

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLNIKS OF PLUNGE (PLONGYAN) AND THE HOLOCAUST¹



*Meir, Michel, Pesia, Berl,
Hirshel, Plunge, 1925*



*Berl, Meir, Masha, Kira, Vladas, Mikas, Hirsh.
Vilnius, 1961*

Thirty six years separate these two photographs, a period that includes an invasion of Lithuania by the Russians, then by the Nazis, and then again by the Russians. All of those on the left married and formed a family. Two, Michel and Pesia, were consumed by the Holocaust, Michel in France, Pesia with her family in Latvia, as was most of Hirshel's family, in the Vilna ghetto. After much wandering and suffering, the survivors were reunited as we see in the picture on the right².

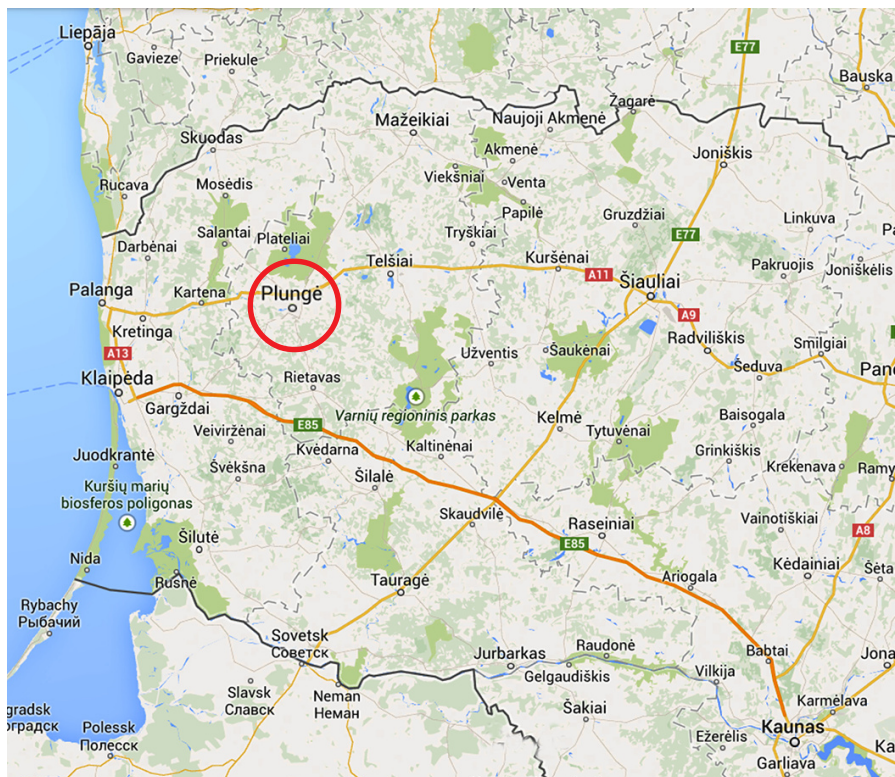
It is this story that the present chapter will tell.

¹ This chapter is based on six sources: (1) the wonderful disc that Shloma Rolnik (born in Plunge) and his children have made of the Rolnik and Rabinowitz families (see <http://rolnicks-of-lithuania.com/>), (2) the book "Zichron Meier – Memories of Meier (privately published, Jerusalem, 1974?), (3) data from the JewishGen website on Plunge (<http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsys~allcountry2>), (4) the Yad Vashem website - The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names (http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/lut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_FL?last_name=Rolnik&first_name=&location=Lithuania&next_form=results), (5) the book "I Must Tell" by Masha Rolnik (see later section), and (6) the Pinkas Hakehilot, Lithuania, by Dov Levin.

² In the book "Zichron Meier" (loc.cit), Dov Levin dates this visit as having taken place in 1963.

The town of Plunge³

Plunge (or Plongyan in Yiddish) is some 16 Km east of Telsiai (which was the original home of the Plongyan Rolniks) and is one of the larger shtetls that we have so far discussed.



Its first synagogue was erected in 1796, with Jewish houses being situated in the center of the town and on the main streets, under the protection of the Bishop. The Jews of Plunge dealt mainly in trade, in crafts and agriculture, maintaining strong commercial ties with Memel (Klaipėda on the map above) and its environs, then part of Germany and only 12 km distant. They sold cattle, horse, geese, and flax to the German market. Jews were always a significant presence in Plunge, accounting for a large percentage of the village population. In the year 1847, the Jewish community of Plunge consisted of 2197 Jews; in 1897 there were 2502 (55% of the total population of the community); in 1921 there were 2200; in the year 1928, 1815 (44% of the total) and in 1939, 2500 Jews (43%).

³ (http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_lita/lit_00484.html)

The origin of the Rolnik family in Plunge

The marriage between Itsik-Abel Rolnik and Chana Levi that founded the Rolnik family in this town of Plunge⁴ was a matchmaker’s dream.

Chana, the daughter of Mendel Levi, a successful business man in Plunge, was already running her own drapery business in the town⁵:

LEVI, Chana	Mendel	Born on 1 April 1871; draper; 80 Rubles	1	Plunge	KRA/I-166/1/1
	23	Postal Savings Bank Records	August	Telsiai	69
			1894	Kaunas	66

Her brother Yankel and sister Tsvie were also shopkeepers in Plunge. Chana’s husband-to-be, Itsik Rolnik was a learned young man, from a family where learning and the Talmud were central to their life. His father, Movsha, was the “Siauliai rabbi assistant for Vieksniai”.

ROLNIK, Movsha	Siauliai rabbi assistant for Vieksniai	Voters	17	Vieksniai	LVIA/1567/1/2610
			January	Siauliai	25
			1889	Kaunas	2

Chana and Itsik, affectionately called by his children Aba (probably from Abel rather than from “abba”, the Hebrew for father) were married in November of 1894:

Plunge Telsiai Kaunas	ROLNIK, Itsyk	Movsha	29	Assistant of Rav	Plunge	2287039 / 3
		Vieksniai		Z. BARIT	1894	
		Mendel		L. SHAFER	Marriage	
25/11/1894 9 Kislev	LEVI, Khane	Plunge	23		30	

⁴ We saw in the previous chapter that Itsyk-Abel had travelled 74 Km to find his bride.

⁵ These records are from JewishGen: <http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?ig-jgsys-allcountry> (The records from Plunge are in very good shape, far better than for the other towns that I have searched.)

And here are the birth records for some of their children:

Searching for Surname Rolnik (D-M code 986500) and Town Plunge (D-M code 786500)
 Number of hits: 4 Run on Sunday 6 March 2011

Name	Father, Grandfather	Date of Birth	Town	Comments	Place Recorded	Microfilm / Item
	Mother, Grandfather	DD/MM/YY	Ujezd		Year	Image
	Mother Maiden Surname	Hebrew Date	Guberniya		Record #	Archive / Fond
ROLNIK, Ber Khaim	Icyk Abel, Movsh	25/7/1901	Plunge	Rolnik could be profession and surname MOVSHOVICH, family is from Vykshniai/ Vykshnenai	Plunge	2287039 / 2
	Khane		Panevezys		1901	
		19 Iyyar	Kaunas		M24	LVIA/1226/1/2033/64
ROLNIK, Ruben	Icyk Abel, Movsh	6/2/1903	Plunge	Rolnik could be profession and surname MOVSHOVICH, family is from Vykshniai/ Vykshnenai	Plunge	2287039 / 2
	Khane		Panevezys		1903	
		22 Shvat	Kaunas		M9	LVIA/1226/1/2033/116
ROLNIK, Khaim Ber	Icyk Abel, Movsha	23/10/1895	Plunge	Family from Vieksniai	Plunge	2287039 / 1
	Khane		Telsiai		1895	
		17 Heshvan	Plunge		M57	LVIA/1226/1/2032
ROLNIK, Girsh	Itsyk Abel, Movsha	10/5/1898	Plunge	Family from Vieksniai	Plunge	2287039 / 1
	Khane		Telsiai		1898	
		1 Sivan	Plunge		M21	LVIA/1226/1/2032

In this list, the first-born child, Khaim Ber third in this list, died in infancy, and his brother Ruben before Barmitzvah, but Ber Khaim (afterwards Berl) and Girsh (Hirsch, Hirsh or Hershel) lived to be photographed in 1961 as we saw earlier. A daughter, Sarah, was born in 1897 but did not live to leave a family. The records for Meier, Michel

and Pesia, additions to the family, in 1900, 1909 and 1913, have not yet (February 2014) been located by JewishGen.

I can't do better than to reproduce what Itsik and Chana's granddaughter Masha (Hirsh Rolnik's daughter) writes⁶:

Izik - Abel 187? - 1941

Chana 1877 - 1941

The family lived in Lithuania, in the small town of Plunge, 22 km to the East of Memel (now the city of Klaipeda). They ran a small textiles shop. I have no data on my grandmother

and grandfather, beside my memories of them, i.e. I remember, how they looked. I know only that the shop was actually created by my grandmother. She was a very vigorous woman, in contrast to my grandfather, a good-natured and very pious person. She even went alone in a cart to another town to bring the goods (that was before traveling salesmen appeared, which was much later). I was full of terror at her stories, in fact, she could have been attacked by gangsters in the woods at any time... just like in the fairy tales I read so much... According to Dad's memories, Thursday was the day when she bathed the children's hair - one after the other. She was very witty. Though her handwriting was awful, her brother's handwriting (unfortunately, I do not know his name and where he lived) was even worse. She postponed reading his letters until Saturday, when the shop was closed, and once she wrote to him: "Come and read the letter". Naturally, she wore "a sheytl", i.e. a wig. One was

for everyday wear, another for Saturdays and holidays. When I was a child, I exasperated her with my questions: if God cannot see her hair, where does she change her wigs - under the table, may be? Grandfather helped in the shop only on market days. He was not skilful in persuading buyers, and Grandmother

was of a very low opinion of him in this respect. I remember that in his waistcoat pocket he always had saccharin. Since Dad was a non-believer, Grandfather only drank a glass of tea at our place (glass is considered "pareve"), although Mother kept milk and meat dishes and utensils separately both in the kitchen and the dining room.

Grandmother died in January 1941. Grandfather lived till the beginning of the Second World War and was shot during the liquidation the ghetto in July 1941.

Masha Rolnikaite



Indeed, Chana was a very successful business woman, in spite of being helped by Itsik-Aba only on market days. Aba spent as much of his time as possible on his Talmud studies, in particular the works of Al-Fasi⁷. Chana was the capable one, known far and wide as a clever

⁶ This and similar pictures are from Shloma Rolnik's wonderful disc, previously mentioned.

⁷ Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi ha-Cohen (1013 - 1103) - also known as the Alfasi ("of Fes" in Arabic) was a Talmudist and posek. He is best known for his work of halakha, the legal code Sefer Ha-halachot. He was born near Fes in Morocco, and spent the majority of his career there.

woman, to whom people would come for advice on many subjects. Her success is confirmed by reports from other Plongyaners.

