

PLUNGYAN

A Memoir

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FOREWORD

In November of 1994 my brother Morris and I returned to the land of our birth — Lithuania. There on a visit to Plunge (*Plungyan* in Yiddish) we met Jacob Joseph Bunka, a renowned folk master in the art of wood sculpture and the last living Jew of that city. He gave us a copy of his manuscript, in Yiddish, on the Jews of Plungyan, their way of life and their demise as a community, destroyed by Nazi cruelty and abetted by the Fascists of Lithuania. We sensed the historic significance of Bunka's chronicle as a testament to the tragic fate of his people, that it contained a record of a new paradigm of evil — a mass grave in every forest of the land by each village or town or city that for centuries, since the fourteenth, were inhabited by Jews. This devastation is captured in simple language in the life and memory of one outstanding personality, Jacob Joseph Bunka.

We took pains to have this unique manuscript translated into English and due to the faithfulness of my brother, the task was finally accomplished by Stephen Geller Katz, refined by Professor Joan Peskin - of Plungyan origins - and completed by the brother of Morris, of Telz background.

We hope this work will add another dimension to what is now termed *The Holocaust* and its literature.

We are grateful to the authorship of Joseph Bunka, as an heroic witness, to Mrs. Bunka for her steadfast loyalty to her Jewish husband, to their son, Eugene, for his editorial help and to all those who have helped us in bringing this work to light.

May the courage of this testament point to a better world and its pain redeemed by a gracious providence.

Rabbi Benyamin Herson

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Chapter I: Historical Beginnings of Jewish Settlement in Plungyan (Plungé)

Plungyan's early population included 111 Jews who founded one of the first Jewish settlements in Lithuania. In the old cemetery stood gravestones, dating from 500 years ago. Jewish immigrants began to arrive in Lithuania in the year 1348 when Jews were being driven out of Serbia, Moravia, Hungary, and Podolia after the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal had begun. Having been driven out of these kingdoms, Jews picked up and traveled to Lithuania.

Jews were always a significant presence in Plungyan, accounting for a large percentage of the village population. In the year 1847, the Jewish community of Plungyan 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%).

Most Jews worked in the area of trade, but little by little they were pushed out. In the years 1931-1935 the number of Jews who had been involved in the area of trade decreased to 50%. The percentage of Jews who traded in tobacco decreased from 50% to 25%. Approximately 200 Jewish families engaged in various occupations. The Jews in Plungyan had six locations in which to pray. The *bes medresh* [study/prayer house] was built in the year 1864 by Yankl Geler. The great Shul [Synagogue] was built in the year 1814. There were four *kloyzn* [houses of worship]: *Gmiles Chesed*, *Shamosim*, *chaye adam*, *Di Gele* (tailors).

In Plungyan in 1908 there was a yeshiva with 50 students. A teacher named Gutl founded a school where all disciplines were taught in Hebrew. At the beginning of 1919 the Progressive Jewish Youth founded a Jewish *folkschule* [elementary school] where all disciplines were taught in Yiddish. The school had five teachers, three of whom were in the service of the government. The young people, themselves, supported two of the teachers. Later, another school was founded in Hebrew, but in the year 1927, according to the order of the Ministry of Education, both schools became unified into one school.

In Plungyan there was also a Jewish *gimnazye* [high school]. There all disciplines were taught in Hebrew. It was located in the present day "Salameio-Neris" Number 4. The wall stands in this street to this day. This was a gift for Plungyan Jews from Mr. Oginskas, especially for the Jewish *gimnazye*. In a school that was called Tarbut, 130 students studied. In an *anfang shul* [beginners' school], which was founded by the *gimnazye*, 100 students studied in the Yiddish language. There was also a library called the Peretz Library named for the author, Peretz.

Not far from the *gimnazye* on Maluno Street (today called "Darius") stood a *cheder*, a religious school called Talmud Torah. (The building is no longer there.) For the most part, the poorest children studied in the Talmud Torah. The wooden building was purchased by a wealthy Jew. He hired the best teachers. One of them was a teacher named Levinson, thanks to whom the authority of the *cheder* greatly increased. But none of the wealthier Jews would allow their children to study there. Talmud and Hebrew were studied at this school. Children who finished this school were accepted to the yeshiva. Plungyan's own administration (self government) offered little material support to the Jewish schools. Their support was sufficient to sustain only one school.

In Plungyan there were several sport organizations including *Maccabi*, and *Ha-poel*. They had soccer teams and other sports clubs. Organizations included *Shomer Ha-tsair*, *Chaluts Ha-tsair*, as well as *Betar*. There was an organization, *Berut Hachayal*, whose goal was to go to Palestine and, with weapons in hand, create a Jewish state. On Paprujai street was a primary school where 30 young boys and girls lived. They learned different trades, worked in agriculture, without shunning heavy, dirty work, and after working a certain amount of time they would travel to Palestine. It turned out that I studied in this primary school and had contact with them.

As in all *shtetls* in Lithuania, Plungyan had cultural autonomy: institutions, press, and other things which were necessary for the Jew to exist with a Jewish spirit. Newspapers were delivered daily: *Der Vort*, *Folksblat*, *Yidische Shtime*, *Der Emes*, *Der Moment*; and the weekly: *Dem Yidishn Lebn* and *Hayntike Nayas*. There was also the Jewish *folksbank* [people's bank] that operated on Vituto Street. At the beginning of its founding it had 321 members. Later there were 220, of whom 15% were Lithuanians. The bank's management consisted of - important Jewish community leaders, the intelligentsia: Chotse Gamzu, Avrom, Gulvitsh, Avrom Pozin, Shoyel Shuch [Shur], Shloyme-Yank Mets, Yente Garb, Odes [Ades], Michl Amolski, Tevye Kesi and Emdin.

In 1927 the management of the department of Plungyan's Aze (Jewish Health Union) were: Avrom, Dembo, Michl Amolski, Itsik Pozin, the doctor's wife Mrs. Leybovish, Lipman, Chaim Zaks, Genese Levinson, Chaim Chest, Leibe Garb and Motl Pozin

In Plungyan lived a well-known writer, Mordechai Plungianski and a well-known sculptor named Rosenthal. The rabbis at different times in Plungyan were: Chaim Bloch, Avrom Vesler, Yehuda Ziv, Z. Barit, Shmuel Pavenzon, (1929); Yitschok Olshvanger, Yoysef Gutman, Meyer Mets, Yoysef Muravitsh, Bere Dov (1716).

During the period of 1918-1931 in Plungyan there was a Jewish mayor, Boruch-Dovid Goldvasser. In the year 1928 in honor of the tenth anniversary of independent Lithuania, this mayor received an award in the form of a "Freedom medal" and an honorary citation from Smetona, the president at that time. His daughter from America, Annette Goldvasser, brought copies for the founding of the Jewish Museum in Plungyan. In 1937 the whole family emigrated to South Africa, where the father died in 1956. In the Plungyan self-government there were 11 Jews, [but] in 1936 there were only two, and the representative of the mayor was Hirshe Mets (according to historical sources).

Chapter II: Jewish Life in Plungyan Prior to World War II

In Plungyan lived two front fighters, Yank Garb (a brother of Yente Garb, Jewish community leader), and Leibe Bunka (my father), who fought in the year 1918 through 1919 for Lithuanian independence and who were rewarded with "Freedom" medals. They were also given 8 hectares of land, lumber to build, and horses to work the land.

In 1936, Necheme Ril (my uncle) who was a member of the self-government and the chairman of AZE was one of the people responsible for determining what occupations Plungyaner Jews were engaged in. In the center of the *shtetl* stood many buildings that belonged to Jewish merchants, businessmen and craftsmen. No Jew worked in governmental institutions because they were not accepted. Besides, there were Jewish institutions that accepted Jews. There were three doctors, two lawyers, two Jewish pharmacists on the street *Darius un Girenas* (earlier called *Moluna*). Kotse Zaks had an electricity station, a sawmill, and a flourmill. The Plungyan inhabitants called the electrical outlets, which were 110 volts, *zaksine*, thereby eternalizing Zaks' name.

At this time, the condition of the Jews was a very bitter one. The crisis became greater for the craftsmen and the shop owners. Some Jewish shop owners were on the verge of bankruptcy, and several did in fact go bankrupt. Much of the fault lay with the Lithuanian stockholders union, "Letukis," which did not pay any taxes to the state. They were exempt from payments, and therefore were able to sell their merchandise more cheaply. Both Jewish and Lithuanian shopkeepers suffered from this. The Jewish People's Bank [*Folksbank*] assisted a great deal. Its members lent people needed-money without interest as did the treasury of the Jewish Aid Committee [*Hilf Komitet*]. Ten percent of Plungyaner Jews had relatives in America, Africa, and other countries from whom they received support. People waited for Wednesdays and Thursdays, when mail from abroad would arrive. You were really happy when you could buy merchandise for your half-empty shop with the dollars or pounds that you received from abroad.

In the marketplace there stood a long wall (burnt down in 1961) on both sides of which there were buildings called booths. They called the buildings "shops." The wall was also a gift from Comrade Oginskas. There were only Jewish booths there. In the "shops" people traded in fancy goods, fabrics, sewing machines, gears, parts, ironware, shoes, and all other things that are used in life. The booths included those for the wealthy, like Goldvasser, Rolnik and Plungyanski, whose proprietors had accounts in the Lithuanian *Telzer* Bank and the Plungyan People's Bank.

The remaining shops were average and were avoided by the well-to-do. There was neither heating nor lighting in the small booths. Hene Shvat, whose shop was in the beginning of the "shops", on the same side as Hile Ruman's green grocer, facing Ritever [Bod Street], sat with gloves, with open fingertips, and kept a pot full of hot coals close by to stay warm while she sold buttons.

As in all *Stetlech* there were also *Chevre Kadishim* [burial societies]. In Plungyan they had no one affiliation and were independent. They dug the graves themselves, laid out the graves with boards ("Roysh" and nails) [?], and placed wood chips on the eyes of the deceased, in a word, they did everything to carry out what was needed to bury the dead. Paupers were buried without charge. The *Chevre Kadishim* would also tear "*krie*" [the rending or tearing of garments] and go around with a collection box [*pushke*] to collect money calling out, "*tsedoke totsil memoves* [charity will save from death]." What they collected was their only reward for the hard work of the burial society: cleansing and putting on shrouds, carrying to the cemetery, and interring the dead.

They did their work the year round, in heat and in cold, in rain and in snow, carrying the deceased to the cemetery at the bottom of the hill. The money that they received from the relatives of the deceased and *tatsl moves gelt* [charity collected for the burial of the dead] was donated to buy shrouds for the poor and was also used to support their *kloyz* [house of prayer], and *shames* [beadle]. Money was also used to keep the cemetery fence in good repair and with the remaining money, a party was held once a year.

Every shtetl had its "extraordinary" Jews and Plungyan was no exception. I would like to recall some of them. First was Moyshele Royzes. Both Jews and Christians alike knew him by name. He was a small man. His knees were pressed tightly together. It was difficult for him to walk, yet he did so shaking from side to side. He had a habit of screaming, "oy" which he yelled out from time to time. He also had a virtue, in that he always knew what time it was whenever he was asked. Everyone knew about this. Consequently, children, adults, Lithuanians really needing to know, or for no reason, would ask, "Moyshele, what time is it?" He would always answer cheerfully, sometimes ten times a day. People wondered how he knew the correct time, accurate within a few minutes, especially since no one ever saw him wearing a watch.

There was another person, who was called "Yankele the Blue" who was an invalid. A hand and a foot were shrunken because of an illness, or perhaps he was just born that way. His hands and face were blue from his condition, giving rise to the nickname "Yankele the blue." Every Friday night he would go through the streets with a knocker in his hand and call, "*Yidn*, in *shul arayn* [Jews, into the Synagogue!]." In the beginning of the war, his friends took him with them. While fleeing Plungyan, lying in the wagon which his friends were driving, he was not able to hold out, and died close to the Estonian border where he was buried.

Almost the entire shtetl had colorful nicknames. For example, "Bebale" [little bean], "Di Luchtse" [The Rag], "Kroe" [Crow], "Sholem der toyt" [Sholem the Dead], "Chane di Shvartse" [Chane the Black One], "Koloshe," "Koshkale," "Cossack," "Berman Foy," "Leibke der Lebenbeyn," "Binkeliner," and others. All Plungyaners together were called "Plungyaner Ganovim"

It's worth mentioning a few other interesting characters, as they say, with their particular personalities, or virtues. In Plungyan such people were not uncommon. I am writing about a few with whom I was acquainted. There was Chayeh Yose Noyachs, a huge woman who on high holidays would stand by the door of the shul at the woman's entrance maintaining order, making sure that children didn't push their way in. She also would not admit children without mothers, chasing them away and cursing at them vehemently. The children thought this was great fun, so they purposely irritated her just to hear her lexicon of curses.

There was Hese Korb, who they used to hire to stay through the night with a dead person (according to Jewish law the dead were not to be left alone), was a cheerful wagon driver, as were all wagon drivers. He also had artistic abilities, and took part in the shows which drivers, tailors, shoemakers, and other craftsmen organized. Even remaining with a dead person he never lost his sense of humor. Leibe Bunka (my father) was always being invited to weddings and other celebrations to entertain the guests with his impromptu singing in couplets, improvised on the spot for the person for whom he was singing. He used to tell anecdotes and perform stories he created himself, keeping time with a match stick on top of a matchbox. He had a good singing voice. He recited rhymes, or *Sharshzirn* as they were called. Aside from this, he was famous for writing legal petitions, "*proshenie*" appeals or other pleas for people. He wouldn't accept money, but some people gave him gifts when they were able to.

At this point I would like to talk about my childhood years and youth. We left Plungyan to live in (Memel) Klaipeda when I was ten years old. My father worked for the company of Israilit in a manufacturing factory. I had a Bar Mitzvah there in Klaipeda on the 13th of July, 1936. At that time I studying in a Lithuanian high school called *Donelaitis*. For a whole month after coming

home from high school, I studied the Haftorah "*Nachomu, Nachomu ami*" for several hours a day with a Rabbi. The day of the Bar Mitzvah arrived, and as the *Shul* was not far from our home (on the next street) my mother made an effort so that more Jewish ladies would come to hear me read the Torah. I must admit that at that time my voice sounded beautiful. When I finished reading the Haftorah and went to my mother, I noticed that she was not the only one wiping away the tears, but so were the old ladies who joyfully congratulated her. Later a community representative approached my parents with a proposal for me to study in the Telzer Mechine (preparation for yeshiva). Naturally they agreed. It wouldn't cost them anything because the Kehile [community] would help. I arrived in Telz and began to study and "*esn teg*" [a rotating meal plan where students would eat in a different home every day]. Financial support from home was out of the question because there were still five children at home. Only my father worked, and he did not earn much. Granted I did receive support from my uncle Cheme Ril who was a wealthy member of the Plungyan Jewish community. He paid a Telzer Jew, Shavel, who every week would give me a kilo of sausages. I lived on *Bod* [Bath] street with a woman named Verblav and her daughter. In the Mechine we were taught by the head of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Bloch and his representative named Pinchos, at whose house I ate Shabbos dinner. He had many children and lived in a house across from the bank (which stands today although their house is no longer there). It used to be cheerful after the meal. As with all children this age, there was a lot of talking. The Rabbi had a morose character. He had a strange habit of pulling hairs out of his beard and he was strict. Many who studied in the yeshiva must remember the great uproar caused by the appearance of an obituary in the newspaper stating that the Rabbi had died. It so happened that the whole incident was a prank perpetrated by a Yeshiva student who had been expelled by the Yeshiva. The Rabbi had stood firm on his decision to expel the boy. On that day the kiosk which stood close to the Yeshiva was swarmed by people wanting to get the newspaper. People read in groups. On that very day the Rabbi had studied Gemora with us. At the beginning of the class the Rabbi said that this was a reminder from God not to forget death and to commit fewer sins, so that arriving in the next world you will have fewer sins, and everyone of us had to know this in order to learn well. The next day an announcement appeared that the obituary was a forgery. The youth was punished for having spread the deception. Unfortunately, it was not long before the Second World War broke out, with its gruesome fate for the Jews of Poland, and thereafter for the Jews in all of Europe.

We had to return to Plungyan after a short time. On March 19, 1939 Klaipeda (Memel) was annexed by the Third Reich of Hitler's Germany. All the Jews had to leave Memel. Lithuanians also had to leave. That day the German newspaper, the *Memel Dampfboot* announced that all Lithuanian censors were out. Many anti-Semitic slogans appeared against front fighters who fought in the years 1918-1919 against the Bolsheviks and also against Germany. My father had to get out as quickly as possible in order not to fall into the hands of the Hitler Youth. It was already clear to me that the Soviet occupation was a definite possibility because a lot of people were talking about it.

I also returned to Plungyan and, being around sixteen, I was given over to a carpenter who made furniture. I worked until the beginning of the war in order to learn the trade.

Mendl Ril (my grandfather) was a *forshprecher* [soothsayer] against an *eyne hore* [the Evil Eye] "*aroyz*" (this comes from an incantation). Both Jews and Christians used to come to him from all corners of the Plungyan area, as well as from other areas requesting his help. This was his remedy: He would pour lemonade into a glass of water if the client brought water. If not, he would leave with him to another room because he held the healing procedure secret. No one was allowed to see what he was doing. He once said he would teach me when he himself was no longer able. (Unfortunately this never happened. He, my grandmother, my little sister and their daughter and her husband were murdered in the town of Skoydvil.) My desire to see what it was that he did with the glasses of liquid was very great. But I managed to see this much: He ran his

right index finger around the glass and quietly, with closed eyes uttered something. This lasted several minutes. Then he took it out to the sick person, ordering him to drink a tablespoon three times a day, and if it did not help, to come back again.

