wasn't a sound anywhere, no shouted orders or barking dogs. It was as if I were the only one left in the world. Not a soul was in sight.

I must be free, I thought with mild surprise. Watch it, Solly, a voice in my head replied. Don't lose your sanity now.

Still nothing moved. I could see huddles of prisoners covered with snow all around me, but nothing stirred.

Below me, on the road, a tank appeared. Then what looked like a jeep. I closed my eyes, waiting for a bullet to put me out of my misery. Then I heard someone speaking English. When I opened my eyes, four men in khaki uniforms were approaching. They looked unshaven and tired. Their oriental features astonished me. They looked like Sugihara and his family. I stared at them, unable to grasp the situation. Japanese? I continued to sit and stir my soup. My throat constricted. I dared not think, and could not speak.

One of the men came up and knelt in front of me. He gently touched me on the shoulder and said, "You are free, boy. You're free now," he said, and then smiled. That smile has been with me ever since. It wreathed his whole face and made his eyes nearly disappear.

When all I did was stare he removed a chocolate bar from his pocket. "That's for you," he said kindly.

I was groping for my English, actually wanting only to fall on my knees and kiss his feet. "Who ... are you?" I whispered.

Now he was surprised. "Hey," he called back to the others, "he speaks English."

“Who? . . .” I said again.

“Americans. Americans,” the angel said. “Nisei. Japanese Americans. My name is Clarence,” he added. “What’s yours?”

I almost gave him my camp number, as I always did to the authorities. But I am free now, I thought. The realization filled me with a kind of panic.

“Solly,” I managed to say, and took another swallow of soup. There was a big chunk of tough horsemeat in it. I chewed on it. It felt good to chew. I continued to eat my soup, while somewhere inside me a small boy named Solly from Kovno, Lithuania, was -slowly going insane with joy.

The soldiers had a smoke and patiently waited for me to finish. I put the chocolate bar into the knapsack. You just don’t eat treasures.

“That’s good,” Clarence said. “You probably shouldn’t eat that yet. We’ll take you to our unit and they’ll take care of you there. Understand?”

The soldiers helped me to my feet and led me to the jeep. A sergeant named Fujimoto was driving. Clarence sat beside me and kept smiling reassuringly. “You’ll be all right. You’ll be all right. just hang on.”

Then we were in a camp, and there were American soldiers and MPs and prisoners in striped uniforms. My legs turned to rubber as we headed for the field kitchen. The men set me down, and Clarence brought me a bowl of soup. “Better than horse soup,” he said.

Then he squatted beside me, lit a cigarette, and told me that he and his buddies would be moving out soon. To Berchtesgaden. They were going after Hitler.

I was taken to a barn and given a German army blanket. The soldiers kept moving in and out, bringing in more and more prisoners from the road.

Toward evening Clarence appeared again and knelt down at my side. “We have to go now,” he said, clasping both my hands in his.

“Thank you, thank you,” I whispered, clinging to his hands. Then he was gone.

*This is my story of the first Passover Seder (ceremonial dinner) in Munich after the collapse of the Nazi empire. I mentioned the Haggadah (Passover prayer book) that was created and written by fellow survivors, especially for this occasion.*

*I still possess a copy of that original Haggadah, and a few years ago, my friend professor Saul Touster of the Brandeis University, edited a fabulous new edition of the Haggadah. It became known as the "A Survivor's Haggadah," and was published in a splendid new edition by the American Jewish Society of New York. For years the 'Survivors Haggadah' stayed in the drawers of those who attended the Seder, almost forgotten. None of us realized what a unique document it was, until by pure chance, Professor Saul Touster discovered it and realized its full value. It was he who rescued it from obscurity, edited it, and had it published. Today, the Haggadah has become a collector's item, and rightfully so.*

*Here is the full story of that Haggadah and how it was created, written, and reborn.*

### **The Fabulous Survivor's Passover Haggadah**

The harsh winter of 1946 in Munich was coming to an end. Spring was in the air and the Passover holiday was approaching. For us, Holocaust survivors, it was of tremendous significance. It was our first Passover Seder after our liberation. We were going to celebrate a double holiday of Freedom. One for the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and the other, our Exodus from Hitler's concentration camps. Yet the two events were vastly different. Moses managed to bring the whole Jewish people to freedom, whereas only a fraction of European Jewry survived the Holocaust. What were we to do? Spend the rest of our lives mourning for our nearest and dearest? The calamity was so enormous that had we mourned for a thousand years, it would not even make the tiniest dent in our grief. We also knew that those who perished wouldn't want us to do that. Their expressed wish was never to forget them, but to go on with our lives, rebuild the Jewish nation from scratch in our own homeland in Israel.

The debate of what should be the fate of the *Sheerit Hapleta* (the saved remnant) was going on in the DP camps all over Germany. Most of us were still in shock of the incredible liberation, when we were convinced that the Nazis would finish us off before their end came. Most of us were in a forced denial trying to shut out the gruesome experiences that no human being should have ever been subjected to. We couldn't function without that denial. The black hole of the Holocaust trauma would have swallowed us alive. But

there was one thing that the majority agreed upon, that there is no other place for us, but Eretz Israel.

The project of the survivors Haggadah was born in Munich and the person whose brainchild it was, was my father's friend Sheinson. He had the idea that we survivors should have our own Haggadah, different from the traditional one. He was a fellow survivor from Lithuania, and he literally became obsessed with the project. Some thought it was a way of trying to forget what happened to him and his family. Not only did he write much of the text, but was involved in all the phases of its complicated logistics. He often consulted fellow Lithuanian Jews, among them my father, but he always made his final decision what to include and what to exclude from the Haggadah. I remember some of the arguments involving the text, as he advocated Aliyah to Israel as the only way remaining to us survivors. Especially one sentence was objected by some: He wrote in Yiddish: "Nito kein schlechter oder guter goles. Yeder goles firt zum untergang." (There is no such thing as a "bad" or 'good' exile. Every exile leads to extinction.) You must understand, that there were those among us, who were tired, dispirited, mourning after their nearest and dearest who perished in the Holocaust. The idea of going to Israel to face strife, hard work and war, after what they went through was impossible to accept. They simply couldn't take it anymore. Those of us who were determined to make Aliyah, could understand them. They simply didn't have it in them to continue to struggle indefinitely, as the struggle in Eretz Israel seemed to indicate. Still, Sheinson included that sentence, despite some protests.

The person who worked tirelessly to help us was U.S. Army chaplain Rabbi Abraham Klausner. He played an important role in all phases of our existence in Bavaria. From helping to establish the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria, to founding the first Yiddish newspaper (*Unzer Weg*).

My father, who was one of the founders of the first Hebrew school in Munich and a member of the Central Committee, couldn't praise Rabbi Klausner enough for all he did for us survivors.

It was Rabbi Klausner who helped with the logistics of having the Haggadah printed. The printing of the Haggadah was done by a group that called itself "Achida." They were fellow survivors from Kovno Ghetto, who tried to avoid getting involved in the politics of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel. Ironically, the Haggadah was printed by a former Nazi printing house named Bruckman, who published during the war Nazi propaganda.

The two editors of *Unzer Weg*, Levi Shalit and Israel Kaplan, both fellow Lithuanians, took the Haggadah to Rabbi Klausner who accepted it and had it printed through army press facilities. There were some changes introduced by Klausner. The new cover was emblazoned with the tricolor insignia, in the middle of which there was a large white capital A, for the Third Army. (The army of occupation of Bavaria.) There was a poetic two-page introduction in English by Rabbi Klausner.

“And the khaki-clad sons of Israel commanded by Lt. General Trust gathered together as was the custom in Israel, to celebrate the Passover Festival.”

Was the first sentence of the part of the Haggadah. The next page said in small letters: “We were slaves to Hitler in Germany”

Following was a Hebrew version and a Yiddish version of the Haggadah. Some of it was traditional text, but much was written by Sheinson’s anguished soul, reflecting the anger of the horrors inflicted on us and hope for a new life in Eretz Israel.

Here is a passage in the Haggadah that Sheinson wrote. It is full of bitterness and irony towards the world.

“When the righteous among the nations of the world saw that Hitler had decided to exterminate Israel, their great assembly came together and out of their great sorrow decided to keep silent. And the righteous among them say: How can we in our weakness save Israel from the hands of the evil man! Perhaps this is the hand of G-d and who are we to interfere in the conduct of this world. And the people see how Israel is swimming in their blood and they pass by. And the children of Israel groaned and cried out but were not heard. And they cried out to the Lord, the G-d of their fathers, who saw their suffering and oppression, and their cry went up. And that man of evil, Hitler, made instruments of destruction which he sent across the sea, killing many. Babies were being killed and still no one knew what to do about it. Finally, the enemies of that man of evil grew indignant, and they girded themselves and unleashed against that man of evil and his people great wrath, rage and fury, disaster, and a band of avenging angels, afflicting them with two hundred and fifty plagues. And G-d hardened Hitler’s heart. And instruments of destruction, and eagles of iron and copper shower fire and brimstone upon his garrison cities, killing man and beasts alike.

And a multitude of chariots, as plenty as the sands of the sea, sweep across the land of the evil man, and destroy him, and the Holocaust survivors (*Sheerit Hapletah*, the saved remnant) are rescued and redeemed.

When peace came down on earth, the people of Israel were gathering. The surviving remnants were coming out of the caves, out of forests, and out of death camps, returning to the land of their exile. The people of those lands greeted them and said: We thought you were no longer alive, and here you are, so many of you. And they sent the survivors all sorts of messages, telling them to leave the land, even killing them. And the people of Israel ran for their lives; they were sneaking across borders only to be robbed of everything they had. And they abandoned their homes, and they saved their lives, and they went to Bavaria in order to go up to our Holy Land.”

Y.D. Sheinson

\* \* \* \* \*

This is but a small example of what is written in the Haggadah, we called survivor’s Haggadah, but some, rightfully, call it Sheinson’s Haggadah.

The full text of the Haggadah with an inspiring introduction by Professor Saul Touster can be obtained from the American Jewish Historical Society, in New York. ID # ISBN 0-911934-50-2

I would like to add that what makes the Haggadah even more unique are the printings of the original woodcuts surrounding each page. It was supplied by a superb artist and fellow survivor, Miklos Adler.

## **Machal, The Forgotten Heroes**

*Machal* were the volunteers from around the world, many of whom gave their lives to defend this country in the WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.

Yesterday I received an invitation from World Machal to participate in the 'Yom Hazikaron service' to honor the memory of our 119 Fallen Comrades. They came from all over the world to lay down their lives for the defense of Israel. They didn't have to come, yet they did, and they died to allow us to live here as a free people in the state of Israel. Soon after World War II ended, many volunteers came to help in the *Ishuv*. Many worked on ships helping to smuggle in Jews from Europe, mostly Holocaust survivors.

After the British left on May 14, 1948 and the State of Israel was established. Approximately 3,500 volunteers from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, South Africa and from many countries around the world, began arriving to help defend the fledgling State against the combined armies of the Arab Countries Most of the volunteers were veterans from World War Two, with considerable combat experience. Some were high-ranking officers in various branches of the military, many of them experienced pilots who were sorely needed in the newly established IDF.

What is not appreciated enough by Israeli military historians and the public in general, is the fact that these experienced volunteers were in many fields crucial for the defense of this country. They participated in all the battles and their experience and expertise were often decisive in winning the battles.

I am a Holocaust survivor and at the time when Israel became a sovereign state, I was serving with the US Army in Germany as an interpreter. I was supposed to immigrate with my father to Canada, but decided instead, to volunteer to join the IDF. There were those who couldn't understand why I would risk my life after four years of horrors in concentration camps. " You have done enough by just surviving, let others do the fighting." " It is a lost cause anyway. Israel will not survive the onslaught of a hundred million Arabs. Why do you want to die now when you have survived the worst slaughter of our people?" They kept on saying.

I couldn't give them a rational explanation. Perhaps it was an irrational decision. All I knew was that I had to go.

It wasn't until I met the Machal volunteers on the way to Israel, that I understood why.

After saying good bye to my father and friends, I left for France. Members of the "Bricha," mostly ex Palestinian soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, whom I met in Germany, directed me to a camp near Marseilles, by name of Saint Jerome. There, members of the Hagana were training volunteers for the Israeli army. I decided to wear my American Army uniform and had no problems crossing the border from Germany to France and continue by train to Marseilles. From there, it was a short distance to the camp. Upon arrival in Saint Jerome, because of my Canadian papers, I was assigned to a group of English speaking volunteers. They came from all over the world, The United States, Canada, Great Britain, South Africa, and other English speaking countries. They were mostly older than I and they received me in their midst with great warmth. They had many explanations of why they volunteered, but deep down all of us had the same feeling: "We Had A Need" to come and defend our ancient homeland. It was as if a call echoing through all the generations of Jews came down to us from Mount Sinai. Most of us were not religious people, but I heard that sentiment expressed by many of the volunteers.

There was one of us who knew how to put into words: He was our military instructor and taught us how to handle weapons. He was a tough looking man with a rugged face. He was much older than the rest of us, with graying hair, and those who knew him called him Cappy. He was an American who served with the Marines during World War II. I never did find out his name, as he remained in the camp after we left for Israel. But before we embarked on the SS "Pan York" he held a short speech, which I remember to this day.

"Those of us who fought in World War Two and helped defeat the Nazis, were there for an additional purpose. We were being prepared by destiny for the battle for Israel. After twenty centuries of Galuth, we have the unique privilege to participate in the historical event of the resurrection of our ancient homeland. There will be those of us who will have to make the ultimate sacrifice in the coming battle, but never in the history of the Jewish people was there a worthier cause to fight for. Good luck and God bless."

Tomorrow, at the 'Zicharon Service' when the names of our fallen comrades will be read, I will remember Cappy's speech, and think of those who came from around the world to 'Make the ultimate sacrifice', for this country. We should never forget them.

*For twenty generations we were filled with the desire of returning to Zion, our ancient homeland, and were praying to God for the rebirth of the State of Israel. When it finally came and she was born, we needed a miracle to survive the onslaught of our enemies, and many more miracles to get where we are today. Given the fact that we started out as a pauper state, and trebled our population with impoverished immigrants within four years, our achievements were unprecedented in human history. Today, once more, we are facing grave dangers, but there is no reason to despair. We should look back at the dangers we had faced in the past and still managed to achieve something that no other country in the world was able to do. And that despite of all the wars that were forced on us and, what seemed at the time, insurmountable obstacles. I was there from the beginning and was proud to be an active witness to the miracle of Israel. Let me tell to about an episode in our humble beginnings.*

This essay is dedicated to those of us in Israel who think that life is too tough and the situation intolerable.

### **The Miracle of Israel**

After surviving the War of Independence in 1948, I decided to join the fledgling Israeli merchant marine. Israel at that time possessed about ten rickety ships, which belonged more to the scrap heap than floating on the high seas. Yet, thousands upon thousands of new immigrants were brought to Israel on these floating wrecks.

There were hundreds of young men who were determined to join the merchant marine, waiting to be called to sign on, but there were very few places available. I had registered like all the others, but as a Holocaust survivor, I knew that unless I use my head, I would never get on a ship if I waited for my turn.

I made myself available day and night, hanging around the harbor and the Zim line offices. Sure enough, one day a sailor fell ill on a ship that was about to sail, and I was there on the spot to take his place. The ship's name was 'Kommemiut.'

To my surprise and delight, it was the same ship that brought me from Marseilles to Israel two years earlier. Except, in 1948, its name was Pan York and she was bringing up to five thousand immigrants each trip. Actually, it was a four thousand ton ancient cargo vessel that had no business taking on cargo, let alone people. To bring five thousand people on

that “luxurious passenger liner”, was a ‘Huzpa’, even by Israeli standards, yet that is what they did.

When I came aboard with my meager possessions the chief mate, an old Italian seaman, who was probably as old as the ship itself, signed me on and the ship sailed from Haifa to Trieste. In the mean time, from an immigrant ship she reverted to her original use as a cargo ship.

As soon as the vessel was on its way, I was called to the bridge to speak to the captain. I was quite surprised that the captain would want to speak to a new and ordinary seamen, but I soon found out the reason.

The captain was even older than the Italian chief mate and his name was Captain Weil. He was a short man with a considerable belly, snowy white hair and sharp gray eyes. He came straight to the point:

“The office tells me, that you speak German, English and Hebrew.” He addressed me in German. “Aye, aye, Sir,” I answered in German, showing my surprise. “Good. You will make yourself available whenever I need you. None of these blasted crew members speak any civilized languages.”

I soon found out that the good captain was from Elsas-Lothringen, a part of Europe that changed hands between Germany and France. The older population still spoke German, while the younger once spoke French. Captain Weil was old indeed. When we became better acquainted, he told me that he was an officer in the Kaiser’s navy during World War I.

He naturally, spoke German, but here and there he would exclaim in French, “Naturelment!” He would address me as *matrosse*, which is means sailor in German.

On our way to Trieste, he would often come to the bridge when I was on my watch at the helm and he would talk to me. It was more of a monologue than a conversation. He kept saying the same things over and over, always in an agitated, loud voice. He would say, “we need a miracle, no thousands of miracles!” until we began calling him Captain Miracle.

“It’s a damn miracle that we won this bloody war with the Arabs, and now, how are we supposed to become a state? Just by declaring it? We have no money, no raw material, no coal, no oil, no water, just Jaffa oranges! Ha, Jaffa oranges! And look how many penniless beggars they are bringing in! Just look at them! Worn out, bedraggled, and traumatized Holocaust survivors, with a psychological problems the size of Mount Everest! And they

are supposed to help build this country?! It is sure as hell that we will have to support them for the rest of their lives.”

“If that is not enough, look what the fools are doing now! They are bringing in equally bedraggled, poverty stricken Jews from the Arab countries. Most of them have no money or a useful trade to speak of, as their money and possessions were robbed by their Arab neighbors before they could escape. Another endless bunch of mouths to feed. How are we going to feed them, house them, cloth them, and provide them with the barest minimum to sustain life? How many bloody miracles do they want from God?! Surely, the miracles of the bible pales in comparison to the miracles we expect him to perform now! Ha! The fools!”

“Why do you think that all countries have immigration quotas? For very good reasons! It is because no country can afford to allow in more immigrants than they can absorb without disrupting the economy, for God sake! And what are these fools doing? They are flooding this pauper state with more paupers! Millions of paupers! Have you ever heard of anything as ridiculous as that!”

“Don’t they know what it takes to build a new country from scratch, with no money, and a bunch of penniless wretches, assembled from hell itself! If that is not enough, hundreds of millions of hostile Arabs surrounding us from all directions, just waiting for us to make a mistake. What are we doing?! We are making hundreds of mistakes daily. Given the enormous problems we are facing, the fools running this so called state of Israel, have brought us to the brink of an abyss where we are teetering at the moment. The slightest push, and we are in for a fall never to rise again. After two thousand years, we have finally returned to our ancient home only to lose it once more for good. The fools are taking insane risks. Unless a Miracle will happen, the biggest miracle of them all, we will all be lost. Yes, may God grant us a miracle, many, many miracles!”