(See for instance: <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/plunge/plunge.html>)



Itsyk - Abel and Chana Rolnik

The sculptor and wood carver Yakov Bunka, a visit with whom is on everyone's Lita Tour, writes:

"You can't say that Plunge was a puny little town. Between the two wars there lived about two and a half thousand Jews alone here. I say "lived." But you can't call everything living. Those who owned shops in the market square -- Goldvasser, Rolnik, Plungiansky -- probably lived. True, they were far from the Rothschilds, but they had accounts both in the Lithuanian bank in Telsiai, and in the Jewish People's Bank in Plunge. They were the top, the cream of the Plunge Jewish community. To the town's "nobility" we could add three Jewish doctors, two lawyers and two pharmacists." (One of the lawyers was our Hirsch Rolnik...wds). Other affluent Plongyaners that Bunka mentions are Chotse Gamzu, who shipped horses to Holland, and Hirsch Metz, who was mayor for a period.



Members of the Committee of the Plungyan Jewish Community at the outset of WWII⁸

Seated from left: Varshtauer, Israelovitch, Sher, Dovid Goldvasser, Nehama Ril, Hile Riman, Chotse Gamzu, Leibovitch. Standing from left: Gelerenter, Minde, Lifkovitch, Michel Amolski, Chaim Rest, Shlomo-Itzik Rest.

The above material is made available by JewishGen, Inc. and the Yizkor Book Project

⁸ For other fine photographs of pre-war Plunge see <http://www.fisherfamily.za.net/plunge%20photos.htm>

The Jews from Plunge and all the neighboring shtetls in the Western half of Lithuania were expelled by the Russian Army early in 1915 on suspicion of aiding the German enemy, and were only allowed to return with the conquest of the territory by the Germans. Several very difficult years followed, with shortages of food and with forced labor imposed on the men, but the collapse of Germany led to the creation of an independent Lithuania. At first, both the political and the economic condition of the Lithuanian Jews improved greatly. Jews had full citizenship and even autonomy, running their own educational system. In that period, the Jews of Plunge were a majority on the town council⁹ and elected a Jew as mayor, the Boruch-Dovid Goldvasser¹⁰ in the quotation from Yakov Bunka, and pictured above. Goldvasser served as mayor until 1931, when new laws restricted the electoral strength of the Jews, such that by 1936 there were only two on the council. But in this Golden Period between the World Wars, the Rolnik family prospered. With Chana Rolnik's business abilities and the entry into the store also of Berl Rolnik and even Meier for a period, the shop became important enough to be, as we saw, remembered by Bunka forty years later.

Meier Rolnik in Palestine

Zionism was a strong intellectual force in Plunge before and after World War 1. Meier's elder brother Hirsh was an active member of the Lithuanian Zionist Youth movement and was a delegate of the organization to the first post-war Zionist Congress in Karlsbad in 1921. While Hirsh soon moved towards Communism, Meier continued the Zionist path. He had had a traditional education and also studied at a business high school with a view to going into the family enterprise. For a time, he lived and ran a store in Memel, and was an organizer of the Zionist Youth movement there. Later he returned to Plunge, joining his mother and Berl in the store, but in 1925 he left the family home to settle in Palestine. (The picture that heads this chapter was taken on the eve of his setting out for Eretz Yisrael). This was a year of record immigration into Palestine, with 35,000 Jews entering as part of the Fourth Aliyah, most of them coming from Poland, and most settling in the towns and especially in Tel Aviv. Finding work was very difficult, and Meier even tried his hand as a plumber. Looking for other possibilities, Meier went up to Jerusalem. Always a bookish young man, he invested his last savings in a partnership, Rolnik and Jack, which managed a publishing house "Aver" , situated at 382 Jaffa Road, Jerusalem¹¹. The firm published a large range of school books, text books,

⁹ One was Mordecai Pozen whose nephew married into the Rolnik family.

¹⁰ In 1937 the whole Goldvasser family emigrated to South Africa, where the father died in 1956.

and general literature. Everyone growing up in the Palestine and later Israeli educational system knows the books well. After Simcha Jack's death in 1953, Meier returned to the name, "Akhiever" for his firm. There was also a bookshop belonging to the firm, at 56 Jaffa Road, right next to Maayan Stub, the well-patronised drapery and notions shop, at the cross-roads of King George St, Jaffa Road and Strauss Street. This was a favourite haunt of Jerusalem's secular booklovers, and filled to capacity with school children at the start of the school year. In addition, Meier ran a library. Zev Vilnai's book, a guide to Jerusalem (an illustration from which is depicted right), was one of Meier's most popular productions.



From: Jerusalem - The Capital of Israel, the New City, by Zev Vilnai. Akhiever Publishing, Jerusalem

Meier married Hemda Ingler, a school teacher, some six years after he arrived in Palestine. They had three children, a son Yoram, and two daughters, Chana and Sarah.

Meier was an active member of the Haganah, the Jewish defense force, from 1930 to 1935 and during the siege of Jerusalem in the War of Independence he was in the Mishmar Ha'am, the Civil Defense Force¹². In 1937, he had returned for a visit to the parental home in Plunge, to attend the wedding of his sister, Pesia.

He did not return again to Lithuania until the war was over and the Holocaust had wiped out half his family. The picture on the right of the two that started this chapter shows him on that family visit in 1961, one of the most moving experiences in his life, as he later wrote.

The publishing firm that he founded is still in existence, almost forty years after his death¹³. When I visited that part of Jerusalem the other day, a shopkeeper on the opposite side of the Jaffa Road fondly remembered Rolnik's bookshop.

¹¹ They were originally the Jerusalem branch of a Polish publishing firm "Akhiever" that specialized in Hebrew and Yiddish books. Later, they set up an independent concern named simply "Ever/Aver".

¹² Meier is mentioned in the Hebrew "Builders of Israel" compendium:

<http://www.tidhar.tourolib.org/tidhar/view/11/3716?search>

¹³ Listed in the Jerusalem telephone directory, 2011, and see this well-cited book: *Vilnai Encyclopedia of Jerusalem*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Akhiever Publishing, 1993) (Hebrew)

Yoram Ronnen.

His son Yoram, who Hebraized his surname to Ronnen (sometimes Ronen), had an eventful career first as radio announcer and then journalist for the Israel Broadcasting Corporation and later as a founder of Israel's TV journalism. He was the reporter for Israel TV's very first broadcast - on the 20th Independence Day parade in 1968¹⁴, the first parade after the Six Day War. The picture, left, shows the young Yoram, already a broadcaster in 1959. That on the right shows him, later, interviewing David Ben-Gurion:



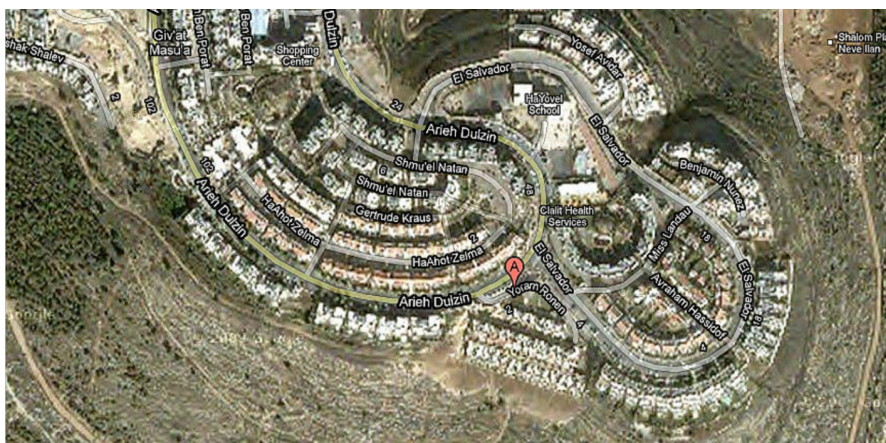
A very famous picture on the next page has him in the further background on the left, following Uzi Narkiss, Moshe Dayan and Yitschak Rabin, as they stride through the newly-captured Old City of Jerusalem in the last days of the June War, 1967.

¹⁴ <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/israel-s-first-screen-test-1.284543>

The focus of Israel's 20th Independence Day celebrations, in 1968, was the Israel Defense Forces' parade celebrating the victory of the Six-Day War, a year earlier. This event was also chosen to serve as the subject of the first broadcast of Israel Television. While tens of thousands of people watched the parade from the streets of Jerusalem, a great many others saw it on their own TV sets or those of friends or relatives. On the following day, May 3, the newspaper, Davar, chose to begin its report with the declaration that "the broadcast of the parade on Israel Television was seen in many parts of the Arab world, including Jordan and Lebanon, and apparently also in Syria and Egypt, because of the special weather conditions prevailing in our region yesterday." Reporter Nahum Barnea went on to write: "In a closed booth above the VIPs dais announcer Yoram Ronen sat, accompanying the parade with ongoing commentary and adjusting his remarks to what was being shown on the screen ... The deputy president of CBS, who is currently in Israel, said that in his opinion, the quality of the broadcast was a source of pride."



Yoram Ronen (left) following Uzi Narkiss, Moshe Dayan and Yitschak Rabin.



And this Rolnik descendant, Yoram Ronen, has had a street named for him: In Jerusalem's Masua quarter.

Indeed, if one Googles "Yoram Ronen" most entries are to people or businesses with that street address.

Two children, Ruth¹⁵ and Gilad were born to Yoram and his wife Rachel.

¹⁵ Globes Business News: 14 December 10: Economic Affairs Court opens tomorrow. History will be made in Israel's judicial system tomorrow, with the launch of the Economic Affairs Court. The new court was inaugurated in the presence of Minister of Justice Yaakov Ne'eman, President of the Supreme Court Judge Dorit Beinisch, and Israel Securities Authority chairman Zohar Goshen. The first judges of the new court are Tel Aviv District Court judges Chaled Kabub, Danya Kareth Meyer, and Ruth Ronnen who will henceforth only hear equity cases. Each judge will serve on the Economic Affairs Court for at least four years.

Berl Rolnik and the exile to Siberia

Back in Plunge, in spite of the increasing hostility of native Lithuanians to Jews and, in particular, Jewish businesses, the Rolnik drapery shop was still maintaining itself successfully until the Soviets entered Lithuania in June 1940¹⁶. A pro-Soviet Peoples Government was installed and land, shops and businesses were nationalized. Masha Rolnik writes: "Grandmother Chana died in January 1941, soon after the new Soviet authorities nationalized her shop – the business of her life. She had the sense to do so before the arrival of the Germans".

On June 14, 1941, Soviet-ordered deportations began¹⁷ and, according to Jakov Bunka, "the following families were exiled to Siberia from Plungyan and surrounding areas: Hirsch Metz – Representative of the Citizens Council, Khoze Gamzu – a horse dealer expert, Bere Rolnik – a business man, Simone Alschwang – a business man, Itzick Tsivye – Leader, Brit Hahayil, Betar, Aron Trob – of Riteve." Of these, we have already encountered Gamzu and Metz as well-to-do folk, a category that clearly included Bere (Berl) Rolnik. Their crime was that they were capitalists. Ironically, Berl's brother Hirsch was in close contact with the Communist party in Vilna at the time, while their brother Michel, a Communist Party member active in the Resistance in France, was arrested by the Nazis almost at this same time and later murdered by the Nazis.