One time a Lithuanian mother and father came to my grandfather from the countryside with their daughter in a wagon bedded with hay. The daughter was covered with a blanket. Her face was swollen and terribly red. They told my grandfather that he was their last hope. They had heard from former clients that he had once healed a similar illness. He did the procedure as always into a glass of lemonade, and ordered the parents to give it to their daughter to drink three times a day. They then went to the wagon where she lay, and my grandfather placed his hand over her face, and whispered something. We were so surprised when they returned with their very beautiful daughter, bringing my grandfather eggs, butter, a few chickens, fruits, vegetables, cheese and I don't remember what else. They promised to bring more when they came to market in Plungyan.

Once a young Jewish woman came, who was a frequent guest in my grandfather's home. She used to become easily provoked about the evil eye and would then become frightened, fearing that anything may happen. As a precautionary measure, she would often come to my grandfather. On that particular day my grandfather was not there, because my uncle, Chayim-Leib, happened to be visiting from the shtetl of Luknik. He also knew about the woman's fears and decided to play a trick on her. He told her that my grandfather was ill, but if she desired he could take the glass of water into the other room where grandfather was lying and he would say the incantation over the glass and bring it back for her. She agreed. My uncle went into the other room, poured a little bit of salt into the glass, waited until the salt dissolved and took it out for her to drink as she was used to doing. Some time passed and she met my grandfather and of course thanked him and asked how he was feeling after his illness. She knew that he had been ill last Wednesday, the day when he warded off the evil eye for her, only the water was a little salty. My grandfather looked at her in bewilderment, and told her that he hadn't been ill at all. Precisely on that day he had been in the tailors' *kloyz* where he was the *gabbai* repairing the *omed* [lectern]. She then understood that she had been fooled, and had been made a laughing stock. She became angry at my uncle, but she remained silent so that no one would find out about it.

It was happy *Simche Le Yehudim* — full of joy and merriment for Jews on our Bod Street. Everyone lived hand to mouth, but in high spirits, as they say.

Hirshe der Fisher obviously sold fish. The fish looked like they were still alive in his hands because he trembled probably due to old age. He was a very strong man. In his youth he had been tall and broad shouldered.

Gite di Telzerke dealt in frozen wild apples, which she would sell. She would gather them in the forest, frozen in the winter, and sell them individually or by the litre.

Toyve, the blind woman, lived together with her son. She would blindly knit socks for people who ordered them from her. She was always thrilled when someone told her they were wearing a new dress. She would touch the dress with her fingertips and say, "What a nice dress you are wearing."

There lived two sisters and a brother, whose last name was Flaks. They were very poor, and also a little bit poor in wits, in addition to which they did not speak well. It was very difficult to understand them. One of the sisters married another poor man from Kelshteyn. I heard an anecdote that they got up in the morning, and one said to the other "I saw our mother in my sleep." The other said with wonder, "Come, come, I, awake, did not see mother, but you were asleep, how could you see her?" They lived close to our house.

Leibke der Leynbeyn was a very strong man. He lived with his mother, but he was not too bright; like they say, he was missing a screw in his head. He was not a wagon driver, but helped them carry heavy things, sacks of flour, sugar, salt and other things. With this he earned a

few *litn* to help make ends meet for him and his mother. Later, in the chapter describing the destruction of the Jews of Plungyan, I will tell how he met his death.

Shortly before the war there were over 60 Jewish craftsmen in Plungyan including: three watchmakers, two photographers, (one the famous Berkovitch), four tinsmiths, thirteen bakers, six seamstresses, three tailors, one leather cutter, eight shoemakers, one carpenter, five blacksmiths, two kettle makers, two leather workers, two hat makers, three mirror makers, two hairdressers, later one or two glaziers, one harness maker, four house painters, one master builder (called *Velvl* the Master Builder). *Eyg Aynbinder*, who worked with his brother-in-law, whose family name was *Takson*, had a small candy factory in which 30 women worked. There was also a woman who ran the Dutch oven and a few small Jewish institutions, restaurants and a hotel.

Plungyaner Jewish teens and children got along fairly well with their Christian counterparts. Many wealthy Jews sent their children to study in the Lithuanian high school or the *gimnazys*. They would often do their homework together helping the less able students. *Neske Shochat*, for example, often did her homework together with a Lithuanian friend, *Dola Vajtkute*. *Dola* used to be often at *Neske's* house as if she were a member of the family. They were devoted to each other. This was told to me personally by *Dola* the Lithuanian friend. I already spoke about a few people on *Bod Gas*, which was the poor street.

Now I would like to furnish a few details concerning the main street, *Vytautas*, where mostly rich Jews lived. On the street there were more than a few Jewish shops. A few of their proprietors were: *Pozin*, *Rhill*, *Rostovski*, *Gelerenter*, *Yudelman's* bakery, *Rihman's* harness and shoe repair, that employed about ten workers. There was also a small lemonade factory on the *Telzer Gas*. The horse trader *Chotse Gamzu* who exported horses to Holland, had three brothers *Chest*, *Rolnik* and *Hirshe* the lawyer. There was also *Bere Press*, a shopkeeper; doctors *Ziv* and *Levin*; *Goldvasser*, the former mayor of Plungyan; *Plungyanski*, a famous shopkeeper and dozens of others who traded in small and large business.

In the *Bod Gas*, as I explained earlier, lived the poor Jews, shoemakers, tailors, water carriers, laborers, laundry women, unskilled laborers, unemployed and poor people in general who were constantly supported. There were also a few small shopkeepers on the *Bod Gas*. They did not have any signs outside; instead they placed in their shop windows empty packs of cigarettes with brand names like *Vilkas*, [or *Vilkos*] *Regata*, *IlSafa* or from Turkish tobacco *Turkas* (or *Turkos*). From sitting too long in the shop window the cigarette packs were faded and covered with a layer of dust. The shops of the small shopkeepers were dark especially when the sun did not shine on their side of the street. The owner lived in the best room of the house as did, for example, the storekeeper named *Kriger*. Entering the shop, a bell would ring that was attached above the door thus letting the shopkeeper know that a customer had arrived so he didn't have to wait at the counter the whole time.

Most shopkeepers on the *Bod Gas* (there were three) sold herring, which was considered to be a cheap food. But when you tried to buy more, all they gave you was herring brine, which alone could be eaten with potatoes, saving the herring for another day. The main staple was potatoes. Potatoes with herring, potatoes with herring brine, potatoes with sour milk. These were the most common foods. They used to buy as they say, "on credit", not paying right away. As soon as you brought the money to the shopkeeper, he would cross out what you owed. Wood for cooking and for heat in the winter was purchased in the marketplace by the wagon load or in bundles. In the old days people didn't buy so much wood because it wasn't cheap.

Plungyaner Jews named the streets in their own way: *Ritever Gas* and for example, *Bod Gas* deriving its name from the bathhouse on the street. *Vaizganter Gas* and *Pakolner Gas* (or *Pakalner*, *Pokolner*, *Pokalner*, or *Fakolner* ... etc.) deriving its name from the Lithuanian word for downhill, the main street *Vytautas*, *Kunigiske Gas* named for the priests who lived on the street. (*Kunigiske*, Lithuanian for *priests*). There was also the *Tifle Gas* (or *Tiple*), the *Frayheyt Alee*

[Liberty Avenue] and the *Deitchisher Gas* named for the Germans that they said lived on the street many years ago. Jews also named other Plungyaner streets.

Bod Gas looked poverty stricken. The old wooden houses appeared to be crippled and overgrown with tall weeds and nettles. On small mounds there were a few garden beds. There they planted garlic, onions, beans, carrots cabbage and sometimes potatoes and other things — a little bit of everything.

With the exception of the *mikve*, people seldom entered the bathhouse. Before the high holidays the bathhouse was full. Every day the bathhouse courtyard would be full of playing children. Children were always in abundance in the house of a poor man.

Many Jews on Bod Gas had goats. A goat isn't a cow; it's a lot easier to maintain. A goat provided enough milk for the entire family. On market days the goats were let out to fend for themselves.

At the marketplace on market days wagons stood with signs raised high announcing the wares on sale: *klumpes*, *medpodes* or shoes with wooden soles and other items that the peasants brought from the countryside. The Jewish goats would immediately settle themselves right next to the wagons and together with the horses would chew on the hay or grass that was hanging over the wagon from between the bars. The peasants didn't bother to chase them away. How much can a goat eat anyway? They weren't stingy with their hay which they had plenty of from their fields. Even after their horses had finished eating, there was plenty left over, which the *Yiddenes* (Jewish Women(?)) would gather up for winter. Other days they used to lead the goats to what they called "the lawn", many areas of which were swamp covered, but with an abundance of grass as well. This area was a no man's land located between the Bod Gas and the Papruder Gas. If a goat grazing in the area was not careful, and fell into the muck, up to his stomach, you had to get help to pull him out onto dry land.

Next to the lawn lived a former Polish or Romanian Jew whose family name was Jakop. His occupation was buying old weak horses no longer any good for work, and afterwards selling them to be slaughtered for meat, or slaughtering them himself to be sold to the fox companies, which sold the meat as food for other animals. He didn't always find a customer so quickly and left the horse to graze on the lawn until a buyer could be found.

We children thought it was fascinating to see the horse being pulled out of the mud. A horse is not a goat, even if it's an emaciated horse. It's still a horse and the weaker he is, the more difficult for him to get out of the mud alone. The more he stumbles trying to wrest himself free, the deeper he sinks into the mire. That's why you have to get help as quickly as possible. The children would run shouting to Jakop, telling him the bad news. In desperation he would run yelling and pleading to everyone along the way to help him save his "capital investment." A crowd consisting of Lithuanians and Jews gathered. Grabbing thick wooded poles by the ends, they placed them under the animal. Some of them grabbed him by the tail and tossed a rope around his neck and, in this fashion, lifting and pulling with a tremendous effort, they saved the horse's life. Jakop went around thanking everyone profusely for their assistance.

Wintertime on the frozen portions of the meadow, both Jewish and Lithuanian children used to slide around on the ice with wagons and goats making the place a pure pleasure. This was not far from our house. We lived right near the meadow. Only one thing was missing: the money to buy skates. So we decided to make them ourselves. We took a small but somewhat long piece of wood, to which was hooked on a thick piece of wire attached to two pieces of string to tie on to the feet. For the most part people only had a single skate and would use the other foot to push with. The kids who didn't have these kinds of skates would borrow them from someone else. At the beginning of the Bod Gas, which started on the top of a hill descending downward, we kids would position a big sleigh, the type you harness to a horse. It was quite heavy and we had to push it uphill with all our might before we could take off down the hill. The sleigh had a shaft that we

used to steer with (to control the descent downhill). So as not to crash into Velvl the Master Builder's house it was necessary to steer to the left. We had no trouble maneuvering safely down the hill because in those days there were no cars in Plungyan. In the evenings almost no wagons passed through the streets. So many kids were anxious to take the ride that it was no effort at all to get the sleigh back up the hill. There was quite a bit of bickering with each other. Finally, we reached the top of the hill (we did not make the girls push) and cheerfully shouted to take off, we sped down to the bottom of the hill. There our parents would be calling us to supper, usually consisting of milk and noodles with *puter broyt* (buttered bread) — then to bed.

Bod Gas was known for a crystal clean stream that flowed into the bathhouse, exiting as dirty water. The stream traversed the street at which point a small wooden bridge had been constructed. Under the bridge there lived huge rats as big as cats. The rats had long tails and people called them "water mice". They struck fear into the hearts of child and adult alike. The "water mice" didn't pay much attention to the passersby. Perhaps they would give them a quick mouse-like glance and quickly return to their search through the muddy water.

Wintertime in Jewish households was a time for plucking feathers. Illuminated by the light of a kerosene lamp with a glass chimney, we would sing popular Yiddish songs, tell stories and legends. I remember to this very day the story of Stese who used to help my grandfather and grandmother bake bagels and smoke herring, starting the work in the middle of the night, delivering fresh bagels for the customers in time for breakfast. One particular late night she left the house and was led away by an evil spirit or maybe even the devil himself. The whole night she wandered around and around and couldn't find my grandfather's house for the life of her. When the sun came up, she realized that she has been standing precisely in front of the door to my grandfather's house. After hearing these stories, children became fearful of sleeping at night.

In those days we played various games with buttons, kites with long and short wooden sticks, banging with the larger and smaller one to make it fly further. Then they would ask "*mozshna?*" (At the time I didn't know what *mozshna* meant. It means "are you ready yet?" in Russian. It appears that the game is from the time of the Russian Tsars.) Girls and boys played together imitating the grown-ups, cooking and baking with sand, making cakes and torts. Girls played with dolls made from old materials while the boys played soccer with balls made out of old rags tied together with string in order to maintain its round shape and to keep it from falling apart when kicked. Most of the time the string didn't hold and kept having to be repaired. We also rode on wooden poles tied to a crate. This was our horse cart. We played, shouted, jumped around and drove the "horse" to fetch merchandise for the booths, riding off to fairs, trading and selling "horses". Paper candy wrappers or buttons served as money.

During the High Holidays the children would go with their fathers to the big *shul* and would stand and listen to the *davening*. During one of the holidays something happened to me that I remember to this day. It happened like this: I was waiting for my father by the source of the well, a place where frogs were always found sitting near the water. It was for this reason, or so they said, that the water was always so cold. Frogs, mice, birds and other small creatures were my real weakness. I had a habit of picking them up to look them over, even sometimes taking them into the house to keep. My father found the frog, which I was not permitted to have, told me to get rid of it and go to *shul*. In that particular moment, instead of putting it back near the well, I lost the frog. Without realizing it, I had placed the frog in my coat pocket where it sat still not moving an inch. When we entered the synagogue, it sat quietly until *Shmoneh Esre* at which point, as if in spite, it began to stir. It turned out the frog had journeyed through a hole in my pocket and was now stuck in the lining of my coat and had crawled on my back. My father noticed my scratching and fidgeting and knew that something was wrong. He couldn't help me because he hadn't yet finished praying *shmoneh esre*. The prayers had barely finished when we were out the door. My father led me to the synagogue courtyard. When he discovered that the disruption had been the frog, he made

me take off my coat, removed the frog himself and threw it in the grass, scolding me all the while. Another time I found a human skull, which I painted completely red and laid it down by the outside wall of the house. My mother took one look at it and told me to immediately take it back to where I had found it. I discovered the skull where they were digging a foundation for Rihman's Lemonade factory. It was determined that the skull had belonged to a Cossack. Part of a rusted sword was found next to the skull.

Gemiles Chesed was a Jewish tradition throughout the ages where wealthier Jews aided poorer Jews. Insuring that poorer Jews had food on the table for *shabbos* and holidays was not an exception in Plungyan. Inviting a less fortunate guest to one's home on *shabbos* was part of this tradition. During the High Holidays the big shul was packed with people. There were some Jews who attended services who did not practice this tradition and were not really considered faithful. People went to the big shul to pray only on the holidays. Very few went to the big shul every day and even fewer in the winter because there was no heat. It was in the *beis midrash* and small study houses where people went to pray three times a day. There were long tables with benches where people sat and recited Psalms.

Jewish laborers and youth were active in the Jewish communal life in Plungyan. Evening discussion group meetings and get-togethers were arranged in "*Izraelovitch*" to which we were supposed to bring tasty sweet foods (without alcoholic drinks). At these meetings we had discussions, socialized and talked about the general situation of Jews. It was decided who was going to help with what concerning matters of the day. We also held poetry recitals where people read aloud their own works or the works of other Jewish poets. We sang Hebrew and Yiddish songs and Borech Gershke accompanied us on the mandolin. There were several Jewish orchestras to keep us in good spirits. Many Plungyaners still remember the following story: A performance was being put on by a troupe of tailors, shoemakers, not to mention a few other assorted workers all of whom would hardly "spit at a glass of whiskey" as they say. In the middle of the performance came the line "Jacob, how do you know that I am the King of Kings?" From the audience came the improvised response — "Yeah, yeah, we know who you are, Yankele the Drunkard." The audience's reaction varied. Most were angry at the person who made the crack. A scene was avoided, and the performance continued.

There was also a movie house called *Kino Lira*. It was there that silent films were shown on the stage. On the other side of the screen sat our now famous Borech Gershke who played various popular Lithuanian and Yiddish melodies.

Many Plungyaner Jews were able to read and write. There were those who knew *shacharis*, *mincha* and *maariv* by heart. Some, as in the case of Elie Glikman, knew *mincha* and *maariv* by memory without knowing how to read or write. Glikman also spoke five languages including a few rarities like Gypsy language. He was also one of the best firemen.

The fire department of Plungyan consisted almost solely of Jews. There were a few Lithuanians but the leaders were all Jews: Hirshe Mets, Cheme Ril, his brother Chest Ril, Chaim Katsin (he had a slight limp) and other honorable and distinguished Jews. During periods of frequent fires, night-shift firemen were organized. The town's youth were also enlisted to help out. Rumors were circulating that people were setting fires for the purpose of getting insurance money from the government to put up new houses so that construction workers would always have jobs. After the big fire of 1931 (there were also big fires in 1917 and 1894) almost a third of the houses in Plungyan were destroyed. The fire started in Chest's wooden building on Vytautas Gas. Arson was suspected, but it couldn't be proven.

The aforementioned Cheme Ril wrote in 1936: "Five years after the fire one would not recognize the streets. There are a lot of new houses and buildings to be found, some of them beautiful wood construction." Not everyone could enjoy their homes because of the high rates of

interest charged by the banks after the war [World War One] when cash was scarce. It was a hardship for many to pay back their loans at such rates.

Not far from Plungyan was the so-called Kolneshiker Forest. It was there that the Jewish community of Plungyan created a summer camp for disadvantaged children. A farmhouse was rented and personnel were hired including a few girls who ran the play activities, led walks in the woods and took care of the children, all on a volunteer basis. During the course of a summer, many children attended the summer camp. The camp organizer was Cheme Ril. The wealthier Jews rented rooms in the country where they stayed with their families the entire summer. The forest, with its many pine trees had positive health effects on those with lung ailments. One such woman was Mrs. Rihman who for years spent the summers in the forest until she finally succumbed to tuberculosis.

Jews and Christians alike ventured from town into the woods to gather the plentiful berries found growing there. On the Sabbath we had to cross through the edge of the woods that stretched along the road exiting the town.