I saw Captain Weil once more eight years later. I was signed on the new passenger ship Zion and he came to visit us. I was a second mate by then, preparing the bridge for departure to New York. He came with the captain, who showed him the bridge and introduced him to the latest equipment.

He looked somewhat older, but not much. When the captain introduced me to him, he smiled. His gray eyes were as sharp as ever “Well, matrosse, I see you are an officer now, another bloody miracle, ha, ha.” We looked at each other and we both laughed. “I know, I know, you guys called me Captain Miracle. I was quite aware of that. Well, you tell me then, wasn’t it a miracle that we got where we got, against the craziest odds? And I will tell you another thing; we won’t need anymore miracles to survive here. We have made it.”

We looked out at the harbor that was bustling with dozens of new ships flying the Israeli flag entering and leaving the port. I could see the pride in his eyes and I was touched. He was a nice old man after all, even though he tended to be somewhat pompous on occasion.

Before he left the bridge, we shook hands.

“Perhaps the miracles happened because we prayed to God, but it helped a lot that we have brains. As for you personally, I wish you many fathoms under the keel when you will be master of your own vessel.” While he was going out the door, he turned around once more and said, and there was a smile in his eyes: “As for Israel, all I can say is: ‘Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!’”<sup>\*</sup> I thought it was an odd thing to say at the time, and attributed it to one of the old man’s peculiarities.

Today, forty-five years later, I am still thinking of what Captain Weil said.

<sup>\*</sup>Expressed by Admiral David Glasgow Farragut (1801-1870) US Navy.

*A thirteen-year-old Jewish boy, Jackson Klein, adopted Solly Ganor as his hero for his Bar Mitzvah speech. This account was written by a woman who attended the Friday night Bar Mitzvah. This story was widely circulated on the Internet. It was later published in the book Chicken Soup for the American Soul.*

### **Solly Ganor's Belated Bar Mitzvah**

Friday night I attended a Bar Mitzvah service that would have been inspirational at anytime, but for the three-hundred-plus who attended in the aftermath of the events of Sept. 11th, 2001, it was an amazing, life-affirming experience. I would like to share the story with you. I believe that many will find comfort from the stories shared with our congregation by a 13-year-old boy.

Like many, my husband and I felt the need to be with people this week and planned to attend the Friday night Shabbat service at the Birmingham Temple of Farmington Hills, Michigan. On the drive, I read from the Temple bulletin that there would be a Bar Mitzvah celebrated. I was surprised and hoped it would be postponed, hoping the focus of the evening would be on making sense of the week's events. Tragically, the adult son of a favorite temple friend had been 94th floor of the WTC, and I knew it would be a sad night. I could not have been more wrong.

We arrived to find the parking lot filled and Temple crowded. Many apparently felt the need to come together. The service began with beautiful, mournful music. Then Rabbi Sherwin Wine spoke at some length about the horrors of the terrorists' attack. He stated that we had two purposes tonight. The first was to mourn the victims, including the son of Skip Rosenthal, Joshua Rosenthal, a fine man who had grown up at the Temple and was well known to many present.

The second purpose was to thwart the terrorists desire to demoralize us and continue to celebrate "Life Cycle" events, such as a Bar Mitzvah, the "coming of age" of a Jewish boy.

Next, family members of the Bar Mitzvah boy read passages about milestones, family, dignity, power and peace. The congregation sang songs about community, peace and love.

Then Rabbi Wine introduced Jackson Klein, the Bar Mitzvah boy. The Rabbi stated that horrible experiences throughout history, from pogroms, to the Holocaust, to Tuesday's attacks have often provided us with heroes and heroines. At our Humanistic Judaism temple, now in it's 38th year, it is the

custom of Bar Mitzvah boys and girls to spend the year prior to their 13th birthday researching the life of a Jewish hero or heroine, and apply lessons from their hero's actions to their own life. Tonight, the Rabbi stated, Jackson would be our teacher as he shared what he has learned.

Handsome, little Jackson Klein climbed the box placed behind the podium and faced the packed room, grinning. Proudly he announced that he had chosen to share the story of the life of Solly Ganor. Jackson had read his book, "Light One Candle," about how, as a 12-year-old boy in Germany, Solly had endured unspeakable hardships to keep himself and his father alive during the Nazi regime. Jackson had managed to locate Solly, now a 74 year-old living in Israel, and began a yearlong e-mail correspondence.

Jackson told us how Solly, as a 12 year-old like himself, enjoyed sports and hanging out with friends, when suddenly he was no longer free and he was in danger because of his Jewish identity. Jackson told us how Solly's family missed a chance to leave the country, and after they were forced from their home, hid briefly with five other families in a barn. In the middle of the night, Solly's father woke them and led them out of the barn, just as soldiers arrived. The family watched in horror as everyone in hiding was forced out, forced to dig their own grave, and shot, one by one.

Jackson shared stories about how the Ganor family lived for a period in a ghetto, where Solly endured hunger and cold. Solly was bravely able to retrieve food thrown over the ghetto wall by a boy who had been a friend before the war, each risking his life to make a midnight run to the barbed-wire fence when the guards were not looking. Boredom was another hardship, as the Germans banned one of the Jews last remaining pleasures by ordering the collection of all books. Knowing he risked his life, Solly and a friend hid books in a forbidden part of the ghetto. Solly grieved when his former math teacher was found with a book and shot. Solly attributes his ability to stay alive in the ghetto to his friendships with two other teens, both of whom later died in concentration camps.

Solly's family was sent from the ghetto to a work camp, and then to a concentration camp. It was here that he was separated from his mother, and promised that he would keep his father alive. Jackson told us about Solly's heart-wrenching experiences at the camp, but also told us about how Solly used his wits to keep himself and his father fed and clothed.

Finally, the Germans had an idea that the Jewish prisoners would build them a fort, and sent them on a death march through miles of snow-covered roads. Here Solly, in his fatigue, lost track of his father. Eventually, Solly collapsed beside a tree, where he truly believed he would die. Apparently, he fell asleep. He was awakened by a Japanese American soldier, who lifted him

out of the snow and told him he was free. Solly was later reunited with his father, who had been taken to a hospital. Just five years ago, Solly was reunited with this very soldier in Israel. This reunion brought back many memories that Solly had long suppressed, and that was when he began to write his book. Jackson stated that he has committed himself to the telling of Solly's story of courage.

At this point, the entire congregation stood and loudly applauded Jackson's moving presentation. As the clapping finally slowed, Jackson announced he had one more part to his Bar Mitzvah. He stated that, due to the closing of the airports this week, none of the out-of-towners had been able to come in for this night, except for one. That person is ....Solly Ganor! A gasp went through the entire room. Jackson proceeded, "Since Mr. Ganor was not able to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah when he was 13, I would like him to join me now."

A white-haired man in the front row stood and slowly made his way up to the podium next to Jackson. The crowd stood and applauded wildly. For several minutes, Mr. Ganor stood with a hand over his eyes, struggling to regain his composure. Then, Jackson and Mr. Ganor read together, first in Hebrew, then in English.

Then Mr. Ganor addressed us, stating that he never expected that his experiences would one day be an inspiration to a 13-year-old boy. He stated that he was glad he had been able to make the journey from Israel, and meet his e-mail pen pal.

Mr. Ganor's story reminded us that evil in the world is not new, but that the human spirit and will to survive is strong. At a time that many of us are asking how can we bear the sadness of these last few days, we are reminded of those who suffered for the years of Nazi cruelty, as well as people in countries all over the world where terrorism is a way of life. We were reminded by 13-year-old Jackson Klein that we must indeed continue to celebrate life.

Our evening ended by standing together and singing *Ayfo Oree*. The words, translated from Hebrew, are as follows:

Where is my light? My light is in me.  
Where is my hope? My hope is in me.  
Where is my strength? My strength is in me.  
And in you.

*During the last few days I received dozens of e-mail letters from friends in the States and even from Europe praising me for coming in these difficult days to Jackson Klein's bar mitzvah.*

### **Hope in This Time of Despair**

By Solly Ganor

It seems that an article was written by a lady who attended the bar mitzvah celebration of Jackson Klein, at the Birmingham Temple of Farmington Hills, Michigan. I played in it a certain role. I was very touched by her article that describes so beautifully the bar mitzvah service. I don't know her name, but I wish to thank her for her moving letter of that memorable evening. It took place on September 14, 2001, three days after the calamity in Manhattan. All of us who attended the service were still in shock, many close to tears. In her article, she describes a 'white-haired man,' whom thirteen-year-old Jackson called to the podium. I was the 'white-haired man,' and it was the story of my life that Jackson had chosen for his bar mitzvah speech.

How did I get there and what was my connection to Jackson's bar mitzvah?

They say that sometimes life is stranger than fiction. It certainly is in my case.

I was Jackson's age when Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union murdering in its wake millions of Jews. Lithuania, where I was born, was first to be attacked. I was among the few lucky survivors, as most of the Jews of Lithuania perished. After four years in the Kovno ghetto and the notorious concentration camp of Dachau, I was liberated by the US Army on May 2, 1945.

After the war, I immigrated to Israel and fought in its War of Independence in 1948. It is my home to this day.

During World War II, like Anna Frank, I kept a diary which fifty years later was published under the title of 'Light One Candle.' It was recently translated into German and Japanese.

In 2000, I received an e-mail letter from Jackson Klein who told me that he was very moved by my book and decided to make my life story the subject for his bar mitzvah speech. I was intrigued by the idea because I, myself, was never able to have a bar mitzvah because of the outbreak of the war. We

started to exchange e-mail letters. In his letters, he asked many questions and by the questions, I realized that he was an exceptionally bright boy.

After many letters, he very graciously invited me to come to his bar mitzvah. At the time, I was a 73-year-old man who went through the Holocaust and participated in five wars in Israel.

As you can imagine, these difficult years left its marks on me. Coming to Detroit would not be an easy matter. I was about to refuse his invitation, when I remembered an incident in my life that made me change my mind.

One of the reasons I accepted Jackson's invitation to his bar mitzvah was the memory of a great Japanese humanitarian, Chiune Sugihara, whom I had met in Kovno. He accepted an invitation from me, an eleven-year-old boy, to come to our family's Hanukah party in 1939. Later, Consul Sugihara, defied the orders of his government and issued thousands of visas to Polish refugees in Lithuania, saving their lives. If Consul Sugihara could accept my invitation, then I should accept the gracious invitation by a Jewish boy named Jackson Klein of Detroit.

What I didn't reckon with was the disaster in New York on September 11, 2001. My wife Pola and I were booked to fly from San Diego, California to Detroit, on September 11. I returned the rented car at the San Diego airport, when I noticed the man who was handling the papers, staring open mouthed at the TV monitor above his head. I followed his gaze and couldn't believe what I saw. One of the twin towers was collapsing like a house of cards right in front of our eyes. I will never forget that site, not only because of the horror, but as a Holocaust survivor I instinctively realized that we are entering a new and terrifying world with unprecedented brutality.

The San Diego airport was immediately closed to all traffic and there was no way I could get to Detroit in time. It was then that I decided no matter what, I had to get to Jackson's bar mitzvah. Many feared to fly after September 11, and my friends thought I was crazy to go to a bar mitzvah, especially when the boy wasn't even family. But I persisted. Somehow I felt, that I couldn't let Jackson down. And I didn't. Miraculously, I was able to get a flight. It was the only flight from San Diego to Detroit that day. I was the only guest who arrived of all those who were supposed to fly in.

It was a Joy to meet Jackson and take part in his bar mitzvah. His speech about my life was so vivid and detailed that it brought uncontrollable tears to my eyes, and I don't cry easily. Perhaps we all needed a good cry in the wake of the terrible tragedy in Manhattan that touched the hearts of all peoples of the civilized world.

## **Jackson Klein's Bar Mitzvah Speech about Solly Ganor**

The week leading up to a Bar Mitzvah is a special week. A week that twelve-year-olds spend eagerly anticipating the wonderful weekend that is approaching. You would never expect something to go terribly wrong. Unfortunately for me, something dreadful and inconceivable occurred that forever changed my life.

My family and I belong to a Humanistic, untraditional temple. At the Birmingham Temple, instead of the Bar Mitzvah reading out of the Torah, we must write a speech on a Jewish hero and present it to the congregation. I chose a Holocaust survivor named Solly Ganor, whose story was absolutely mind blowing. About nine months before the Bar Mitzvah, I started researching my hero. I read Solly's autobiography, which was a wonderfully written tale of the gruesome horrors that he encountered through his years in ghettos and concentration camps. This story had a very personal effect on me because Solly was my age when he encountered the Nazi hell. The story made me compare myself and my privileged life to a person who had to make life and death decisions every day. When I finished the book, I began writing my speech. Luckily, I was able to obtain Solly's email address, so via we had some great discussions that helped shape my paper. I talked to him all the time and he was a w.....

Monday, September 10, it was my birthday, and I was four days from the service. I was so excited and even a bit nervous. Then all of the sudden the very next day, a week of happiness took a dreadful turn. Tuesday September 11, three days away. I was sitting in my social studies class, when Mr. Zangkas informed us that a terrible tragedy had occurred in New York. He pushed the power button on the television screen, and what we saw seemed like a dream. Images of the World Trade Center collapsing, people jumping from hundreds of feet hitting the hard pavement. Watching made me sick. Every airport in the country was shut down. This meant that none of my out of town relatives would be able to fly into Detroit in time for Friday night. I was devastated. Not only had thousands of innocent people lost their lives that day, but it seemed like my Bar Mitzvah was destined to fail. All hope of having Solly witnessing my performance was lost. All of the people outside of Michigan....

My decision basically came down to this; canceling a Bar Mitzvah would be like a victory for the evil terrorists. I spent the next two days on the phone with the airlines from when I got home from school at 3:30 until midnight. I refused to accept the fact that Solly wasn't going to show up. I had to find a way to find a way to book a flight out of San Diego (where Solly lived in the summer). After two grueling nights of booking and canceling flights, it just didn't seem possible that my hero was coming to Detroit. It was late

Thursday night, the day before my service. We had one last LONG shot of getting a flight for Solly and his wife. There was only one flight out of San Diego that left Friday morning, and my dad managed to get the last two seats. It was Friday morning, the big day. I, not wanting to sit by the phone all day decided to go to school for a couple of hours. I sat in school anxiously waiting to hear my Bar Mitzvah's destiny. At about 12:30 I got called .....

There was a dinner at my grandma's house two hours before the service was scheduled to start. All of the sudden a car that I have never seen before pulled up into the driveway. Out of it walked Solly Ganor. I ran and gave him the best hug I have ever given anyone. Even though we had never met in person before there was an immediate bond between us.

That night, as I walked up to the podium to begin my speech, there was no fear, just determination to make Solly happy that he had flown in all the way from his summer home in California. I delivered my paper with a passion. By the end, everyone in the audience was either teary eyed or flat out bawling. Keep in mind none of them knew of the special guest that was in attendance. After I was finished, I announced that I had one last part of my speech. I said, There is only one out of town relative that was able to make it because of the terrorist attacks. I would like to invite that person to come up and share my Hebrew portion with me. And that person is Solly Ganor! A gasp like you wouldn't believe came from the crowd of over four hundred. Many tears were shed as Solly struggled to maintain his composure as he translated what I had just read into English. That night will forever remain in my heart. At this moment a 72 year old Holocaust survivor from Lithuania and a 13 year old boy...

Even though I have not seen Solly since last year, we still email each other to keep in touch. He is maybe the greatest influence in my life. My Bar Mitzvah taught me that you can make good out of even the very worst situations. This event truly made me feel like an adult instead of a 13-year-old.

December 4, 2002

## **The Ship of Doom**

by Solly Ganor, Dachau-Landsberg survivor

We sailed upon oceans of blood,  
And the captain's name was death,  
The wind in our sails were the winds of hate,  
And the world just couldn't care less.

We called on each port to let us get off  
We cried, we begged, we moaned,  
But our cries and tears fell on deaf ears,  
'Cause their hearts were made of stone.

The crew of the vessel, they sang the Horst Wessel,  
While we prayed to God in fear,  
We called to the world to save our souls,  
But the world just wouldn't hear.

We sailed into darkness where time had no meaning,  
We were murdered in millions without pity or feeling,  
They worked us in pits where no one could last  
And when we were finished we were to be gassed.

They didn't use coal to stoke their fire,  
The fat of our bodies forced the flames higher,  
The sky in the darkness it glowed purple red,  
The war was soon over but we were all dead.

When they finally knew that they lost the war  
And Europe lay ruined from shore to shore  
They were at least proud in having caused,  
The death of our millions and the Holocaust.

But on the oceans of the eternal night,  
There was Sempo Sugihara's single light,  
He gave out visas from morning till late,  
To thousands of people who stood at his gate.

He was the man whose soul shone so bright,  
Who lost his career to do what was right,  
He never asked for praise or pay,  
He did it all in his modest way.

We came to the land of the rising sun  
To pay tribute to its illustrious son  
To a man whose spirit was noble and kind,  
And showed an example to all of mankind.

## **Speech by Solly Ganor at Fuerstenfeldbruck, Germany, April 28, 1994**

On the occasion of the dedication of a monument to the Jewish survivors of the Dachau Death March

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

To begin with, I would like to express my thanks to the *Arbeitskreis Mahnmal* (Dachau Death March monument committee) that invited me to this commemoration ceremony.

I can see among you several friends who were our guests in Israel. I am glad to meet you once again and extend to you my greetings.

Those that do not know me: my name is Solly Ganor and I also speak on behalf of our Israeli association of survivors of the Landsberg/Kaufering concentration camp.

I was born in Heydekrug, a small town on the German Lithuanian border, and I live presently in Herzelia in Israel.

The flight from Tel Aviv to Munich lasted only four hours, but psychologically it lasted forty-nine years. It was not an easy journey to undertake.

I was barely seventeen when I marched these very same streets, 49 years ago. I could hardly believe then that one day I would be standing in front of you and speak to you in such a friendly manner. Then I had only one thing on my mind, namely how to survive the day. That was the last period of the war, the end of April 1945.

To survive to that period, I had to spend four terrifying years in the Nazi hell. Behind me, I left dozens of family members who were murdered and the ruins of my childhood home in Lithuania.

That nightmare began for me on June 22, 1941, when the German army, like a deadly flood, invaded our lives. In one day I became, from a happy thirteen-year-old, perhaps somewhat spoiled boy, a hunted animal. A hunt was declared by the Nazis on Jews and no one needed even a license for that. Anyone could murder us without suffering any consequences. In the first days of the war, the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers murdered three quarters of the Jewish population in Lithuania. Those who lived in the small towns suffered an especially gruesome death. They were locked up in the synagogues and, men, women, children, babies, as if they were rats, were all burned to death.

Since that day in June 1941, till the day of my liberation, I was a prisoner in the worst and most repugnant hell created by men, the Nazi concentration camp; where the most abominable atrocities were committed by men against men in the annals of human history.