Berl, his wife Riva (nee Rabinowitz), and their children Shloma and Rosa were woken at 2 a.m, given two hours to pack up, and loaded into goods trucks, the doors locked from the outside. In this fashion, they travelled the 3,000 Km from Plunge (A) to Novosibirsk (B), where they were loaded on a barge and sent up the river Ob to Andarma (C) in the Tomsk area (see map on next page).

Another of the deportees, Olympia Gritsene (a Lithuanian) described her deportation

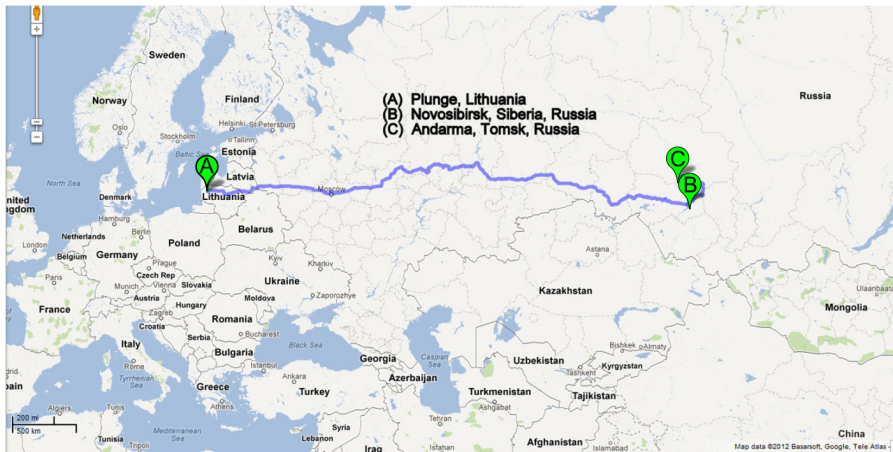
<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/plunge/plu003.html>:

"Arriving in Siberia, I was placed in the same camp as Chotse Gamzu¹⁸ and his wife. The Gamzuses, who were elderly and didn't

¹⁶ Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union of the previous year. The pact had led to the partition of Eastern Europe.

¹⁷ The list of deportees had been well-prepared months in advance, down to the smallest detail. A team of three military people came to the house of each deportee to give the deportation order and to ensure that it was carried out. Most of the heads of the families of the deportees died in Soviet labor camps during the war. See the important study by Dov Levin in *Crossroads*, 11, 1984, pp 67 – 107: Arrests and Deportation of Lithuanian Jews to Remote Areas of the Soviet Union.

¹⁸ The horse dealer whom we mentioned previously, and whose photograph appears as member of Plongyan's Jewish Community Committee.



The 3,000 Km journey from Plunge (A) to Novosibirsk (B) and Andarma (C) in the Tomsk area.

have any children, became isolated and depressed. Being classed as "unfit for work", they were barely given enough food to sustain themselves. Even though I (Olympia ... wds) worked very hard and didn't have much myself, I helped the elderly couple as best I could. We all toiled like slaves in the worst Siberian frosts, hardly receiving enough food to keep up our strength for such hard labor. Gamzu never lost hope that someday he would return to Plungyan. He even promised to buy me a booth or two when we came back to Plungyan, in return for my kindness. But fate would deal them a different hand. Despite my efforts, both Gamzu and his wife died of starvation and disease, a gruesome twist of fate that they could not have imagined, even in their worst nightmares. Chotse Gamzu's demise was also hastened by the fact that thieves had removed his teeth for their gold. You can just imagine how it must have been for him not to be able to chew on a piece of bread."

Berl Rolnik's son, Shloma, describes the administrative problems, how the family had to get KGB authorization to leave the camp at all, at first weekly and later monthly, and how after two long years his father managed to get them moved to the district center and then, after three more years to the regional capital Tomsk. There Shloma and his sister were able to study (as engineers). Finally, only in 1961, could they go back to Lithuania where the father Berl worked as a storekeeper in the Republic's goods department. In 1968, Shloma married Luisa Gutman and both worked as engineers before immigrating to Israel in 1990.

In the event, it was the deportation, with all its attendant difficulties that probably saved their lives. Days after they got to Siberia, the Nazis invaded Lithuania, and the Holocaust massacres began.

Michel Rolnik and the French Resistance

Michael (in French, Michel) the youngest of the four brothers was at first a student in a local “cheder” and then in the famous yeshiva of Telz. He transferred to the Hebrew Gymnasium in Kovno, started law studies in Kovno and continued in Paris at the Sorbonne. His doctoral dissertation was on the trade unions of the USSR and was published as a book¹⁹. In Paris he joined the Communist Party, becoming one of its outstanding young members, actively engaged in public work as a lawyer. When the Nazis occupied Paris, he joined the underground under the nom-de-guerre Lirra. Arrested in June 1941, he was put in the concentration camp of Royallieu near Compiègne, where he and a dozen others, Jews and Communists, were held as hostages, among them the “communist lawyers: Georges Pitard, a Parisian of Paris; Michel Rolnikas, born in Kaunas, Lithuania, Jewish; Antoine Hajje, Syrian origin. All three were French by birth or adoption”²⁰. Michel acted as spokesman of the inmates²¹. In September of that year he and eleven other hostages were executed as a reprisal for the Resistance’s killing of Captain Scheben, a German naval officer, who was killed in broad daylight at the Metro station Barbes, in the heart of a working class district²². This was the first of the French Resistance’s actions against the Nazis. (These commenced when Germany invaded Russia and the War was no longer only between Imperialist powers). General von Stulpnagel, head of the German forces in occupied Paris, had the following proclamation posted in the City:

“On September 16, 1941 a cowardly assassination has once again been committed on the person of a German soldier. As a measure of repression against this crime, the hostages whose names follow have been executed:

Pitard, Georges, Paris, Communist Party activist

Hajje, Antoine, Paris, Communist Party activist

Rolnikas, Michelis, Jew, Paris, propagator of Communist ideas

Nain, Adrien, Paris, author of Communist tracts

Peyrat, Roger, Paris, aggression against German soldiers

¹⁹ Les Syndicats professionnels en U.R.S.S. Michel ROLNIKAS University of Paris : Librairie technique et économique, 1937

²⁰ <http://www.humanite.fr/node/166370>

²¹ Michel, together with his colleagues Pitard and Hajje, set up a mutual aid committee and lectures were given to help boost morale. This was the so-called “University in Fetters”. See also :<http://gauloiseblues.com/SLEEPERS%20AWAKE.html>

²² The assailant, who made good his escape, was later revealed to be a young militant Communist, Pierre Georges, who went on to play a prominent role in the Resistance under the name Fabien, with the rank of colonel : <http://gauloiseblues.com/SLEEPERS%20AWAKE.html>

Marchal, Victor, Paris, aggression against German soldiers
Anjoly, Rene-Lucien, Paris-Gentilly, distributor of Communist tracts
Herpin, Francois, Paris-Malakoff, head of a Communist band during an act of sabotage
Guignois, Pierre, Ivry sur Seine, possession of Communist tracts, possession of firearms
Masset, Georges, Paris, illegal possession of firearms
Loubier, Daniel, Paris, illegal possession of firearms
Peureux, Maurice, Paris-Montreuil, illegal possession of firearms

I call attention to the fact that, in case of recidivism, an even greater number of hostages will be executed."

Masha Rolnik writes: "Michel and his friends were taken away to execution in the middle of the night, in secrecy, since the Nazis were afraid of a revolt by the other prisoners. They carried their own coffin. Each was allowed to write a farewell letter (it is published in French²³)." Michel refused the eye-bandage offered him. Von Stulpnagel, who was in charge of the execution, kicked Michel's already dead body with his foot and said: 'yes, he was a man!'"



Michel, dressed as a lawyer.
Photograph from the Holocaust Museum, Paris ²⁵

The place of execution was Fort Mont Valerien in Suresnes, near Paris^{24, 25}.

After the war, their bodies were exhumed and reburied in the military section of the cemetery Père Lachaise²⁶.

²³ He wrote to his partner :“ (...) tell my friends that the ball that pierces my heart will not tear from me the ideals that inspired me. “

<http://www.fondationresistance.org/documents/lettre/LettreResistance033.pdf>

²⁴ Fort Mont Valerien, built from 1841, is located in Suresnes, near Paris, where it dominates the Bois de Boulogne. This is where the Germans shot from 1940 to 1944, more than a 1000 hostages and prisoners. Brought from outside in a truck for their execution, they were locked in a disused chapel, then led into a clearing about a 100 feet below. Their bodies were then scattered in cemeteries in the Paris region.

²⁵ <http://www.juifs-en-resistance.memorialdelashoah.org/recherche.htm>

²⁶ Photographs (on the next page) by Chana Stein



The grave of the heroes in the cemetery Père Lachaise



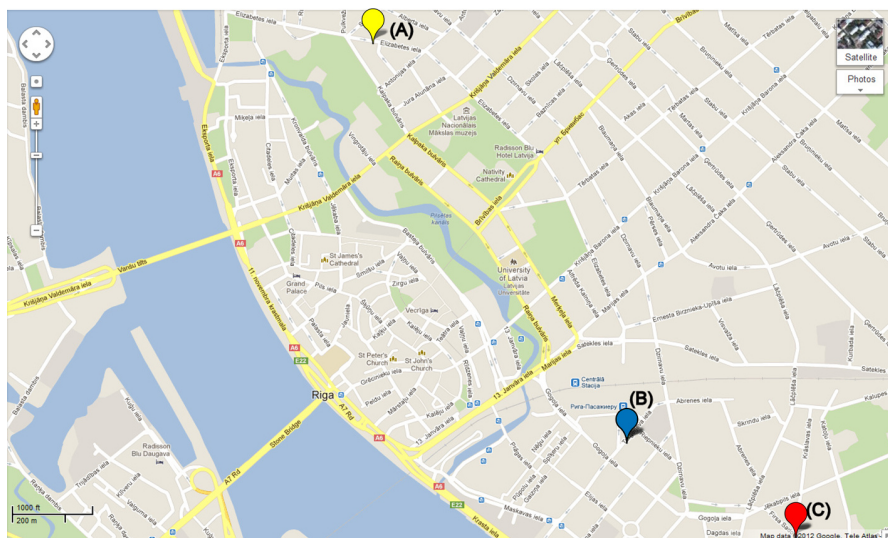
A building in Paris where Michel used to lecture is named after him and there is a plaque on the wall of the house where he lived. A street is named after him in the Stains district in Paris^{27,28}.