Palange, a seaside resort, is about 50 kilometres from Plungyan. The summer cottages by the sea were not the only attraction in Palange. Poor Jewish youngsters traveled there from Plungyan to earn a few *liden* doing business with the kosher hotels and villas where rich Jews vacationed. From the kosher hotels in Palange, chickens and poultry were brought to the *Shoychet* to slaughter in the ritual way. Boys were hired to carry the chickens back and forth. I was informed by a boy from Plungyan that there were boys who slaughtered the chickens themselves and kept the few pennies for their own pockets. At the kosher hotels girls waited on tables and washed dishes along with other workers, men and women.

Jews and Lithuanians shared varying, but complementary, economic interests. Jews leased orchards from the Lithuanians, harvested the fruit and berries and sold them at their booths at the market. Jews also purchased flax, grain, horses and other necessary goods and provisions to sell to the Lithuanian farmers in the countryside. The farmers were grateful not to have to waste valuable time in the high farming season. Jewish tailors, with their sewing machines in tow, traveled to the countryside and made clothes for entire families, and afterwards for everyone else in town. Jews made trips with wagons to buy old clothes and things that the peasants no longer needed. *Korobelnikes* or peddlers sold various small items like sewing needles, buttons, thread, candles, headache pills and the like. Jews painted the traditional Lithuanian chests with various birds and similar images in an old-fashioned style.

Provincial Lithuanians, who came on market day, to the fairs or to attend church services, always had a Jewish acquaintance who would allow them to park their wagons in their courtyard and provided them with a place to stay in their house. The Lithuanians also bought fresh bagels and herring from the booths where each merchant would grab them by the sleeve pulling them over to his booth. Sometimes the merchants would even take a chance and let merchandise out on credit to a peasant with whom he may or may not have been well acquainted. To this day Lithuanians remember those days when you could count on the Jews in times of need, and you could trust them. But one cannot say the same about the Lithuanians from whom it was difficult to get help or expect favors.

Whether in the booths, Jewish restaurants or bakeries, you could always buy what you needed: clothes, dishes, harnesses, chains, shovels, nails, bullets, horseshoes — whatever you needed to run your household. You could also have the Jewish blacksmith make you a plow and harrow to order. He could also overhaul your wagons and sleighs or shoe your horses. (It wasn't just by accident that we had five Jewish blacksmiths in town.)

It was a common tradition to bring little gifts for the children. And the children anticipated tasty treats like *bobkas*, milk rolls and bagels.

Chapter III: The War and the Destruction of the Jewish Community of Plungyan

In the 1940s, under the Soviets, the Jews of Lithuania lost their economic and cultural autonomy. This process began gradually but eventually everything was abolished. The big synagogue and prayer houses were confiscated and closed. The teachers' schools, together with all of the Jewish organizations, which had existed for hundreds of years, were closed. Jewish merchandise from the booths as well as Jewish homes were confiscated and turned into state property. Few managed to hide their merchandise to have a little to live from.

On the 14th of June 1941, six families were sent to Siberia including Ear Retavel of the town of Riteve. It was the fate of one such person to comprehend the inhuman treatment by the past Soviet regime against these people. I was told by a Lithuanian woman, named Olympia Gritsene, who related how she was taken with her husband and their children in trains that were used to transport Jewish families from Plungyan to Siberia — the same rail cars used to transport cattle.

Those sent to Siberia included: Chotse Gamzu, the richest Jew in Plungyan, and of whom I have already written. He was a horse trader and a leader in the Jewish community; Itsik Tsivye, the director of the *Betar* in Plungyan with his wife and small children. On the journey one of his children became deathly ill and needed immediate assistance or at least some water. But unfortunately, there wasn't any to be had. It wasn't known when the train would stop next and they did not know what to do. Olympia just happened to be carrying a bottle of champagne. They decided to give the child some of the champagne and miraculously, the child was revived.

Arriving in Siberia, Olympia was placed in the same camp with Chotse Gamzu and his wife who was elderly and didn't have any children. They became isolated and depressed. They were starved as those "unfit for work" and were barely given enough food to sustain themselves. Even though she worked very hard and she didn't have much herself, Olympia helped the elderly couple as best she could. They toiled like slaves in the worst Siberian frosts and hardly received enough food to keep up their strength for such hard labor. Olympia told me that Gamzu never lost hope that someday he would return to Plungyan. He even promised to buy her a booth or two when they returned to Plungyan in return for her kindness. But fate would deal them a different hand. Painfully, Olympia recounted that despite her efforts, both Gamzu and his wife died of starvation and disease, a gruesome twist of fate that the elderly couple 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.

Rumors were beginning to circulate from the other side of the ocean and from local extremists claiming that Jews had jubilantly greeted the Soviet army with flowers in their hands as they entered Lithuania. They also claimed that Jews were employed in repressive institutions involved in enforcing the Soviet regime in Lithuania. This huge lie that spread throughout Plungyan and other *shtetlech*, serves to illustrate just how absurd things were getting. It was primarily Lithuanians and not Jews who met the Soviet army with flowers and cheers. You did not find cheering in Yiddish anywhere.

There were no Jews at the managerial levels of government. Lithuanians and Russians almost exclusively laid the foundation for the Soviet regime in the towns and cities. Jews were entirely not part of this process. Only in the bigger cities did a few Jews hold these posts. It was the Lithuanians and Russians that organized and directed the regime.

Most Jews were well aware of the Soviet regime's treatment of them starting with the nationalist policies of the 1940's. This was all part of an initiative to kill the Jewish spirit and culture by repressing the Jewish intellect. The best representatives of the Jewish people were murdered off (in the early 1950s) (writer, Moyshe Kulbak and theater artist, Michoels among many others). It was obvious the Lithuanians knew nothing about this. The Jews in Plungyan worked harder than the others. There were no special privileges. And as a result of the Soviet occupation, many Jews lost their property, further crushing the Jewish spirit. So it is a mystery how the Jews could have possibly cheered the incoming Soviet army when they knew that what was happening to their brothers in the Soviet Union, could happen to them next.

It must also be stated that both Lithuanians and Jews were deceived by Soviet propaganda that was put out by the *Aktiv* of the Communist party in an attempt to rally people around the idea that the best and most correct state was the Soviet Union. We were told that people don't live and breathe as freely as we do in the Soviet Union. Today we understand that we were seduced, and lived with these illusions or fifty years.

The beginning of the war

We arose Sunday morning. It was the 22nd of June 1941. Our parents woke us up, and because we were half asleep, we didn't understand what was happening. We looked at them with sleepy eyes and asked them what was going on, and right then we heard people running in the streets and yelling that a war had started.

Later, on the streets groups of people began to gather, including fleeing Jewish refugees from Kreting. The Germans had already reached their towns and these refugees had a sample of what was in store for them. Between Hitler's henchmen and the local collaborators, they had to get out of there as quickly as possible. There were also Jewish refugees living in Plungyan from Poland had who witnessed the German invasion of 1939. They knew that the Germans intended to do the same to them as they had done to the Jews of Poland and Germany.

Low flying German war planes appeared in the skies and began firing machine guns at groups of people standing in the cemetery. Groups of entire families gathered together to flee Plungyan. But even before the Germans arrived, trouble started for the Jews when the local Lithuanian fascists and anti-Semites reared their ugly heads. They began capturing lone Soviet soldiers and Jews not allowing them to evacuate. They had already grabbed a few of them retreating from the area when the shooting started. There was a small uprising by the Russian Army personnel who were stationed in Plungyan. The Russian army continued its retreat pushing ahead of the refugees who clogged the escape routes that lead out of the town. Parents with infants in their arms, leading small children by the hand, escaped by what ever means possible. Some had horses and wagons loaded with possessions that eventually had to be tossed away to make room for more children or those exhausted from the trip. We, a group of boys, ran further ahead of the others. We were then detained by the Soviet soldiers, who were lying in wait in the forest in preparation for battle. They searched us for guns because apparently civilians were shooting at Soviet soldiers, clearly the work of the fascist Lithuanians. They finished searching us. On one youth named Rachmilke they found a Russian grenade. It turned out that he had taken the grenade from the munitions factory where he had been employed so that he would be armed against the local fascists. The fact that we were Jews and opposed the Germans who wanted to destroy the Jewish people was of no consequence to the Russian soldiers. No excuses we were valid. They said they should shoot us all. They then decided to let us go farther on. But they led Rachmilke away, deep into the woods.

We walked a little further and then came to a stop. We waited, thinking that maybe they would let him go (he was partially handicapped) when we heard a few shots. We took that to mean that they shot him.

It was especially horrible when the low-flying German planes would fire at the long rails of women and children in wagons or on foot. The fascist pilots definitely saw they were civilian refugees and not military personnel. It was on the road that the first Jewish casualties occurred. People didn't know where to take shelter. Some tried to take refuge in the woods that lined both sides of the road, but fell in ditches trying to flee. Mothers shielded their children with their own bodies. The noise from the screaming and yelling was loud. People became separated from one another. After the attack, people were looking for each other, calling out the names of their loved ones.

I recall a certain tragic image. Not far from a ditch lay a little girl, maybe 4 years old, covered with blood. There was no sign of life. Not far stood her mother with two children who were crying. The mother took the dead child in her arms. Lying further up the road was a dead horse that was killed while still harnessed to a wagon.

These were not the only tragic incidents that we witnessed along the way. It was a sad situation. No one knew if he would survive, die on the way, or be captured by the "White Bands," Lithuanian fascists who had organized before the Germans came. (The name came from the white bands they wore on their arms.) They would halt Jews and shoot them.

It happened to the Glikman family. They were stopped and the bandits wanted to take their horse and wagon and their belongings, and they were ready to shoot them. As luck would have it, the Glikmans managed to escape such a fate. Amongst this band of killers was one who knew the Glikmans well and he was persuaded to let them move ahead unharmed, thus saving them from certain death.

Only 10% of the Plungyan Jews saved themselves in their flight deep into Russia. But all the others who remained in Plungyan and surroundings were rooted out, their names eternally erased. Narrating the demise of women, children, how the killers subjected them to all kinds of tortures, makes the heart weep and shudder, as if in electric shock. And it is difficult to visualize that such events could take place, that on a certain day a handful of Lithuanians would take upon themselves the right to decide to become beasts of prey and to begin to kill, to murder, to annihilate human life. This the murders did, but others remained indifferent as Jews were being put to death. But there were others who spat curses upon the killers and confessed with sorrow their helplessness to do anything, to change anything or to help the victims.

Very few Plungyan Jews survived. The rest were killed in the same gruesome manner in which Jews everywhere were being massacred. Entire families were wiped out, leaving not a single trace that they had once lived. From here on not much will be written about my birthplace Plungyan. There are few witnesses to the events that took place later in Plungyan attesting to the manner in which men, women and children were brutally murdered. But what I did manage to learn will be told further on. A human being cannot respond to these events with indifference but instead with shock and horror. Telling the story is also difficult. It is painful to the heart, but it is our duty to relay the accounts that I have successfully collected as proof so that people around the world learn what happened to the Jews during the time of vengeful Hitler's fascism.

On July 23, 1941 Plungyan was taken by the Germans. As I mentioned before, the Lithuanian fascists in Plungyan got a hold of the remaining Jews before the Germans even arrived. When the Germans arrived, they (the Lithuanian fascists) became the Germans' first collaborators in the persecution and later in the extermination of the Jews.

In Plungyan all the Jews were rounded up and locked in the *Groyse Shul* (Great Synagogue) where they praised the very God Who had forsaken them.

A Jew who had converted to Christianity was also locked up with all the Jews in the synagogue with his three children. His Lithuanian wife was free. With the help of the priest Pukis, who did the conversion, she was able, after a certain period, to get them out. He witnessed everything that was happening there. It is this man who related to me the gruesome details.

For a period of two weeks they weren't given anything to eat or drink. Small children were crying. There was a lot of confusion and no air to breathe. Later there came a terrible stench. They didn't even let anyone out to go to the bathroom. Old and sick people began to die of thirst and hunger. The dead were not permitted to be taken out. Not being allowed to open the windows or the doors, a lot of people went out of their minds. When people tried to make a run for the door just to get a breath of air, the guards shot at them. A seamstress, named Ida Sher, gave birth to a child in the synagogue.

The synagogue was not the only place where Jews were being treated sadistically. Also outside in the courtyard of the synagogue, terrible things were taking place. A Lithuanian woman who lived close to the shul in a room on the second floor was able to see, through the window, what was happening in the courtyard of the synagogue. The courtyard was enclosed by a fence. A hole was dug and the holy *sforim* (holy books) *sefer toyres* were thrown in it and then set on fire. In order to make them burn better, the well-known photographer of Plungyan named Berkowitz was forced to stir the embers with a stick. The murderers then forced him closer to the fire in an ugly way, mocking and making fun of him. A little later they lead in the blacksmith named Gilis. Gilis hadn't been locked in the synagogue because he was needed to finish a job he was working on with his son. He had been falsely accused of setting fire to a house on the Bod Gas not far from his foundry (such accusations were common place in the *shtetlech*, where the fascists attempted to stir up hatred against the Jews).

A certain German stood in one spot with a whip in his hand hitting the man and ordering him to walk around the fire. Then they circled him and, being in close proximity, loathsomely spat in his face and hit him with clubs. After the man fell to the ground covered with blood from the beating, the German approached him while he was still lying on the ground and finished him off with a pistol at point blank range, then threw his body into a hole. The murderers then decided to continue the spectacle. They lead in three Lithuanian women who had been detained because one of them, whose family name was Bogdanaite, had married a Jewish boy before the war. The boy was a tailor and was already locked in the shul. She went secretly to give him something to eat. The third woman, whose family name was Boltrukaitė, was the wife of a Soviet officer. The three were lead in and forced to hug and kiss Gilis and shout that he was their very good friend. Elderly Jews were then let out into the synagogue courtyard and were forced to balance a heavy block of wood on their shoulders, and carry it back and forth, a very difficult task for those who were weak. To make the task more difficult, the murderers especially selected those smaller in stature. Those who attempted to hold the piece of wood in place with their hands, received a beating from the fascist murderers who surrounded the Jews. One of them was beaten because his shoulders couldn't take the weight of the piece of wood. Another man was beaten for moving too slowly under the weight of the wood. He had simply reached the end of his strength.

A group of Jewish women were lead out, and standing near the door of the synagogue, were forced to witness the old men being tortured. One of them was unable to bear what she was seeing and ran over to the men and knocked the wooden blocks off their shoulders. The murderers then began to push the woman around. In the beginning they were taunting and laughing at the one woman. When they realized that it wasn't so easy to shove her off, one of them shot her.

There lived not far from the synagogue (due to my initiative the street was renamed "Synagogue Street") a Jew whose business was cows' intestines. A Lithuanian, by the name of Fumpus Kazis, was working for him. At the beginning of the war, when the local fascists began on their rampage, they forced this Lithuanian man to give his employer a live bird to eat, while the

others insulted and made fun of the man. (Later Fumpus met an unfortunate demise. In 1948, he fell from a truck, was run over and fatally injured).

On the 15th of July 1941 came an order that all Jews locked in the synagogue were to be driven out. The old and handicapped who were unable to walk were taken away in vehicles with the old and sick, thrown in trucks like pieces of wood. The eye witness recognized a certain elderly paralyzed Jewish man name Brik. There were a lot of witnesses. She used to buy flour from him. She and many others heard the echoes, groans and shrieks from the agony of broken limbs.

The sad procession of half-dead men, women and children were led to their death through the main street of Plungyan, the Vytautas Gas. Lithuanians milling about on the sidewalks stared at the half-dead Jews, some with small children in their arms. They walked supporting one another. Those who were too weak were heaped onto trucks. People gazed at them with both pity and confusion at being powerless to help them. Others looked on with indifference. A woman with a newborn was seen in the crowd being led away, being supported by her husband. It was Ida Sher who gave birth to the child in the synagogue. They arrived like shadows barely moving their feet to the place where a day before, about 40 Jews had dug 6 pits. The pits were prepared for those doing the digging as well as for those arriving from the holy synagogue where they used to turn to their God in prayer. Their God had abandoned them.

Having reached the gravesites, they were now to be killed in a most horrible manner. The Lithuanian witness related further that whoever didn't see it would neither believe nor comprehend how a mother in the last moments could sacrifice herself for her child. They attempted to tear from mothers' arms small children tightly pressed against their breasts. When they succeeded in wresting the children from their mothers, they took them by their little feet and cracked their little heads on a tree or a rock. They didn't want to waste a bullet on them. Then they were tossed into the pit with their murdered mothers. Those mothers who refused to let go, were shot together with their children. The screams of mothers and children about to be shot were heard with the cries of those who lay wounded in the graves. Gunfire mixed together with gut wrenching screams melted into one sound.

As soon as one group was killed, another group was brought to the grave site. With them came a new group of murderers. Having completed their dirty work, they went to the place where the whiskey had been set up for them. The new murderers were even more drunk than the first group, and it started all over again. Being drunk, it was obvious that the murderers' bullets would not hit their victim in a way that would kill them right away. The increasing number of wounded or half-dead were thrown into the pits and shot again. Those who were shot were covered with a thin layer of dirt. Blood flowed from under the raised earth. It was in this way that approximately 1,800 Jews from Plungyan were killed. On this spot a monument called the Koshan Memorial was erected. At the time of the massacre of the Jews of Plungyan, there was a certain man who was not in full possession of his faculties. I mentioned him in the beginning of this writing. They called him *Leibke der Leibn bein*. These murderers convinced him that if he would help them throw people into the pits who hadn't fallen in by themselves after they were shot, they wouldn't shoot him and he would be permitted to go home. After the last Jews had been killed, they told him to go and sit on a rock to rest. No sooner did he sit down to rest, then a murderer shot him from behind.