Unfortunately, there hasn't yet been created a language that could describe our pain, the fear, the humiliation we suffered during those years. The feeling of helplessness and the endless feeling of hunger as our stomachs consumed our bodies, till there was nothing left of us but skin and bones.

And at the end of the war, there was the death march. That grotesque, inhuman expression of cruelty of the Nazis. As their "thousand-year" empire crumbled at their feet, they marched us out of Utting and Dachau on a journey to nowhere. The last remnants of European Jewry marched through rain and snow without food or shelter, in a thin striped prisoner's uniform, wooden shoes, a blanket and nothing else. We were like a column of ghosts that shuffled through the snow barely able to continue. Many of the men who were still marching were driven by their spirit alone because their bodies were barely alive.

And so we marched many days; we had stopped counting them. The nights we slept on the wet ground and in the morning there were hundreds of dead bodies lying around everywhere. And so in the seven or eight days of the march thousands of people died who couldn't keep their bodies and soul together. They were strewn about in the streets and roads of this beautiful and picturesque country. What a cruel and inhuman end to so much suffering!

Of the eight days of the march, I can recall only a few episodes. One: as we arrived from Utting to the main camp of Dachau, we were brought to a shower. My father pressed my hand so hard that it hurt. He was sure that we were being taken to a gas chamber. And then I remember the terrible weather. It rained and snowed as if the God himself wanted to have part in our misery. And then I especially remember when we marched through Koenigsdorf. I was at the end of my endurance and was ready to lie down and give up the ghost as suddenly we walked by an old house. Through a crack in the blackout curtain, I saw an old man sitting in a rocking chair. A golden flame was flickering from a fireplace, casting shadows on the wall. The scene was the closest thing to paradise I could imagine. I could almost feel the coziness, and the warmth of the fire. It was a scene of painful normalcy, all feelings that I had forgotten long ago. Yet at the same time it brought me out of my thoughtless lethargy. From somewhere inside of me, a source of untapped strength sprang forth, forcing my trembling legs to move ahead.

And so I continued. That was the last day before our liberation. That night we were brought into a forest, where we, starved to death and exhausted, simply fell to the ground. It snowed that night and the snow covered our bodies. For some, the snow became their grave; for us who survived, the snow was our means of survival, because the SS men who wanted to shoot us couldn't see us. The Americans were too close for them to start digging us out one by one. During the night, they ran away and in the morning, we were freed. My liberators were Japanese American soldiers of the 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion that found me half-dead in the snow and brought me to Waakirchen.

How we survived the Holocaust is a miracle; how we survived it mentally is a different story. No one who survived that hell could escape with his mental health intact. Our minds, and even our souls, were wounded. We were traumatized to such an extent that no human soul could tolerate. But in spite of it, we are still here! From the burned down tree trunks that we were, we grew new branches and buds. We built new families and turned the desert into a fruitful land.

And now we stand close the end of the century. Once more, there are many dangers before us. Dangers of fascism, anti-Semitism and the hatred of foreigners. This time we shouldn't stand on the sideline and we must explain to the coming generations to what it can lead.

We together, the survivors from the camps and the Germans, who remember our bloody past and are not willing ever to forget it, to you we stretch out our hand in friendship, for the coming generations. May the world take an example from us.

As the world-famous psychologist Victor E. Frankl said: "The world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best."

So, let us be alert--alert in a twofold sense. Since Auschwitz, we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima, we know what is at stake.

Thank you.

And now I would like to surprise you, with two of the ex-soldiers of the American Army, Clarence Matsumura and John Tsukano, who then, in May 1945, found me in the snow and saved my life. They are here with us. They came from Los Angeles and Hawaii in order to be with us at this commemoration ceremony.

A third guest is the historian Eric Saul from San Francisco, who two years ago in Jerusalem brought us together once more.

## **Returning Home to Lithuania: First Part of the Journey**

“I am going home to my childhood dreams, dreams that turned into a nightmare.”

The flight from Tel Aviv to Vilnius lasts only four hours but my memory takes me back more than sixty years when my life was violently disrupted by the Nazi invasion of Lithuania on June 21, 1941.

One day I was a happy, spoiled thirteen year old boy, and over night I became a hunted animal who could be sought out and killed by anyone who felt like it. The Jews were not protected by the new laws, the murderers of the Jews were.

Over night we were plunged into an abyss of hate, plunder, rape and murder. Over night we found ourselves defenseless in a New World of savages. The transition from normalcy to this world of horror was so sudden, so unexpected, so unprecedented, and so violently brutal that we were simply stunned by the sheer enormity of our calamity . The Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers didn't leave us much time to asses our new situation, they immediately set about to murder as many Jews as they could lay their hands on, especially in the smaller towns and shtetlach of Lithuania. Within the first few months of the Nazi onslaught the majority of the glorious Lithuanian Jewry was mercilessly slaughtered and buried in mass graves that are dispersed all over Lithuania.

By the end of the war 94% of Lithuanian Jewry were murdered, more than anywhere else in Europe, including Nazi Germany and Poland, where the Nazis erected their murder factories. Small wonder then that the majority of the Jewish survivors of Lithuania chose never to return to the land of their birth. Considering the trauma I suffered there as a child, what made me decide to return after sixty years of absence? Throughout the flight I was in a panic and if I could have turned the plane around, I would have done it. But it was too late for any regrets, I was Lithuania bound and there was nothing I could do about it.

I tried to calm my fears; more than sixty years had passed since the war and the Nazis were also long gone; I was just being childish and unreasonable. But one can't rationalize away emotions that stem from such horrifying childhood traumas. I was glad that my wife Pola was with me for moral support.

I tried to concentrate my thoughts on the positive aspects of our journey. Besides visiting my childhood home, there was another reason for our voyage. We had decided on a family gathering at the gravesite of our cousin

professor Alexander Shtromas whose ashes were buried in a cemetery near Kaunas. The Shtroms were a wide spread family in Lithuania. (My first ancestor on my mother's side was Zelig Shtromas, who was registered in the municipal archives, as far back as 1756. It shows how deep were our roots in Lithuania.) Beside cousin Irena, my cousin Margaret Kagan-Shtrom, the sister of Alexander Shtromas, was coming from England, with Violeta, Alexander wife.

There were several other friends who were also going to attend the ceremony. A well-known Lithuanian sculptor had sculpted the face image of Alexander and we were going to attend the ceremony of placing the stone at the graveside.

But there were other reasons, emerging from my distant memory. I tried to think back to the years when I was surrounded by a loving family, uncles and aunts, cousins and friends.

I also longed to see once more the places where I grew up, went to school, played soccer with my friends, kissed a girl for the first time, swam in the river Niemunas, and went for the summers to our Dacha in Kalautuva. Perhaps in my declining years I just wanted to feel once more the sweet innocence of my childhood, in its original surroundings. My heart was beating fast as our plane approached Vilnius.

It was a sunny day, and in the distance I could see the dense green forests and hundreds of lakes shimmering in the afternoon sun. I had never seen Lithuania from the air and it seemed breathtakingly beautiful.

"How could so much evil exist among all that beauty," I thought. I felt a stab of envy when I thought of our Israel we had left behind. Dry and parched in the harsh summer heat, stretches of yellow fields, and sand dunes, with its single lake barely able to keep its level of water to sustain us from year to year.

I couldn't help thinking of how much blood, sweat and tears we had to shed to bring it to what it is today, and how much work there is still ahead of us to wring it from centuries of neglect and Arab hostility. Then I remembered with what enthusiasm our sabra grand children described the beauty of Israel while travelling from Dan to Eilat, visiting the national parks, the ancient historical sites, Jerusalem, and many other to them familiar and beloved places. It came to me that I was still a product of Lithuania and my childhood impressions outweighed sixty years of living in Israel. A thought occurred to me that perhaps Moses was right to keep the Jews for forty years in the desert. The old generation had to die to wipe out any memories of

Egypt they had left behind. Guess I too am a modern version of the desert generation.

As we were landing at the small Vilnius airport I saw in the distance dozens of church steeples and cathedrals with their crosses glistening in the afternoon sun. Then I caught a site so familiar to me from the days of my childhood. It was the tower of Gedimina's castle, that every child in Lithuanian schools before the war was taught to revere. The Poles had occupied Vilnius between the two world wars, and the Lithuanians vowed never to rest until Vilnius will be their capital again. That is why we never went to Vilnius before the war, and the town was unfamiliar to me. Of course everyone knew about the Gaon from Vilna. We also knew about the numerous Jewish institutions, schools, theaters and newspapers. Before the war it was known as Jerushalaim De Lita, and it was a serious rival to our Jewish community in Kovno. We prided ourselves to have more Hebrew High Schools than Vilna, and more members in Zionist movements. I didn't know how I would react when I took my first steps on Lithuanian soil, the soil I swore never to walk on as long as I live. Did I expect to be struck down by lightening, or hear a stern voice speaking to me from heaven for breaking my vow?

Nothing really happened as we were quickly cleared by immigration and customs. Full of apprehension I stepped out to the waiting hall and to my great relief saw among the small crowd waiting there the familiar face of my cousin Irena. She just smiled and gave me a big hug and much of the apprehension dissipated.

My cousin Professor Irena Weiseite, who was saved by a Lithuanian Christian family and remained in Lithuania after the war, where she taught at the University of Vilnius. It was hard for me to understand her decision to remain in Lithuania after the Holocaust, but I was sure glad to see her at the airport. She told us that she had rented for us an apartment in the center of Vilnius.

"It was walking distance from the old town where once the Jews used to live," she told us.

Then I remembered that was the quarter that the Nazis on September 6, 1941 turned it into the Vilno Ghetto and on September 1943, the Ghetto was liquidated. The majority of the Ghetto Jews were taken to Ponar where they were shot and buried in mass graves. Some managed to escape to the forests and fought with the partisans against the Nazis. The remaining few thousand were transported by the Nazis to Estonia to slave labor camps where most of them perished.

As we drove through the streets, I couldn't help thinking of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who once lived here, prospered, made it into a world famous center of Jewish culture, and religious and secular learning. Where the Gaon from Vilna lived and taught Torah, and countless writers, poets, musicians like Jasha Haifetz and many others lived and enriched the town with its presence. Today the only traces left of them are in the local museums.

I couldn't help but think of what Hitler said in 1939:

“By 1945, the only Jew left alive in Europe will be in a museum.”

Hitler was not completely right in his predictions, he was only 96 percent right, because that is the percentage of Jews murdered in Lithuania by the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers. No matter where I turned in this country, it always brought me back to the Holocaust.

Of course, there are some Jews left today in Vilnius who are desperately trying to revive some of the old glory of Jewish Vilna, but it is a pale sample of what it once was.

One can not speak of the Holocaust in Vilna without mentioning the recently published diary of Herman Krook who was a prisoner in Ghetto Vilna. It is a stupendous book, both in size and its contents. Krook was among the small group that was sent from the Ghetto to Estonia, after the majority of the Vilno Jews were murdered at the killing fields of Ponar. Even as a salve laborer in Estonia, he continued writing. His diary written in Yiddish was lately translated into English and published by the Yivo Institute of Jewish research under the title: “The Last Days Of The Jerusalem Of Lithuania.” It took almost sixty years for the diary to be published and it is recognized as one of the most important diaries of the Holocaust. We have Yivo to thank for it.

Even though I was imprisoned in Ghetto Kovno myself, barely sixty kilometers from Vilno, and I even wrote a Ghetto diary myself under the title of "Light One Candle", nevertheless I was deeply shocked by Krook's diary. The diary contains 730 pages and it would be impossible for me to write about its content. Still, I would like to relate Krook's last poem before he died.

I am quoting from the first page of Krook's diary:

“Krook continued writing his chronicles-in the form of diaries, narratives and poems-up to the last day. He was killed and burned with most of the surviving Jews just hours before the Red Army liberated the area on September 19,1944. The following poem, written in Yiddish in precise

amphibrachic meter, was found among his writings from this last period and is presented here in a literal translation.

### FOR FUTER GENERATIONS

Neighbors in Camp Klooga often ask me,  
Why do you write in such hard times?  
Why and for whom?..  
... For we won't live to see it anyway.  
I know I am condemned and awaiting my turn,  
Although deep inside me burrows a hope for a miracle.  
Drunk on the pen trembling in my hand,  
I record everything for future generations:  
A day will come when someone will find  
The leaves of horror I write and record.  
People will tear their hair in anguish,  
Eyes will plunge into the sky  
Unwilling to believe the horrors of our times.  
And then these line will be a consolation  
For future generations, which I, a prisoner,  
Kept in my sight, things  
I recorded, fixed faithfully..  
For me it is superfluous,  
For future generations I leave it as a trace.  
And let it remain though I must die here  
And let it show what I could not live to tell.  
And I answer my neighbors:  
Maybe a miracle will liberate me.  
But if I must die, it must not die with me-  
The time of horrors I leave for future worlds.  
I write because I must write- a consolation in my time of horror  
For future generations I leave it as a trace.

-March 24, 1944

Perhaps Herman Krook's story and his anguished poem does not belong here in my journey to the past, yet I feel it belongs very much, because his story is my story, and the miracle to be liberated he had hoped for, was granted to me and I am deeply sorry that it was not granted to him as well. I am glad that I didn't read Herman Krook's diary before my visit to Vilnius, because had I done so, I wouldn't have been able to walk in its streets and enjoy its beauty, without seeing the shadows of horrors perpetrated against my people in these ancient Jewish streets.

End of the first part of my journey to Lithuania.  
Herzelia Pituach,  
October 17, 2003

## **Returning Home to Lithuania: Second Part of the Journey**

Vilnius, Lithuania  
September 18, 2003

First day in Kaunas.

I didn't sleep well at night. The following day we were going to Kaunas and I was full of apprehension. Kaunas was the town where I spent my childhood, dreamt of all the wonderful things that were going to happen to me in the future, but my dreams soon turned into the nightmare of the Holocaust, with all its horrors of rape, plunder and murder of our people. I tried to push away the dark memories of the Holocaust and thought of the years before the war when life was joy and gladness; when every passing day was filled with happiness.

At promptly 10 o'clock a young man from the Sugihara Museum in Kaunas by the name of Mindaugas came to fetch us from our hotel. He spoke English to some extent and informed us that it will take about an hour to get to Kaunas. The director of the Sugihara Museum, Simonas Davidavitchius, had rented an apartment for us downtown Kaunas. I corresponded with Simonas through e-mail and he was all excited to meet me. He knew of my acquaintance with the Sugihara family and promised to make our stay in Kaunas a pleasant one.

It was bright and sunny when we left Vilnius, but as we were half way to Kaunas clouds covered the sky and the day turned gray, which suited my gloomy mood. I felt more and more agitated and I braced myself for the emotional upheaval that I was sure would come. I was coming back to the town where my generation experienced a trauma that was unprecedented in human history by its sheer cruelty and scope. In the back of my mind I remembered what had happened to a friend of mine who has served with me in the merchant marine. He too was a child during the Holocaust and when he came back for the first time to his hometown, he suffered a massive heart attack and died on the way to the hospital.

These thoughts kept going through my mind as we were entering the town. The houses on both sides of the road looked shabby and neglected. The driver told us that these were houses built soon after the end of World War Two, during the Soviet occupation. But as soon as we began driving down the hill on Savanoriu Prospektas, which was known to me as Ukmerges Plantas, I recognized most of the buildings. It seemed as if nothing much had changed here since my childhood, as if time had not passed at all.

At the corner of Savanorius Prospectas and Laisves Aleja, I glimpsed at the distance the big Greek Orthodox church known to us as "Sobor". I asked the driver to stop for a minute. I wanted to have a closer look at the street that was so familiar to me.

Standing on Laisves Aleja between the chestnut trees that lined the middle of the boulevard, a flood of memories overwhelmed me. I felt as if sixty years had disappeared and I was a little boy again.

The year was 1933. We had just moved from Heydekrug to Kaunas and my parents gave my sister permission to take me for a walk and show me the town. My sister loved Kaunas. She was raised and had many childhood friends here. For many years she attended a Hebrew high school called Schwabe. At the time she was very unhappy with my parents decision to move to Heydekrug and when we moved back she was the happiest girl in the world.

The first place she took me to was the main street of Kaunas. It was called Laysves Aleja. To this day I can close my eyes and still see that street the way I saw it the first time as a child, although later, we lived very near it and I walked it many times.

It was a very wide street divided in two, with a walking promenade in the middle where rows of tall chestnut trees were growing as far as my eyes could see. On both sides of the street there were modern buildings with elegant shops, and at the end of the street, shimmering in the sun, was the huge golden cupola of a church, known as the "Sobor"

And the people! I have never seen so many people in one place! They were milling about in a confusing kaleidoscope, men, women, children, all dressed in a variety of colors, speaking loudly to each other, shouting, laughing.

I stood open mouthed holding onto my sister with all my strength. I was afraid to be swept away and lost in that mob. When I later asked my sister if Kaunas was the biggest city in the world, she laughed, and told me that there were towns in the world many times the size of Kaunas, which at the time, I could hardly believe.

After buying me a generous portion of ice cream, she took me to the banks of the river Niemunas that passed through the town on its way to the Baltic Sea. It was so wide that I could hardly see the other side of the bank, or at least that's how I remembered it when I saw it for the first time. From there we went to the Town Garden, where the opera stood, and later in the afternoon, we went to a movie house named Forum, where I saw my first full

feature film, Laurel and Hardy. It was getting dark by the time we came out of the movie house and my sister rushed us home.

Thus ended my first day in Kaunas.

It was an unforgettable day and it left an indelible impression on my mind.

My wife's voice brought me back to the present.

"The driver said that he can't park here. You will have plenty of time to see the place once we have settled," she said gently.

She saw the tears in my eyes and took my hand in hers and lead me back to the car.

As we were driving towards the rented apartment, I saw many familiar buildings.

Here was my aunt Mere's milk store, and there was my father's restaurant on Luksho Street, and my uncle Isaak's fruit business, and my God!

There was my School, "Yavneh Gymnzie" that I attended before the Russians came! And there was the offices of the popular Yiddish news paper "Yiddishe Shtime."

And there was Daukshos Street with it hundreds of Jewish shops, that were always full of Jewish people, coming and going with parcels in their hands, speaking Yiddish to each other, telling jokes, laughing, children playing hopscotch, babies crying, their mothers singing them a lullaby in Yiddish. They were all gone, as if they had never existed. The street looked neglected, the houses drab and colorless with peeling stucco. The place looked as if life itself was drained out of it. Where are the, Chaimalach, the Yankelach, the chanalach and the Leyalach from my childhood? Where are my uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, teachers, rabbis? Five hundred yeas of existence were wiped out in one frenzy of homicidal lust for Jewish blood. "Why, for God's sake, why? What have we ever done to them? If anything, we have only enriched them with our presence in every aspect of the human field."

The answer to my questions I actually got two years ago in Berlin from a theologian named Professor Hofmann. At our meeting he said:

"Never in the history of man, has there been a more innocent people than the Jews, who for centuries were deliberately vilified, maligned, falsely accused, persecuted and finally sent to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, for no other

reason than they were Jews. The participants in these dastardly deeds will for ever bear the sign of Cain on their heads.”