²⁷ Photograph by Chana Stein and detail of plaque from: <http://www.plaques-commemoratives.org/plaques/ile-de-france/plaque.2006-09-29.0569187284>

²⁸ rue Michel Rolnik, Stains, 93240 France

Pesia Rolnik Blumberg - the Holocaust in Latvia

Pesia was the youngest child of Abba and Chana Rolnik. She married Moshe Blumberg from Latvia in 1937²⁹ and, as we saw, her brother Meier came especially from Jerusalem to be at the wedding, the last time that he would see his sister. Moshe had been an assiduous wooer of Pesia. I have a copy of his Latvian passport with exit and entry stamps (from Meitenes in Latvia across the border to Joniskis in Lithuania) for journeys in April, May, and August 1937, and finally September 16th (exit) and 19 September 19th of that year, this last presumably accompanied by Pesia. Moshe had been born in 1909 in Libau, Latvia, a major port on the Baltic³⁰ and was by 19 a merchant in Riga, where the couple went to live after their marriage, starting their life together in Moshe's apartment, 23 Elizabetes Street, Riga, (A) in the map below³¹. Soon after they were married, they moved to Inculkalna, a rural district east of Riga, where their two children, Ben-Zion and Menachem Isak, were born in 1939 and 1940.



This idyllic life was interrupted with the entry of the Nazis into Latvia in June 1941. Moshe was shot within the first few days, perhaps with thousands of others in the Rumbula forest³². Pesia had to move to

²⁹ On 17th September of that year. The ceremony was performed in Siauliai, Lithuania. A photograph taken at the wedding appears on page 45.

³⁰ <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/libau/lib001.html#libau1>

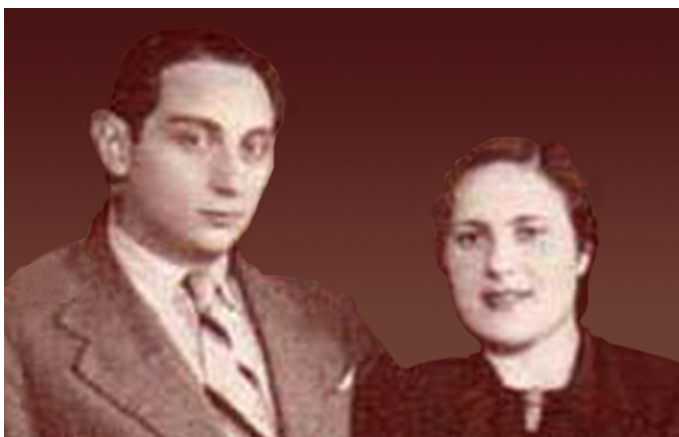
³¹ I have, courtesy of the Latvian National Archives, house registers of the Blumbergs in Riga, from 1937 through 1941.

³² <http://www2.ca.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/places/latvia/riga-shootings.1241>, <http://www.deathcamps.org/occupation/riga%20ghetto.html>

Turgeneva St, (B) on the map, in August of 1941, by which time the condition of the Jews in Riga was truly dreadful, and then on October 22nd, she moved to Sadovnikova St 23 (C on the map), when all the Jews were forced into the Ghetto³³.

The 1935 Latvian census identified 93,479 Jews living in Latvia. It is estimated that about 70,000 Latvian Jews perished in the Holocaust, the great majority by December 1941³⁴. The totality and speed with which this mass murder was achieved meant that many families were completely destroyed with no one left to mourn or even inquire about the dead. As a result, few of those killed have been identified. Until now approximately 70 per cent of the Holocaust victims of Latvia remain unidentified. Some members of Pesia's family did, as we will see, manage to survive and left records of her fate and the fate of her husband and children with the Yad Vashem Memorial.

From Shloma's diskette:



Они жили в Риге.
Мужа расстреляли
одним из первых.
Песя была в Рижском
гетто с двумя малень-
кими детьми, выходить
на работу не могла и
они умерли от голода.
Не позже 1942 года.

They lived in Riga.
Her husband was
among the first who
were shot. Pesia was
in the Riga ghetto
with two small chil-
dren, she could not
go to work and they
died of starvation
around 1942

The little ones were 3 and 1 at the time.

³³ http://www.rumbula.org/riga_ghetto.shtml#accounts

³⁴ For an eye witness account of the Riga ghetto see:

http://www.rumbula.org/Statement_of_Gabriel_Ziwjan.pdf

Hirsh Rolnik and the Resistance in Lithuania

The noted historian of the Lithuanian resistance, Dov Levin³⁵, is a close relative of the Rolniks of Plunge, through the Vigoders of Vieksniai. As a child, he visited them often and the families would spend summers together on the Baltic coast at Palanga. His own family lived in Kovno. There they were caught by the Nazi invasion and, with his mother and father and twin sister Batya, he was taken to the Kovno ghetto. Dov was the only one of his family to survive. He escaped from the ghetto and joined the partisans in the Lithuanian forests³⁶, fighting with the famous "Death to the Conquerors" detachment. In the book *Zichron Meier*³⁷, he writes of his return to Vilna with the partisans, searching for what remained of his family:

"I asked everyone I saw if they knew anything of the Rolnik family. All answered in the negative. Until on the third day, while I was still, gun-in-hand, walking through the ruins of what had been the ghetto, I saw an old woman, one of the few survivors, searching among the rubble. She told me that one Rolnik daughter had survived and was in Vilna. A few hours later I found Miriam, who had indeed been told that a partisan from Kovno was looking for her. She told me that her mother and the three children had perished with the destruction of the Vilna Ghetto, but that her father had disappeared from Vilna on the first day of the German invasion... .A few days after, there appeared a bespectacled, white-haired officer of the Lithuanian Brigade in faded uniform whom Miriam recognized as her father....".

This was Hirsh Rolnik, whom we saw in each of the two photographs that began this chapter. Miriam was not correct when she said that all three of her siblings had perished. The oldest of the three little ones had survived - Masha, whose story we will take up soon.

Hirsh himself was born in Plunge in 1898 (his birth record appears earlier). He started his education in a yeshiva but after being expelled from it, turned to secular studies. During his time as a student in Germany, he moved closer to the Communists. In 1923, he married Taiba Kagan from Tryskiai in the Siauliai district.

(Taiba and Hirsh were related, both having Vigoder connections). Hirsh became a lawyer receiving a doctorate in Jurisprudence from Leipzig, Germany. His 1925 doctoral thesis on the post-WW1 constitution

³⁵ <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/dovlevin/levincv.html>

³⁶ For the story of his escape and time with the partisans see: <http://www.jpost.com/Features/Article.aspx?id=140511>

³⁷ My translation from "Zichron Meier – Memories of Meier" (privately published, Jerusalem, 1974?)

Plunge Telsiai Kaunas 9/10/1923	ROLNIKAS / ROLNIK], Hirsas	Abelis Ickas Chane Plunge	25	S. A. FAIVELZON	Plunge	Not filmed / LVIA/1718/1/226
	KANAITE / [KAN], Taube	Aronas Beile Malke Tryskiai	25	M. GOLDBERG	1923 Marriage 10	

law of Lithuania and Latvia was later published as an influential book³⁸. He was head of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Raseiniai, but continued practicing as a lawyer, defending left-wingers on trial. Hirsh was definitely one of the notables of the town of Plunge, cited in a number of reminiscences³⁹.

At (A) on the map of Plunge below, out in the country, lived Chotse Gamzu, the horse dealer and the richest man in town. Hirsh lived at 13 Vytauto Prospekt, (B). Next door was the house of his cousin, Gita Karpul, a school principal, while at (C) lived Zaks, with his electrical works that supplied all the town and the surrounding areas with electrical goods. The father-in-law of another cousin, Ester Pozen, had a fancy goods shop also on Vytauto Prospekt⁴⁰.



In 1939, following the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, with Vilna being again the capital of Lithuania, the family relocated to Vilna and Hirsh set up his law practice there. By now, he and Taiba had four children,

³⁸ Hirsch Rolnik, *Die Baltischen Staaten Litauenn, Lettland und ihr Verfassungsrecht* Leipzig: Universitatsverlag von Robert Noske, 1927

³⁹ See, for example, from footnote 3 earlier: "On April 19th 1933 a day of protest was held against the persecution of Jews in Germany, during which spoke Dr. Jacob Robinson, local lawyer Hirsch Rolnick and others".

⁴⁰ This was Abraham Pozen who had been outstanding in helping to resettle the Jews who had been expelled from Memel. He gave up his own business to devote himself to this purpose. See Pinkas HaKehilot by Dov Levin, p 489.

Miriam, Masha, Ruven and Riva. A child, Aron, had died very young of pneumonia. In Vilna, they lived at 26 Vokieciu (Deutsche) Street, on a fine boulevard, A in the map below, . (Later, this street became the border between the two ghettos of Vilna).

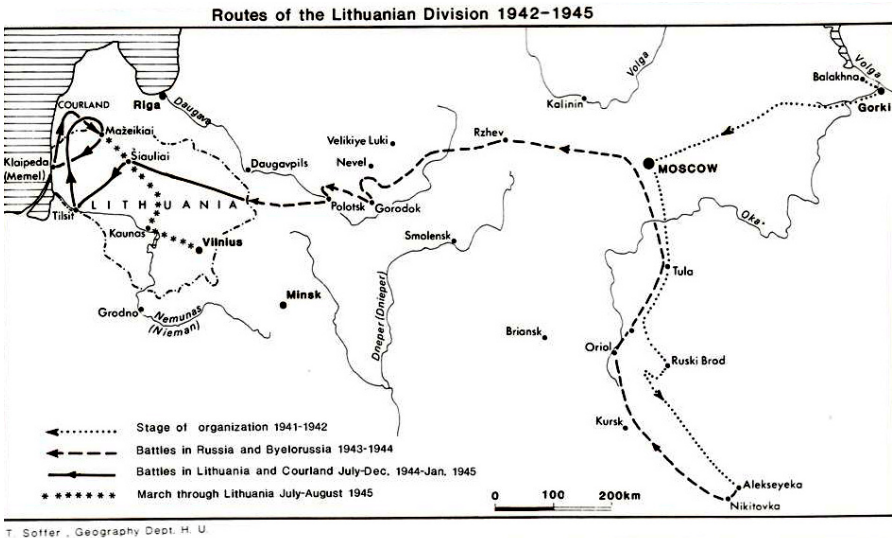


When war with Germany broke out, at the end of June 1941, Hirsh left Vilna to join the Lithuanian forces. Hardly expecting that the German advance into Lithuania would be so swift, he hoped that his family would be able to escape in time. Picked up by retreating Russian soldiers, he got to Minsk, which was already on fire. Masha writes: “My father found someone there, gave him all the money he had and our address, so that the man could go to Vilnius in a cart and bring us to him. Then he learned that the Nazis (were) already in Vilnius, so there was no sense in waiting for us and he went on to the city of Gorky”. They did not reach him, as we shall see.

Hirsh was already past military age at 44, indeed had been rejected with poor eyesight in the draft for World War 1, so at first he was given the task of teaching German to soldiers who would have to use it. He spoke fluent German and loved German proverbs⁴¹. But he continued to press for the chance to join an active unit. Eventually his pleas were successful, he was enlisted first as a private in the Lithuanian Division of the Soviet Army but later his language skills were recognized. He was promoted to Second Lieutenant and served throughout the war. Using his skill in German, he was in the front line, opposite the German soldiers, from where he megaphoned propaganda messages

⁴¹ According to his daughter Masha, one was: “Money lost, nothing lost, courage lost, all is lost “

telling them how the war would be lost and that they should come over to the Russian side. Later in the war he interrogated captured Germans.