A Lithuanian (recorded on a cassette) told how he was forced to spread earth over the last mass grave. Before that, Jews were compelled to cover the pits with dirt. When there were no more Jews left to perform this function, the firing squad leader, Pabriezsha, gave an order to grab some 10 Lithuanians in Plungyan. The squadron surrounded the church and waited until the service had ended. As soon as the worshippers began to exit the church, they began to nab the men. They put them in a truck that was waiting for them, and drove them to Koshan to cover the

graves. With tears in his eyes he described an image that he sees in his mind as if it were yesterday: A gruesome sight, it is impossible to convey in words. Children, big and small, including newborn infants, lying in the graves with smashed heads covered in blood and bone marrow. A woman was lying half naked. They made them remove the best clothes before they shot them. She was lying in a strange pose still clutching her child in her arms. There were others who were lying in various poses hugging each other as if they were protecting themselves and those below them. He couldn't stomach anymore and fell unconscious, and didn't see anything. When the grave was covered they loaded the men in the truck and drove them back to Plungyan. After returning home he wasn't able to eat or sleep for a few days because of the violent bloody images that plague his thoughts even to this day. A woman lived on the other side of the road near where the tragedy took place in Koshan. The murderers entered her courtyard covered in blood and began to wash the blood from their hands in the trough in the courtyard. She overheard their conversation. One of them with a drunk voice yelled to another bragging about how they ridiculed, mocked and robbed their victims, sadistically killed men, women and children and how they smashed babies' heads against trees. She recounted hearing how they beat those who refused to take their clothes off. Listening to the account, she became sick to her stomach. It was so unbearable to listen that she wanted to run away. When they left the courtyard, she saw that the water was full of blood. For an entire month she wouldn't let her cows go near the trough to take a drink. Instead, she brought water from a neighbor who lived close by.

Later a man with a few of his sons arrived with a couple of baskets full of bloody clothing to wash in the woman's courtyard. It was clear to her that the clothes belonged to the murdered Jews. The water became even more tainted with blood.

People still talk about one particular grave in which 74 high school girls were shot. This is what happened: The Nazis and their local collaborators selected these girls from the school, used them for their own pleasure and then brought them to the mass grave sites to be killed. But then for a brief moment a miracle happened. A priest arrived and told the girls that he would convert them to Christianity, and thereby save them from being shot. Was this a sincere gesture on the part of the priest to save the girls? Or was it merely the commander's cruel deception of the priest and the girls? These are still unanswered questions. It soon became clear to the girls that no such miracle had occurred when they saw the murderers making the preparations to execute them. And when the girls began to resist, they began shooting. One of the girls was able to grab hold of a half drunken murderer and began choking him. She was immediately fended off by another one of them who split her head open with his rifle. In this way everyone was killed on the spot and tossed into a mass grave. They say that this particular girl who put up a fight was tall and strong. Her name was Rochale Tsin. This is how all the girls were killed. Today they lie in the first grave by the entrance at the Koshan Memorial.

Jews were killed in groups and individually. The leader of the murderers, whose name was Pabrieshza, can be considered the most guilty of all in the extermination of the Jews of Plungyan. He personally tortured and murdered Jews, and in 1988, in his seventies, he was found living in Australia. At the request of the Soviet Lithuanian government he was to be turned over for extradition. After a long search the Australian government wasn't able to find him. Perhaps he had already died upon hearing about the extradition.

A Lithuanian farmer who lived close to the *Kolneshiker* forest related that Heid Pabrieshza and a few other murderers passed through his farm with a couple of pretty young Jewish girls, one of whom he recognized to be Tsipele Kest. (Everyone bought leather goods from her father's leather shop). They asked for a drink. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the farmer to look at the girls who returned his looks with horror in their eyes, hugging each other tightly. The farmer's dog pulled at his chain and barked at the uninvited guests. He probably sensed that they were bad people. There was no way that the farmer could make the dog quiet. At this point the

murderer went right up to the farmer and said, "If you can't shut up your dog, then I am going do it for you", and then shot the dog dead. The girls were very shaken up and the farmer was also concerned for his own life.

Shortly thereafter, the murderers led the girls into the woods. As they walked away, the poor, innocent girls turned their heads to the farmer, as if pleading to save them. What could he do? They were murderers whose only response to everything was to shoot. They remained in the woods with the girls for three to four hours. Later a few shots were heard, and then it was as still as a graveyard. For awhile you couldn't even hear the birds. Pabrieschza and the other killers returned drunk and in high spirits. They ordered the farmer to go into the woods and bury their victims. It was horrific to see what they had done to the girls. It was evident to him that they had been raped. You can just imagine what those poor girls must have gone through in their final moments. Empty bottles of whiskey were found on their breasts and other places. Also found were left over pieces of food. He cried while he buried them.

*

At the Koshan memorial, not far from Plungyan, there is a yearly gathering honoring the *yahrzeit* of the genocide. At the inaugural gathering those in attendance included the few elderly Jews, who remained, and Jews from other towns but originally from Plungyan, as well as Lithuanians. All gathered to commemorate the extermination of the Jews of Plungyan and the surrounding area. At the opening of the memorial, the guests included people from *Vilnius* (*Vilnius*), *Klaipeda*, *Shavl* (*Siauliai*), *Kovne* (*Kovno*). Lithuanians were among those who expressed a sense of sadness, condemning those Lithuanians who aided and abetted in the implementation of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jewish people. The following words were spoken: When one stops to consider what happened to the Jews, it makes your blood run cold because you have to remember that most of the people gathered together for this opening of the memorial and *Yortzeit* could not have been born early enough to know that there exists such a girl with black hair and brown eyes who arrived clutching a bouquet of red flowers - reminiscent of blood! Could not this also have been a gray haired man? A woman clutching her grandchild? If their fathers, grandfathers, and grandmothers could have left their birth places in June of 1941? Those who did not leave, lie under the mounds here at Koshan, their final resting place. Out of the 1800 Plungyaners who lie in six mass graves, no one will even know what those high school girls felt standing before the open grave, or mothers, who with blood curdling shrieks were separated from their children, or the kind of threats and accusations heaped on the old people by those murderers. Or what kind of look did the children have in their eyes as their little heads neared the tree trunks? Were they looks of confusion and terror? They were even begrudged a bullet. The trees are still groaning to this day, having absorbed the lamentations of those who perished, in whose echo the hearts of the Plungyaner Jews can be heard.

The history of the Jews of Plungyan was left unfinished. There is no one left to finish, to write it down. They lie here in Koshan, people, former friends & neighbors of the Lithuanians in Plungyan, 2,234 Jews from Plungyan and the surrounding area lie murdered in innocence. This is hallowed ground for those that rest beneath the mounds of Koshan, in the forests of the surrounding villages of *Loialenko*, *Vilashai*, *Vilisaicon*, *Pirvaithai*, *Iovashiskai*, *Vestuven* and towns: *Platel*, *Alsad* and *Tverai*. This place should serve as a sacred reminder that man's memory is stronger than steel. This memory preserves within itself the names of the innocent.

It gives me pleasure that I was successful as one of the few Jews who took upon himself the difficult task of perpetuating the memory of those martyred. These tasks include maintaining all of the mass grave sites as well as restoring the old Jewish cemetery, with the help of the Jewish community center and financial support of the City Council of Plungyan and other esteemed Lithuanians. These people were instrumental in carrying out the difficult but necessary work. To

date, all of the conservation work is finished at almost all of the mass grave sites in the cities and towns of Lithuania. Everything that can possibly be done has been done.

I would like to end this chapter with a poem written by my sister, Hene Bunk-Gornsteyn.

“My Shtetl Plungyan”

I
O My Shtetale Plungyan,
With life teeming —

Full of decent hard-working folk
Of tailors and

Craftsmen united as one in the
Bath house, intent

The High Holy Days to embrace
In cleanliness

And love of Rosh Hashanah’s awe
Of Yom Kippur

Of Passover in springtime joy
For big or small

In freedom to recall the walk
Of Moyshalle

Marking time with never a watch
Attuned to heaven

And who can forget “Blue Yank’le”
On Friday eve

With cries, heralding the Shabbos,
‘In shul are in’.

With klapper through the shtetl streets
Of memories

Of those winter nights when kin
Would feathers pluck,

To warm the beds of children’s sleep
With tender love

And Toybeh the Blind who would knit
Her woolen tales

Her Bible’s coats of many colors
Josephian

And lo! Behold Chaye Yoseh

The way she stood

Large, on synagogue stairs looming,
With curses and hisses

Not letting children to mothers run
Lest they disturb

The holy silence of the shul
As shofar sounds

Its broken cries, its stirring call
To heal the world

And Oh what beautiful girls we had!
Of such beauty

Eyes have not seen no never till
The end of time

(Angels weep on their massive graves
By white birches)

II

In Bet Medresh and shul we prayed
Packed to the roof

Of heaven for God's providence
For life and health

"And I the Almighty will guard
You from Evil

The Great One promised you shall be
As stars in my

Domain when Messiah comes to
Bring fulfillment

To the dream of generations
But also, oh!

The Great One forgot His promise
A black wave came

Instead of the Messiah, hell
Odious hell!

In this same shul packed were the Jews
For days on end

Without water, or food or air

Betrayed, betrayed

By murderers who exiled God
From hearts of stone

Who trampled the Divine Name
His holy place

Defaming in demonic rage
Brewed in whiskey

Their cross-bred piety of death
Of Roman guilt

Upon God's people so innocent
Of such a deed!

On the Lord's Day in '41
In summer month

Into the forest the half-dead
Were driven from

The synagogue, driven as corpses
Through Plungé street

O home of centuries among
Sighing forests

Have the dead been resurrected?
Young and old

In twisted columns of sorrow
They walk their death

Dogs howl with the howl of killers
Wild, mean and crazed

Thus through the main streets of Plungé
Are my Jews driven

Driven deep into the forest of
Koshan, Koshan

The trees in the woods stand frozen
In sheer horror

Mute witnesses to crimes beyond,
Beyond compare

Why were these living dead taken
Into the woods?

Shot in rapid fire by master race
By waiting graves...

III

At my shtetl's common grave I stop
And bow my head

Here rest the martyrs of Plungyan
I read their names

In the stillness of the forest
I hear their sighs

Echoing, whispering in the wind
And murmuring

A kaddish in praise of the God
"Vengeance is Mine"

Not yours O mortal man, not yours!
Pray for the land

One pure in native song— long, long
Before the cross!

Ride your horses to the river
Like Mindaugas

To the waters of Nemunas!
Wash off the blood

From your tainted death once so noble
Land of my birth!

Hear again, Lithuania
The echoes of

Your dianosian conscience
Or be renounced.

Hene Bunk-Gornsteyn
Vilnius (Vilnius) March 20th 1998
Adapted and revised by Benyamin Herson

Chapter IV: The Destruction of Kratinga, Salant, Meisda and Riteve Communities

Fourteen kilometers from Plungyan and about two kilometers from Shateikai, 100 women were brought by the murderers from the shtetl Salant (*Salantai*) where they selected the handicapped ones for themselves. In Shateikai a lot of the fascists and their local collaborators got drunk, and for a whole week did what ever they wanted to these women. The women were raped and forced to service them. People anxiously walked past the building where the criminals were holding orgies. Finally, the unfortunate women and girls were led off to the woods not far from Shateikai, killed and dumped into a grave that had already been prepared for them.

There is another mass grave of 60 strong, young Jewish men located near the village of Milashaits approximately 9 kilometers from Plungyan. They were led away to their deaths in chains, and consequently there were only a few murderers accompanying them. People witnessed them as they walked past, the murderers with shovels in their hands prepared to dig graves for the young men they were about to murder. They approached the area on foot. In the last moment before they were to be killed, one of the young men shouted to the others to start fighting for their lives, to kill the murderers themselves or to take the murderers with them. Suddenly, they all began to move to attack their captors. A few fell immediately, others succeeded in reaching the criminals and put up quite a fight despite the fact that their hands were shackled. Confusion followed, with shouting mixed with volleys of shots. This event was personally witnessed by a farmer standing some 50 meters away. He reported hearing the criminals recount the struggle as they stopped in the farmer's courtyard to rest after the massacre. He saw a few of them with cut up faces as well as bandaged hands and heads. They had bottles of whiskey with them.

The mass graves of the Jewish genocide in Plungyan are located at 10 sites. It was in those places that 2234 Jews from Plungyan as well as the surrounding area were murdered. I was able to learn new information pertaining to the areas of Kratinga, Salant, Meisada and Riteve.

A Lithuanian man from Kratinga who has been living in Plungyan for the last few years related the following: He was 18 years old at the time when he accidentally witnessed Jews being tortured in Kratinga. A building was set on fire and the Jews were falsely accused of the crime. A group of Jews was taken and forced close to the smoldering building to choke on the smoke. With their trousers rolled up to their knees they were then forced to walk back and forth on their knees over sand and gravel until they were writhing in pain and their knees became swollen. Even the sand became bloody, but the murderers continued to urge them by hitting and mocking them. Those who could no longer bare the strain and fell senseless were dragged to the side. As he relates, in his naivete, he thought that the fascists intended only to humiliate the Jews. Suddenly, he started to shout at the murderers. At that point one of them sprang to his feet and struck him on the back with a rifle. He fell on the ground in a lot of pain. He quickly stood up and got out of there as quickly as he could.

They tell me that near the monastery in Kratinga, 50 men, women and children were driven into a swamp. They were forced to trudge back and forth through the mud and water. The less fortunate became weak and fell into the water. Mothers carried children in their arms. The strong attempted to help the weak because the murderers were picking people off who were too worn out to continue. Great was the screaming and crying of the children. Those who witnessed the children in their distress wept. The Lithuanian also wept so much that he used up two handkerchiefs. He sees the image as clearly today as if it were yesterday. It is something he will never forget as long as he lives.

In Riteve a teacher at the gimnazye, Jonas Abukevitchus a former officer in the army of independent Lithuania, and Dr. Leonas Kontvainus organized the so-called *aktiv* (in effect, a gang) to fight against the soviet *Aktiv*. They started by making arrests. One of them, whose name was Goldikoiskas, arrested Mote Zaks and five other Jews from Riteve and shot them in the *Reyner* woods seven kilometers from Telz in July of 1941. On orders from Abukoyskas, the commander of the so-called *Aktivistn* group, Galdikoiskas, with the aid of a few other criminals, rounded up a group of Jews and took them to the village Gerulai. They brought the Jews to the edge of a 20 meter long pit that had already been prepared and shot them. Another group of Jews was brought in and forced to shoot at those who were just murdered before being shot themselves. Goldikoiskas estimated that he shot five or six times. According to Goldikoiskas' own estimate, he could substantiate having personally killed 50 to 60 Jewish men, women and children. Some of the mothers were still clutching their children in their arms as they were shot. The Jewish victims of Riteve were also forced to participate in the shootings. Mikolas Rubeshzus, Smilgevitchus, Srebalis, Antonas Gurtshis, [or Gurtshif], Ioazas Alutis, Petras Varnelis, climbed into the truck after they finished killing all the Jews and drove into Riteve singing.

On the 23 of July, 1941, Ionas Petroiskas from the village of Gedgoydzu, began organizing the so-called partisans in the town of Salant. The first to register were: Antonas Ereminas from the village of Perkunkaimo, a former leader in the army of independent Lithuania; Petras Kuzis from the small town of Erlen, later from the town of Platel (*Plateliai*) and Difreionas Skridaila. Their leader, Ionas Benetis, reported to the former chairman of the independent council of Salant, *Paranas* (*Paronas*) (*Baltonas*) on October 19th, 1941, that Salant was free of Jewish elements, which in their language meant the Jews had been killed. Basie Abelman who was born in the Kratinga region in the area of *Kalupen(e)* in the village of *Salinai*, relates that in June of 1941 she and her father were arrested by the Germans. When they were about to be shot, she was able to run away from the grave site where they were standing with other Jews who had also been rounded up for execution. The Germans, with their local collaborators, forced the remaining Jews of Salant and the village of Imbares into the synagogue of Salant. From there a group of Jewish girls were sent to work the fields of a farm in Saline. Later she was able to work for a farmer named Fronas Kaspirovitchus from the village of Saline. She worked four weeks for him after which came an order to go back to the previous farm. As she returned, she saw a large group of girls and immediately understood they were to be taken away and shot. She ran away and returned to Kaspirovitchus who hid her for three years until the area was liberated.

Difreionas Skridaila, born in the Plungyan region in the village of Virkshai, was a former petty officer in the army of independent Lithuania. In the years, 1941 through 1945, he was a member of the so-called "Security Battalion." At the beginning of July, 1941, through the initiative of the Chairman of the Independence Council of Salant, Fronas Baltone, those fit for work were turned over for execution. Two cars with SS Personnel arrived along with members of the so-called "Correction Battalion" (Criminals). The Germans selected men, handed them shovels and led them away to the village of Zshvainai, not far from the Jewish *Emetay*, and forced then to dig their own graves. A German arrived from Salant and suggested to him, and to Baltone, to observe how they were going to shoot the Jews. In the beginning it was agreed upon to shoot first those who dug the grave. Those who were dressed in good clothing were ordered to undress, led to the edge of the grave and shot. (The Lithuanian from Kratinga doesn't elaborate on how this is carried out. However, it was well known what was perpetrated in the places where people were shot.) Afterwards, a few more groups were brought from other shtetlech to the open pits whereupon they were shot. In total, there was said to have been killed some 150 Jews there. (In actuality I know there were 405 men, women and children killed there.)

At Meisada: a few days after the war broke out, all the Jews of Meisada were rounded up and herded into the synagogue where there was neither air to breathe nor a place to stand. Nor

were they permitted to leave to take care of their physical needs. They were held without food or water. The young and the old suffered a great deal. Jews were ridiculed and murdered at a whim. Pretty Jewish girls were taken away to be raped and taken advantage of. They forced the men to clean up manure with their bare hands. One Sunday when people were coming out of church, the murderers decided to make a special show. They led elderly Jews out of the synagogue and ordered them to race, to run fast and beat those who fell behind with whips. It's hard enough for old men to walk, let alone run. And in addition they were weak from hunger. A Lithuanian woman recounted how a girl around 16 years old named Zelda fell to her knees in front of one of the murderers and begged him to shoot her together with her parents because she couldn't bear to watch them torturing her parents and others.