It always came down to that. “And the reason they could do that to us” I thought “was because we were always defenseless and thank God that we are defenseless no more.”

Mindaugas stopped the car at the gate of an old building. It looked vaguely familiar. Then I remembered! To my astonishment, he brought us to a house that was about five houses away from where we used to live! I left the suitcases standing and with my heart beating fast I rushed over to the house on Kalviu 13, where I spent many years of my childhood. I didn't know what I had expected, but with a shock I realized that the house was not there anymore. Instead, there was a new and unfamiliar building standing at the place where our house used to be.

There was a part of me that was deeply disappointed that I wouldn't be able to see our home where I spent so many years of my childhood, but the other part was relieved because I remembered the day when we had to leave our home in order to escape the Nazis.

I will never forget that day as long as I live.

Memories...memories...deeply etched in my mind through the trauma I had experienced here as a child.

22 of June, 1941

I barely fell asleep when the neighbor's pigeon woke me up.

While I stood deep in thought it was growing lighter. The first rays of the rising sun spilled on the Alexotas hills, painting them pink and orange. The town began to stir from its slumber.

“Another night had passed and the Russians didn't come for us.” I breathed a sigh of relief.

A few days earlier we were warned to pack a few belongings as we were going to be sent to Siberia as “Enemies of the Soviet Union.”

Suddenly I noticed something strange above the airport in Alexotas. A dozen or more silvery dots, like some metallic butterflies were swirling in the sky, as if performing an early morning mating dance. Black angry puffs of smoke

were mushrooming all around them, and a few seconds later sharp cracking sounds reached my ears. They sounded like anti aircraft guns.

All at once the dots dove one after another emitting shrill whistling sounds that sounded like metal was being torn apart.

- German Stookas! - Was the first thought that came to my mind.

I recognized them by their spine chilling sound wave when they dove for attack. They were shown often enough on newsreels when the Germans attacked Poland. Deep rumbling explosions followed their dive. Again and again the explosions sounded in the clear morning air rattling all the windows in the house.

A thick column of black smoke rose over the airport, spreading slowly over Alexotas.

“So it finally happened; the war has caught up with us,” I thought trying to convince myself that I wasn’t having a nightmare. The whole scene seemed so unreal. One minute I was watching the peaceful sunrise, the next, as if someone pushed a button, the war was on.

- Another wave of planes screamed their way down in low dives, followed by heavy explosions. Anti aircraft guns were now going full blast and some shrapnel suddenly fell on our neighboring roofs, sending roof tiles flying in all directions.

I hastily withdrew from the window in alarm. Suddenly the war became very near and very real.

I quickly ran down to wake up the family.

It was June 22, 1941. The war between the Nazis and the Soviet Union had begun.

When I came down to the living room the whole family was already assembled. They stood around the radio listening to Molotov’s speech. He was very indignant about the dastardly and unprovoked attack of the Nazis on a friendly nation and promised to fight them till final victory.

Berlin gave very brief and factual reports of the German army’s rapid advances into the heart of Lithuania on one side and into Belo-Russia on the other. B.B.C. from London more or less confirmed the German version.

During breakfast father held a family conference what action we should take if any. We all agreed that it was too dangerous to remain and face the Nazis and we should leave for Russia as fast as possible. Even if we land in Siberia it would still be better than remain under the Nazis.

But how were we to go? We had no car because the Soviets had confiscated all cars. Therefore we could either leave by bus or train.

Father and Hermann went down to speak to uncle Isack who lived near us. When they came back they were both pale. The Russians were evacuating the town full speed and they were taking up all the places on the outgoing trains. Even if any one could get on a train the chances of getting through were very slim as German planes were bombing the railroad tracks ahead. There were no buses or any other form of transport. That meant walking to the Russian border with the hope that the Germans won't get there ahead of us.

Father had a more frightening story to tell. Suddenly there was a new threat from an unexpected quarter. Even while the Soviet army was still in full force in Kaunas, gangs of Lithuanians armed with rifles and revolvers were roaming the streets and there were reported clashes between them and the Russians. The same gangs were beginning to rob and beat up Jews in the streets. It was an ominous sign of things to come. Our neighbors with whom we lived in peace for five hundred years turned against us and the Germans weren't even anywhere near Kaunas!

We realized that any further delay may be very dangerous. As we didn't know when we'd have our next hot meal we decided to finish any left over food and have our last meal at home.

For some strange reason my mother insisted to serve the food in her best china dishes. Father began to protest, but when he saw my mother's tucked in chin, a sure sign that nothing he would say would change her mind, he gave in.

It was a sad meal. Mother behaved very strangely. She switched on the candelabra cluster and the Rosenthal dishes were gleaming white in its sparkling light. We felt like the condemned who are served their last favorite meal before the execution. We even had some wine with it.

We ate in silence. Perhaps each one of us said in his heart a silent prayer. We were not a religious family, but in times like these even irreligious people tend to pray to an unknown God. I had an eerie feeling of the unreal as we sat quietly at the table probably for the last time. Mother, by insisting that we eat in such a formal atmosphere managed to slow us down. Of course,

it was a delusion, but seeing all the fine things on the table , the dining room, the furniture, the family pictures and paintings hanging on the wall, the knickknacks and the embroidered pillows that my mother received as a gift from her grand mother, the heavy blue curtains , all these familiar things that we have known all our lives, somehow made us feel secure. For the last time I went to my room and said goodbye to it. It was a pleasant room and it contained everything I ever received as gifts or collected as a child. But what really hurt me to leave behind was my collection of books I was so fond of.

Instinctively I reached for the book that my brother brought me when I was in bed with the measles. I was probably seven years old at the time.

It was the first full novel that I read, and it introduced me to a new and enchanted world in which I often dwell to this day. It was the “Mysterious Island” by Jules Vern. I decided to take it along with me for the way.

We never made it to Russia. The German army cut us off before we were able to reach the border. We spent three bloody years in Ghetto Kaunas where the majority of the Jews were murdered in numerous actions. My brother was killed in the beginning of the war, and my mother died on Christmas night in 1944 the concentration camp of Stutthof by Danzig. My father and I were sent to one of the satellite camps of Dachau as slave laborers. We survived the war and were liberated by the Us army on May 2, 1945.

My wife brought me back to reality again.

“The driver wants to show us the apartment and help with the luggage.”  
Again the same soft understanding voice. I was glad to have her with me. I wonder if I could have done it by my own.

From the outside the house looked neglected like all the other buildings in the area, but the apartment was very modern. It was completely renovated a short while ago. Shimon saw to it that the refrigerator was well stocked with all kinds of food and there were even flowers on the table. Suddenly I was dead tired. New impressions and old memories, a tiring combination. Before I would be able to undertake any further stressful activities I needed a rest.

End of the first day in Kaunas

## **Journey to the Past: My Visit to the Killing Grounds of the Ninth Fort, in Kaunas, Lithuania.**

Sunday, September 21, 2003

Shimon Davidovitch, the director of the Sugihara Museum in Kaunas, came to the apartment to fetch us. We were scheduled to go to the Ninth Fort today.

I dreaded the idea of going there. The worst nightmares of my childhood were connected with that dreadful place. During the four years of the Holocaust, the Ninth Fort stands out in my mind like a beacon of the most terrible evil, even worse than the place of horror, Dachau, where I spent the last nine-month of the war. Yet I knew that I had to go there. I had to see with my own eyes the horror that lurked there, the horror that my friend Kuki described after escaping from there, the horror that caused so many of my nightmares. I had to confront my childhood demons that connected me with the Ninth Fort. I couldn't back down now, not after I came all the way from Israel to see the place.

We drove to the Fort in silence. He brought with him a very knowledgeable guide by the name of Chaim, who spoke Hebrew and Yiddish.

On October 28, 1941, exactly sixty-two years ago, thirty thousand Jewish inhabitants of the Slabodka Ghetto in Kaunas were waiting for the Nazis to determine their fate, who would live and who would die. My family and I were among the thirty thousand to be selected. The event became known as the "Grossa Aktzie- The Big Selection." I was thirteen years old at the time and I remember it as if it happened today.

It was a cold morning and a few snow flakes came drifting down from a gray sky. A few hours passed and nothing happened. We were cold and our feet began to ache. All around us we could hear babies cry, and children begged their parents for food. Many began to recite psalms and that melancholy melody spread among the condemned standing on the field. Here and there old people began to collapse and fell to the ground while their families were trying to lift them up.

Around nine in the morning we suddenly heard a strange sound. It reminded me of the wind moving through tops of trees in a forest. It was the sound that escaped from thousands of mouths when they saw the German and Lithuanian battalions surround the Demokratu place. They were armed with machine guns and they looked grim. Many of them seemed drunk. Then two figures resplendent in new uniforms and shiny black boots approached us.

They were the ghetto Kommandant Jordan and the Gestapo man Rauka. These two were to decide our fate.

Rauka placed himself in front of our column and without any further ceremony began his bloody job.

The members of the Jewish Committee and the ghetto police were standing in front of the column. They and their families were sent to the left, to a specially assigned area. After them came all the departments of the ghetto institutions. As we were filing past him he began to send the elderly, the ill, women with small children, some of them boys my age, to the right side, where they were assembled in a separate area. Families were torn apart, the young and the healthy to the left while their elderly parents or small children were sent to the right. The heart rending cries of the separated family members filled the air, while those who tried to reunite would be knocked down with rifle butts by the Lithuanian guards. It immediately became obvious who were to live and who were going to die. A few showed him Jordan Passes, but he only tore it out of their hands and threw it down into the mud.

My heart began to beat wildly. Suddenly I felt awfully small. The precious life certificate that I held in my trembling hands became worthless before my very eyes. In a few minutes our turn would come and I could already feel the cold breath of death on my neck. Neither father, or mother or sister Fanny could do anything for me. "Within a few seconds my fate would be sealed," I thought wildly.

If I could stop the time and go back for a short time into the past.

If only.. there.. there is snowman's hill behind grandfather's house..

It is covered with pure white snow that glitters like a million candles in the afternoon's sun. Lena is laughing, her hazel eyes full of Joy.

"Where are the charcoals you dummy? You were supposed to bring the charcoals for the snowman's eyes, remember?" Itamar's laughing face pushed itself in my mind's vision.

"Come, Solly, my boy, come with me to Palestine, the only place in the world where a Jew can defend himself." My uncle Melech's dark eyes were laughing at me.

"A fanatical Zionist, an impractical dreamer." Father said, shrugging his shoulders.

“This place is doomed, doomed! Don’t you see that the ground is burning under your feet? What are you all, blind?!” The envoy from Palestine spoke heatedly..

“If only I could turn the clock back.. If only.” I thought.

“Forward March!” We started moving.

“Oh, God! Give us a little more time, just a little more time.” I prayed silently.

A red face, pale blue eyes, his right arm extended as if he were conducting an orchestra, Rauka stood before us. The executioner!

Three rows, two rows, one row before us.. Left.. right.. left.. right. I didn’t even hear the screams of the separated families. My heart stopped beating. I was drowning in fright.

Then we stood before him. He seemed bored, his eyes looking indifferently at us.

I wanted to scream: “We are people, for God’s sake! We are fathers mothers, sisters and brothers. We have our dreams, our ambitions, our lives given to us by God! You stand there with your pudgy hand sending us to die?! You are not God! You are just a fat, red faced German. How dare you to deprive us of our lives? Who gave you the right?”

But the these words of raging protest only echoed in my brains. Not a sound escaped my frightened lips.

Rauka quickly scanned our line and pointing his hand at Moshe and his family said:

“You! Dreck Sack, and the rest of your garbage, off to the right.”

Moshe who stood next to me began shaking like a leaf. Because he stood so close I could actually feel his trembling that revibrated through my body like the death throes of an animal. It made me nauseous and I thought I will vomit my breakfast at Rauka’s feet.

Moshe and his large family began to move in the direction indicated by Rauka.

I stood frozen to my spot not daring to breath. From Rauka's gloved hand a thumb shot up in the air and pointing at me he made a short ark in the direction of Moshe and his family.

"You too," he hissed at me. Two words that might as well have been bullets from a gun. I was a dead man. A tremor shook my body. The same type of tremor that shook Moshe.

Moshe who had moved a few steps turned around and our eyes met. He had dark brown eyes, that looked at me with compassion.

"He is not my son. He belongs to the other family." Moshe said pointing at my father. These words that saved my life will live with me till my dying day. It symbolizes the nobility of the mind of our people who even at the brink of death tried to save others.

Father, mother, and Fanny who stood like hypnotized, woke up and they all said that I belonged to them. At the same time I whipped my glove off from my right hand and extended to Rauka my Jordan Pass. I noticed how for a second his yes widened at my sudden movement. Later I thought how easily I could have shot him if I had a gun. Perhaps he thought the same thing.

Rauka was already busy with the row behind us. Like in a trance I moved with my family with Fanny holding on to me with all her strength. From the corner of my eye I saw Moshe and his family being chased by the Lithuanians to the right. His older son who was about my age, was looking at me and there was reproach in that look. Perhaps he thought that his father should have saved him instead of me.

My family and I were among the lucky ones to escape death that day, but many of my relatives, friends and teachers were not so lucky. Among them were my childhood sweetheart Lena Greenblat, and my best friend Kooky Kopelman.

I was barely thirteen when I saw them being led up the road to the Ninth Fort, a gray mass of people walking to their doom. The Fort was barely ten miles away from the Ghetto, and with the wind blowing in our direction we heard the faint echo of the machine guns firing, as they were all being shot.

It was undoubtedly the worst day in my life and I will never forget it till my dying day. Some times I still have nightmares about that day. I dream that a bloodthirsty dragon is sitting in the Ninth Fort and devouring our people, as they are being shoved screaming one by one into the dragon's mouth.

But the truth of how they died is even worse than any of my nightmares. My friend Kooky Kopelman who was among the few who somehow managed to escape from the Fort later told us his story.

It is a terrible story and I am not quite sure whether I should include it in this journey report. Still the truth of what happened there must be told.

Kooky was among the few who managed to escape from the fort and this is his story:

It was cold as we marched up the road to the Ninth Fort. It was up hill all the way and it was difficult climb. In spite of the chilly weather I was soon drenched in perspiration. As far as I could see ahead there was a long snake of people making slowly their way up to the Fort.

We walked four of five in a row, but the people, tired from lack of sleep and hunger soon broke ranks. Taking advantage of the confusion I began falling back dragging Lena with me. I don't know why I did it. Perhaps it was just an instinct. Besides, Lena was completely dispirited and could barely walk.

The guards were walking on both sides of the marchers and within sight of each other. We heard frequent shots and then a truck would drive up and throw the dead inside. I knew that escape was impossible, yet I wanted to postpone death as long as possible.

Several times the guards hit me in the back for falling back, but I didn't even feel it. I looked around trying to spot a familiar face, but they were all strangers to me. They looked grey with frightened eyes. No one spoke only deep sighs could be heard. Even the children were very quiet, their anxious eyes looking for some comfort from their parents. But their parents were themselves preoccupied with thoughts of imminent death. The smell of fear and death was everywhere. By then I learned to recognize it.

Suddenly I recognized the familiar face of my math teacher. His name was Jablonski. He looked terribly thin, almost emaciated, only his grey mustache hadn't changed. He too was falling back. He was breathing heavily as he was struggling to keep up with the rest of us.

Mr. Jablonsky! Mr. Jablonsky! I called out getting near him. He looked at me in confusion then recognized me. He tried to smile, but didn't quite make it.

"Give me your hand Cooky, I am at the end of my tether." Jablonsky said. Lena took his arm from one side and I from the other trying to give him some support. We walked in silence. Only the heavy breathing of Jablonsky could be heard.

In the last few years Jablonsky was always a doom and gloom prophet. He kept on warning any one who would listen of the dangers ahead.

I remembered last summer. The parents of the pupils made a farewell party for our class before the summer holidays set in. I was standing not far from Jablonsky, drinking lemonade and stuffing myself with home made cakes. Jablonsky held his traditional speech. I loved those pre summer school parties. We all knew each other, like a close family. Even the teachers weren't as formidable as during the school year. There were always so many tasty dishes and sweets to eat as each mother competed with the other to bring a better tasting dish. With the school year and the cold winter behind us we could be looking forward only to the pleasures of the summer.

At these parties Jablonsky would usually imbibe a little of home made liqueurs. Last summer he drank more than usual because in his speech of warning of the coming disasters to the Jewish communities in Lithuania he frightened the living day light out of us.

“Get out! Get out! Get out of here! The writing is on the wall and those who won't heed it are doomed!”

Then he started singing a well known Yiddish song:

“Es brent, briderlech es brent.” (It is burning, dear brothers, our village is burning, and you are standing as if nothing happened, with your folded hands, God forbid, the moment may come, dear brothers, when all of you, and the village may go up in flames.)

A shudder went through us as he sang that song and later I heard that a few families, influenced by his speech, actually left Lithuania in the nick of time. He most likely saved their lives.

The prophet of doom they called him. If only our parents would have listen to him we wouldn't have had to go through the horrors of the Holocaust. And here I was walking next to him on our last journey on earth.

As we were approaching the Fort we were terribly tired. Jablonsky was an additional load on us as we had to drag him along the last few hundred yards. Lena was sobbing and trying to pray and I was in a terrible turmoil. The deepest, most intrinsic, the most pervasive instinct in the human being is the instinct of survival. It rules above anything else, above love, above hate, even above greed. No matter what the poets will tell you, when it comes to dying, everything else is forgotten.

As we were approaching death my whole being revolted against it. I heard Jablonsky tell us:

“Hush children, don’t cry. Let’s not give them the satisfaction of seeing us cry. Let’s die with our heads up high.”

“Even at the threshold of death, Jablonsky couldn’t help speaking in dramatic terms.” I thought.

It was almost evening when we reached the Ninth Fort. It was an old building with very thick walls and iron covered small windows.

A group of German police and Lithuanian guards stood at the entrance with large dogs on a leash. They immediately surrounded us and lead us through the gate, the dogs barking and snarling at us furiously.

Several trucks were standing inside the court yard their engines running. They were continuously back firing and it sounded like shots.

A young German Officer came out and addressed us:

“In spite of all the rumors you are going to be transported to working camps in the East. After the shower, you will be issued working clothing. So undress and leave your clothing on that pile there in the corner.” He spoke in civil tones. In spite of all we knew about this death factory he managed to instill a spark of hope in us. But that soon vanished when we heard above the din of the back firing trucks, long bursts of machine gun fire and distant screams of many people.

The Germans heard it too, for they lowered their sub machine guns at us menacingly.

“Quickly you Jews! Get undressed and into the showers! What you heard was the back fire of some trucks. ” The Germans shouted again. His eyes were watching us carefully, very carefully. They wanted to dispatch us at maximum speed and efficiency and resistance on our part might have delayed their tight schedule.