The Lithuanian Division of the Red Army⁴² recruited from all over Lithuania but with most being Jews⁴³, fought a long series of bloody engagements against the Germans. One of the fiercest was at Oriol (see map), where the Red Army finally broke through the German line between Oriol and Kursk. Another fierce battle took place at Gorodok. After the surrender of the German Army, the Division took a major role in the Victory March through Lithuania, July and August 1945.

After being demobilized, Hirsh returned to civilian life as head of the legal unit of the Council of People's Commissars and thus as legal adviser to the government of Soviet Lithuania. He organized the Vilnius branch of the All-Union External Institute of Law as Director of the branch and worked as a teacher there. Now a widower he married Kira who appears on the right-hand photograph at the start of this chapter.

But with the anti-Semitic campaign of 1952, he was dismissed and returned to private practice as an advocate. He was, as we saw in the photograph that headed this chapter, in 1961 reunited with his brothers Berl and Meier, and in the summer of 1965 he visited Meier in Jerusalem. In the book "Zichron Meier", Dov Levin writes that on that visit Hirsh "told me in secret that the two great events of his life had been his taking an active part in the fight against the Nazis and the privilege of being able to see Israel with his own eyes".

⁴² See: Dov Levin "Fighting Back – Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945". Holmes and Meier, New York, 1985.

⁴³ In many circumstances, the military commands were in Yiddish as were the marching songs.

Miriam Rolnik, saved by a Righteous Gentile

Before the three Rolnik survivors met again in the rubble of Vilna, where had Hirsh's eldest daughter Miriam been in the years since Hirsh had waved her farewell as he left the family to follow him to Minsk? She was not present when her mother Taiba and her three siblings were listed in the May 1942 census of the Jews incarcerated in the Vilna ghetto⁴⁴:

Vilnius Ghetto List/Searching for Surname rolnik/(D-M code 986500)/Number of hits: 4/Run on Wednesday 16 March 2011.

Name Born	Residence in Ghetto	Source Publication Page	Town Uyezd Guberniya	Month Year
ROLNIK, Masa 1927	Rudninku 6 – 36	Vilna Gaon State Museum of Lithuania Vilnius Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners Volume 1 204	Vilnius	May 1942
ROLNIK, Raja 1933				
ROLNIK, Ruwin 1935				
ROLNIK, Taiba 1897				

It turned out that before the final destruction of the Vilna Ghetto, Miriam had found refuge in a hiding place that kept her safe until Vilna was liberated. The story is little known. It is well worth repeating⁴⁵.

Father Jouzas Stakausas was a Roman Catholic priest living in Vilna, in charge of the Lithuanian State Archives. It appears that the Germans had approached him to find space to store the huge amounts of books that they had already looted during the invasion. Stakausas found space in an ancient Benedictine nunnery, a building with hundreds of cellars, garrets and corridors. He made place for the archives with the help of Jewish workers recruited from the ghetto (one of whom must have

⁴⁴ This is from a gruesome list of persons who were living in the Vilna Ghetto in May 1942. <http://www.jewishgen.org/litvak/HTML/vilniusghetto.htm>. In 1996, the Vilna Gaon Museum in Vilnius, Lithuania published a remarkable book in two parts - "Vilnius Ghetto: Lists of Prisoners" Volumes I and 2. The first volume contains data of a census which took place in Lithuania in 1942, May 27- 29 and concerns Vilnius Ghetto prisoners, which numbered 15507 people.

⁴⁵ I take this material from the book "The path of the righteous: gentile rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust". Mordecai Paldiel 1993 KTAV Publishing House Tel Aviv Israel

been Miriam Rolnik). Cleverly, he blocked off one of the corridors at its farthest end with huge shelves of books, enabling him to fulfil a plan that he had long been contemplating. Here he could hide Jews whose plight had been troubling him from the start of the Occupation. When asked, years later, what made him take that step he answered: “It was my Christian duty”.



Father Jouzas Stakauskas

He is listed amongst the Righteous Gentiles of Lithuania.

He was helped in his task by Vladas Zemaitis, a mathematics teacher and the skilful carpenter who designed the hide-out, and by Sister Marija Mikulska, the three working together until the liberation in July 1944.



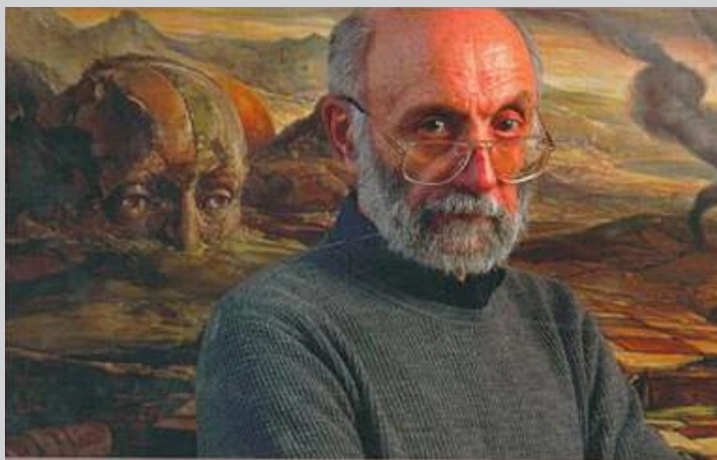
The memorial tablet⁴⁶, affixed to a wall of the nunnery:

⁴⁶ I am indebted to Devora Berliner of California (<https://picasaweb.google.com/110761355252458786805/Vilna2006>) who took this and the three photographs on the top of page 70, while on a visit to Lithuania in 2006.

When the work was completed, the Jewish workers, who had not known of the plan, were invited to move in, later being joined by others. Their food during all the months that followed was bought by Stakausas and his colleagues at shops scattered across Vilna, so as not to draw suspicion of the authorities. (For the hide-out, see pictures next page.)

The sheltered Jews ate once a day, after the many German and Lithuanian users of the Archives had left. They kept themselves occupied by reading from the huge supply of books in the Archives. In this way, all of them survived the Holocaust. Miriam's companions included a well-known personality, Dr Aleksander Libo, an ear, nose and throat specialist, and his wife and child. Other people that I have been able to identify are Sara Iafe and her daughter Anita, whose names appear on the Yad Vashem Righteous Gentile testimony⁴⁷, Esther Kanterowitz, one of Miriam's fellow workers in the building of the hiding place, and an already famous (at age 8) young artist, Sam Bak and his mother.

Bak also eventually got to Israel and studied painting at the Bezalel Academy before settling in the USA.



AT MY FIRST SIGHT of a painting by Samuel Bak, I had the keen sense that he was telling me stories with his brush. Now that at long last he has written this book, I find it no wonder that he painted with his pen... Among the tens and hundreds of books I have read about the pre-Shoah and post-Shoah period. . . Bak's book is unique. Despite being suffused with a sense of loss, horror, degradation and death, it is ultimately a sanguine, funny book, full of the love of life. rocking with almost cathartic joy. At times I found myself bursting out laughing . . . a marvelous ode, a colourful hymn to the forces of life, love, creation, and the joys of the senses. Bak has written a tragicomic epic about the birth and maturing of an artist who grows from out of the absurdities of childhood into the nightmares of history.

Amos Oz
from the Foreword,

⁴⁷ After the war, Sara Iafe lived in Haifa and contributed to the Yad Vashem records many testimonies of victims of the Holocaust.



Three views of the refuge: On the left, the entrance to the nunnery. On the right two views from opposite sides of the path that ended in the hiding place: Above, the entrance to the refuge from outside; below, one can see the window on the left corner, through which the inhabitants could peep.

Miriam, reunited with her father and later with her sister Masha, remained in the Soviet Union and married Vladas Lisauskas. She visited Israel in 1990 when she deposited some of the testimonies at Yad Vashem that I quote in a later section of this chapter.

Miriam and Vladas' first child Mikas was named for Michel Rolnik, the second, Edward, was born some ten years after Mikas. Miriam's husband Vladas died in 1963, and Miriam herself in 2013 .



Miriam, Mikas and Vladas, 1954.



Miriam in Klaipeda



Two of Miriam's grandchildren, Daniela and Gabriela Rolnik-Lisauskaites⁴⁸, seen here in Klaipėda at a 2006 Memorial Meeting to the Jews of Lithuania.

Masha Rolnik: Diarist of the Vilna Ghetto

Masha Rolnik is, almost certainly, the most well-known of all the descendants of Leyba Rolnik of Telsiai. When the Cold War divided the world up into the East and the West, Masha was the Eastern counterpart of Anne Frank and known as the Anne Frank of Vilna. Like Anne in her attic hiding-place in Amsterdam, Masha kept a diary, but of her horrifying experiences in the Vilna Ghetto. She wrote, in Yiddish, on scraps of paper that she found around, writing at night after her days of forced labor in the factories supplying goods for the German war effort. Later, when she was moved from place to place, she kept these accumulating scraps hidden, sometimes inside her shoes. Her mother and her two little siblings were murdered when the ghetto was finally destroyed in late September 1943.

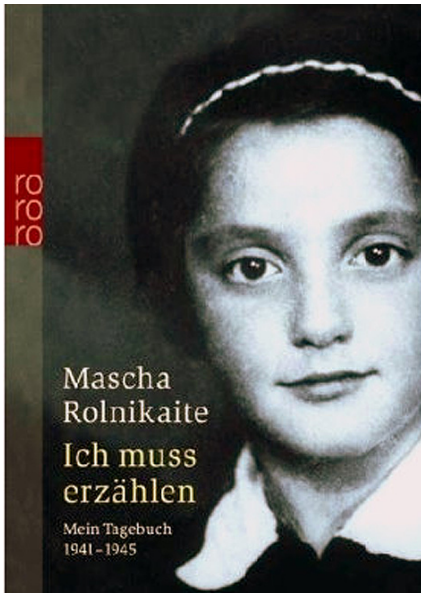
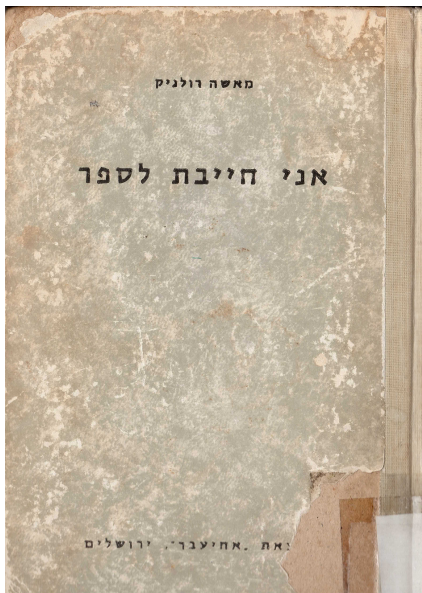
During the twenty years after her liberation, she managed to reconstruct her diary from a deep searching of her memories and from some original pages that had been kept all through the war by her school teacher and the family's benefactor, the Righteous Gentile, Henrikas Jonaitis. With this material, she published her diary "I Must Tell," first in Lithuanian as "Turiu Papasakoti"⁴⁹, and soon after in Russian, serialised, as "Ya dolzhna raskazat"⁵⁰, and in 1965 in Hebrew,