Ms. Esther Milner, who presently lives in Israel visited her birthplace, Meisada, directly after the war. She entered the house where they lived prior to the war. She knew the Lithuanian woman and her daughter who now occupied the house. The Lithuanian woman told her what she witnessed and spoke to Esther's mother. She also related that her son (who Esther Milner couldn't stand) had participated in the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and after the war was tried and found guilty of war crimes. The Jews of Meisada were confined to the synagogue for almost a week. Leizer Hodes and Yankl Katz were tied to a wagon and taken away to Skud where they were shot together with the Jews of that community. Later the remaining 125 Jews of Meisada were taken away to Kratinga and killed at the Jewish cemetery together with the remaining Jews of that community. The Lithuanian woman continued that she saw Esther Milner's mother in the group of Jews being led away. She noticed that when she began falling behind, one of the criminals hit her and shoved her with a rifle in an effort to make her walk faster. You couldn't even recognize her; she looked so terrible. All the Jews of Meisada were taken away to Kratinga and killed.

In 1944, a Jew from Meisada whose family name was Gutkind had just been discharged from 16th Lithuanian division, which fought against the Germans. He went to the place in Kratinga where the Jews of Meisada were killed. Among other things that remained, he was able to locate his sister's documents. She was 17 years old at the time. He donated the documents to the museum in Telz. He also was told that as the Jews were lined up by the edge of the grave to be shot, a woman named Ester Hodes was seen among them kissing and tightly embracing her two children, and then taking a look at them, began to cry. Those who witnessed it expressed that it was difficult to watch. This was recounted to Ester Milner during her trip to Meisada by her acquaintances, Baltinaite, Galdikas, amongst others.

Constructing a summary of the events that took place in the *Shzemaiti(er)* region of Lithuania is difficult because many of the facts are obscure, and getting at these facts is even more difficult today. The Nazis took great pains to destroy all evidence of their dirty work. And to a certain degree they succeeded. It is necessary, however, to recount what is known. Thanks are to those who have made great efforts to research the Jewish genocide, a process that includes searching for those who remember and then recording their recollections. What we do know concerning these events is because of them. But more people from the younger, upcoming generations need to know what happened to the Jewish people during the period of Hitler's fascism.

Chapter V: Evacuation to Soviet Russia, Life on the Front, Episodes of Plungyan Jews In Combat

It was already chilly when we were brought by truck to the Novosibirsk train station in Siberia. The trip was bitter and odious. We went hungry and experienced many discomforts along the way. Making the journey in train cars filled to capacity, men, women, children, teenage boys and girls were forced to wait until the train (the type used to transport troops) came to a full stop in order to take care of their physical necessities. Having lost their shame, people ran from the cars, boys and girls men and women could be seen squatting together. They were actually more fearful that the train would leave without them. In the train cars there were chamber pots and other vessels for the children, the elderly, or the infirm for whom it was impossible to leave the car. Those in the car managed whatever way they could. Later a hole was chopped into the floor of the train car and this eliminated the bad odor. To insure some privacy, a curtain of sorts was fashioned.

The sleeping accommodations consisted of unfinished rough boards. There wasn't enough room for everyone. The first to be accommodated were the children, the sick and the elderly. The teenagers and younger people had to make do with sitting on an unoccupied spot on the floor and sleep there, or leaning on each other back to back. From the beginning of our trip from the town of Pechora, until our final destination going to that one station where the train used to stop, we were given one bucket of soup per car along with warm water. We always prepared cold drinking water for trips, but we didn't have any of our own provisions. Some were able to trade with a Russian woman who purposefully waited for the passing evacuation trains aware of the demand. People traded away clothing, rings, watches or other pieces of jewelry for a loaf of bread or for other food items. Not everyone had this option. Transports were arriving with loads of refugees from far-flung towns near the front lines, some of whom had the opportunity to take with them many provisions and other items. While they were stopped not far from our train, our children ran over to them to beg for whatever food they could spare for those who were left without in the train cars. One time my little sister Hene joyfully returned carrying a couple of loaves of bread in her little hands. She was so happy with her achievement. The children were the sustainers of life. The adults were too embarrassed to go out and beg. Money was another thing people didn't have. Evacuation trains frequently stopped to let other trains pass carrying soldiers or munitions to the front. For this reason it took us nearly two months to reach Siberia. To describe the entire trip until we reached Novosibirsk is not possible at this juncture. It will suffice to deal with the more important events.

From Novosibirsk we went to the *Bolotnoje* region. There we experienced various ordeals. We were given temporary lodgings. For a time we were forgotten about. The independent council was obviously not concerned about us. We were forced to survive by whatever means we could. Having no money to buy food we suffered a great deal from starvation, especially the young children. We set out to look for food. Once, I was able to find a bunch of potato skins that had been left in the basement where we were living. After cleaning them off we roasted them on the stove, and there was enough for us all. And how tasty they were. Our life there, such as it was, lasted a few weeks. They probably remembered us at this point because we were given a little money. So we went to a restaurant where they sold soup and a piece of bread for a cheap price. They wouldn't sell you bread without the soup. The little piece of bread weighed 100 grams and if you wanted more of it, you had to also pay for the soup. But it was worth it because a 100 grams wasn't enough to fill you up. For us, that bread was more delicious

than cake. One time I was arrested in the street. My appearance and unfamiliarity with the language had apparently raised some suspicion. My hair had grown to shoulder length and it was curly to boot, which added even more to my startling appearance. My shoes had almost completely fallen apart and were full of holes. One foot was held together with string. You could see paper sticking out of the holes (paper keeps your feet warm). What I was wearing was also horrible: A loosely fitting torn jacket, and my trousers didn't look much better. I was taken to the base by the militia men to ascertain who I was. I attempted an explanation in a sort of jargon mixing together the Lithuanian and Russian words I knew. They seemed to have understood because I kept repeating the words "evacuation" and "refugee". They said something to each other and then pointed to a chair, an indication that I should sit and wait. About an hour later, a Lithuanian man appeared who turned out to be a special evacuation representative for Lithuanian citizens from the Lithuanian government. I told him the whole story. I let him know that I didn't have any documents and gave him my family name along with where we were staying. He then told me to go and promised that the location of our permanent residence will soon be determined. Shortly thereafter, people from the *Kolchoz* (collective farm) arrived with sleighs to take us to the *Kolchoz* in the *Balontnoje* region. Various families had discussions concerning who wanted to stay together with whom. Everyone expressed the desire to be placed together, close families, friends and acquaintances together with a couple of our families. Our family was taken to a *Kolchoz* located about 10 to 20 kilometers from Balotnoje. In this way all were accommodated. The other families were settled in other places in the *Bolothoje* area.

We must have made a fairly pitiful impression on the residents of Siberia. They looked at us as one looks at unfortunates, forced to leave their place of birth leaving behind everything they have spent an entire lifetime acquiring. Most likely, we recalled their parents and grandparents, banished to Siberia after the Russian revolution. Some of them were still living. Our family was settled with a Ukrainian calling himself "Tsaldon" who was sent to Siberia after the revolution. He had 45 hectares of farmland. It wasn't just by accident that collective farms were established in 1936. When we first arrived we actually spent the first few days in the office of the *Kolchoz*. We were surprised with the kindness and empathy of the other residents. They learned that we were Baltic refugees and seeing us in our half-starved condition, began bringing bread, milk, eggs and butter. Our children didn't know what to grab first. They ate with a huge appetite. The sight of the children brought tears to their eyes. More and more people arrived with food encouraging us to eat and saying that again tomorrow they would bring more food. They caressed the children's heads. We bigger children and the grown-ups also began eating with a huge appetite, but only after we were sure there was enough for everyone. They served us cheese and potatoes with sour milk in their uniforms. The plates were not collected. We were instructed to keep them for ourselves because we would need them.

Our family consisted of six people including me, my father and mother, a younger brother and two small sisters. We were given a bathroom dubbed *izpushka*, "the little house" or "little room," in which to live. The room itself measured 3 by 2 meters, obviously too small for us. The little ones slept on top of the very wide oven. The rest of us slept where ever we could. My bed was on top of two tables that had been pushed together, the same tables at which we ate. At night I would prop my head up with a couple of pieces of wood putting my winter hat on to soften the hardness of my "pillow". My own clothes served as under bedding and blankets. Next to the walls of the "Little House" stood narrow benches on which our parents slept. When my father and I were taken into the army there was more room. Provisions and other items were sold especially for the refugees. We were starting to return to a normal life. They didn't give us any heavy labor (in the summer working various farm jobs). There was a shortage of workers because many were fighting on the front.

My father and I tended the horses the entire night. It was our job to feed them. Early in the morning the horses were taken out to perform various tasks, giving us a chance to go home and rest. These horses were unlike the ones we were accustomed to seeing in our town or in Lithuania. They were covered with long hair. They might as well have stayed outside the entire winter. The frost was really bad and the barn was an unfortunate sight to behold with its roof full of holes and its Jerry-rigged doors and windows. The warmth from the horse manure protected us to a certain degree from the cold. I have to admit that those long fur coats kept us cozy and warm and well covered on those cold nights. The winter of 1941 was exceptionally cold. There was plenty of wood for heating. Whoever wanted could go into the Taiga woods and take as much your heart desired. We carried wood on sleighs and sometimes borrowed someone's horse for the job. The thick Siberian cedar forests helped us survive the summers, providing cedar nuts, berries, mushrooms and the so-called Siberian apples along with various other things that served as food. And what did the Siberian people eat? It was their custom, for everyone big and small, to sit together around one table and place in the middle a big bowl of soup. They would draw out the soup with wooden spoons while holding a piece of bread under their lips to prevent the soup from dripping on the table. Pieces of meat, pork, and fat were added to the soup. There lived in the surrounding *Kolchozy* of the *Bolotohoje* region several families and a few single women from Plungyan. There were my uncles, the family Ril, his father-in-law and the Fish family. Our friends with their five sons, the Olshvang family; also our acquaintance, a single blind man named Dibke, Arke Hirson and his mother, and a single Ruvke Dimant, with whom I used to cut wood for the people of the village. There was also Elie Glikman and his family. Later, Elie and his son Leibe were conscripted into the so-called Working Army Front. Elie was discharged after a short time, having been deemed unsuitable for such work. Leibe became ill shortly after his return to the collective and died, and was buried there. Years later, at his brother's request, I carved a wooden sculpture portrait of Leibe in oak. They took it to Siberia where it was placed on his grave.

In the summer of 1942, I was told by my mother and sister upon returning home from the war (my father and I were already in the army — the Lithuanian Sixteenth Division) that life had become a little easier for the Jewish refugees. Women and children went into the woods to gather berries to sell, often walking 20 kilometers in one day (back and forth). The men who weren't taken to the front did various types of jobs on the farms. We really lived fairly well there in comparison to the other places where Jewish refugees were being settled. My sister and the others recalled tales of gruesome events that they had witnessed with their own eyes in the Caucasus.

Most Jewish refugees went to the Caucasus thinking that the warmer climate would make survival easier. There were tens of thousands of Jewish refugees there. There were various epidemic outbreaks, no food, and people were dying in the streets from starvation. My sister was there with her husband, a former Yeshiva student from Poland who escaped to Plungyan in 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland. Initially, we went to Siberia together but lost each other along the way. They ended up in Tashkent (Caucasus). He had a weak constitution and didn't hold out, dying of starvation in the street. She then went to look for someone to help with the burial. When she returned, she saw that her husband's pants were missing. People had removed whatever they could from the dead man. Perhaps they would sell or trade the pants for any scraps of food. This kind of thing was a common occurrence there. In a trick of fate, Jewish children were forced to become thieves. One such Plungyaner child came from a wealthy family. When his father was sent to the front, he told me that he used to steal from the market place in order to sustain his mother so she wouldn't starve to death. On one occasion he was caught, given a few slaps, and released as an under aged minor. One particular time he was locked up for an extended period. He returned to find his mother had already died. There were a lot of tragedies of this sort. Siberia, on the other hand, looked like heaven compare to the Caucasus. In Siberia you were sure to survive until the end of the war.

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On February 21, 1942 I was separated from my family, friends and from the good-natured Siberian people. The poignancy of the separation from my mother, little sisters and brother can't really be described. My father and I had been mobilized with our division, the Lithuanian Sixteenth. We had quite a send-off as does everyone who goes off to war. People found it hard to believe that they would never see each other again. And if so, when? Tears were shed the entire way, especially on my mother's part. Almost half the village accompanied our departure. Everyone wished us a safe return, and to come back alive. (Sadly my father was killed March 8, 1943 and my brother later fell on March 12, 1945). I was wounded twice and discharged in April of 1947.

We arrived at the place where the Lithuanian Sixteenth Division was beginning to fall into formation. I met my two uncles, Chaime Leib and Zelig Ril, who had already arrived, and my cousins and other friends and acquaintances from Plungyan. We were all very happy to see one another. Everyone was trying to find out who got away from Plungyan and where they were now located in Russia.

I was designated for a Special Machine Gun Battalion. I became a machine gunner. My father was in a regiment with some 168 foot soldiers. He was 47 years old whereas I wasn't much over 19 at the time. Over a given period we were taught martial arts. In the beginning of 1943, we left Bolotno where our division had been established and began the pullout toward the front. That year was particularly cold and snowy. It was difficult enough to trudge through the snow, let alone carry the heavy ammunition and the machine gun equipment on your back. Your feet would sink into the deep snow. Raging winds and blinding snow would often make it difficult to see where you were going. At times, the snow created such a fog that you could scarcely see the person walking next to you. The young soldiers helped the older and weaker ones by carrying some of their equipment. But we still had ten days to go until we were to reach the area from which we would begin to make our push forward. These were probably the most difficult days of the campaign, if not of my entire life. During the whole time we were moving, excluding the occasional flour mixed with hot water, we almost had nothing to eat. Driving wind and snow had prevented the unit (that was responsible for supplying us with food) from reaching our unit with provisions. Nevertheless, we continued on, everyone deep in his own thoughts: What's going to happen at the front? Am I going to live or die — or maybe end up wounded? What's life going to be like after the war? What about everyone you left behind waiting for you to come home, their sobbing when they get 'the notice' and read the words "your son was heroically killed in battle fighting against German fascism in defense of the homeland." These and other thoughts were going through our heads. Between us we discussed our desire to take revenge on the enemy for lives robbed and for the victims among our people and for their desire to exterminate the Jewish people.

We arrived at the positions from which point we would begin our front line drive to take part in the battle. For the first time, frozen loaves of bread were distributed, one loaf per four men. The soldiers' outer clothing was so stiff and wooden-like that you could stand them up. A damp night had been followed by a slight March frost, causing the thick damp coats to freeze. It wasn't long before we received the order to take up our indicated positions. Many didn't have time to get their share of their loaf of bread that had to be cut up in portions. As soon as the frozen bread was distributed, the soldiers placed it inside their coats, next to their chests to unthaw it. Later on it would be divided up between the four men.

The battle was really a bloody one. Later it was said that the division commanders of the first battle were found to be at fault and were duly punished.

Those who took part in the battle will never forget it. The location of the battle field was a wide-open spot in front of the enemy. Whenever possible, snow embankments were built as

protective walls. The heavy machine gun, which we nicknamed Maxim, was set up behind one of these scant protective walls. Very little ammunition was given out to the soldiers. Some of them didn't even have guns, but only a few grenades. And there weren't only a few of these soldiers who didn't have guns in my machine gun unit. Despite everything, they fought heroically. There were heavy casualties. There were many killed and wounded. That the Jewish contingent of the division fought heroically is supported by the fact that out of the 12 heroes from the Soviet Union, almost half of them were Jews, including the famous Jewish commander Vulfe Vilensky.

According to Soviet statistical counts, Jews fought in numbers that put them in second place after ethnic Russians. Also according to statistics concerning decorations, order and medals, Jewish fighters scored very highly, which proves that Jews fought bravely on the battle field. There was a saying that there was no other way for a Jew to fight except until the last enemy was gone. Under no circumstances could a Jew become a prisoner of war under the Germans. Jews and Politburo members were immediately shot. In the next few pages I would like to mention a few episodes concerning how Jews fought on the front. Around 72 men and a few women fought on the front against German fascism in the 16th Lithuanian Division as well as in other anti-Hitler regiments. Killed in battle were 42 Jews from Plungyan. Many others remained invalids for the rest of their lives.

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In September, 1941, the Nazi fascist murderers with swastikas on their sleeves, pounding loudly on their drums, marched their way towards the Arch de Triumph. A Jew from Plungyan, who was a member of the French anti-fascist movement, was executed in France. Michl Rolnik faced death together with other Frenchmen from the movement. Michl Rolnik lived in Paris and was a lawyer, as was his brother Hirshe who was living in Plungyan at the time. Michl belonged to the Resistance during the time of the Nazi occupation of France. He and two members of the committee fell into Nazi hands. The names of the other two were: Gabriel Feri and Jarja Mirtarda. There on a hill, the site where the glorious French Patriots lost their lives, stands an old Ford with the plate *Mai Valerian*. When they were brought there (to *Mai Valerian*), it turned out that the prison guards forgot the keys for the shackles and decided to shoot them with bound hands. "We will wait," said the French patriots. Go get the keys." An hour and a half passed and the guards returned with the keys. Before the execution the guards wanted to blindfold them, but they protested. The guards then removed the shackles from their hands and the prisoners marched to their death singing the "Marseillaise". This laconic tale was recounted by the French writer, Levy Arogon during his brief stay in prison. He promised Michl Rolnik to send a letter written in prison to his wife. Arogon did in fact send the letter to Rolnik's wife. Michl writes:

"This evening in Sainte prison they came to make an announcement in this, the place where I once carried out my professional duties. They said they were going to shoot us tomorrow morning. You know what my life consisted of. I am certain that I will die as heroically as I lived. But everything is so difficult when all that remains is but a few hours to live. Especially when you still feel so young: 33 years old, when your heart is still so full of joy and a will to live. Tell my friends that the bullet that will pierce my heart will not kill the ideals for which I fought, (ideals) that have imbued me with courage. Please tell them that I implore them, as heroes and as a man, to bear the pain. Seek solace and happiness in the collective, as I once did and still do."