No one moved. We all stood frozen unable to move a muscle. The officer then calmly walked up to an elderly man who was standing next to Jablonsky, drew his Luger and shot the man straight in the face. He must have used a dum-dum bullet, because as the man fell to the ground, his head was split open, and grey matter was pouring out into the mud.

Everyone began hastily to undress. When you are about to die even a few minutes of life is precious. Finally we all stood naked, covering our private parts with our hands, shivering with cold in the freezing weather.

These despicably evil men were not satisfied with merely killing us, they had to humiliate us till the very last minute. Why didn't they let us die with our clothing on? Did they really need our old torn clothing?

Lena looked so terribly thin standing naked next to me. She was terribly ashamed to stand among naked men.

"Cooky, I am so terribly frightened. We are only thirteen, we haven't lived yet at all.. Death is horrible...it is coming.. soon we'll be dead...I wanted to die with my family and even that was denied to me.. " She cried pitifully.

I tried to say something comforting to her, but my teeth were chattering uncontrollably. I was cold and scarred. I wish I could have said something meaningful to her.. But what can you say when you are on the threshold of death?

And it wasn't just that we were going to die.. It was the way we were going to die, scorned, humiliated, denied any human last rights..Suddenly, it became important...I would have sold my soul to the devil if I could die peacefully in a bed, between clean white sheets...Anything but this horrible way...But we weren't given much time to spend in reverie. What followed was a night mare in slow motion. Every tiny detail remains ingrained in my mind till the day I'll die.

Upon a signal by the officer, the Germans and Lithuanian launched themselves at us with sticks and rifle butts, their dogs attacking the slow moving ones, tearing pieces of flesh from their legs and buttocks.

"Run, run, you Jews!" They shouted, lashing out at us again and again. We started running in wild panic with the guards and dogs after us. Steam was rising from our sweating bodies as we were herded along the wall of the Fort. Suddenly, as we came around the corner of the building, we saw hundreds of guards standing in the open fields and firing long bursts of machine gun fire into the huge open pits. I heard the screams of the people inside and it drove me almost mad with fright.

I wanted to stop, to run, escape, but the terrified, stampeding naked bodies pushing behind me encircled me like in a straight jacket.

Lithuanians and Germans with rolled up sleeves and red faces were loading and firing into the mob. I saw the yellow flashes of the guns and the blue cordite smoke emitted by the firing barrels was drifting through the field.

I heard the horse shouts of the men, the shrill screams of the women, the cries of the children, the babies, the barking of the dogs. I smelled the stench of sweat, urine and feces as the terrified people couldn't hold back. It was a scene out of hell itself.

Suddenly I saw this bearded man standing by the pit. He looked like the rabbi who prepared me for Bar Mitzvah. He was baling his fists towards the sky and screaming:

"Jews! There is no God! There is devil sitting up there!" He screamed over and over.

Blood was streaming down from several bullet holes in his body. Then several more bullets hit him. Yet he stood there defying the Germans and God.

Then we were by the open pit. Thousands of writhing bodies, lying on top of each other, screaming, shouting, raising their hands to the guards to finish them off. A vision of hell.. A vision of hell.

I half turned around and saw our murderers closing in on us, their faces grim, their machine guns blazing. Bullets were buzzing around me like angry bees, yet I felt nothing. Suddenly I felt being pushed by the stampeding crowd and I found myself falling with Lena clinging desperately to my arm. As we were falling her hands were pressing my arm with tremendous force. She was trying to say something, but there came only a croaking sound from her lips. A large gaping hole appeared in her throat, pumping streams of blood on her tiny breasts.

Something heavy fell on my head knocking me into merciful oblivion, but before I blacked out, I saw Lena's terrified eyes looking at me, begging me to help her.

End of the first Part of the 9th Fort story.

September 21, 2003

## **Visiting the 9th Fort**

This is the last part of my journey back home to Lithuania.  
I kept a journal of the voyage, and this is part 5 of that journal.

### **Introduction to part 5 of my journal.**

Dear Friends,

In a few days we will commemorate the 'Big Action' of the Kovno Ghetto. I would like to share with you part of my childhood diary that describes the 'Big Action' and the impressions of my visit last year to the 9th Fort.

On October 28, 1941, ten thousand Jews of the Kovno Ghetto were selected to die on the killing fields of the 9th Fort. Sixty-three years have passed since; yet I remember every horrid detail of that day as if it happened yesterday.

Sixty three years have passed, yet the passing years did not alleviate the pain the dread, the immense feelings of grief and utter helplessness, as we stood all thirty thousand of us, the inhabitants of the Kovno Ghetto, waiting to be selected to life or death. We stood utterly defenseless before two Germans deciding our fate. SA captain Jordan, and Gestapo Sergeant, Rauka.

For two thousand years have the Jews been subjected to endless persecutions, but what was taking place on that day in the Kovno Ghetto was something unprecedented in its evil. Two German bureaucrats were standing totally indifferent and bored, deciding who was to live and who was to die.

The required quota was 10,000-, one third of the Ghetto population. We stood like cattle being prepared for the slaughter, and there was nothing we could do about it. In the annals of man's inhumanity to man, this action was one of the worst, for sheer cruelty, inhumanity and the cold blooded singling out of children, the infants, the weak, the sick, and the old for murder.

I was thirteen old at the time, and what I remember most is the utter feeling of helplessness. We were doomed because we were helpless.

I remember making myself a promise that if I were to survive that purgatory, I would make sure that I would never have that devastating feeling of helplessness. That was one of the important reasons that brought me to the shores of Israel in 1948 to fight in its 'War of Independence', and since then, thank G-d, I have never felt that feeling of helplessness again.

**A poem by Solly Ganor. Herzelia Pituach, Israel. 25.2.1997**

Unzer Heimale in Lite, dos Land fun Mord un Schite.

Wu es loift di Sheshupe, un der Nieman fliest,  
Fliessen oich taichen fun Yddishes Blut,  
Taichen fun Blut un Yamen fun trern,  
Zeier letzten gebet ken ich noch hern:

Eli, Eli, lama azavtani, lama azavtani, Eli mein Got.

Durch die blutige wegen un shteskes fun Lite,  
Wern toizenter Yiddn getrieben zu der schite,  
Zei wern gejogt in nakete reien,  
Es hilcht durch dos land zeiere letzte geschreien.

Barg aroif fun Slabodker Ghetto,  
Tsit zich der weg zum farsholtenem ort,  
Gepeinigte Yiddn tsum toit farmishpet,  
Wern gefirt tsu dem ninten Fort.

A gezind zalbe acht un kvorim nur zwei,  
Wen es kumt on der toit wu lign dan zeı,  
Drei mitn taten un drei mit der mamen,  
Hentlach un fislach geflochten tsuzamen.

Oif die grine lonkes fun Lite,  
zingen Litwiner Birutes lider,  
Un unter die lonkes in blutige griber,  
Lign bagrobn unzere shwester un brider.

Wu es lofit die Sheshupe und der Nieman flist,  
Flisn oich taichen fun Yddishes blut,  
Taichn fun Blut und Yamen fun trern,  
Zeier letzten gebet ken ich noch hern"

Eli, Eli, lama azavtani, lama azavtani, Eli mein Got.

**Visiting the 9th Fort**

The road to the 9th Fort hadn't changed. It was exactly as I remembered it. It led from Paneriu Street upward towards the dreaded killing grounds around the Fort. Shimon was driving the car slowly uphill, the same road that so many thousands of my beloved people walked on their last walk on earth over sixty years ago.

I was thirteen years old at that time and was condemned to live for a while. I stood inside the ghetto by the fence, as so many of us did, and watched with horror as our relatives, our teachers, our doctors and rabbis, who only yesterday walked among us, walked to their death.

Some things of horror are so traumatic that they remain engraved on your mind to your dying day. I watched them on that dark wintry morning on October 29, 1941, as they moved slowly uphill, a gray mass of dear people condemned to death, for no other reason that they were born as Jews.

I saw a man with tears running down his face grab the barb wired fence with his bare hands and screamed on top of his lungs:

“Farwos reboino shel oilim, farwos!” “Why, God Almighty, why?” The barbwire pierced his hands and blood was dripping on the fresh snow, but he was pressing the wire harder, as if begging for more pain.

On the other side of the fence, a young Lithuanian guard raised his rifle and took aim at the men. It was forbidden to come so close to the fence, but an elderly guard approached him and pushed down his rifle. We could see on his face that he was affected by what was happening, as from time to time he looked up at the mass of people going to their death and shook his head. I guess the enormity of the crime being perpetrated with his collaboration must have had some effect on him.

After a while he raised his rifle in the air and shouted:

“Go home, Jews, go home. We can not allow you to stand so close to the fence!”

There were twice as many guards around the fence as usual, but they all showed restraint. They must have been affected by what they saw.

You had to have a heart stone not to be affected. Slowly the crowd dispersed without a single shot being fired.

It was hard to believe that only a day had passed since we stood all thirty thousand of us on Demokratu Square waiting to be selected to life or death.

Excerpts From my original manuscript:

Ghetto Diary.

October 28, 1941.

"We decided to retire early that night because we knew that the next day was going to be long and cold and we would be needing every ounce of strength.

I was tossing and turning trying to drive away the frightening thoughts. I heard my mother crying and father trying to comfort her. There were deep sighs and choked sobs and all kind of strange noises in the house.

When I finally fell asleep I had terrible nightmares. I dreamt that I was falling endlessly into a dark and bottomless abyss and those thousands of strange demons with red eyes and long snouts were leering at me and laughing. I must have screamed out loud because my sister Fanny shook me quite hard to awaken me.

“It is all right, darling, it is all right. It was only a nightmare.”

I woke up wet with perspiration. It was still dark outside, but the East showed the faintest line of gray.

I woke up to a terrifying reality. It was by far worse than any nightmare. At least from a nightmare you can wake up, but this reality probably meant death.

Anushka prepared some hot coffee substitute while we all got warmly dressed. It was time to go. We all embraced and kissed each other. We couldn't hold back the flow of tears. I especially cried when I said good bye to aunt Anushka. I thought that she had the least chances of survival because she didn't have a Jordan Pass and I loved her so much. She looked at me with her kind eyes and smiled.

“Don't worry, darling, we will see each other in the evening,” she said and gave me a big kiss.

Before we left the house I looked at room we lived in and it suddenly became so incredibly pleasant. The bed I slept in looked so warm and cozy.

If I could just curl up under the blankets and go to sleep for ever... Then I noticed the book I was reading lying on top of my pillow. I impulsively slipped the book under my coat. I don't know why I did it; I certainly wasn't going to read where I was going.

The streets and fields were covered with an early morning frost. It was going to be a cold day. I pulled the flaps down of my leather hat to protect my ears from the cold.

Hundreds of people suddenly emerged from the houses all around us. In the semi darkness they looked like gray ghosts. Many were carrying their small children on their arms or pushing a perambulator through the sandy streets. Some supported the elderly parents or carried on a stretcher the very ill. No one wanted to remain inside the houses and be shot.

Then I heard a strange hum that came from the people. When I listened closer I realized that many were reciting psalms.

Strangely enough I was thinking about Cooky. In the evening his mother appeared in our house and told us that she was very worried about him because the workers from the day shift didn't come back from the airport and no one knew why. In a way I was envious. Cooky had guessed right. The Germans in charge of the airport kept the workers back because they needed them and didn't want them exposed to the action. I also thought about Lena. Their chance of survival may depend on their cousin the policeman. In previous actions the Jewish policemen managed to save their families. I also thought about my cousins Arik who was hiding with a Christian family and little Rony who a few days earlier was taken out of the ghetto by Mariane. Why couldn't it be I hiding somewhere outside the ghetto, instead of marching to my death? This and many other thoughts were going through my mind as we were approaching the Demokratu Place. Thoughts ranging from utter despair, where I saw myself falling dead into horrible pits full of dead bodies, and thoughts of hope that perhaps the Jordan Pass may save my life.

Then again the terrible fear of death would rise in me like a floodwater overwhelming my being. My mind was screaming for me to run, escape vanish in thin air, anything but walk with this doomed souls. But my feet assumed independence and just kept on going one step after another.

Arriving at Demokratu Place we were directed by the Jewish policemen to our assembly point. It was one of the first groups on the Place. A man in the first row carried a banner with the words written in German: Ghetto Administration Workers.

We were ordered to form rows of ten. In front stood the members of the ghetto committee and the police with their families. Since we were only four another family joined us, consisting of a woman with two children and an old couple who were her parents.

The woman was working with father at the supply and distribution department.

"Rachel, where is your husband?" father asked the woman.

"He went to the airport yesterday morning and didn't come back," she told father looking anxiously around.

Suddenly a tall man appeared running up and down the column. He was wearing an old suit smeared with mud.

Father was the first one to recognize him and called out:

“Moshe! Here!” father beckoned to the man. The man ran over and embraced Rachel who was standing next to me.

“Thanks God I found you! We were running up and down the whole field looking for the families.

We had to work two shifts because the night shift was not allowed out of the ghetto,” Moshe said completely out of breath. I barely recognized him. I met him a few times in the supply department when he came to see his wife.

He was dirty, with a graying beard, and smelled of sour sweat and urine. He looked like an old man.

‘The poor bastard must have made in his pants,’ I thought turning my head away towards Fanny who was standing next to me.

Suddenly I remembered that Cooky was among these workers who returned from the airport! ‘Poor Cooky, he completely miscalculated the situation. And now he too must be running around among the columns of people looking for his parents. And I envied him that he managed to avoid this action!’ I thought feeling guilty.

Daylight found the whole ghetto population of about twenty eight thousand men, women and children standing in neat columns waiting for the German executioners to finish their breakfast.

It was a cold morning and a few snowflakes came drifting down from a gray sky. A few hours passed and nothing happened. We were cold and our feet began to ache. All around us we could hear babies cry, and children begged their parents for food. Many began to recite psalms and that melancholy melody spread among the condemned throughout the field. Here and there old people began to collapse and fell to the ground while their families tried to lift them up.

Around nine in the morning we suddenly heard a strange sound. It reminded me of the wind moving through tops of trees in a forest. It was the sound that escaped from thousands of mouths when they saw the German and Lithuanian battalions surround the Demokratu place. They were armed with machine guns and they looked grim. Many of the Lithuanians seemed drunk.

Then two figures resplendent in new uniforms and shiny black boots approached us. They were the ghetto Commandant Jordan and the Gestapo man Rauka. These two were to decide our fate.

Rauka placed himself in front of our column and without any further ceremony began his bloody job.

The members of the Jewish Committee and the ghetto police were standing in front of the column. They and their families were sent to the left, to a specially assigned area. Behind them came all the departments of the ghetto institutions. As we were filling past him he began to send the elderly, the ill, women with small children, some of them boys my age, to the right side, where they were assembled in a separate area. Families were torn apart, the young and the healthy to the left while their elderly parents or small children were sent to the right.

The heart rending cries of the separated family members filled the air, while those who tried to reunite would be knocked down with rifle butts by the Lithuanian guards. It immediately became obvious who were to live and who were going to die. A few showed him Jordan Passes, but he only tore it out of their hands and threw it down into the mud.

My heart began to beat wildly. Suddenly I felt awfully small. The precious life certificate that I held in my trembling hands became worthless before my very eyes. In a few minutes our turn would come and I could already feel the cold breath of death on my neck. Neither father, or mother or sister Fanny could do anything for me. 'Within a few seconds my fate would be sealed,' I thought wildly.

'If I could stop the time and go back for a short time into the past.

If only... There... There is snowman's hill behind grand father's house...

It is covered with pure white snow that glitters like a million candles in the afternoon's sun...Lena is laughing, her hazel eyes full of Joy.

'Where are the charcoals you dummy? You were supposed to bring the charcoals for the snowman's eyes, remember?' Itamar's laughing face pushed itself in my mind.

'Come, Solly, my boy, come with me to Palestine, the only place in the world where a Jew can defend himself...' my uncle Melech's dark eyes were laughing at me.

'A fanatical Zionist, an impractical dreamer...' father said, shrugging his shoulders.

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'This place is doomed, doomed! Don't you see that the ground is burning under your feet? What are you all, blind?!' the envoy from Palestine spoke heatedly...

'If only I could turn the clock back... If only...' I thought.

“Forward March!” We started moving.

“Oh, God! Give us a little more time, just a little more time...” I prayed silently.

A red face, pale blue eyes, his right arm extended as if he were conducting an orchestra, Rauka stood before us. The executioner!

Three rows, two rows, one row before us... Left... right... left... right.

I didn't even hear the screams of the separated families. My heart stopped beating. I was drowning in fright.

Then we stood before him. He seemed bored, his eyes looking indifferently at us.

I wanted to scream: “We are people, for God's sake! We are fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers.

We have our dreams, our ambitions, and our lives given to us by God! You stand there with your pudgy hand sending us to die?! You are not God! You are just a fat, red-faced German. How dare you to deprive us of our lives? Who gave you the right?”

But the words of raging protest only echoed in my brains. Not a sound escaped my frightened lips.

Rauka quickly scanned our line and pointing his hand at Moshe and his family said:

“You! Dreck Sack, and the rest of your garbage, off to the right.”

Moshe who stood next to me began shaking like a leaf. Because he stood so close I could actually feel his trembling that reverberated through my body like the death throes of an animal. It made me nauseous and I thought I would vomit my breakfast at Rauka's feet.

Moshe and his large family began to move in the direction indicated by Rauka.

I stood frozen to my spot not daring to breathe. From Rauka's gloved hand a thumb shot up in the air and pointing at me he made a short arc in the direction of Moshe and his family.

“You too.” He hissed at me. Two words that might as well have been bullets from a gun. I was a dead man. A tremor shook my body. The same type of tremor that shook Moshe.

Moshe who had moved a few steps turned around and our eyes met. He had dark brown eyes that looked at me with compassion.

“He is not my son. He belongs to the other family,” Moshe said pointing at my father. These words that saved my life will live with me till my dying day. It symbolizes the nobility of the mind of our people who even at the brink of death tried to save others.

Father, mother, and Fanny who stood like hypnotized, woke up and they all said that I belonged to them. At the same time I whipped my glove off from my right hand and extended to Rauka my Jordan Pass. I noticed how for a second his yes widened at my sudden movement. Later I thought how easily I could have shot him if I had a gun. Perhaps he thought the same thing.

Rauka was already busy with the row behind us. Like in a trance I moved with my family with Fanny holding on to me with all her strength. From the corner of my eye I saw Moshe and his family being chased by the Lithuanians to the right. His older son, who was about my age, was looking at me and there was reproach in that look. Perhaps he thought that his father should have saved him instead of me.

All those gathered on the left stood like transfixed watching the ever-growing number of the condemned. We were the lucky ones, but for how long? But those who are saved from imminent death don't ask questions like that. All you feel is elation.

The future has no meaning at moments like this. So intrinsic is the sense of self-preservation, that survival of ones life is above all else.

As the day wore on and thousands upon thousands of people, many of them young and needed craftsmen, were being sent to the right we began to have our doubts as to our first impression that the other side was the bad side. And when they began to march them out to the Small Ghetto, our hope was rekindled that perhaps this time Rauka didn't lie. Perhaps, just perhaps, they were really going to separate the two populations of the working and non-working as he said in the beginning.