⁴⁸ At the time of writing, (May 2012), Gabriela is in Israel, serving in the Israel Defence Forces

⁴⁹ M. Rolnikaite, published by Valstybine Politines Ir Mokslines Literaturos Leidykla (Political and Scientific Literature Publishing House) Vilnius 1963

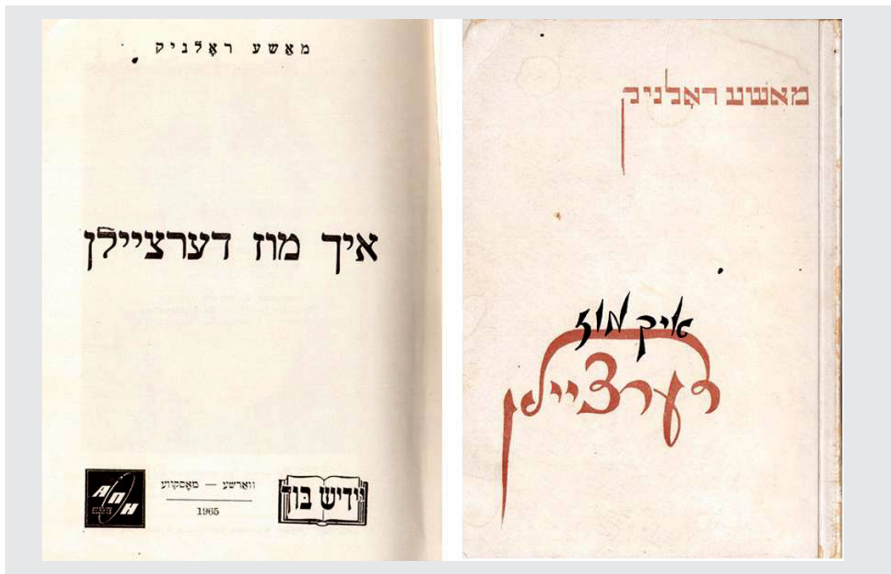
by her uncle, the publisher Meier Rolnik⁵¹, and in fifteen other languages but not, surprisingly, in English. Here are covers of six versions of the book: in Russian, Italian, Hebrew, German and Yiddish.

A few “ghetto diaries” were recovered after the war in their original



⁵⁰ Masha Rolnik (Isvestia) 3 # 2 1964

⁵¹ “Ani Chayevet Le-saper” Akhiever Publishing, Jerusalem Israel, 1965



form, as written at the time. Masha’s book is not of this direct sort but represents an attempt to re-enter the thoughts of a young girl, twenty years later. The book is written, also, in a particular place and time, Russia in the time of the post-Stalinist thaw, and this is reflected in the writing itself. Nevertheless, the book is a tremendously useful resource with its descriptions of life in such unbearable circumstances.

You will recall that the German Army entered Lithuania on 22nd June 1941 and reached Vilnius a few days later. The Vilna ghetto was set up between the 6th and 7th September 1941 and liquidated two years later, during 23rd to 24th September 1943. Masha’s diary starts with the outbreak of the war against Lithuania and ends with her rescue by Red Army troops in June of 1945. The book’s sections are not dated but appear in chronological order. I give below my own free translations of some sections⁵², and link these to the history of the Vilna Ghetto, taken in part from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vilna_Ghetto. These Wikipedia extracts are written in italics, my comments in square brackets.

From “I Must Tell” by Masha Rolnik:

[Two days after the war began, and the aerial bombardment had ceased, Masha’s father went off to the railway station to buy tickets to take them away from Vilnius. Meantime, the family had been sheltering in the basement.]

Masha writes: “Mother brought us up into the house. She calmed us, saying that because we will certainly be able to get into the depths of

⁵² An English translation of some other sections can be found at <http://www.sebastiansommer.eu/workshop/mascha.pdf>

the country, the Fascists won't be able to harm us....She emptied out our school satchels, filling them with food and clothes for our trip. ..A few hours passed and father had not yet returned. Apparently it was not easy to get tickets. Everyone wanted to get away. .. [They decided to get to the railway station].

"Each of us took a bundle. Finally we got to the railway station. But no good news. There, there were only crowds pushing and shoving, and the last train had already left...Father was nowhere to be seen"

"...We walked, moving along in a great stream of people. The sun burned like an oven. Little Ruvela⁵³ asked for a pause...Mother took her bag, but to no avail...Ruvela still continued to complain. Rayele, two years older, was also clearly suffering. We rested a while and tried to continue, but soon the young ones again asked for a rest...They pleaded for us to return home"

"...Again we are home...The janitor tells us that father had arrived but had left soon after to try to find a motor car." [We saw earlier that he never found one, but went on to Gorky and there joined the Lithuanian Army for the duration of the War.]

"A deathly silence, except for far away some scattered rifle shots...Nazis on motor-bikes and in tanks in the street in which we live."

"We should not have returned home. And what if father is no longer alive?"

"The Nazis gave orders that all restaurants and cafes should reopen, but on each was a notice: Fur Juden Eintritt verboden".

"Miriam says that we should go to our school to fetch our examination certificates, else they might be destroyed. Mother agrees. It is I who will have to go, since Miriam is already seventeen and they might ask her for her passport. I stood at the gate of our house, and there were the Nazis. What if one stopped me? But they didn't notice me. With beating heart, I crossed the street...Left and right, men with swastikas on their arm-bands. I reached the school... A ninth-grader, Kavkurios by name shouts: 'What are you doing here? Go away! You bring a stink into the school!' I turned my head and there was my school teacher H. Joniatis. Fearing that he, too, would turn me away, I stepped



⁵³ Ruvela and Rayele: her brother Reuven and her sister Raya, five and seven years old at the time, pictured above at a younger age with their mother, Taiba.

aside. Joniatis asked what I needed. I told him about the documents and he promised to bring them to our house that night. He kept his promise. Mother was astonished. 'Someone who knows us so little speaks with us like a family member and even offers us help.'"⁵⁴

"The Nazis come to our house every few days. They took away our radio and father's typewriter and our telephone"

"Only two weeks have passed since the invasion and how everything has changed! In town there are new orders: All "Juden", adults and children alike, must wear a yellow patch...bearing the letter J..."

"Today is the 21st July. Almost a month since the beginning of the war and it is my birthday. I am 14 years old. Mother congratulated me and wished me 'long life ... until 120'⁵⁵. And burst out crying. How often have I heard that conventional greeting and did not pay much notice. But in this new world of ours, I now pay attention to the meaning of the words."

The Jewish population of Vilnius on the eve of the Holocaust was probably more than 60,000. The Nazis plan was to clear the predominantly poorer Jewish quarter in the Vilnius Old Town in order to force the rest of the more affluent Jewish residents into the Nazi -created ghetto. Tens of thousands of Jews were murdered between 1 September and 3 September.

"A rifle shot breaks the silence, accompanied by shouting. There is running in the streets. Rayele and Ruvele wake up. I am shaking with fear. Again we hear a rifle shot. A voice shouts : Nach Vorn! We hear many footsteps, more loud cries. We peep through the shutters, and see women and their half-dressed children, all wailing. The men are bent over carrying heavy parcels and suitcases. They are being pushed along, under blows. A flashlight shows terrified faces. It is turned off, and in the darkness, only the sounds... Apparently, we are not on the list to be removed. Again there is quiet. Dawn breaks."

On 6 September and 7 September 1941, the Nazis herded the remaining 20,000 Jews into the parameters of two ghettos by evicting them from their homes, during which 3,700 were killed. The move to the ghetto was extremely hurried and difficult, and Jews were not allowed to use transportation. They could take only what they were physically able to carry.

[Joniatis had been visiting the Rolniks most days. He hadn't come and Masha's mother was worried. Masha offered to go and check on

⁵⁴ Time and again , in the years that followed, Joniatis did indeed help the family, bringing them food and clothing often at great risk to himself. He is listed as a Righteous Gentile.

⁵⁵ The traditional birthday greeting. "Bis hundert und zwantsik". The prophet Moses lived to be 120.

him. She decided not to wear her “Jude” patch so as not to draw attention to herself.]

“I was not worried. Who would think that at this hour a Jewess would walk on the roads with no yellow patch? I get to Gedimino Prospekt. I look behind to check if no one has seen me. I knock on the door. No answer. Footsteps behind me, they pass on - and no one approaches me. The time is, maybe, already close to 10 pm, the general curfew time. What am I to do? Must I stay on the doorstep all night? Suddenly H. Joniatis⁵⁶ appears. When I told him the purpose of my visit, his spirits dropped. To our sorrow, there were just five minutes before 10 pm. He offered me the sofa. I could not sleep, worrying about mother”.

“When I woke, I could not for a few moments work out where I was...H. Joniatis calmed me. ‘I will go and find out what is happening with your family. You can sleep on a little.’”

“He went and quickly returned: ‘I could not get to them. They are not allowing anyone to pass. In Rodninko Street they are building a barrier. There the ghetto will be set up. Already they are moving people in. What do you think you should do’ ...‘I can’t remain here alone without Mother. No, I will go home’”.

“H. Joniatis emptied his satchel and put into it what he had, half a loaf of bread, some smoked meat, cheese and a jar of jam, and all of the money in his purse. Both of us cut yellow patches from paper and put them on. It was no longer possible to be without them.”

[They walked towards Rodninko Street].

“At Rodninko Street, close to the entrance, was a barrier. Through the opening that still remained, soldiers were herding people. We approached. Joniatis kept up my spirits by holding my hand. I entered.”

“Where should I go? Perhaps I could still try to get home? But I couldn’t get to it, since they were building fences around that area. More and more people were being brought in. Dead-tired, they dropped their bundles and dropped to the ground where they were. The streets and alleys were filled with crowds. I wandered through the hundreds of people, but nowhere could I find Mother, nor could I see anyone I knew.”

“I stood near the entrance to check those who were entering, and to ask them what streets they were from. One woman said that the people from Vokieciu⁵⁷ Street had been put into Lidus Alley. I rushed towards there, but found a new barrier. Lidus Street was not included within the ghetto. ...I continued to search. Someone suggested that perhaps the

⁵⁶ Masha almost always writes of him thus formally: H. Joniatis.

⁵⁷ The Rolnik family had been living at 26 Vokieciu Street since their arrival in Vilnius. See the map in the section on Hirsh Rolnik on page 65.

family was in the other ghetto, being built somewhere between Stikliu and Gaono alleys⁵⁸?”