In 1950 these freedom fighters were honored and their remains moved from *Mai Valerian* to the Per Loshez cemetery where the French people paid their last respects to the heroic fighters. Marchel Kashen and Moris Torez marched ahead in the first row.

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One can't forget the heroic deeds of Jews who fought in the ghettos, in the battle fronts, in partisan units and even in the trenches. A Plungyaner, David Chest, with a small machine gun unit was on the edge of a small forest. They found themselves amidst the noisy racket of German warplanes and the unending sounds of guns, cannons and heavy artillery volleys from the German side. They impatiently lay in wait as their return cannon fire reached the enemy infantry. It was at this point that the first commander of the machine gun unit was killed by a land mine. German foot soldiers with automatic weapons were already showing up in big numbers. Mines were still exploding preventing them from lifting their heads. The Germans took advantage of the circumstances and surged toward the spot where the machine gun unit was positioned. Lieutenant Chest took notice and dashed over to the machine gunners, the first of whom had already fallen (i.e. the gunners. The others crouch down beside them and feed the bullet belts to the gunners.) They waited for the Germans to come a little closer.

Then, as 80 men approached, he opened fire. Chest also ordered the other gunners to fire and they all started shooting from all sides. The fascists weren't expecting such a huge resistance and began retreating. About fifteen minutes later the Germans with reinforcements again stormed the trenches where the leaders were to be found including Lieutenant Chest. He and the other gunners again made the Germans hit the dirt. They were again forced to retreat with even greater casualties. When they attacked a fourth time, they were again stopped in their tracks and were unable to break through the defensive line.

When the sun went down, the fighters were able to breathe a little easier. There were a few dead and some wounded as well. For bravery in protecting a strategic point, the fighters were awarded decorations and medals. The Jewish Lieutenant, Dovid Chest, was awarded one medal of the highest order: the *Alexanderneviski*.

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Bentse Olshvang from Plungyan also fought bravely on the front. He was an artillery fighter. He was seriously injured fending off many a German attack, never abandoning his cannon post, until artillery reinforcements arrived. Later his hand had to be amputated. They said if he had received immediate medical attention, he would have saved his hand. He was later awarded the order of the "Red Flag."

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During one of the battles on the (Arioler) front while serving as a machine gunner, I was severely wounded and had to be transported deep into Russia to the little town of Slataust located in the Ural mountain region where I was taken to recuperate. One day we were waiting for new wounded to arrive at our hospital. We always had high hopes of finding friends or family among those newly arrived wounded. And lo and behold, I recognized the Plungyaner, Ruvke Tsimbler among the wounded. (I later found out from him that he had been with my father in the same unit when he was killed). This is how the meeting happened: Having progressed in our recovery, we were moved from the 21st ward, which was located on the second floor, to a higher floor. The more seriously wounded were housed on the second floor and afterwards moved to a higher floor, when their condition improved. The wounded, who had just arrived, took our place on the second floor.

In the meantime, we weren't allowed in to see them. Only the day after were we given permission to enter the ward. A lot of them were sleeping, exhausted from the long journey. With the exception of small intervals to eat, take medication or change dressings, they slept. (I also slept for 4 days in a row.) Going from one bed to the next I noticed someone with a shaved head and sunken cheeks. He was asleep. The upper part of his body was in a cast. An arm that stretched in a forward position was also in a cast. This type of cast was called *samaliot* (airplane). On the plaster was written the date the cast was set, as well as the patient's family name. Something in his face looked familiar to me, and when I read the family name, I couldn't believe my own eyes.

What a rare coincidence to happen in such a huge country as the Soviet Union. I read the name over and over in disbelief. Could it really be Ruvke Tsimblev from Plungyan? As he was asleep, I just had to wait until he would open his eyes and recognize me too. It was just like in the movies. A certain time passed. When he awoke, I was standing right at his bedside. Sleepily he looked at me, then shut his eyes again. Then immediately, as if he had just remembered or seen something incredible, he opened his eyes, but this time wider and suddenly let out a yell: "Yoske?! It's me Ruvke!" He hugged me with one hand and shed a few tears. I felt a strange mixture of happiness at out having met this way as well as a sense of sadness that my father didn't make it. We were in recovery for a few months. It was clear to Ruvke that he was going to be handicapped. A commission determined that I was still fit for military service. I was then sent by the arriving representative of the Department of the Military to a collection point for the bodies of those who died on the front. (After my discharge I later met up with Ruvke in Plungyan).

My campaign took me through White Russia and Poland until we reached Germany. It was there that I participated in the storming of Berlin with a particular Russian army unit called The Thundering Cavalry Guardsmen. It consisted of two Cossack corps with the Twenty-first Cavalry Regiment and a squadron of mounted scouts within the Third Division. These were the same scouts with whom I rode into Berlin, February 2, 1945. Before that, however, I was wounded a second time near the town of Frankfurt an der oder. I was placed in a Polish Lazaretto in the little town of Bydgoszcz. I was what they referred to as the "mobile wounded." (I was shot in the face.)

One time while walking in the street, I encountered some Jewish women who were liberated from a camp in Poland where they had made train rails and grenades for the Germans fighting on the fronts. One of them, despite being younger than the others, was weaker and somewhat ill. All three were still wearing prison clothes. They had been placed in a house located in a swamp. I helped them as much as I could. It's a shame I can't recall their names. I only remember that one of them said she was from Memel (Klaipeda) or thereabouts. They didn't know what was going to happen to them. I was then taken to a hospital in Lodz and never saw them again and don't know what their life was like from then on. I think they probably took the emigration route out, as did many from the ghettos and camps. After a certain time I returned to my military unit, the Dansk Cossack Corps. There I waited out the remainder of the long difficult war. The end came on May 9, 1945, a day I consider to be my second birthday. But on that day we were to experience yet another strange feeling. This is what happened:

As with all orders, this one was delivered with considerable clamor. The trumpet resounded with the familiar tune followed by the appropriate orders. The order was as follows: "All are to assemble with horses on the field at the Summer Pavilion, on the double." We were wondering what was going on. Some of them said we were going again to battle. (There were still pockets of German military units that continued the fighting.) Others thought we were being transferred to another place. No one really knew what to expect. And so standing to the right of our horses, as is proper, we saw the commander of the squadron galloping at full speed. In Russian it's called "Aliur tri kresta" because of the inscription on the envelope of urgent telegrams to be quickly delivered on horseback. The commander brought the prancing horse to a halt facing us. He looked at us in silence for a few moments. Suddenly with a strange cry, he shouted, "BROTHERS, THE WAR IS OVER!"

All of us had awaited this moment for so long that we also were silent for a few seconds. Then everyone began to shoot his gun in the air. Even the horses began to jump around as if they too understood the war was over. Hugs were exchanged and tears of joy were shed. We still couldn't believe that death had passed us by, that we had survived to see our loved ones, our friends and acquaintances who had accompanied us to war with tears. On the front we were well aware of what happened to our Jews in the countries occupied by the Germans. The joy continued

for a long while. But then we were ordered to assemble. We were given papers and something with which to write, and told to write to those who were waiting to hear some news from us as soon as possible, to put an end to their worries about us, and to share with them that we were alive and healthy. It was also to let them know that they should expect our return and would see us again. I wrote to my mother in Siberia. I was her only remaining son — survivor but not an invalid. A year after the war I happened to go to Germany yet again as part of the so-called "Russian Occupying Military in Germany." In April 1947, my military service ended.

After almost five years in the Lithuanian and Russian armies, I was discharged, and I returned to Plungyan. My mother and two sisters, as well as a few other families, had already returned from Siberia, the few who were able to survive. A few Jews had been saved by Lithuanians who hid them for the duration of the war. People had to start life all over again. Finally, people were able to settle down and begin life anew.

Chapter VI: The Return of Jews to Plungyan After the War

The war had not yet ended when Plungyan was liberated on October 8, 1944, the day the Germans were driven out of Plungyan. The first Jew to walk into Plungyan was the soldier, Berke Glikman. He walked into the house of a Lithuanian woman named Domitsele Vaitkiene and gave her some happy news: Her son, Benas, of whom they had heard nothing since the beginning of the war, was a Lieutenant in the Lithuanian Sixteenth and that he, Berke had been one of his soldiers. He also added that she shouldn't worry, that in spite of the fact that he was wounded and recuperating in a hospital in Russia he was alive and would be well. Glikman said that when Vaitkus finds out that Plungyan is free from the Germans, he would write his mother a letter and let her know how he was doing. You can just imagine their joy at this wonderful news. Berke continued the fight as there were still Lithuanian towns and cities to be liberated. The final victories were still far in the distance. Benas Vaitkus still lives in Plungyan. We get together with him and his family, all great supporters of Jews.

As I explained earlier, people who had evacuated earlier began returning from towns and cities within the Soviet Union. Not all Plungyaners returned to settle in their place of birth. People settled in Vilnius, Kovno, Shavl (Siauliai), and Klaipeda.

Among the first families to return after the war were Mule and Mote Pelts, who were both discharged from the army directly after the war. Later, other families arrived. Those who came earlier and were a bit more established assisted those having just arrived. The newly arrived were joyfully received. No one was quite sure who had managed to survive. Jews checked to see if their Lithuanian neighbors had any of the possessions they had been forced to leave behind in their haste, but seldom was anything found.

Everything was confiscated by the government in power at the time. The houses where Jews once lived were now occupied by Christians given to them by that former government. They had no problem moving out and finding other places to live. It is possible to describe this process because there were only 27 Jewish families and a few individuals living in Plungyan at the time. Later these numbers dwindled. (To date only two Jews live in Plungyan). I consider it my duty to write about those who survived and returned, that it may be known who remained out of some 2500 Jews who lived in Plungyan before the war.

As I mentioned earlier, the Pelts brothers, Mule and Mote, returned to Plungyan. They were among the first. They began to farm the very land that they had owned before the war. They were able to obtain cows, a horse and some other things necessary for farming. Mule, the older brother, kept a cow in town that he milked himself. Later he also worked in a cooperative buying potatoes in bulk (potatoes for the government restaurants) Mote was later made into a chairman of a "Kolchoz" in the period where people were being forced into these collectives. The Kolchoz was called "Vladas Rekashius" (after a Lithuanian Communist leader), and was located where Mote had his five hectares of land.

These were turbulent times. And many chairmen of Kolchozy were killing opponents of the Soviet regime who attempted to escape into the forests to avoid going into the Soviet Army. On the other hand, at "Motl's Kolchoz" as people called it, which was located near Plungyan, you could breathe a little easier. Mote really didn't want to be chairman but seeing as he was a member of the Communist party, he was forced into it. Also, the peasants wanted him as their leader. He was a good boss. His wife Malke and their three children lived on Bod Gas where they had their own house. She worked as a saleswoman in a general store. Mote later died after an unsuccessful operation.

Mule emigrated to Israel where his two children lived. Although expecting to live out his later years in Israel, he also died. Ete Slavin, his daughter, died a young woman. Here in Plungyan she possessed a great deal of authority and was a well-known community leader. On the day of her funeral all school children from the Plungyan area accompanied the procession beyond the town. She was buried in Vilnius. Due to the trauma of Eta's death her mother became paralyzed and died shortly thereafter. Eta's husband, Kalman, worked as the head of the Production department of the Promkombinat [Industrial Combine].

Ruvke Tsimbler returned from the war an invalid. He worked as a cashier for those who sold merchandise at the marketplace. The government paid him well and the work was not too demanding. Hence he made a good living and had a good life. He was at Kolchoz "Shvitur" not far from Plungyan. It was there that, being a Communist party member, he also received some support to lead the organization of the Communist Party. He had a cow and his own house. For a long period his wife didn't work but raised their three sons. She was a great housewife and her cooking was delicious. Later she worked in a communal institution repairing stained clothing.

Berke Glikman worked at the marketplace together with Ruvke. He did the same work and also had a similarly good life. He made a good living at that time and his wife didn't work. Later he began working at Handsphere. He had two children. Berke died in 1991 at age 68.

Avrom Glikman, Berke Glikman's brother, left during the evacuation and returned directly after liberation. He worked for an institute combating those hiding in the woods to avoid the draft. More than a few of his colleagues took part in the exterminations of Plungyaner Jews. He became dissatisfied with the Soviet regime. He later went on to study management and worked for the company that supplied cooking gas to the Plungyan area until his retirement. His wife worked as a saleswoman in a store. Their only daughter emigrated to Israel where she was joined by her parents shortly thereafter. Today they live in Israel.

Itse-Mende Sher was one of the very few Jews whose work was physically demanding and involved hazardous conditions due to dust and dirt. He wasn't exactly a young man, not to mention that he walked with a limp. Nevertheless, he was a strong person. His work consisted of pressing flax refuse into bundles of up to 92 kilos in weight. After pressing and packing the bundles he had to lift and stack them one on top of the other. His wife didn't work but took care of their two children. The son later worked as a shoemaker. At present they live with their mother in Israel. Itse-Mende died suddenly here in Plungyan.

Gute Abramson also worked with flax in the same place as Itse-Mende Sher. Her work consisted of beating out the harder waste residue from the flax. As I mentioned earlier, she worked in unsanitary working conditions. To do this work the mouth and nose had to be covered with a cloth to prevent dust from entering the lungs. The building where they worked was made of wooden planks. A huge door stood open allowing for truck deliveries as well as for hauling off the finished bundles of flax refuse. Freezing wind and snow blew through the walls and open door making it impossible to work for part of the winter. Gute's husband, Henech, was a hairdresser and died later in Plungyan. Gute now lives in Kovno with one of her daughters. Her other daughter lives in Israel.

Bentse Olshvang was one of the first to return to Plungyan. As I mentioned earlier, his hand was amputated, the result of a battle injury obtained while fighting the Germans. He was one of the first group of handicapped from the war. His wife, Sheyne, didn't work and he received a pension as a handicapped veteran. Later however, he worked as a watchman in a sawmill that had belonged to the Plungyaner Promkombinat, But because he didn't exactly get along with the director, he lost his job. His son Itsik later emigrated to Israel with his wife and their two children. The move followed the death of Itsik's mother who had been ill and bedridden for several years before she succumbed. He carried her in his arms "in gradn farstand." His father had died while

still a young man many years before. Itsik put up a beautiful gravestone for his mother before he emigrated to Israel.

Beyle Libe Rostovski returned to Plungyan with her seven children. Her husband, Manes, was killed on the front. She received a very small pension, not nearly enough to survive. Like many at the time she was forced to buy on what we call "speculation." She would buy merchandise cheaper and sell it to make a small profit in order to fill the gaps with a few rubles. It became easier for her when the children were old enough to work and help out financially. Later they started their own families and some of them turned out to be well adjusted and responsible people. Her children live in Israel, Vilnius, and Germany. Beile Libe died here in Plungyan.

Yanke Moishe returned from the evacuation and found his daughter Sorke, who had been hidden through the entire war by a Lithuanian man from Riteve named Gintalis. They even gave her a Lithuanian name. She spoke Lithuanian perfectly without a Yiddish accent. Her father worked as a shoemaker in a state-run hotel where they used to make new shoes, and rebuild old ones. Both of them emigrated to Israel.

Shie Micchelzon and his wife, Tishe, had no children of their own. They raised their niece Dobke, whose parents had a lot of children before the war making their lives very difficult. So Dobke grew up with Shie and Tishe calling them mother and father. Dobke married a Jew who had served as an officer during the war. His last name was Gurvitch. Dobke, as it turned out died early. Her husband and children moved to Vilnius and later to Israel. Shie and Tishe lived for a short period in Vilnius where he worked as a shoemaker. Both died in Vilnius.

Shie's brother-in-law, Alter Chaves, shared the same courtyard with Shie. He made military clothes and uniforms for officers and had a reputation as an excellent tailor. Alter's wife didn't work. Needless to say he had a lot of customers and did pretty well for himself. Unfortunately he was kind of a sickly person but he was well cared for by his wife. She made sure that he didn't exert himself too much while working. She prepared tasty dishes for him. They raised two children. They later decided to build a cooperative residence in Vilnius for themselves and later moved there. They both died in Vilnius. One of the daughters who lived with them got married, and the son remained a bachelor.

Michke Minster was famous as an adept tailor who also made women's clothing. He always had plenty of work and made a good living. His wife didn't work. Michke was also a well-known musician. He had a good singing voice and played the violin. He was always in high spirits and always had a lively expression on his face. He used to play for dances and concerts. He also raised all three sons as musicians. Rive his wife made sure that her husband was well attended to. At her house you could find delicious homemade *bandelech*, *teiglach* and other tasty baked goods. On more than one occasion I was treated to tea accompanied by delicious baked goods not to mention the wonderful food. When Michke was eating, she almost always stood by his side and made sure that he finished eating everything she had served him. He had to eat even if he didn't want to.

One of their sons who emigrated to Israel was to be followed later by his family and his mother-in-law where they would all live together. Then disaster struck. The son was killed in Israel, causing his family to alter their plans. Instead, they moved to America where they had friends already living in New York.

Meyerke Rostovski was also a tailor but didn't remain for very long in Plungyan. During the war he was in the Lithuanian Sixteenth Division. He was not careful in his criticisms of the Soviet government. It turned out that someone reported the criticisms to the Polit representative in the army. He was sentenced to 10 years in the camp (maybe this was fortunate for him) as speaking against the government was considered to be a mortal sin. After his sentence ended he returned to Plungyan; his mother and remaining brothers were living in Vilnius at the time. From there his family all emigrated to Israel. He didn't stay very long in Plungyan, as I mentioned

before. From there he emigrated to America and lived in Los Angeles with other family working as a house painter until he died there, still a fairly young man.

Itsik Tsvivie was taken to Siberia with his family for being a former leader of Betar organization in Plungyan. They returned to Plungyan and Itsik took a job as a salesman in a kiosk. He also was illegally dealing in meat. It goes without saying that he was clearly dissatisfied with the Communist regime, and never wasted an opportunity to express these views. His wife didn't work. She stayed at home and raised three children. When it became possible to emigrate to Israel, Itsik and his family did just that. They threw a fine going-away party one evening during which Itsik even called up the Chief of the Plungyaner M.G.B. (Security Commission) just to get on his nerves.