But why then, would they send so many young and able workers there?

This is how the historian Joseph Gar describes the events that took place on Demokratu place. Quote:

“After Rauka finished sorting out the columns of the ghetto institutions, he speeded up the tempo of the selections. Columns after columns and rows after rows of people walked past him and he, with a small stick in his hand directed them either to the right or to the left.

From the beginning it became evident that Rauka was judging the people basically from their physical looks, their clothing, cleanliness, and size of the family. The younger, stronger and better-dressed people, with smaller families, that had less children or aging parents, were sent to the "good" side.

The elderly, the ill, the weak looking people, families that did not have a man as the head of the family, families that were badly dressed or didn't look clean, he sent to their death.

After a while he didn't pay any attention at all, whether the people were working or not, not even well known craftsmen who showed him certificates from various German institutions weren't spared. The various certificates prepared by the Jewish workers made very little impression on him. Not even the Jordan Passes that saved so many lives in the previous actions were honored. Rauka had his own criteria that was to live and who was to die.

Some of the Jewish craftsmen, who showed their certificates signed by high ranking German officers, were told by Rauka with a cynical smile:

"Very well, there we will need just the type of craftsmen like you."

He would say pointing to the Small Ghetto.

But when he would get from his adjutants information that the number of Jews that had arrived at the Small Ghetto were much less than expected, he would send whole columns of people to the bad side, irrespective of where they were working.

Around lunchtime Rauka sent for sandwiches and even while he was eating he continued sending people to their death. He just couldn't take a break from his work.

As the day wore on and there was still a lot of work to be done, Jordan himself joined the party and began selecting the people. The only difference between the two murderers was that Jordan recognized his own certificates, and anyone showing one to him was sent to the good side. There were hair-raising scenes when the murderers would decide to separate between families. Parents from children, and husbands from wives. Heart rending cries of despair could be heard throughout the huge place as families were torn asunder.

The tragic day seemed endless. Everything that took place on the square seemed strangely wild, inexplicable, like some terrible nightmare. But unfortunately, it was not a nightmare, but the most tragic reality."

End of Quote.

It was getting dark and still we were standing awaiting our fate.

Fortunately, we had prepared some sandwiches and brought with us some bottles of water, which we shared with the people around us. Some of the elderly, unable to stand any longer sat down on the cold ground.

The square began to fill up with dead bodies of the old and the sick who couldn't endure anymore the rigors of the day and gave up their ghosts. If that were going to go on much longer, pretty soon all of us would be dead. Only the two henchmen were tireless.

Standing the whole day eating sandwiches and drinking coffee brought to them by their orderlies, they were tireless in sending to their death the best elements of European Jewry.

Finally when Jordan and Rauka got the word that ten thousand men, women and children were now in the small ghetto, they called it a day. We, the "lucky" ones were finally allowed to return to our homes. We were coming from a funeral of ten thousand of our brethren.

Returning home we found the place upside down. The Germans were obviously looking for anyone who tried to hide. It was terribly cold in the house, as the doors were open all the time. With trembling hands mother managed to light the stove and put some water for boiling. Our momentary elation soon turned to despair when we realized that we were alone and that neither Anushka nor Jochil with his family had returned.

We looked out anxiously at the street where thousands of people were still coming from Demokratu Place and that gave us some hope. Perhaps we were among the first to return and they would soon follow, we tried to console each other. "But what about the others? What about the masses of people who were sent to the small ghetto? What about all our other relatives?" we asked each other.

'What about Lena and Cooky? Did they survive?' I thought with dread in my heart.

Then suddenly the door opened and uncle Jochil with his family stood at the entrance, and there, a few seconds later, aunt Anushka's face appeared too. For a moment we looked at each other as if we were seeing ghosts. The same thought must have passed through their minds that we were among the unfortunate ones. Then we fell into each other's arms and cried, each one telling his experiences of the day.

Jochil and his family, who stood in the column of Fima's brigade, were among the earlier groups to be selected. At that time Rauka still had patience to sort out the people. Jochil and his family of four, all relatively young and well dressed, seemed to fit his criteria by which he made his decisions.

A row in front of them and a row in the back were all sent to the bad side because they had too many small children or old parents.

Anushka, who stood among the air port workers, didn't fare so well. To their bad luck, just before they filed passed Rauka; a messenger came from the Small Ghetto, which made Rauka furious. Apparently there were not enough victims there as yet.

"All of you shit heads, off you go!" he screamed at us, sending row after row of airport workers and their families to the right. When our turn arrived he didn't even bother to look at us. He just kept his arm extended to the right, and before we knew what was happening the Lithuanians drove us with clubs and rifles on the way to the Small Ghetto.

Suddenly, Greenblat the police man, you know, Lena's uncle, or cousin, whatever he is, appeared out of nowhere like an angel from heaven and pushing me with great force brought me to the good side. He used to be my customer before the war and we often played cards socially. I must go and thank him for saving my life," Anushka said. Then she came over and gave me a big hug:

"You see, I told you that we will meet in the evening, and you wouldn't believe me."

Although we were dead tired we couldn't sleep that night. We were all worried about the family and friends and the fate of the thousands sent to the Small Ghetto.

It was a long and gruesome day for all of us, young and old. Although we already knew the murderous intent of the Germans from previous actions, we still couldn't believe that they would murder so many thousands of people in one go.

'Therefore, perhaps there is some hope,' we consoled each other before we went to sleep.

I woke up in the morning to the terrible screaming of my sister Fanny. She stood by the window crying hysterically:

"They are marching them to the Ninth Fort! God in heaven, they are taking them to their death!" Fanny cried and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

While mother and Anushka tried to revive Fanny, we all rushed to the window and there before us, was the most gruesome sight my eyes had ever seen. It wasn't as gory as what I had witnessed before, but its implication was a thousand times worse. In my imagination I could see these unfortunate thousands being shoved into the huge mass graves, and layer upon layers of dead and wounded covered with freshly dug up earth.

I could hear the muted screams of the wounded as they were struggling for their last breath under the masses of people.

In the early morning gray we saw ten thousand people being led to the Ninth Fort. From where we stood we could see them clearly as they were marching uphill on the road to the Ninth Fort. Miles and miles of people on their last walk on earth.

Driven by an inexplicable force, together with other thousands of people we rushed to the ghetto fence to say good bye to our nearest and dearest on the other side.

It is impossible to describe the heart-rending cries of the people from both sides of the fence as people recognized friends, relatives, sometimes, parents, brothers and sisters. How can one's heart take in these terrible scenes without breaking to pieces? How can one's mind remain sane while witnessing such a tragedy? One had to be stronger than iron to survive it. The whole day the masses of people were forced to march to the Fort. Hundreds of well-armed Lithuanians and Germans took up positions along the road and would shoot anyone who tried to escape.

Unable to look anymore at the dreadful scenes, which took place before our eyes, we returned home completely dejected. All the time I was looking at the other side trying to see if I could recognize anyone I knew. I was afraid to think of Lena and Cooky. I was even more afraid to go to their homes and check. I knew that eventually I would have to do it, but I couldn't do it the same day. In a way I was hopeful about Lena. If Greenblat managed to save aunt Anushka, surely he would have done the same for his family. But what happened to Cooky? He was among the workers who returned from the airport and many of those unfortunates, because of their dirty cloths and tired looks were sent to their death.

Even as we were returning home we couldn't help looking back. From every spot in the ghetto we could see the endless columns of the doomed moving slowly up the mountain. Although I was warmly dressed I couldn't stop shivering. When we returned home I slipped into the bed with all my clothing on, but I was still cold. Finally I fell into a long and dreamless sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but I woke up to the terrible cry of the whole family. I was completely confused and couldn't understand why they are standing by the windows and crying. When I got out of bed and neared the window, I understood the cause of their terrible grief.

Although it was quite a few miles away we could hear from the direction of the Ninth Fort the unmistakable chatter of multiple machine guns. Our brethren were being shot there at this very moment! The shooting, sometimes fainter some times louder, continued incessantly, without let up, hour after

hour, day and night. It takes a lot of bullets to kill ten thousand people. We tried to shut out the terrible sound by stuffing our ears, but that didn't help much.

At times I wished that I had gone off with Moshe and his family, at least the horror would have been finished once and for all. Staying alive meant that I will have to go through those terrible selections who knows how many times until the day when my luck will run out, and I'll be making the same journey to the mass graves of the Ninth Fort.

The next two days were the most terrible days since the war began. The surviving population of the ghetto ran around like a mad mob, looking for relatives and friends, covering their ears to shut out the terrible sound of machine gun fire emanating from Ninth Fort... All of our family, the Shtroms, were saved, some of my school friends were saved as well, but many were sent to their death.

We heard that some of our neighbors at Kalviu 13 were on the good side. Among them the Rogol sisters, Frieda, Riva and Miriam.

Miriam was of my age and she was my childhood love.

The Greenblats, Rachel, Lena, Vova, and their mother, were sent to their death. Lena's death was a terrible blow to me. During the short time in the ghetto we became very close.

There were many more of our close friends, teachers, doctors and rabbis who went to their death.

The spirit of the people was at its lowest ebb. Suddenly all our hopes were dashed. If there were one thing we firmly believed was that as long as they needed our workers for their war effort they would keep us alive. But many thousands of able and young workers were sent to their death, therefore that theory collapsed like a house of cards."

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And now returning sixty-three years later, I was driving up the same road that our nearest and dearest walked to the 9th Fort.

The events as I described them above kept flooding my brains in its gruesome details.

Again, I was about to tell Shimon to turn the car around and flee from that dreaded place, but an inner voice told me to face the horrors of the past no matter how difficult it was.

Approaching the fort I saw green lawns surrounding the area. A newly constructed building stood in the middle of the lawn.

Shimon stopped the car and went inside. He came out with a pass allowing us to drive up all the way to the fort. The director of the fort, hearing that I am one of the survivors of the Kovno Ghetto, came out and shook my hand.

“Usually we don’t allow cars to drive up there,” she said apologetically.

The fort itself, built of red bricks a century ago, hadn’t changed, judging by the pictures we saw since the end of the war.

It stood massive and threatening, full of horrifying shadows, its foundation soaked in Jewish blood. My whole being revolted against entering this evil place.

It took all my will power to force myself to go on. My life’s companion, my wife Pola, walking by my side, was a great help in somewhat calming down the turmoil in my soul.

Before entering the Fort, we were brought to a monstrous sized monument built of metal. The monument looked like a huge bird with hundreds of wings in which were embedded the suffering figures of human beings.

It was built by the Soviets, and somehow it added to the atmosphere of malevolence of the place.

The plaque attached to the monument spoke of Soviet citizens who perished in this place, without mentioning that they were Jews.

Only after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, some plaques were added in Hebrew, Yiddish and other languages, that the victims were mostly people of the Jewish faith.

Entering the Fort gave me the feeling as if I was entering the mouth of a bloodthirsty monster. I was full of apprehension and a deep revulsion.

“What was I doing in this purgatory? Why am I here? Will I survive this place of horror?”

These thoughts kept going through my mind, but as if in a hypnotic trance I continued to walk inside the Belly of the Beast.

As if in a haze I walked through the various rooms with inscriptions on the walls by people who were incarcerated here before they were executed.

There were inscriptions of people from all over Europe and some even from Monaco.

They were dragged here to be shot before the murder factories of Auschwitz, Sobibor, Chmelno and others were built in Poland, were they used gas instead of shooting people.

There were photos from various communities and the Kovno Ghetto and one room, to my horror, contained a photo of myself.

It was in the room dedicated to the Japanese consul Chiune Sugihara, who saved thousands of Jewish refugees from Poland by issuing them visas to Japan. I had no idea why they decided to include the story of the Japanese consul on the 9th Fort, and why my photo appeared there.

I was later told that idea came to them, that if it weren't for the Japanese consul, all the ones who were saved by him would have been buried on this Fort.

We continued walking through the fort until we came to a maze of labyrinth like corridors. They were narrow, and their ceilings were built in an arch and very low.

These corridors were winding through the depth of the Fort, lit by dim electric bulbs. I felt a menacing presence of evil in these corridors, and heard all kinds of whispering noises. They sounded like voices from far away. The corridors were badly ventilated and I broke out in a sweat.

As if suggested by the whispering voices, suddenly a horrible thought occurred to my mind and I asked Chaim the guide, walking beside me:

“In the big action of October 28, 1941, ten thousand people were brought here and shot. How could they have shot so many people in such a short time? And where did they bring them, straight to the mass graves?”

Chaim took some time to answer me. Finally he said in a whisper:

“Didn't you know? They were brought here and stuffed into this labyrinth of corridors, one on top of the other. Then they were taken out five hundred at the time and shot at the mass graves.”

Suddenly the whispering became louder. I felt as if I was transported back in time and was standing among the mass of people squeezed together, waiting to be executed. I had the feeling that I was suffocating.

“Take me out of here. Quickly... Take me out of here,” I said to Shimon.

The lights became dimmer and I felt that the menacing evil in this labyrinth is going to envelop me in its grip. It felt like the touch of death.

I was about to pass out. I don't know how long it took us to get out from these haunted corridors in the open air. I took a deep breath and was glad that I

came out alive. The sun was just sinking in the West and an evening breeze was blowing through the blue grass.

The grass looked smooth and healthy and stretched all around the Fort, covering the killing fields where our people were buried. A thought occurred to me that the ashes of our nearest and dearest dispersed in these fields were feeding the grass, contributing to its beauty. Somehow the thought was comforting.

**End of the Fifth and last Part of 'Journey to Lithuania'.**

Solly Ganor  
Herzelia Pituach,  
Israel. October 19, 2004

## Conversation on the Beach

About half a mile from where I live in Herzliya, on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean, stands an old mosque. It was built during the Middle Ages and a Moslem holy man is buried on that site. The holy man's name was Sidney Ally and that is how the mosque is known to this day. The beach below stretches all the way to Herzliya to the South, and Netanya to the North.

I often go there for walks because from its heights one has a panoramic view of the sea and the whole area. There is another reason why I go there; from that hill, at certain weather conditions, the Mediterranean turns into a color of blue that can not be seen anywhere else.

Last Friday, as the wind began blowing from the East, the Medi, as we call our sea, began calming down. It flattened the waves coming ashore until it became as placid as the Kinneret during the summer. It was then that the deep blue color, as if by a magic wand, emerged from the depth of its waters. It wasn't the first time I saw it and I always witness that phenomenon with rising spirits. "If there is so much beauty in this world, then there is hope for us humans yet." I said to myself.

The silence was interrupted by a noisy bus full of Arab worshipers who arrived to the mosque for their Friday services. They wore the traditional Arab garb, and entered the mosque quietly. Some of them threw me hostile glances. Their arrival brought me back to our desperate conflict with these people for the piece of land we call Israel, and they call Palestine. Only a few years ago at Camp David, we deluded ourselves that they are finally ready for peace; Israel and Palestine living next to each other for the mutual benefit of both peoples. But that was not to be. They are still not ready to relinquish their old dream to oust us out of the Middle East.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" I heard a voice behind me speaking English. As I turned around I saw a well dressed young man of about twenty-five, looking wistfully at the sea. By his accent and looks, I realized that he was an Arab, probably one of the lot that arrived by bus. A quick visual scan of his body assured me that he didn't come to stab me, or blow himself up. I nodded. "Yes it is beautiful." "Well, we have at least one thing in common," I thought.

And then I had a second thought. "Here stands an Arab youth next to me, in the heart of Israel, calmly admiring with me the sea. There was not a shadow of a doubt in his mind that something bad would ever happen to him here in Israel. I tried to imagine myself standing that way in Ramalah, and having that conversation with an Arab youth. Then I remembered a scene filmed by an Italian TV correspondent in Ramalah last year.

Two Israelis, who by mistake took a wrong turn, found themselves among a mob of Palestinians. They were brought to the Palestinian police station where they were lynched and their mangled bodies were thrown out of the window, to the cheering crowds below. They kicked them and beat them until they were an unrecognizable mess of flesh.” The Italian TV crew, who filmed that scene, had to run for their lives to escape the mob. Fortunately, they were able to sneak the film out and show it to the world, one of the few films that were ever shown of the Arab atrocities. But the world isn’t interested in Arab atrocities. They are used to them and they don’t make good news.

For a while we stood in silence admiring the view.

“Didn’t you come with the others to pray?” I asked just to make conversation. I was curious about him. Why did he join me? It wasn’t just to watch the view, of this I was sure. ‘I know what that old fool will say by heart. He is of the old school and preaches moderation. Fortunately, his time is over.’”

“You don't think that moderation is a good idea?” “ What has moderation ever done for us? We have been moderate long enough. We are growing weaker while you have grown stronger. It is time for us to act.”

I was a little surprised by his belligerent tone right from the start. Usually Arabs are polite in the beginning of a conversation.

“Do you think that you were moderate up to now? Would you call five wars the Arabs launched against us, moderation? I wonder what you would call hostility?” He gave me a sober look.

“Hostility is what you are getting now. Our young people are blowing themselves up in all of your major towns, taking with them hundreds of your Israelis. President Arafat has promised you a million ‘Shihads’ to march on Jerusalem. The march has already begun, and it won’t be thanks to Arafat. He is another old bungler. Things are changing. Until now you had the upper hand, but no more! Our “Shihads” are the answer to your atomic bombs. If necessary, one “Shihad” can be an atomic bomb, here in Israel, in America, in Europe, or anywhere the Jews and the Crusaders live. We don’t need millions of dollars worth of sophisticated labs and expensive scientist. What we have is cheap and efficient. That is because we are not afraid to die. We have finally found your soft underbelly, your Achilles Heal. You Judeo-Christians worship the sanctity of life, while we don’t mind dying for Islam” The last sentence he said with certain pride in his voice.

From the way he expressed himself, I realized that he is a student. As if confirming my thoughts, he told me that he is a student of political science at

the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. “Do all the Arab students studying at the Israeli universities share your views?” “Absolutely! A few may be oriented towards the West, but the overwhelming majority are for the new emerging Renaissance of Islam.”

Then he smiled and said, “You might as well enjoy the beautiful view from ‘Sidney Alley’ while you can. You won’t be able to do so for long. If I were you, I would pack and leave for safer countries.” I gave him a long look.

“Thanks for the advice, but I remember another Arab who gave the same advise to us in 1948, when the British were pulling out. He may have been your grandfather, for all I know. He lived in a village somewhere around here and he was a friend of a Jewish man named Peytan whom I knew as well. Peytan lived in Kefar Shemaryahu across the road. One day the Arab neighbor came visiting Mr. Peytan and strongly advised him to pack and leave. At the same time, he brought out a measuring tape and began to measure the room they were sitting in.

“What are you doing?” asked my friend.

“Look, you are going to lose your house anyway. There is no way that six hundred thousand of you can stand up to the combined might of six Arab regular armies, not to mention our Palestinian battalions. We can actually kill you with our hats!” Yes, that is what he actually said: “We can kill you with our hats. We have been good friends for a long time. You might as well give me your house rather than to someone you don’t know.”