“I went to the gate and asked permission to get through. ‘I do not intend to escape’, I said, ‘just to go to the other ghetto, where my mother is’. He wouldn’t hear of it and even hit me so that I almost fell to the ground. I saw a [Lithuanian] school-friend, with a gun in his hand, apparently one of the “activists” and asked him to help me get out. ‘Certainly’ he said, ‘Let’s go’. We walked along, with him pointing his gun to my back as if I was under arrest. We got to Stikliu Alley where the wall that was being built was already pretty high. ‘Can you jump over’ he asked. ‘Of course’, I answered. He helped me and soon I was on the other side.”

“The confusion there was worse than in the first ghetto...But within this entire crowd, I still couldn’t find anyone from Vokieciu Street. It was as if they had disappeared into the ground. In one of the areas I saw a neighbour, Franny. ‘What are you doing here?’ It appeared that she and her family had been moved into this ghetto. People were taking over rooms in all the houses there, a whole family into a room. I also took over a room, settled down and, as it was already dark, tried to sleep.”

“At dawn, I went out again, looking for my family. But Mother was nowhere to be seen...Someone suggested that, indeed, perhaps they were in the first ghetto. Others suggested that the people from Vokieciu Street had been taken to Lokishkiai prison! It’s not possible that I would be left alone. I will find them! Another day passed in searching. Meantime, the contents of the satchel were giving out a strange smell. I put my hand into the satchel. Glass! The jar had broken and the jam was everywhere, meat, cheese, bread. But I was hungry and licked the jam off everything and ate the lot.

I went out and began again searching. “

[Another day passed.]

“I saw a notice. A ghetto police was being organized and they needed recruits. ..[Masha joined].....They organised us into a parade and counted us. They left us a long while and counted us again. Then, accompanied by an armed guard, we went through the open gates of the second ghetto. After a while the gate of the first ghetto opened and there ...I saw Mother. Alive and smiling! It appeared that Franny had managed to tell her that I was alive and looking for the family. There was no end to our happiness and talking. The days of loneliness and searching no longer seemed so dreadful.”

⁵⁸ These streets are shown on the picture of the Rolnik family’s residence, given in the section on Hirsh Rolnik.

“It hadn’t been so easy for Mother either. When neither Joniatis nor I had got to the house in Vokieciu Street, she had assumed that we had been seized and sent off somewhere. She had cried all night through.”

[For much of the following two years, the family lived in Rodninko Street, as the Ghetto census record shown earlier had noted. Where they had lived, in Vokieciu Street, was now the boundary between the two ghettos].”

The old Jewish quarter in the centre of the city was split into two ghettos with a non-ghetto corridor running down Deutschegasse (Niemiecka or Vokieciu Street).

“Gens⁵⁹ has received new orders from the Gestapo. All those whose work skills could be of use to the Nazi war effort would have to live in the first ghetto...and in the second, all the others. The skilled workers received the ‘Facharbeit’ document giving them the right to work. To our great luck, Mother received this document⁶⁰...but another person in our building did not, and he and his family had to take their possessions and move to the second ghetto.”

By the end of October 1941, the Nazis had murdered all the inhabitants of the smaller second ghetto. The Germans systematically carried out Aktionen, or massive killing sprees, to reduce the number of sick and elderly and to meet quotas on the total of the population allowed. These Aktionen were conducted on a regular basis from the creation of the ghetto until January 1942.

“Sleeping, we were woken by loud noises. Cars and trucks on the road outside...I peeped out through a chink in the blocked-up window. A truck stopped, soldiers jumped out and lined up in the street....Alarm in our building, children crying, mothers trying to calm them. No one can find their clothes in the dark. All of us shivering in the cold, already autumn. There is knocking on the doors. No one opens, but more knocking with fists on the doors. ..Again, I look out of the window. The gates of the ghetto are open. From the ghetto people are forced out of their homes to stand in line in the street. All have some bundles of belongings. More people join them. Children crying. Eventually all are herded onto trucks. The soldier-drivers climb into the trucks and all drive off.....Quiet...the alley is again sleeping.”

⁵⁹ Jacob Gens, head of the Ghetto Police, who had the terrible duty of deciding between those who could be temporarily saved and those who had to be taken out of the ghetto to the killing fields of Ponar. Just before the ghetto was liquidated, Gens himself was murdered.

⁶⁰ Tova (Taiba) Rolnik was a very skilled seamstress. Her work was much in demand in the ghetto-supported factories that made and repaired clothing for the German Army. She was able to keep her family out of the Aktionen right until the ghetto was finally wiped out.

The period between January 1942 and March 1943 was known as the time of ghetto stabilization when German murder in the ghetto decreased.

“It is now a year that we have been under the conquerors. How our lives have changed! How many people have perished! The year is so different from the years that came before this one. Yet the days here in the ghetto are the same, day after day, apart from the ‘Aktionen’.”

“Early in the morning, a noise in the streets. Pedlars: ‘who wants cigarettes, saccharine?’ These are the chimney-sweeps, employed in the City doing work that no-one else wants to do. They are the rich people of the ghetto, with permits “Passerscheine” that allow them to move all over the city. Always satisfied, getting good food from their employers and taking home also for their families. They mostly manage to avoid the body searches at the ghetto entrance since they clean the chimneys very early in the morning, getting back into the ghetto when other workers are just leaving.”

“We have little money and little left to sell. One day a neighbour asked Ruvele what she had eaten for dinner. He answered ‘the sleeves of my mother’s night-dress’. But we are lucky in that there is still in this world a teacher by the name of H. Joniatis.”

“One day, my friend Emma took me with her to the director of the choir, Dormashkin. He tested my voice, my hearing ability and my musical memory, and immediately invited me to join the choir. They sing in Hebrew, which is a problem for me, since I understand nothing. At the beginning, the choir operated under great difficulties since after each Aktion they had to recruit new members. It is very difficult to sing after a heavy day’s work and many people are in mourning. But the choir has two rooms for rehearsals and a piano.... Dormashkin has, in addition, established a symphony orchestra. It is not easy. If a musician is neither a glazier, a shoemaker or has some other useful trade he has already been sent to Ponar⁶¹. But things are being accomplished. The orchestra and choir are to present a concert that will include the ninth symphony of Beethoven.”

“Already November [1942 ... wds], and again cold. Winter is coming...will we be able to hold on? One thing warms me. This winter almost certainly brings an end to the Nazi conquests. They are being beaten. For sometime now, there are battles near Stalingrad and they are unable to take the city. The soldiers of the Red Army are heroically defending each house, each piece of ground.”

“The situation of the Nazis is bad not only at the front but also here. Someone has told me in deep secrecy that there are also partisans

⁶¹ Ponar or Ponary: A wooded area outside Vilna where Jews were taken to be shot. It is now a memorial to the victims. See <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/einsatz/ponary.html>

within the ghetto who are arming themselves. They don't bring the arms in through the gate but by some secret route, through the sewers, under bundles of wood and even in coffins."

[Some months later]

"An amazing report has come to my ears: An underground organization is at work in the ghetto that plans to fight the conquerors. This is the FPO⁶² – a special partisan organization. The members made a mine with their own hands and laid it on the railway line that leads to the ghetto. Hooray!

It is forbidden to say anything about them. My mother even says that I must not write anything about this in my diary, but how can I ignore news like this?"

"The Nazis have called for three days of mourning! Theatres and cinemas in the city are to be closed and also restaurants and other entertainment places. Hooray! They are in mourning for the loss of an Army⁶³ on the Volga. We are organizing a ball, the first in the ghetto. Also the siege of Leningrad has been lifted. And it is still the beginning of February [1943 ... wds]. The Nazis will be freezing"

[Gens became worried that the FPO were smuggling arms into the ghetto and he arranged for the arrest of some of the leaders. The FPO heard of the arrest of Wittenberg⁶⁴ and, led by Kovner⁶⁵, they attacked the Lithuanian guards, freed Wittenberg and spirited him into hiding.]

"I have just returned from work to sad news. Wittenberg is again in the hands of the Germans.... The FPO had fought back several attempts by the Lithuanian guards to approach the house in which Wittenberg was hiding. So Gens changed his tactics and sent the FPO an ultimatum that the Gestapo had made: either send us Wittenberg or the whole ghetto will be destroyed. A short time later, Gens's messenger returned with the FPO's answer: they were not convinced that by the handing over of Wittenberg, the ghetto will be saved. If there is already talk about the ghetto's destruction, then this will take place, whether or not Wittenberg is handed over. Wittenberg will remain with the FPO and continue the fight.

In short, Wittenberg will not be returned to the Gestapo.

But there was no mercy. Gens sent another message.

Suddenly Wittenberg announced that he would go of his own free will. He did not want to be the cause of the death of 20,000 people. Calmly, he took leave of his comrades, asking them to continue

⁶² Fareinigte Partizaner Organizatsie (Fareinigte=United)

⁶³ The Sixth Army, encircled by the Red Army in Operation Uranus.

⁶⁴ Yitzhak Wittenberg, a leader of the Partisans within the ghetto.

⁶⁵ Abba Kovner, head of the Partisans within the ghetto.

the fight and he went to Gens. At the other end of the ghetto stood the closed car of the Gestapo. Armed guards pushed him into the car which started off at once.

I don't know how long we in the ghetto will still survive but I must give thanks to Wittenberg that he saved me today. Not just me, but also my mother, Miriam and the children, and thousands of other mothers and children.

Apparently Wittenberg must have taken with him some poison. It could not have been otherwise, since if he had been forced to tell of the whereabouts of his comrades they would have come looking for them."

[Masha describes in detail the death of the singer Lyuba Levicka, shot by command of Franz Murer⁶⁶, the cruel Nazi ruler of the Vilna ghetto, because of one and a half kilograms of beans that she wanted to bring into the Ghetto. A translation of this section of the diary can be found at <http://www.sebastiansommer.eu/workshop/mascha.pdf> and the story is the basis of the famous play "Ghetto" by the Israeli playwright, Joshua Sobol⁶⁷.]

"August has begun with good news. Orel and Belgorod have been liberated. In Moscow they have organised a parade celebrating these victories⁶⁸."

[But a little later]

"Again some large groups did not return from work. The ghetto is looking like a cemetery."

"The Nazis are retreating. The Red Army is attacking near Smolensk. It won't be very long before our liberation"

From 6 August to 5 September 1943, however, 7,130 Jews were deported to Estonia by order of Heinrich Himmler. Under the supervision of Oberscharführer Bruno Kittel, the ghetto was "liquidated" between 23 and 24 September 1943, and the majority of the Jewish population were sent to the Vaivara concentration camp in Estonia, or were killed in the forest of Paneriai (Ponar...see footnote 18...wds), or sent to the death camps in German-occupied Poland.

[Masha's harrowing description of the liquidation of the ghetto occupies ten pages of her book. I translate only a few paragraphs here. It was before these events that their sister Miriam had managed to escape from the ghetto, as we saw in the previous section].

"Quiet in the ghetto. The gates of the ghetto are locked. No one goes

⁶⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Murer

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Sobol

⁶⁸ Unbeknown to her, Masha's father was at the time in the Lithuanian Division that was heavily involved in the fighting on the Orel-Kursk-Belgorod front. See a previous section.

out, no one comes in.