Beye Korobelnik, a former leader of *Shomer Hatsair*, worked as an employee of the Communist Party Committee after the War. After that he worked as an editor of the newspaper published at that time for the Plungyan region, the *Sotsialistinis Kelias (The Path to Socialism)*. He was a highly regarded person at the paper. He was well respected for his high level of education. His wife, Liube, worked as a saleswoman in a store. His two sons emigrated to Israel. Ultimately, he worked as a director of a commercial cooperative. After a short time in this position he left the Communist party (many were renouncing the party) and left for Israel together with his wife where they lived with their children who preceded them.

Toybe Bunka (my mother) returned from Siberia with three daughters, Dina, Hene and Chane. She was given an apartment to live in because she didn't own a house before the war. Dina got a job as a sales girl in a general store. Hene worked as a bookkeeper in homes and for a management organization. After she got married, she moved to Vilnius. Dina married the type of man we used to call a "mountain Jew." He was from the Caucaus region. Chane was later married in Vilnius and had two daughters who subsequently emigrated to Israel. Subsequently, everyone including my mother, her sisters and their families all emigrated to Israel. (My mother, her sister and sister's husband died there).

I arrived in Plungyan after I was discharged in March of 1947. I began working as a military instructor in the civilian organization called "*Dasap*" [*Dosop, Dosof* etc.] Later, I worked in the area of management of state run housing. These were housing units that the government rented to people. People called it "*Nomu Valdiba*" [or *Nomu Maldiba*] Housing Management Organization. Since my real profession was that of a carpenter, I resigned my position and went to work in a furniture factory where I made chairs and other furniture. Mainly, in the course of my work activities I was still working as a metal worker doing cold welding, and even worked on a locomotive, producing electrical energy to run the factory machines because electricity was difficult to obtain from the stations in Plungyan. There certainly was not enough power for factory production. When the manufacturing profile of the factory changed, we began to produce wood veneers, sculptures and other things. I began working with the particular guild that manufactures these items (I've been working with wooden sculpture for years now. I put on my own exhibitions.) Now my work consists exclusively of Jewish themes.

Yankl Piker had a great sense of humor, was quick to tease and told various jokes, anecdotes, or simply hilarious stories. He worked as the director of a store. Jews and Lithuanians alike called Piker's Store. His wife did not work. They all emigrated to Israel where he wrote a book about his life and the time during the war.

Chaim Fish and his wife were already elderly when they returned from the evacuation with their remaining children. They received a pension for their son who was killed on the front. One of their sons lived in Russia. Another son, one of the first handicapped war veterans, lived in Vilnius and worked as a shoemaker. They had two daughters who lived with them in Plungyan; the one named Shavartsbord worked in a leather factory and the other daughter went to live in *Klaipeda (Memel)*.

Zelik Ril (my uncle) worked in a butcher shop, which at the time was a very profitable job. Obviously, he lived well and his wife didn't have to work. They saved up a tidy sum of money, enough to build a cooperative apartment in Vilnius where they lived together with a daughter who had already been working in Vilnius for some time. One of their sons was killed in the army. Zelik Ril died in Vilnius. Not long thereafter his daughter's husband died, while still a young man. The mother, daughter and remaining children then emigrated to Israel.

Elie Glikman, whose wife died a young woman leaving behind five children, was a widower for years. He and his mother-in-law returned from Siberia both advanced in age. Elie, notwithstanding his inability to read and write, was a remarkable human being. He knew five languages including the rare gypsy language. The prayers recited three times daily, he knew by heart. I still remember, how before the war he used to lie on a hard sleeping bench surrounded by children and singing songs from the Tsar's time. He had been a soldier in the Tsar's army and was a prisoner of war under the Germans during World War I. The children sang along with him, although they didn't understand the words. His mother-in-law and Elie died here in Plungyan. His daughter Dobke married a Jew from Russia.

Fete [or Pete] Segalovitch was a hand painter. They had two children. Later they moved to Vilnius and from there emigrated to Israel. Dobke died there during the time of the war between Iraq and Kuwait.

Motl Glikman married here in Plungyan. He worked as the Chief of a Communal Service department. He divorced his wife and went to live in Vilnius where he married a Jewish widow from Minsk. He died in Vilnius. His ex-wife and children are presently living in Israel.

Chaskl Sher arrived from Vilnius with his wife and the twins, a boy and a girl. As a former pre-war member of the then prohibited Communist Youth Organization, he was afforded special privileges, despite the fact that he had only completed two grades at the Jewish Folkschule and was practically illiterate. But it didn't get in the way of him becoming a director of a large industrial complex. He was a member of the Communist Party Committee in Plungyan serving as a commissary officer. As with all Directors at the time, he used his high position for his own personal benefit. Among others, the mills of the Plungyan region belonged to this particular industrial complex [promkombinat]. The millers lived very well from their work. Every miller had to pay a weekly or monthly visit to the director for a "discussion". To arrive empty handed was unacceptable (Everyone knew about this practice but it was a taboo subject not to be broached. Those who arrived empty handed were let go by the director, which was the case with Bentse Olshvang.) Everyone understood this. This was the curious thing about the Soviet Union, that a person who had a second grade education could become a director of a factory and be prominent in the Communist party. With time he was moved to the town of Shiliute and held a similar position, albeit somewhat smaller. As was the case with many, he renounced the Communist party and from *Klaipeda (Memel)*, emigrated to Israel with his wife and children. After a short period they went to Germany to live with his wife's brother where Chaskl died. His wife and children still reside in Germany.

Leibe Orlianski worked as a leader of communal economy for the Plungyan region. He carried out his duties well. It was due to his initiative that the first house was built after the war in Plungyan. He sent workers to Vilnius to build houses, where there had been a previous shortage of builders. As a result of his efforts to rebuild houses destroyed during the war, he received many thank-you notes. He lived with his wife. They had no children. Later he served as director of an industrial complex, expanding into new production areas. After he was freed from his post, he went to Vilnius to live. Attempting to emigrate illegally to Israel, he was sentenced to 15 years in a prison camp. After serving part of the sentence he was released and emigrated to Israel where his brother Berl was already living.

Yudl Piker and his wife, Sara, worked at the same industrial complex. She served as a head bookkeeper. He worked as a master craftsman in a guild where wool was combed and cotton was produced. They raised two boys. Later they moved to Vilnius and from there emigrated to Israel.

Yose Hodes worked in a commune in the area of commerce, selling kerosene. Afterwards, he worked in a furniture store. His wife was hidden by a Lithuanian family for the duration of the war. She made women's hats. They had two daughters. Their youngest daughter married in Israel, where her parents were already living by this time. She then went to live in America where her husband was already residing. After a short while Yose and his wife also joined them in America. The older daughter, who had been living in Vilnius, also moved with her family to America.

Itsik Pozin worked in a center handling various merchandise in a commercial cooperative. His wife worked in the same furniture store with Yosl Odes. Eventually, their son became a head engineer for a large state-run institution.

It is necessary to mention an incident that happened to him before the war. Itsik Posin came from quite a wealthy family. He married a blacksmith's daughter. He was what you called a leftist because he believed the Communist propaganda that extolled our high standards of living and lack of discrimination. In the meantime, Communists had established a Jewish "autonomous republic" called *Birobidjan*. Itsik and his wife went there illegally. He later claimed that he personally felt the goodness of the Soviet Union. In reality, Jews arriving from the Baltic lands were suspect. This was a result of Stalin's anti-Semitic policies.

Perhaps the beginning of the war succeeded in shielding Itsik from repression. After the war they returned to Plungyan where Itsik's wife, Hode, died. Some time, after he was living in Vilnius with his children, he also died. His son emigrated to Israel. Here in Lithuania Itsik Pozin was one of the first to establish the Jewish community [after the war].

Tevie Grolman was a handicapped war veteran who received a pension. He didn't work. His wife worked as a saleswoman before the war. (They had their own store on the Bod Gas). They had a son and a daughter. After they were falsely accused of a blood libel, they left Plungyan and settled in Shavl.

Moishe Zalkinovitch and his wife were no youngsters when they returned to Plungyan with two sons and a daughter. Moishe worked as a salesman in an army store. Both sons followed in their father's footsteps. The daughter (who later married Bene Korokelnik,) also worked as a saleswoman in a general store. Rochl Mets illegally returned (from exile in Siberia) where she agreed to marry Leibe Zalkinovitch. But shortly after her return to Plungyan, she was arrested and confined to the prison in Klaipeda because she still didn't have the right to return to Lithuania. No excuses were accepted. She was sent back to Siberia. Leibe made the journey with her to Siberia and married her there. They remained there for some time until they were legally allowed back into Lithuania. They lived in Vilnius and from there emigrated to Israel. Their son Velfke also married in Plungyan and raised two daughters. His wife helped him in the store he ran for so long that he called it his own store. They presently live with their younger daughter here. The older daughter lives in Vilnius.

Shuel Hirzon was already sick and elderly. He had grown-up children who were already working. Leibe, his son, worked in a commercial cooperative where, together with Mule Pelts, the two would buy provisions for the restaurants in Plungyan like potatoes, cabbage onions and the like. When it became possible for former Polish citizens to travel to Poland (from there one was permitted to travel elsewhere) he found a woman, a former Polish citizen who agreed to marry him for a certain amount of money. They were divorced in Poland and each went his/her own way. He emigrated to Canada where he did quite well for himself and became quite a wealthy

man. Her sister with her family also came to live with him. He died in Canada. But according to his last will, he requested to be buried in Israel. His wishes were carried out.

Mote Reznik was a leather cutter for shoes. His wife didn't work but brought up their son. His wife was sick and partially paralyzed, She even attempted suicide not to be a burden to anyone, but they saved her. After a time, however, she died. Mote and his son went to Israel where an accident happened to Mote and he was killed.

Toybe Zelde Hirzon lived out the evacuation years with her troubled son Arke in Siberia. It goes without saying that Arke was not accepted into the army. He wasn't seen as a normal person. He was forced to return to Plungyan and was killed. This is how it happened: One day Arke went into the rural villages near Plungyan to sell his wares. This one time he went to the house of a peasant with whom he was acquainted. He was just sitting there when intruders entered the house. They were those hiding out in the forests fighting against the Communist regime. (At the time these people were called "criminals". Today they call them "partisans".) In those days these "criminals/partisans" were killing hundreds of people, entire families, even the small children of Lithuanian peasants, officials and party members for having served the regime. Many chairmen of a Kolchozy were killed. They also went after Communist party people, officials or anyone who supported the Soviet Regime. Sometimes the victims happened to be the first to enter the Kolhoz on their way to work in the morning. Entire Lithuanian families were massacred, old people, men, women and children just as the Jews had been killed during the war.

When these "criminals/partisans" saw a stranger in town, they feared being recognized and turned into the authorities. So they decided to kill Arke, especially since he was a Jew. He was then tied to a tree and tortured the entire night by his drunken captors. Arke was around two meters high and was a strong guy. His voice was very strong. People who lived close by heard his cries of anguish resonating throughout the area. It was horrible to listen to it. Sometime in the early morning hours they shot him. We found him bound to a tree, and it was a horrendous sight. He was covered with blood and gaping wounds and burn marks on his face and body. Shortly thereafter, his mother died in Plungyan.

Shgie Odes (nickname "Koshaie") was a single man. He was handicapped from birth. It was miraculous how he managed to save himself by fleeing deep into the Soviet Union, whereas healthy people didn't even make it. Understandably, he wasn't able to work and instead sold goods on speculation. He sold yeast which was not always available at the stores. The militia people didn't bother him. There were bigger speculators than him. Besides he was handicapped and where would they put him anyway? He wasn't exactly unfond of having his little drink of whiskey. This is what he earned his money for. Food didn't cost him anything. He would eat at a different house every day like a Yeshiva *bocher*. The day he was to eat at someone's house they were prepared with a graph to measure exactly how much whiskey he was getting with his meal (that is to say, whoever had whiskey.) At Ruvke Tsimbler's house he received a glass of *samogon* (homemade whiskey), which they used to make a lot of in the countryside for parties and similar occasions. He became ill and died shortly after the war.

Tsipe Bank was a single woman. Her brother Yeke lived in Vilnius and emigrated to America. Tsipe was a Jewish patriot. After the evacuation she returned to Plungyan, but eventually she moved and now lives in Israel. She still keeps in touch with everything happening in her birthplace, Plungyan. She was very concerned about the memorials for the victims, the mass graves amongst other concerns. Somewhat elderly and with health problems, she has not had the opportunity to visit Plungyan in recent years.

Ruvke Dimant was the only one left after the war from a very large family. He was with us in Siberia and returned together with my family. He was a strong young man and worked as a loader in a commercial cooperative. He married a girl from Shaul. It was an arranged marriage and they had two children, but it just so happened that he became ill. No one ever imagined that he

would die but it turned out to be far more serious than anyone had thought. He was only sick for a short time and then died. After his death his wife and children moved to Shaul to live with her parents.

Yudeske Fish lived with her mother and daughter. She married Motl Rostovski (Beile Libe's child) who also returned from the evacuation. He worked as a metal welder in what was called a car and tractor station [repair shop]. Yudes sold yeast, pepper, cinnamon, samogon whiskey and other things. She got around the chairman of the anti-speculation department by paying him a small amount of money, (that's if the government employee would accept money). This is how she lived until she moved to Vilnius with her daughter and her family. She died in Vilnius late in life.

Shore-Yuzls Levinson remained single after the war. Her only son was killed on the front. The Lithuanians used to call her Shorke. She was already an old woman. She made and sold poppy seed cake, *mernpletslach*, [carrot crackers or carrot flat rolls], apples and other delicious things. Both Jewish and Lithuanian kids would run to Shore with their pennies to buy poppy seed cake or other delicious things she used to make. Every day she would sit in front of her house and sell her treats. (The street is presently called Synagogue Street. The Bes Medrash, the Great Synagogue and the Shamosim prayer house are still standing. I have already mentioned that I was the one who proposed that the street name be changed to Synagogue Street.) She was assisted during the first emigration to go to Israel to be with her daughter who had emigrated before the war. But Shore died in Israel within the first few months of arriving.

Basheve Okum, similar to Shove Yuzels, sold sour pickles, apples, pepper and other things, which her son Leizer forbade her to do. He felt this type of business was unnecessary. Leizer was Basheve's only son. He was born fifteen years after the wedding. Leizer was very dear to her. Her husband had already died. He arrived from the *Caucasus* where he had been during the evacuation. He was a handsome young man. He worked with me in housing management, managing a few streets. He worked and studied in the evening school which existed for those who didn't have a chance to study because of the war or for those who worked during the day. He finished seven grades, entered a university in Vilnius and became an engineer. He married the niece of Ziman, then well-known editor of the Vilnius newspaper *Tiesa (Truth)*. He brought his mother to live with him in Vilnius where she later died. After a time they went to live in Israel as did many Jews.

There were also a few Jewish families living here who were not from Plungyan. Velvl Belkind, his wife, mother-in-law, children and a few other people were hidden until the war's end by Lithuanians Francs Charier (died), Yule Gadeikite and her brother Franas, Vitkevitchiene [Mitkevitchiene] among others. Kareiva told me that the Jews he hid were prepared to take their own lives before they would fall into the butchers' hands with him and his family. He attempted to allay their fears and strove to improve their living conditions. He convinced them, and right after the war they presented him with a written declaration attesting to his humanitarianism. The document contained all six of their signatures. A copy of the declaration can be found in the Plungyan Jewish Museum, which will be housed in the Bes Medresh. Velvl also finished evening school just as Akum had. He later worked as a leader of the regional department of commerce. His children finished their studies in Vilnius. His son Misha recently became a well-known scholar in the United States. Afterwards, Velvl and his daughter followed suit, and emigrated to America. Velvl's wife died fairly young. His mother-in-law died prior to her daughter here in Plungyan.

Ruve Maler worked as a manager of the aforementioned car and tractor station. His wife was a teacher. They had two daughters and emigrated to America. One of their daughters is a noted writer in Lithuania. Her literary creations are translated in other languages. She is also known in Israel.

Motik Yashdin came from White Russia. He married Teme Rostovski (Beile Libe's daughter). They raised two children. Motik worked as a mechanic in a cooperative and was considered to be one of the best. He was a very decent, quiet person. They all emigrated to Israel where he died still a young man.

Everyone was desperate to leave Lithuania. Many were successful through legal means by going through Poland. Some were caught and put on trial for attempting to get out illegally. This happened to a woman from Plungyan who tried to get out with her husband and daughter. They discussed the plan with an airplane pilot who agreed to fly them illegally to America. They agreed upon the hour of departure, but then suddenly, he tricked them and turned them over to the militia. They confiscated everything they were carrying, and they were put under arrest. In those days this was considered a serious crime and carried a long prison sentence. Waiting for trial, the husband committed suicide. The entire blame was heaped on him, which saved the woman and her daughter. It was proven that the woman was unaware that they would be traveling illegally. They served a lesser sentence and then emigrated legally to Israel, because by this time it was already permitted to leave the country. The mass exodus to Israel and to other countries had already begun. Almost all the Jews in Plungyan, including Plungyaner Jews living in other towns and cities, were packing up to emigrate. Most Plungyaners moved to Israel. Only a few families choose to go into exile again. Presently, very few Jews from Plungyan live in Lithuania. After the war many came to realize that only Israel guaranteed the Jew a life free of assimilation and anti-Semitism, both of which predominate in the countries of the Diaspora. The Jewish State builds and strengthens traditional Jewish life, which in turn protects the independence of the state of Israel. No one is going to do it for us. Unfortunately, those who moved elsewhere didn't understand this. Or perhaps they didn't desire to understand. In 1950 in Plungyan there were 150 Jews and in 1970, only 45. Today (1999) I am the only one, and it is not possible for me to leave Plungyan for various reasons. This is the end of the road. There is already no one to pass down the history of the Jews of Plungyan. I am the last of the Jews who lived here for centuries with our Lithuanian neighbors, from the founding of the Jewish community, to the last Jew of a community that ceased to exist — 2234 Jews from Plungyan and the surrounding area were wiped out forever.