“His advice reminded me of your advice. Yet during the 1948 war, which was forced on us by you, your ‘grand father,’ not only that he didn’t get the house in Kefar Shemaryahu, but he lost his own house and became a refugee. And now he is blaming it on the Jews. Fifty-five years later he still sits in the camp. His views haven’t changed much. He still wants not only his house back, but he wants the house in Kefar Shemaryahu, of his Jewish friend as well. Will he ever get it? I doubt it.”

“Yes, he will get it! And you know why? Because in 1948 they were all cowards! Today, our generation is proving that we are not! Eighteen determined men with carton cutters who were not afraid to die, defied the big American might, causing them thousands of dead and trillions of dollars worth of losses. We found out that we can bring the Western capitalist system to its knees, and we shall do so! It is a shameless selfish system that causes endless human misery around the world, especially in the third world countries and for Islam. It is time for it to go!” It was obvious from the way he said it that he didn’t say it for the first time.

“Communism, Nazism, Fascism, they all were defeated by the Western Democracies, What system do you propose to replace it with?” I asked. I was beginning to get irritated with this young Arab.

“Islam!” He said fiercely.

“Islam?” I asked. “Islam? What did Islam ever do for the countries under its rule?”

It brought nothing but poverty and misery to the masses, while bestowing fabulous riches to the rulers. All you have to do is look around you. Israel, that was in 1948 a pauper state, barely able to feed its population, has grown into a modern self-sufficient state. We have absorbed a million Jews from the Arab countries, who fled for their lives leaving all they possessed behind, while your Arab brothers with their billions of petro dollars let the Palestinians rot in refugee camps. While we progressed in the last fifty years, the Arab states have only regressed. As a matter of fact, the Arab masses are worse off than when they were under the British or the French rule. How many Nobel Prize winners has Islam produced? How many new inventions to benefit mankind? Practically zero! How many Einsteins, Freuds, Salks and Rubinsteins has Islam produced? Zero! From a once vibrant Arab civilization, that gave us Algebra and the concept of the zero, Islam has plunged you into a pit of fanaticism, illiteracy, poverty and corruption, and you would like to force the world into the same abyss? “For a while he looked at me perturbed. “We all make mistakes. But Islam with all its faults is a thousand times more preferable to the abomination that is the West,” he finally said quietly.

Then he gave me a fierce look and said: “If you had said in any Arab country about Islam, what you have just said to me, you would be a dead man!” “I am sure I would. And if you had said in any Arab country denouncing their corrupt regimes the way you are denouncing Israel, you would be a dead man too. Yet, here you are, studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, allowing yourself openly to speak of subversion and treason against the State of Israel, without any fear of being arrested, let alone being killed for it. Doesn’t it say something to you?”

“Yes, it says that you are weak, and that weakness will be your undoing,” he said seriously.

“Isn’t there a way our two nations could ever come to terms and make peace?”

Again, he gave me that serious look. “Yes, there is a way. We are not like the Nazis who gave you no other choice but death. We give you the chance to convert to Islam, then you will become a part of us and our people will live in peace.”

For a while we stood in silence looking at the sea.

“You will never defeat us because we have a secret weapon, the same weapon that saved us from you in 1948.” I said.

“Yes, and what is that, your atom bomb?” His tone was derisive.

“No. In Hebrew it is known as ‘Ein Breira.’

“Ein breira? That is your secret weapon? It means ‘there is no other choice. Why, we too can say the same thing.’”

“But that is not quite true. We have ‘no other choice’ because you challenge our very existence in this country, whereas we don’t do that. We are quite willing to coexist with you as a Palestinian state and an Israeli state, side by side. You don’t.

There was nothing more to be said. The sun was dipping towards the horizon in the West, and the sea lost its deep blue color. The magic was gone. It was time to go home.

“Good bye. I have to go inside the mosque. I promised them a lecture.” He said walking away. I could imagine what the lecture was all about. We didn’t offer to shake hands. After all, you don’t shake hands with your sworn enemy. I walked home depressed. If there was a way out of this conflict, I didn’t see one.

By Solly Ganor  
Herzliya, Israel  
Friday, December 6, 2002

## **Conversation in Europe Or why the Europeans consider Israel dangerous.**

About a week ago I was invited by my German publisher, the Fischer Verlag, to give a lecture on the Holocaust in Frankfurt. Some years ago, they published my book "Light One Candle" in German, and since then it became part of the curriculum in German high schools. My lecture was quite successful judging by the standing ovation of the fairly large audience. The same evening, at dinner, my hosts told me that my lecture was important not only to tell this new generation about the Holocaust, but also to expose the lies and disinformation the European press writes about Israel. I didn't sleep well that night. I never sleep well when I am in Germany.

As my flight back to Israel was scheduled for eight in the evening the next day, I had a whole day to kill and my hosts suggested to show me around town.

After a short walk and some lunch we said good bye to each other and I returned to the hotel. It was still very early and I decided to have my coffee in the lobby.

Next to where I sat down, I saw two man, in their early thirties, drinking beer. One of them looked slightly familiar.

"Hello," he said "You are Solly Ganor, from Israel. I was very impressed with your lecture last night."

"Thank you," I said.

"My friend here is Kurt, and my name is Manfred. We are both peddling computer software," he said with a grin. By the expensive suits they were wearing and the aura of money around them, I guessed they were not doing too badly.

"Actually, it was my girl friend who persuaded me to come to your lecture. I am glad that I did as I learned many things about the Holocaust I had no idea about. I know my grandfather's generation was stupid to follow Hitler, but the brutality and the cruelty of the Germans you described in your lecture was a bit of a surprise, but then your army doesn't seem to be much different, does it?"

"How is that ?" I asked calmly, trying to control my fury.

"What we read in the news, and see on the television, your army is suppressing the civilian Palestinian population with great brutality. You may

sometimes disbelieve the press, but you can't dismiss the video shots we see on television. We constantly see your tanks aiming their cannons at kids throwing stones at them. It is not a pleasant sight and reminds us of the Nazi times.

"To start with, who do you think are the camera men who take this video shots?" I asked.

"Why? They are German cameramen, on German television, British on BBC and Americans on CNN, we see them all here on cable."

"That is where you are wrong. More than 90% of the cameramen are Palestinians hired by the TV stations you have mentioned. The Germans, British and Americans are not too keen to go to these places. They are too dangerous. Besides, if you dare to broadcast something against their liking, your life is in danger, and sometimes, even that of your families. Did you know that? Of course, you don't. Israel is a democratic country and the correspondents have nothing to fear no matter how much they slander Israel. They do not dare to do the same with the Palestinians.

And then, imagine what would have happened to me and my family, if during World War Two I would have dared to throw a stone against one of your Nazi tanks? They wouldn't even waste a bullet on me, they would have hanged me and my family without any mercy. And what is happening to the kids throwing the stones at the tanks? Nothing! If you watch the video shots you will see that the tanks are not shooting at them at all. The whole scene is obviously staged by the camera men for propaganda purposes."

After a short silence, at which the two men looked at each other, Manfred said:

"Yes, already yesterday I noticed that you have persuasive powers. You have me at a disadvantage here. I am not too well informed about what is going on. Perhaps we should, considering how the region is becoming the most dangerous place to world peace."

"You mean Israel, don't you?"

"Well, yes. Many of us think so. Well...let me explain. I don't think that anyone really thinks that Israel constitutes a danger to Europe. What we do believe is that if a major war breaks out again between Israel and the Arab States, and Israel's existence is threatened, you may set the world on fire with your nuclear arsenal."

I was getting a really annoyed with them and answered rather sharply:

“If you mean that this time, we won’t go peacefully to the gas chambers like good little Jews, you are absolutely right. We won’t, even if we have to use all means at our disposal. If Europe is effected by that, too bad. Your continent is soaked with Jewish blood anyway. Perhaps it could do with some cleansing,” I said sharply.

There was a short silence. The Germans looked embarrassed.

“Actually, what Manfred means, is why don’t you settle the matter with the Palestinians once and for all? And if you can’t, why don’t you just quit. You live in a sea of Arabs who aim at your destruction. Perhaps the fifty year experiment of the State of Israel, is unfortunately, coming to an end. Perhaps we should all consider that it didn’t work .Why don’t you cut your losses and emigrate to places where you would be appreciated and where you can bring much good, as you always did in the past.

Look at our Europe. For hundreds of generations we were engaged in endless bloody ruinous wars against each other. When today we look back at the endless carnage of hundreds of years we can only curse the absolute stupidity of our previous generations. Why couldn’t they get their act together before hundreds of millions of people died in wars? Hitler only came to power because of the devastation of the German people following World War One. If it weren’t for that war, Hitler would have been simply laughed at. The obvious reasonable thing for you to do, is what we finally did here in Europe. Anything else is madness and ruin.” It was the second German, Kurt, who held that impassioned speech. He even got up while addressing me.

“To start with, our bringing so much good to this world, as you have stated, wasn’t exactly appreciated by your grand parents, since they tried to gas us out of existence. You won’t mind if we are a little suspicious about living in Europe again.

Second, you still seem to see us as the wandering Jew, living on his suitcase and any time there is a danger we just get up and run. What you don’t seem to understand is the deep roots we have in our country. These roots go back thousands of years, when your forefathers were just barbaric tribes. For thousands of years we have prayed: “The next year in Jerusalem,” and now that we are there we shall never leave!

It was there that we laid the foundation of civilized living for the world. It was there that we brought to the world the Jewel of civilization, the Ten Commandments, and it was there we brought you our bible that became the basis for Western civilization. According to the Malaysian prime minister

Mahatir Mohamad, we Jews invented Human Rights and Democracy, two things the Muslim fanatics hate the most.

So, you are addressing the wrong people. It is the Islamic fanatics that you should address. You are either blind, or anti-Semites when you accuse us of being the biggest danger to peace, while Islamic suicide bombers blow themselves up in Istanbul, New York, Bali, Moscow, Philippines and dozens of other places around the world; where a prime minister of Malaysia denounces the Jews for creating democracy and human rights and where an Iranian head of state puts out a contract to murder a writer with whom he disagrees on what he wrote about the Quoran.

They don't give a hoot about your achievements in Europe. They think that your Western Civilization is an abomination on Earth, decadent and rotten to the core and should be replaced by the purity of Islam. They are convinced that now that they have discovered a cheap strategic weapon, the suicide bomber, they can bring the West's economy to its knees. September eleven, besides thousands of victims who died in New York and Washington, their attack cost the American economy eleven billion dollars, by conservative estimates. How much will cost the next mega blow up in the West, is anybody's guess. Their aim to bring the economic ruin to the West is not so far-fetched, and the Americans realize that, but you in Europe are playing a second act of Chamberlain. Instead of seeing the real danger to the world "Islamic Fundamentalism," you are blaming Israel and the Jews instead!"

"What would you have us do? These people are hiding all over the world. It would be like fighting shadows." Manfred said. He seemed taken aback by my tirade.

"Do you know what "El Quaida" means in Arabic? It means the "Base." They named it after base they had in Afghanistan. Now their bases are the Islamic Fundamentalist states, that give them their full support in fighting the West. Sooner or later we will have to go to war with them, whether we like it or not.

In the middle ages the pirates on the high seas threatened to undermine the economies of the world. It took a combined world effort to stomp out that threat. Today the Islamic fundamentalists are the pirates of the twenty first century, except they are much more dangerous to our world than the pirates of the old days."

"I think you are exaggerating their danger. The fact is that when we leave them alone, they leave us alone. You don't see any one of them blowing themselves up in Europe, do you?"

“That is your problem here in Europe. You are living the good life and think that they won’t come after you. Let me tell you, that to them you are part of the Western world, the same crusaders, the abomination on Earth.

You know, you remind of what reverend Martin Niemoller who was a prisoner with us in Dachau once said:

“They first came for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Catholic. Then they came for me—and by that time there was nobody left to speak up.”

I could see by their startled look that I scored a point.

“As I said before, you have persuasive powers. Perhaps we should think about what you said, especially about Israel. There is one thing we don’t understand, though; The “Berlin Wall” came down in 1989 and now you are building a new “Berlin Wall” in Israel.

“There is a vast difference between your “Berlin Wall” and the wall we are building.”

“Yes, what is that?”

“The difference is that the “Berlin Wall” was designed to keep people who wanted to escape from the brutal system of East Germany in, while our wall is designed to keep murderers who blow up our children out. That is the difference.”

For a while we looked at each other in silence.

“Well, you always seem to have the right answers. Perhaps Israel is not as bad as we are informed by the media.”

“Yes, perhaps,” I answered quietly.

“Perhaps there are not enough of us to plead our case in an hostile Europe. Perhaps our Foreign Office should do a better job informing the Europeans. Perhaps there are not enough of them and not enough funds,” I thought wearily

Two Japanese young men dressed in dark formal suits entered the lobby and approached the two Germans. They bowed deeply and then shook hands with

them. The two Germans raised their beer glasses in a salute and smiled at me. Then they settled down to talk business with the two Japanese.

For a while I was depressed by my conversation with the two Germans, but then I remembered that I will soon be back home in Israel. It was a pleasant heart warming thought. Thank God for Israel. On the way to the airport I saw the huge modern buildings of Frankfurt towering in the business area, and thought about the two Germans in the lobby. It occurred to me that the only way they will wake up to the danger of Islam, is when some of these towers will be pulverized like the twin towers in Manhattan were on September eleven.

Herzelia Pituach,

November 26, 2003

## Quotes

### **The Diary of Solly Ganor (*Light One Candle*)**

*In 1933, when I was five years old, Hitler came to power in Germany and my parents decided to leave the predominantly ethnic German population of Heydekrug where I was born. We moved to Kovno, where a third of the population, some 30,000 people, were Jews. The Jewish community was diverse, and Jewish cultural activities were highly developed. There were schools conducted in Hebrew and Yiddish, Jewish newspapers and theaters.*

*The move to Kovno caused a great upheaval in my life.*

*My mother's family was huge. My grandparents, two great uncles and their wives, five sets of aunts and uncles, and more cousins than I could count. All lived in Kovno. My father called them the Strom clan, and that was the maiden name of my mother.*

*I remember my childhood with great fondness. I was surrounded by a loving family who pampered me with their affection.*

### **Hanukah 1939**

*In Hanukah 1939, I met someone that had a profound influence on my life to this day. His name was Chiune Sugihara, the Consul of Japan in Kovno.*

*I met him quite accidentally, at my Aunt Anushka's gourmet shop and he gave me some Hanukah money. He smiled when he gave me the money and told me that he would be my Japanese uncle. There was humor and kindness in those strange eyes, and I immediately warmed to him. "You should come to our Hanukah party on Saturday," I blurted out. "The whole family will be there. Seeing as how you are my uncle," I added.*

*That was the beginning of a strange friendship between an eleven-year-old boy and his Excellency, the Consul of Japan. It was eight months later, in July 1940, that we found out what a great humanitarian I befriended, when he began issuing visas to Jewish refugees from Poland against his government's orders. I remember Jewish crowds besieging the consulate, where Chiune Sugihara sat and wrote visas from early morning till late at night, with barely a break for food. In August 1940, he left by train for Berlin, his new post. A crowd of Jewish refugees came to the station and with tears in their eyes, bid him farewell. "We will never forget you, Chiune Sugihara," they shouted, and I shouted these words with them.*

## **Sugihara**

*“Soon after I began writing my diary in 1939, Kovno became a sort of way station filled with people desperately seeking asylum from the Nazis. They sought help from any country they thought might receive them. Most of them were denied and were turned away by one government after another. The one official who offered the Jews any hope was the representative of a government, which shortly became Germany’s strongest ally. That man was the Consul of Japan, Chiune Sugihara, who risked his career, his honor, perhaps even his life, to save more than six thousand Jews.”*

*“In my memory of those years Sugihara stands out as a single light in a sea of darkness. My family, for various reasons, was not among the fortunate thousands he helped directly, but he remained an inspiration to me throughout the terrible years to come-years spent in the Slabodke ghetto and in the camps of Dachau.”*

## **Massacre at Kazy’s Farm.**

*“When they were down to their underwear, the German told them to line up in front of the pit, but the Lithuanians wanted them to strip, especially the women.”*

*“Let the men have their fun. They’ve earned it,’ the Lithuanian officer said.*

*“No!” the German snapped. It’s psychologically undesirable for the men to see them naked, especially the children. Many good men simply lose their nerve. Better to leave these Untermenschen in their ridiculous underwear. You understand me?’*

*“The Lithuanian looked doubtful, but didn’t argue the point.*

*“I will never forget the German’s little lecture. He had enunciated clearly, and in my hiding place, I heard every word. It gave me my first insight into the Nazi killing machine.”*

*The massacre of these people at such close range, where we could see, hear, and smell every minute of it, went through me like a branding iron. I was a normal thirteen-year-old boy brought up in a sheltered environment, and suddenly I was plunged into a world where anyone who felt like it could hunt me down and kill me.*

## **Oral History of Clarence Matsumura, 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion**

*Almost all of them were wearing black and white striped uniforms. I don't know how any of them could stand on their feet. They were nothing but skin and bones. We kept finding them along the roads. We went into the village and got the Germans out of their houses and brought these prisoners in. We put them in their beds, on their sofas, wherever we could make them comfortable.*

*"The first thing we got them was water. But the thing was, a lot of them couldn't swallow. They were starving, but only the strong ones could eat or drink.*

*"I remember holding these people up and trying to feed them broth. We were doing that day and night for several days. We didn't know what else to do. They were so emaciated you couldn't tell whether they were men or women.*

## **Our Lithuanian Neighbors**

*On the night of June 22, 1941, we were informed that the Russians were going to deport us to Siberia.*

*But Hitler had other plans for us. The same day the Nazis stormed the Soviet Union and we were saved from the gulags only to fall into Hitler's concentration camps.*

*Even before the Germans occupied Lithuania, the Lithuanians began slaughtering the Jewish population. In the smaller towns and shtetlach [villages], the total Jewish population was taken to the woods, forced to dig their own graves, and shot. Some were brought into the synagogues and burnt alive.*

*The brutality of our Lithuania neighbors was a terrible shock to us. On the way, I witnessed two massacres of Jews. The source of their murder remains burnt into my mind, as if someone branded it with a branding iron.*

## **Burning of the Hospital in the Kovno Ghetto**

*"We are behind schedule," said the German officer, looking at his watch. 'Lock the place up and burn it. We can't afford the spread of infectious diseases.'*

*“For a moment we didn’t grasp the significance of the order. But we were shocked into reality when the Lithuanians and Germans began pouring gasoline around the base.*

*“Several torches were lit and thrown before our horrified eyes, the gasoline exploding with loud thumps. Blue flames began to shoot up along the building’s dry timbers.*

*“At first all we heard was the roar of the flames as they ate their way through the wood. Then we began to hear the terrible shrieks and almost inhuman cries of those inside. That blood-curdling sound will remain branded in my soul forever.*