If only they would let us live, even without food, I think we would be able to hold on. Soon the Red Army will be here.”

“A late September evening. Again we are filled with a leaden fear. Nothing yet has happened in the ghetto. Not a single Nazi is to be seen, but everyone is filled with trepidation. Oberhardt came into the sewing factory (where there is a late night shift) and demanded that someone make him, on the spot, an epaulette for his uniform. He waited for the work to be done and for the shoulder-strap to be fitted on to his uniform. No one asked him why he needed it done immediately like this, and he didn’t elucidate further. But he seemed troubled by something.

Dawn breaks. Great preparations are being made in the ghetto. People take bundles of stuff into hiding places that they have made. The children are hidden, too. The Ghetto [Jewish] Police also join in the common panic. This makes the fear even greater.

Kittel⁶⁹ arrives with men from the Gestapo. At the entrance, Oberhardt greets him and brings with him the members of the Judenrat, and those of the Ghetto Police who have not yet fled. The Nazis stand on the steps of a building and ask for a loudspeaker: ‘The Jews of the Ghetto, who have been living here now for two years, will be moved to two work camps. One in Estonia and the other here in Lithuania, not far from Siauliai. The move will be done within one day...You are allowed to bring with you only as much of your belongings as you can carry.’

“Rayele looks at us with fearful eyes: ‘What if they are fooling us and we will be sent to Ponar?’ How could I answer her, because in my mind, too, the same thought had taken hold. Rayele asks ‘Can I take my book with me? Will they allow us to read there?’ ‘When we are free again’, Mother says, ‘then you will be able to read.’”

“I look out of the window. Mud everywhere. The alleys are full of people. Quietly and sadly, they are marching towards Rodinko Street. Some carry heavy bundles, others are almost empty-handed. Perhaps this latter choice is more sensible. Why should one burden oneself in one’s last hours?

I carry a small suitcase and Father’s winter jacket that Joniatis had once brought to the ghetto gate⁷⁰. All are coming out into the streets. If they will demolish the ghetto, there is no point in remaining in the secret hiding places.

We marched on to the gate. How many times have I walked here

⁶⁹ Bruno Kittel, head of the Jewish section of the *Gestapo*. See the excellent article: <http://www.deathcamps.org/occupation/vilnius%20ghetto.html>

⁷⁰ Masha’s mother had given Joniatis all of Hirsh’s clothing when the Nazis were confiscating such things. Joniatis had been holding them in safe-keeping.

during the last two years! Will I ever return here and see these buildings, these windows, and the church tower?

At the gate stand the Gestapo people, Kittel and Oberhardt among them. They count the people as they leave the gate, one of the officers pointing with his stick at each of us one-by-one. On each side of the street are soldiers with dogs. No way to escape.

We walk on, too tired now to carry our bundles. I still hold onto Father's heavy jacket, Mother says I should discard it. I can't. To do so would be to discard Father himself. The coat trails on the ground, trips up someone. He shouts at me. Mother urges us on, so as not to get separated.

We reach Rossa Square. The men are told to remain there. The women cry out to them, bidding them goodbye, wishing them long life. (The men, it would seem, will be taken to work camps). The square is enormous and surrounded by soldiers.

They force us into a small alley. Here there are soldiers armed with machine guns. Machine guns in the city! Will it be here that they will...?

Into the alley, come more and more people. I never thought that there were so many still alive in the ghetto. It is raining, to add to our discomfort. We are told to sit down. . in the mud. .we sit on our suitcases, the children on our knees. Mother is crying and I plead to her to stop, so as not to worry the children further. But she cannot. She just looks at me with those tearful eyes and cries even more sadly.

It becomes dark. They shine lights on us every now and then to make sure that no one escapes.

Ruvele moves in his sleep, drowsy, sitting on my shoulders. His warm breath tickles my neck. His last sleep? Rayele is not sleeping. She disturbs Mother with her questions: 'Are they taking us to Ponar? By foot or by truck? Or are they taking us to a camp? Where would you prefer to go, Mother, to Sialiai or to Estonia?'

A flare, shot into the sky, illuminates us."

"Already nearly light. Close to us a little nightingale sits on the branch of a tree. Turns his head, looks at us and flies off.

From the ghetto, they bring out the Jewish Police and their families. The men join the other men who had been separated from us.

We are ordered to stand up and move to the gate. It is narrow and we go through one by one. Mother is worried that we will lose each other. She says that I should go first, then Ruvele and then Rayele, while she herself will be last, so that she can keep an eye on all of us. I go through. A soldier catches me by my coat and pushes me to one side. On that side, there are no trucks. I turn my head to tell Mother, but she

is not behind me. There she is, on the other side, in a long line of women and children. I rush towards a soldier and tell him that my family is there and that, because of some mistake, I have been separated from them. The soldier doesn't bother to listen to what I say. He looks at the people coming through the gate. Some he pushes towards me, the rest to where Mother is.

Suddenly, I hear Mother's voice, saying that I should not go to her. She asks the soldier not to let me through, that I am still young and am a good worker...

'Mother', I shout, 'so come to us here!' But she shakes her head and shouts in a strange hoarse voice 'Live, my child! At least you alone will live. Revenge the children and myself!'. She hugged the little ones, and with difficulty lifted them up so that I could see them."

"Suddenly, I find myself on the ground. Someone is holding my hand, another is measuring my pulse. I must have fainted. Never before have I fainted."

"Kittel, Weiss and others come towards us and start a count. We are 1700. I look back at where Mother and the children had been. The people there are being marched away."

[There follow some eighty pages of Masha's subsequent experiences in work camps. She describes beatings, dreadful tortures, hunger, and a death march from one camp to another.]

"I am being carried along. I don't have the power to walk unaided. With the last of my strength, I try not to lean too much on the women who are helping me, and I try to walk a little alone. But it is so difficult. The snow on the ground makes it even harder. We are so hungry. They haven't given us food for days. Sometimes a farmer gives us something. At night they lock us within store houses, where we can grab a few potatoes. Even the soldiers are too exhausted to stop us doing this."

"At night we can hear far away explosions. There is where the Front must be. We are not the only ones on the road. Unending lines of carts, loaded with German families, fleeing with all their belongings, towards the West. How strange, that we, whose hearts are there in the East, at the Front, are being forced to travel in the same direction as those fleeing Germans!"

"It is now a week that we have stopped here in Stralintin. This used to be a farm. The owner is at the Front, his wife and children have fled to Berlin, while the neighbours have looted their property. We are kept under lock and key in the barn, taken out once a day for exercise. The soldiers humiliate us, forcing us to do silly movements, what they call 'Sport of the Skeletons'. We get practically no food. I can't keep

going, but I can't allow the guards to realize this. But I am not the only one."

"When night falls, we are made to start off again. The other women help me along. It would be sad for them to leave behind such a young girl to die by the roadside. We are ordered to be silent. Even the dogs are muzzled. What is this mystery? We realize that the Red Army is close behind us."

"I lie down. They lift me up, but my legs can't hold me, and I can't overcome my weakness. The women go on, leaving me alone."

"I want to sleep. Someone comes up to me, and tells me to stop this nonsense. 'Why now, when freedom is so close! You must keep going with the last of your strength'."

[The two women are reunited with the others from the march, and all are packed into a shed].

"Someone asks me 'Do you understand Polish? There is a man shouting something in Polish. What is he saying?' I tell them he is shouting 'The Red Army is in the village and the Nazis have disappeared'."

"Behind the barn we hear men's voices. The Red Army! I want to go out to them but I can't stand up. God! How can I get myself upright?"

The soldiers come into the barn. They check us carefully to see who is still alive, and help the living to rise. They lift their caps to those who are no longer alive."

"Can I help you, sister?' They lift me up but I can't stand alone. Two soldiers make a chair for me with their four arms and take me to an ambulance."

"Don't cry, sister, we won't let anyone hurt you any more'
And on his cap, a red star. This I have never seen before."

[On the last page, Masha writes]:

"Before me lie pages, just come from the press. These are the pages of my diary, no longer just my notes. They will be the bearers of my story and will go out to thousands of homes, to tell people the things that have happened, that I must tell."

Eventually Masha was reunited with those who remained of her immediate family, her father and sister. She studied at the Moscow Literary Institute, married engineer Semion Cukernik, and became a writer.

She writes⁷¹:

Semion Cukernik Masha Rolnikaite

Masha Rolnikaite was born in the city of Klaipeda on 21/07/1927, although the family lived at that time in Plunge, a small town located near Klaipeda. She finished primary school and the first grades of high school in Plunge. In the year 1940, when Vilnius was returned to Lithuania, the family moved there. On the first day of the Second World War (22/06/1941) the mother, elder sister Mira, Masha, little sister Raechka and little brother Ruvim parted with the father. He volunteered to fight at the front in the ranks of the Soviet Army, while they remained in Lithuania and on 6/09/1941 were sent to the Vilnius ghetto. With the liquidation of the ghetto on September 23-24, 1943, Masha was separated from her mother and siblings and sent to the Strassdenhof concentration camp (in Latvia). From there, in September 1944 she was transferred to the concentration camp of Stutthoff (in Poland). Mira succeeded to escape right before the liquidation of the ghetto and was in refuge till freedom came.

Masha was freed on March 10, 1945. She returned to Vilnius, completed her studies at a secondary evening school and then graduated from the Moscow Literary Institute. During the years 1945-1948 she

worked at the Arts Administration, then, until 1964, she was employed at the State Philharmonic as an editor and head of the literary division.

In the year 1959 she married a Leningrad-born man and in 1964 moved to live in Leningrad (today St. Petersburg). While in the ghetto and the concentration camps she kept a diary, which was published in the Lithuanian language in 1963 under the title "I Have to Tell" and afterwards translated into as many as 18 languages. She is the author of six novels, several short stories, essays, and translations. She is a member of the St. Petersburg Writers' Association.

Semion Cukernik was born in the city of Leningrad on 22/06/1922. He finished secondary school there. In 1941, after completing the second year of his studies at the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute he was called up for military service. In 1946, after his demobilization, he continued his studies and graduated from the Institute in 1950. From then on and until his retirement in 1985 he worked as an engineer at the Leningrad Excavator Plant.

Masha Rolnikaite

Masha visited Israel in 1995 and deposited numerous testimonies in Yad Vashem, recording those of her family who had perished. She is a grandmother.

Masha Rolnik has recently written an extended account of her life in Lithuania before the War and the accompanying Holocaust. Her story describes also the lives and fates of her uncles and aunt.

Masha's book, *Alone with Memory* amplifies greatly my account of this history. For those without Russian, machine translation can be a great help.

Rolnikaite Maria G. "ALONE WITH MEMORY". This is the story and fate of three generations of our family and photographs of all its members and four "Righteous among the Nations."

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For the text:

http://lit.lib.ru/r/rolxnikaite_m_g/text_0100.shtml

For the images:

http://lit.lib.ru/img/r/rolxnikaite_m_g/text_0100/index.shtml

⁷¹ In the wonderful DVD made by her cousin, Shloma Rolnik. see <http://rolnicks-of-lithuania.com/>