*“Several of the doctors and nurses tried to break out through the windows, but were cut down by a hail of fire from the machine guns. They were the lucky ones.*

### **The Kovno Ghetto Orchestra**

*“June 1942 brought better news. Father returned from work one day with a remarkable announcement: he had just been made the supply officer for the newly created ghetto orchestra. We all thought he was joking. An orchestra in the ghetto? But it turned out to be true.*

*“I remember the first rehearsal I heard. The orchestra was housed in the former Slabodker Yeshiva. I hadn’t heard music in a long time. After Chaim’s old gramophone was destroyed during the ‘Big Action,’ I thought I would never hear music again. “The orchestra was playing Tchaikovsky. It was the 1812 Overture, and as the music swelled up from the pit I couldn’t hold back my tears.”*

### **They Too Were Germans**

*“March 27, 1944. I woke that morning well after sunrise, having stayed up late reading Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks. I couldn’t tear myself away from it, and stopped only when my candle sputtered out.*

*“As I lay in bed thinking about the gentle people who inhabited the book, it dawned on me that they too were Germans, perhaps of an earlier time, but Germans nevertheless.”*

## **March 27, 1944: The Children's Action**

*“Mothers who wouldn't let go of their children were attacked by snarling Dobermans until they fell. Some were shot; others were thrown into the truck with their babies. The old and sick who couldn't move fast enough ended up crawling under a hail of kicks and blows, and were attacked by the dogs when they collapsed. The din was horrible-barking, curses, shrieks. I thought I would lose my mind. The dark opening at the back of the truck was like the maw of some prehistoric monster swallowing human sacrifices.*

### **Children's Action – Part 2**

*Of all the atrocities I witnessed during the years of the Holocaust, none affected me as the Children's Action.*

*That day, Germans decided to “eliminate,” as they called it, all Jewish children and the elderly people. The scenes I witnessed that day overshadowed all other atrocities I had witnessed. It was the epitome of sheer brutality and meanness to babies, little children, and the elderly.*

*Mothers who wouldn't part with their babies were brutally beaten to death. The old and the sick who couldn't move fast enough ended up crawling under a hail of kicks and blows and were attacked by the dogs when they collapsed. They were thrown into the waiting trucks and brought to the 9th Fort where they were shot.*

## **Israel**

*In these days of sadness, when we are faced with ongoing terror, death and destruction, and a staggering economical downturn, we must remember what Israel is all about. For me as a Holocaust survivor, Israel is not only my country that I love, have fought for, and helped to establish from the very beginning, but the country where six million Jews could have found sanctuary against the Nazi persecutions. I bitterly resent the British white paper of 1938, that prevented hundreds of thousands of my fellow Jews from escaping the gas chambers of Auschwitz, and I bitterly regret that Israel didn't come into being ten years earlier, when Hitler was still willing to let all the Jews go. These bitter thoughts are always with me and probably will be till the day I die.*

*We dwelt in the shadow of the beast where nothing human could exist, at the bottom of the abyss of evil. Yet, I saw the death throes of the fiend, as his thousand-year empire crumbled to dust. I survived him and his legions of darkness. Yet to my regret, I live to see the reincarnation of the same beast, in his grand children who are hate filled with lust for our blood once more. But this time, the world will be ready for them.*

### **My Diary**

*During the war, in Kovno Ghetto, I kept a diary. I promised my friends and family that if I should somehow survive the Holocaust I would tell the world what happened to us. For fifty years, I shied away from the subject until one day I was reunited with the soldier who liberated me and saved my life at the end of the World War II. He was a Japanese American soldier by the name of Clarence Matsumura of the 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. Our emotional reunion resulted in the publication of my diary. I called it: 'Light One Candle.'*

## **Solly Ganor Holocaust Chronology**

*September 25, 1892*

Chaim Genkind, father of Solly Ganor, born in Minsk, Russia.

*July 15, 1894*

Rifka Rebecca Strom, mother of Solly Ganor, born in Kovno, Lithuania.

*1905*

Chaim Genkind joins Russian Socialist Democratic Party (Menshevik party).

First Russian revolution fails to overturn government.

Russian-Japanese war.

*1908*

Chaim Genkind becomes full member of the Menshevik party.

Genkind is used as a courier for top party officials. Allied with Menshevik leader Zhdanob.

*1910*

Chaim Genkind leaves Russia after dispute with Communist leadership. He has established a relationship with Communist founder Leon Trotsky.

*August 1, 1914*

World War I breaks out.

*1914*

Chaim Genkind moves to Kovno, Lithuania, marries Rebecca Strom.

*1915*

Genkind family, along with all the Jews, are deported from Kovno.

*January 1, 1916*

Solly's sister Fanya "Fanny" Genkind born.

*1917*

Chaim Genkind sent by underground to Minsk where he participates in the October Russian revolution. Participates in the storming of the czar's Petersburg palace.

*1918*

Chaim Genkind appointed as official in Alexander Kerensky's government.

Kerensky's provisional government in Russia quickly collapses.

Chaim Genkind condemned to death by Communist leadership. Returns to Kovno.

*1919*

Lithuania becomes an independent republic.

*August 1919*

Lithuanian government grants minority rights to the Jewish community in an unparalleled era of Jewish freedom and self-expression.

*January 20, 1920*

Lithuania passes laws further empowering the Jewish community.

*April 15, 1920*

Solly's brother Hermann Zwi Genkind born in Kovno.

*1927*

Chaim Genkind opens soap factory in Heydekrug, East Prussia, with partner.

*May 18, 1928*

Solly Ganor is born in Heydekrug, Lithuania, the youngest of three children.

*January 30, 1933*

Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.

*1933*

Hitler sends agents to Heydekrug.

The Genkind family moves to Kovno. Young Solly meets extended family for the first time.

*March 22, 1933*

Dachau concentration camp opens.

*April 1, 1933*

German boycott of Jewish shops and businesses.

*August 2, 1934*

Hitler proclaims himself *Führer und Reichskanzler* (Leader and Reich Chancellor). Armed forces must now swear allegiance to him.

*1934-1936*

Solly enters Yiddish school, attends grades 1-4.

*1936-1937*

Solly enters a secular high school in Kovno.

*September 15, 1935*

“Nuremberg Laws”: anti-Jewish racial laws enacted; Jews no longer considered German citizens.

*March 7, 1936*

Germans march into the Rhineland, previously demilitarized by the Versailles Treaty.

*July, 1936*

Sachsenhausen concentration camp opens.

*October 25, 1936*

Hitler and Mussolini form Rome-Berlin Axis.

*July 15, 1937*

Buchenwald concentration camp opens.

*March 13, 1938*

*Anschluss* (incorporation of Austria): all antisemitic decrees immediately applied in Austria.

*1938-1940*

Solly attends Jewish school called Yavneh High School.

Ganor family hears stories of the persecution of Jews in Germany, Austria and later Poland.

*July 6-15, 1938*

Representatives from 32 countries meet at Evian, France, to discuss refugee policies; most of the countries refuse to help or let in more Jewish refugees.

*August 1, 1938*

Adolf Eichmann establishes the Office of Jewish Emigration in Vienna to increase the pace of forced emigration.

*October 5, 1938*

Following request by Swiss authorities, Germans mark all Jewish passports with a large letter "J" to restrict Jews from immigrating to Switzerland.

*November 9-10, 1938*

*Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass): anti-Jewish pogrom in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland; 200 synagogues destroyed; 7,500 Jewish shops looted; 30,000 German, Austrian and Sudeten Jews sent to concentration camps (Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen).

*1939*

Approximately 40,000 Jews live in Kovno, nearly one quarter of the city's population.

*March 15, 1939*

German troops invade Czechoslovakia.

*July 1939*

Sugihara is sent to Kovno (Kovno), Lithuania, as a one-man consulate. His primary mission is to gather intelligence for the Japanese government. He is to report on Soviet and German troop movements in Eastern Europe.

*September 1, 1939*

Beginning of World War II: Germany invades Poland. Thousands of Jews are killed during the invasion and subsequent pogroms. Thousands of Jews flee to Lithuania for refuge.

*October 12, 1939*

Germany begins deportation of Austrian and Czech Jews to Poland.

*November 1939*

The Ganor family takes in the Rosenblatts, a Jewish refugee from Poland and his daughter. Rosenblatt tells Ganor family how his wife and two daughters were killed by the Nazis.

*December 1939*

Solly meets Japanese Consul Chiune Sugihara in his aunt's gourmet delicatessen. Sugihara gives him a Lithuanian Lit for Hanukah. Solly impetuously invites Sugihara's to the first night of Hanukah 1939. They attend the party and Mrs. Sugihara remembers this to this day.

*April 9, 1940*

Germans invades and defeats Denmark and Norway.

*May 10, 1940*

Germany invades the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.

*May 20, 1940*

Concentration camp established at Auschwitz.

*June 10, 1940*

German army invades France.

*June 15, 1940*

Soviet Army occupies independent Lithuania.

During the Soviet rule, from 1940 to the German invasion of 1941, Hebrew educational institutions were closed and most of the Jewish social and cultural organizations were liquidated. Of the 5 Yiddish newspapers, only one remained.

*June 22, 1940*

France surrenders; the French sign an armistice with Germany; in Article 19 of this document, the French agree to “surrender on demand all Germans named by the German government in France.”

*July 2, 1940*

Thousands of Jewish refugees from Poland request Japanese visas from Sugihara.

*July 24, 1940*

Sugihara asks for permission from Japanese government to issue visas to Jewish refugees. Government states he can issue visas only to Jews who meet immigration requirements. Virtually none of the Jews meets these regulatory requirements. Sugihara decides on his own initiative to issue transit visas, in direct violation of orders.

*July 27, 1940*

Sugihara and Zwartendijk issue first transit visa to Polish Jews.

*August 2, 1940*

Sugihara told by Ministry of Japanese Foreign Affairs to close down Kovno office and leave Lithuania. Russia intends to take over Lithuania August 3.

*September 1, 1940*

Sugihara family leaves Kovno for Berlin. Sugihara issues visas as train leaves station. Officially, Sugihara registers 2,139 visas. Many of these visas

are for families. Some visas are not registered. It is estimated that Sugihara has issued more than 6,000 visas to refugees. The Genkind family has received a visa but cannot use it because they are now Soviet citizens.

*September 27, 1940*

Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis alliance is signed.

*June 14, 1941*

A week before the German invasion, hundreds of Jewish families were rounded up and exiled to Siberia. Many of them were factory owners, merchants, public leaders and Zionist activists.

*June 22, 1941*

German army invades Soviet Union; Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) begin murder of Jews, civilian and Communist leaders.

*June 25, 1941*

Nazis invade Lithuania. Hundreds of Jews are killed, at first by Lithuanians and then by SS *Einsatzgruppen*. The first Jews to be killed as part of the "Final Solution" are killed in Lithuania. By war's end, more than 97 percent of Lithuanian Jews will be murdered. Several thousand Jews try to escape to the Soviet Union and many are killed during their flight.

*July 4-6, 1941*

2,977 Jews are murdered at the Seventh Fort, just outside of Kovno.

*July 7, 1941*

The Germans announce the formation of the Kovno ghetto in an old Jewish neighborhood with single-story houses without running water or sanitation.

*July 1941*

More than 30,000 Jews are to be crammed into the Slobodka section of Kovno. All Jews are ordered to wear the yellow Star of David. Strict curfew is established.

In the following two and a half months, 3,000 Jews—men, women and children—are killed.

*July 24, 1941*

Kovno ghetto is surrounded by barbed wire fences.

*July 31, 1941*

Heydrich appointed by Göring to implement the "Final Solution."

*October-November 1941*

German and Austrian Jews are deported to ghettos in Eastern Europe.

*October 29, 1941*

More than 9,200 Jewish men, women and children, comprising more than 30% of the Kovno ghetto, are murdered at the Ninth Fort. Among them is Solly's brother, Zwi Genkind. This mass murder was later called the "Great Action."

*November 25, 1941*

A secret archive is begun in the Kovno ghetto, to document ghetto life and activities. Writers and artists are encouraged to write down their observations as witnesses to the German atrocities.

*December 1, 1941*

SS-Colonel Karl Jäger reports that "our objective to solve the Jewish problem for Lithuania has been achieved." He claims a total of 136,442 Lithuanian Jews are killed by *Einsatzgruppen* murder squads and Lithuanian auxiliary troops. His report states that there are 15,000 Jews in the Kovno ghetto.

*December 7, 1941*

Japanese attack Pearl Harbor.

*December 8, 1941*

Gassing of Jews begins at Chelmno extermination camp in Poland.

*January 1942*

Kovno ghetto workshops, employing prisoners and forced labor, begin operations. This includes mending uniforms and manufacturing gloves for the German military.

*January 20, 1942*

Wannsee Conference in Berlin: Heydrich outlines plan to murder Europe's Jews.

*February 27, 1942*

Germans order turning in of all books in the Kovno ghetto. Solly hides many books in his attic at the risk of being shot.

*May 1, 1942*

Germans again reduce the area of the Kovno ghetto. Crowding worsens.

*August 26, 1942*

Nazis prohibit all religious observation and operation of schools in the Kovno ghetto. Jewish prisoners secretly continue religious activities and operate, and even expand, school curricula.

*Summer 1942*

Deportation of European Jews to killing centers from Belgium, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, and Poland.

*Winter 1942*

Deportation of Jews from Germany, Greece and Norway to killing centers; Jewish partisan movement organized in forests near Lublin.

*April 19-May 16, 1943*

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; Jews in the Warsaw ghetto resist German deportations to murder camps.

*June 1943*

Himmler orders the liquidation of all ghettos in Poland and the Soviet Union.

*June-July 1943*

Two Jewish fighting organizations, under the leadership of Chaim Yelin, are formed in the Kovno ghetto. At their height, these organizations have 600 members.

*September 15, 1943*

SS troops formally take over control of the Kovno ghetto, which begins transformation of the ghetto into a concentration camp. This begins an era of increased terror and murder in the ghetto.

*November 1, 1943*

SS Captain Wilhelm Goecke officially designates the Kovno ghetto as a concentration camp.

*March 1944*

Approximately 17,400 Jews reside in the Kovno ghetto. Most of the adults are put on forced labor in military installations outside the ghetto.

*March 19, 1944*

Germany occupies Hungary.

*March 27-28, 1944*

"Children's action." Gestapo and Ukrainian auxiliary troops round up 1,300 Jewish children, most of whom are under 12. They are taken from their homes to the Ninth Fort and murdered. Solly survives this action in hiding.

*April 4, 1944*

Germans close down all Jewish ghetto institutions in Kovno, including the Elder Council, whose members are taken to the Ninth Fort and later released.

*May 15-July 9, 1944*

More than 438,000 Hungarian Jews are deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where most of them are gassed. It takes 148 trains to carry them there.

*June 6, 1944*

D-Day: Allied invasion at Normandy.

*July 8, 1944*

The Nazis begin the six-day liquidation of the Kovno ghetto concentration camp. They remove the former ghetto's remaining population to Stutthof, Landsberg and Kaufering concentration camps in Germany. About 4,000 Kovno Jews are taken as slave laborers to Germany. The ghetto camp is burned to the ground. In the process, more than 2,000 Jews die. Only 90 Jews are able to survive the ghetto's burning.

*August 1, 1944*

Soviet Army liberates Kovno. A few Jews who survived in hiding are liberated.

*April 1945*

US and British troops liberate the concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, Nordhausen, Bergen-Belsen and other camps.

*April 30, 1945*

Hitler commits suicide.

*May 2, 1945*

Solly Ganor and several hundred survivors of the Dachau death march are liberated by the all-Japanese American 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. Solly meets Private Clarence Matsumura, who lifts him out of the snow and feeds him for the next several days.

*May 8, 1945*

V-E Day: Germany surrenders; end of Third Reich.

*August 15, 1945*

V-J Day: Victory over Japan proclaimed.

*September 2, 1945*

Japan surrenders; end of World War II.

*1945-1948*

Thousands of survivors of Hitler's concentration camps emigrate to the United States, Canada and Israel.

*May 14, 1948*

The state of Israel is established by UN vote.

*1948*

United States recognizes the state of Israel.

British withdraw from the Middle East. General war breaks out between Jews and Arabs.

Solly Ganor participates in Israel's War for Independence. The Jews defend their homeland and Israel becomes an independent state for the first time since 70 CE.

Solly changes his name from Zalke Genkind to Solly Ganor, which means "garden of light."

*1955-?*

Solly serves in Israeli Merchant Marine.

*1959*

4,792 Jews are living in Kovno, approximately two percent of the city's population.

*May 2, 1992*

Solly Ganor meets Clarence Matsumura and other Japanese American soldiers of the 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery who liberated him from the infamous Dachau death march. This is 47 years to the day from when he was liberated in Germany.

*1993*

Solly Ganor agrees to revisit his Holocaust history and begins writing his autobiography, which recreates his wartime child's diary.

*April 1993*

Solly Ganor is again reunited in San Francisco with the veterans of the 522<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery.

*April 1994*

Solly Ganor and Clarence Matsumura return to Germany to revisit the scene where they met during the liberation of the death march on May 2, 1945.

*September 1994*

Solly Ganor is reunited with Yukiko Sugihara, widow of Chiune Sugihara in Nagoya, Japan.

*1995*

*Visas for Life*, by Yukiko Sugihara, is published in San Francisco, California. The book mentions the Hanukah party with Solly and his family in 1939.

*In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust*, by Hillel Levine, is published. Solly Ganor is extensively quoted in the book.

Clarence Matsumura passes away.

*Light One Candle* is published by Kodansha America. It receives outstanding reviews.

*1996*

Solly visits Honolulu, Hawaii, to be reunited again with his wartime Japanese American liberators.

*1998*

*Light One Candle* is translated into Japanese and is adapted into the Japanese school curriculum.

*Light One Candle* is translated into German in an abridged edition entitled *Anders des Lebens*. It also becomes a standard school text on the Holocaust for German students.

*March 2000*

The book *A Special Fate – Chiune Sugihara: Hero of the Holocaust*, by Alison Leslie Gold, is published. Solly Ganor story is featured in this book.

*2000*

Solly Ganor receives special medal from the German air force in honor of his work in educating young people on the Holocaust in Germany.

*September 12, 2001*

*Light One Candle: A Child's Diary of the Holocaust* exhibit premiered in Bloomfield, Michigan, the day after the tragedy in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania.

*September 14, 2001*

Solly Ganor attends the bar mitzvah of Jackson Klein. A story appears on the Internet about the bar mitzvah ceremony. This article eventually appears in the book *Chicken Soup for the American Soul After September 11*.

*June 15, 2003*

*Light One Candle* exhibit opens at YIVO in New York City. The book *Light One Candle* is issued in paperback by Kodansha.

## Dedication

*For my mother Rebecca and brother Herman,  
and all those who perished during the war.*

*For my father Chaim and sister Fanny,  
and all those who helped me survive the Holocaust years.*

*For Chiune Sugihara, Clarence Matsumura,  
and the men of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion,  
my guides and my rescuers.*

*For my wife Pola and children, Leora and Danny.*