They now rest in ten locations beneath the mounds in the forests, where the mass graves are located. Eighty-four scattered gravestones were also returned to the old cemetery. I then set them up in an area of the old cemetery that had not yet been built upon. (A Lithuanian high school was built on top of a portion of the old cemetery.) I also placed gravestones and sculptures at the 10 mass grave sites, which will stand for hundreds of years, bearing witness to the once large Jewish community that Hitler's fascists and local collaborators were responsible for killing off.

Children of Plungyan Jews

Jews from Plungyan were called *Litvakes*, a term referring to Jews from all over Lithuania. Branches of Plungyaner Jews living in foreign countries never forget the town where they lived for so many generations, the town of their grandparents and great grandparents. Plungyaner Jews can be found in almost every country. They recall the vanished world of the shtetl with its large, vibrant Jewish community.

These Jews (living in a foreign country) include Elie Broyde from England; others are Ted Sher from America; Anetta Goldwasser (the former Mayor's daughter) from America and her brother, Harry, from Zimbabwe (they had both emigrated to South Africa as children); Allen Polivnik from Australia; and the famous "artist" from the Royal English Theater, writer and actor Anthony Sher. Anthony Sher made a visit to Plungyan in 1992 and described the town in his book, *Middlepost*. His grandfather emigrated from Plungyan to Johannesburg, South Africa in

1896. When Anthony Sher was in Plungyan he took a lot of pictures as does everyone who comes to visit the mass-murder sites, including the Koshanner Memorial and the old Jewish cemetery. He also filmed and took pictures of homes formerly owned by Jews. After his return to London, the English newspaper, *The Independent*, described his experiences in Plungyan with pictures of the town. In England there is another writer Ronald Harvard who hasn't yet been to Plungyan but his grandfather was born there in 1888. In 1900 he emigrated to Africa and now lives in England. There are always those who come to see their ancestral home and look for the roots of their genealogical tree.

Chapter VII: A People of Memory: The Koshan Memorial and Restoration of Jewish Cemeteries

The Creation of the Koshan Memorial

Today the Koshaner Memorial is not only known in Lithuania, but also in many countries around the world. Jewish travelers come from all over, sometimes with their families, to pay their respects, bow their heads for the innocent, murdered men, women and children, who suffered the greatest pain and torture imaginable. Most came from America but Jews from South Africa, England, Canada, Israel, Australia, Germany, Austria, even from Zimbabwe have come. And it's not only Jews who have roots in Plungyan who are coming. There are also those who have no connection with Plungyan, but simply heard about the memorial from someone else and came to see it.

When Jews returned to Plungyan after the war they saw the evidence of the holocaust from the mass graves in the woods at Koshan and in other places. The six grave sites at Koshan were often found dug up in certain areas, human skulls strewn around the graves. Apparently, people were looking for gold teeth. Frequently, we had to re-inter bones. This happened more than once. We would also straighten out the contours of the mounds to prevent people from stepping on them. The village of Koshan is about three kilometers from Plungyan. People went to the town administration of which there were the chairmen Itsik Tsivie, Zelik Ril and others. They requested an ordinance be passed to prevent people from digging up body parts, desecrating the graves of those who lie in the graves below. In those days it was difficult to request anything from them, let alone that each grave should be encircled with cement and the entire area be fenced in. We also requested that sidewalks be put down to permit easier access to the graves. After some time, we persuaded them and they granted our requests. To prepare the memorial stone, people collected money, and in 1952 the stone was set with the inscriptions in Yiddish, Russian and Lithuanian: "Here were murdered 1800 Jews from Plungyan and the surrounding area."

Even on the front I was constantly plagued with the thought that if I would survive, I would never forget those who perished (for even then we knew about the mass shootings of Jews — the Jewish genocide). I would see to it that memorials and sculptures were placed at these places. When I returned after my discharge from the army in 1947, I immediately began to worry about it. But it was only after some time that I was able to attain my goal.

In 1976 I was approached by Jonas Valoiskas, former chairman of the town Shateikai, and another Lithuanian with a surprising proposal. Surprising, because the Soviets would have never tolerated this proposal. Jonas explained that he could not rest. He explained that not far from Shateikai, in the forest, lie 100 murdered Jews from the town of Salant, and there is almost no sign of the spot where they were killed. (I wrote earlier about the location of this grave site). He wanted to at least lay a stone at the site. He also wanted me to create a sculpture that would portray the torture of the Jews who were murdered there. Finally, he said that no one needs to know anything for the time being. Later we would secretly install the sculpture and people would think it's been there for some time and they wouldn't touch it. And that's what we did. We discussed how the sculpture would look. The image was to be that of a person with bound hands, exhausted but with an expression of rage. I made the statue in the Sheltie region, in the village of Fuchsia where a friend, who donated the cedar wood for the sculpture, lives. The sculpture was 4.2 meters in height. Lithuania is famous for its national art of wood carving. Consequently, he and other Lithuanians requested that another sculpture also be placed next to the gravestones portraying the Lithuanians' feelings of sadness for the Jews. Creating the sculpture in Shateikai gave me what I needed to energetically begin the Koshan memorial. My wife advised me in the meantime to do one sculpture secretly, and maybe, later, they would permit me to create others. In my summer garden outside of town I did a huge sculpture, 4 meters high, consisting of an entire family including four small children. The parents are holding the fifth, a newborn, in their arms. On the

bottom part of the sculpture I carved the inscription: "Born To Live". This symbolizes how it is impossible to exterminate a people. The roots remain. And from those roots grow new branches covered with leaves. (The people in the sculptures are pressed between the branches and leaves from which they emerge.) The oak wood from which the statue is made is also a symbol of strength.

When I finished the work, I went off to the then chairman self-government for the Plungyan region, Nanas Vindashius, with whom I was acquainted. He was an art lover and already possessed several of my works. They probably had a real effect on him, not to mention the fact that he couldn't be selected as chairman again. So when I told him that I wanted to erect a sculpture, I didn't believe he would be amenable to the idea. Prior to this, every time I requested to put up a few sculptures in the same place, his building representative always answered that a memorial stone was already there and they didn't need another one. To my astonishment, he was interested in my proposal. He telephoned his driver and told me to put away my scooter. First he wanted to see my sculpture. We drove to my summer garden. He was very impressed with my work, especially with the subject matter. He gave me permission to put it up in Koshan next to the memorial stone.

Later I became bolder and again approached him with the desire of putting up more sculptures to make a memorial. He wasn't against the idea. With the assistance of my Lithuanian colleagues, under my direction, we finished the work that took three years to complete. They helped me without financial reward. Two of those three years I worked alone.

On the *yahrzeit* of the genocide, representatives and deputies from all political movements and parties from the regional self-government gathered for a commemoration at the mass gravesite. Also present was Gregori Kanovitch, the writer and chairman of the Jewish community in Lithuania; Emanuel Zinger; Professor Shloyme Otomuk [?] [?] Yadovski a legal scholar; Y. Levinson, the leader responsible for memorials, restoration and upkeep of old cemeteries and mass murder sites throughout Lithuania. In attendance were those from Kovne, including the writer Mark Singer. People arrived from Klaipeda, Shavl and from the surrounding towns where Jews still resided. They even created the name the "Koshaner Memorial". It is there in Koshan that the majority of the Jews lie — about 1800. In keeping with my request, access paths leading to each grave were constructed along with stairs over the mound. An asphalt parking lot was also created. They also fenced in all six graves.

The self-government of the region has also assisted in the setting up of memorials as well as with the upkeep of the remaining mass graves from the entire Plungyan region where it is known that some 2234 Jews perished. Here are the location of the towns with the number of those who were killed: Platl (Platelei)-30, Alsad (Alsedzai)-30, Shateik (Shateikai)-100; Villages: Vetuven (Vestuvenai)-82, Milashaitsh (Milashaitshai)-60, Loimalenko-90, Twer (Tverai)-16 Furvaitshai-4. Placed over these graves were simple stones without any indication that Jews were killed there. We put up new Memorial Stones with inscriptions in Yiddish and Lithuanian. The version we used was the following: "On this spot the Nazis and their collaborators on the 21st day of July, 1941, gruesomely murdered Jews, men, women and children".

Lithuanians often come to place flowers at the gravesites in accordance with their traditions. At the entrance to the Koshaner Memorial people tie black ribbons that are used as a sign of mourning. I felt a sense of satisfaction that in a period of a few years we were successful, albeit through great effort, to accomplish everything necessary to serve as a reminder that Jews once lived here with their interesting life and traditions. That there would be no more Jews here, I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams, as much as I couldn't have dreamed that it would fall on me to be the last Jew of Plungyan. It is my fate to write the last chapter of the Jews of Plungyan. Almost all the former Jews of Plungyan, who the murderers so gruesomely put to death, will lie here forever in their eternal rest.

The Restoration of Jewish Cemeteries — Their Remnants

When the few Jews returned to Plungyan after the war, the cemetery was already ransacked. The better quality stones made of granite and the like were sanded off, the Jewish inscriptions removed, to be used for Christian gravestones. The only stones remaining were those considered too plain or too old to be of any use. The cemetery was being used to graze cattle, and as a place to drink whiskey while baking in the sun. No one took care of this holy place. People were digging deeper and deeper holes searching for what they believed to be the hoarded money of Jews. The Jews who were living close to the cemetery tried to make sure people didn't step on the graves. A few Jews had cows and cut the grass on the outskirts of the cemetery for them to graze. This is how it was until the administration of Plungyan decided to put a high school on top of the cemetery. In those days there were already very few Jews in Plungyan. Nevertheless, people started to protest. But it was no use. They refused to listen to reason. During this period, destroying a cemetery, even a Christian one, was a normal thing for the Communist regime. We were notified that whoever wanted, could exhume family members and take them to another town where burial was permitted (it wasn't permitted everywhere). Four families, one from Vilnius, former Plungyaners, did just that. These were people whose family members had died after the war. They also moved their gravestones. They brought them to Vilnius and buried them there. The remaining gravestones were brought to the location (Koshan) where the majority of the Plungyaner Jews had been killed. They had promised me, as I had requested, to set aside any gravestones or bones that they might find while digging (the foundation of the high school). But at the time when the building started, I happened to be out of town for that entire month. (I was at an artist's camp doing sculptures). When I returned, it was already finished.

When the Lithuanian poet, Mikolas Kartshoiskas, was at the place where the Plungyaner Jews were killed and to where the stones from the old cemetery were taken, he read from his poem written especially for this place. The poem is about the 1800 Jews and is entitled "The Memorial in Koshan". He writes the following: "Gravestones were banished by force, from the places they occupied for hundreds of years in the old Jewish cemetery."

I wasn't able to rest until I could set up the gravestones in a place where they hadn't yet built (next to the high school). I went to inquire several times when I could carry out my work, but always received nothing but refusals. I put in a lot of effort until the city manager, Ketvirtus, and the regional manager Vidashius, both agreed to my proposal. The director of the newly built high school, however, was against the plan. His rationale was that the high school students would not have a playground to run around in. I embarrassed him by saying it wasn't a good thing to walk on dead people's bones.

This was how I succeeded in preserving the Plungyaner Jewish cemetery for hundreds of years to come. According to many of the gravestones, the cemetery has been in existence for some 500 years. Besides the 89 gravestones which were relocated, we placed a separate stone with inscriptions in Yiddish and Lithuanian indicating the location of the old cemetery. An area was also built for people to say Kaddish and Yizkor on the Yahrzeit of the Jewish Genocide. Remnants of the last Jews of Klaipeda are in attendance. But in the surrounding area there are already no Jews left, save for a handful in the Telz region who also attend the memorial on July 21st.

Addenda

1. Translation of brochure on Jacob Joseph Bunka

The following is a translation of the brochure on Jacob Joseph Bunka:

The title page:

Jacob (Joseph) Bunka
Wood Sculptor —
1998

The Sculpture: "The Tragedy of the Jewish People"
Stands by the Koshan Memorial, 1986

Page two

Joseph Bunka is celebrating his 75th birthday, a venerable age. His life of creativity began when he was barely five, when his father noted his son's artistic bent so at age 16 he took him to the famous master in Plungyan (Plungė), Yozas Shublinskasn, to become his apprentice, to teach him a craft the art of carpentry.

Then in 1941 there began the terrible catastrophe of the Jewish people. Jacob Bunka suffered heavy losses in his personal life and from the year 1945 and the years to follow, he dedicated his life to a mission, both human and aesthetic, with the aim of immortalizing the brother and sisters of his folk in Plungyan and environs who fell victim to the annihilation of the community. Thus in 1976, he fashioned a sculpture in wood, 4 meters in height, showing a human being with bound hands in torn clothing, now standing by the mass grave in Shateikai. In 1986 Bunka, with the help of his Lithuanian colleagues, created in the village of Koshan a lasting memorial for the genocidal victims and mass grave. His moving sculptures of towering height, depicting human anguish, stand like sentinels above the tragic scene of mounds and trees. People from all over the world come to visit the Koshan Memorial, from America, Canada, England, Germany, Austria, Israel, Even as far as Korea, South Africa. Bunka's sculptures are also to be found in these countries. The master's work is exhibited at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

In 1996 Bunka was invited by Israel where his works were exhibited in Tel Aviv and ? cities. They received beautiful tributes in the press as a new page in Jewish history because traditionally Jewish religion did not allow the making of human images. There were many responses in Yiddish, English, Lithuanian, Hebrew, one of them reads as follows:

'We thank you for the uncommon and exceptional, obviously not so simple, but great work you are doing, for your concern and caring for the old Jewish cemeteries and the mass graves in Plungyan and surrounding area, for your monumental sculptures, your gigantic labor, for your creative energy which embodies the memories of loss, pain and our contemporary hope that never shall such a gruesome tragedy happen again. Our thanks for your steadfast commitment to your creativeness, that you cannot imagine yourself living in Lithuania without it. And only the strongest tree can grow alone, even when it stands, in its solitariness, at the edge of a field, still does it give strength with royal dignity to its surroundings. Regina Riaukaite (Sociology)

Bunka is the only Jewish folk master in Lithuania. In 1995 a special documentary film was produced on this unique master, which was entitled *Moses Our Teacher in Phlotl*.

The master knows no rest, ax and tools in his hands, not only does he want his work immortal, but he knows an old saying: 'He who recognizes his own essence, that person is full of hope.' Danute Serapiniene

Sculptures shown:

- Page 3: A Shoemaker in Synagogue — 1995
- Page 4: Moses Our Teacher — 1992
- Page 4: Agamemnon — 1997
- Page 5: The Fiddler — 1994
- Page 5: The Smith — 1996
- Page 6: Blowing the Shofar — 1991

Information about Jacob Josef Bunka compiled from various publications and Press articles

Yankel Piker, a former Plungyaner, now living in Israel, wrote in his memoirs as follows:

"Yosel Bunka, a front fighter, highly decorated for his bravery in battle against the Nazi fascists, was appointed by the local administration, the municipality of Plungyan, as housing inspector.

With regard to this young man, Yosel Bunka, it is worthy of note that Plungyaners, wherever they may be, should know what precious Jewish youth Plungyan had, what great soldiers they were in the war against the Nazis.

Yosel's father, Leibe Bunka, with his brother Avrom Lazer Bunka, also fought on the front but sadly fell in battle as brave soldiers. Yosel, himself was at the front while still very young, yet notwithstanding his youth, he excelled himself as a courageous fighter.

A decade later, when he became a master in the folk art of wood sculpture, his fame spread throughout Lithuania and beyond, deep into Russia. From Moscow came a correspondent from the only Yiddish journal in the Soviet, *Soviet Homeland*, who wrote a lengthy article on Yosel Bunka. We quote the following excerpts:

"Zhematye is located in the northwest of Lithuania and is rich with folk artists who create wonderful works out of wood and clay in all kinds of colors and forms. Those who visit this region to view the exhibitions of their work in the larger cities gape in wonder at their creation. The Zhematye masters were not even trained formally in any art academies, hence the term *folk artists*.

Not long ago I met in Plungyan such a folk sculptor, Yosel Bunka, a man now in his forties. His lively eyes are forever smiling. According to his attire and the exhibits in his home, it is not difficult to see that he is steeped in the spirit of art and wood sculpture.'

"Yosel, at an early age, became a friend of the forests, developing a love for their gift of trees. As a child, the little knife in his hand, he was already carving the wood. His friends at school were all armed with whistles which he sculpted for them. His mother's wooden shoes did not seem to her to be of the ordinary kind for they were not as hard and did not rub harshly against the foot. Why? Because they were the creation of her son Yosel.

The most frightening way in which the war affected Yosel was the fact that he was forced to take flight from his beloved home eastward into Russia. He returned later as a liberator of Lithuania. In his first battle against the Nazis in which Yosel took part — the battle in the vicinity of the Russian village, Alexyovke (where he was thrown into a fierce and bloody struggle) established the basis, the way of return, for his eventual reunion with his birthplace, Plungyan. In one of these battles behind Oriol, Yosel was wounded. When Yosel joined the Cossack brigade after he left the Zlotauser Hospital, he was warmly welcomed as if he was a full-fledged 'Donsker' Cossack among the horsemen with their long mustaches and he felt at home as if in Zhematye — horses, forests, fresh hay — but here he was by this time a sergeant and Yosel had become a leader!

In one of the battles, Yosel and several comrades captured a *tsung* (literally a "tongue," meaning a high officer who might have vital information to divulge to his captors), a fascist officer whom they brought to the command post. When Yosel was asked how such a catch took place, he answered, "What's there to tell?" The *tsung* was really a prize, for the *tsung* gave important information. The *tsung* proved to be a vital source, indeed, for shortly after, on Yosel's chest sparkled the medal, Slava. When the Soviet army reached the river Visel, Yosel and several comrades were the first to swim across to the enemy's bank to capture a German post. For this exploit he was again decorated with the highest order, second rank. The recommendation for Yosel to receive the Order of the First Rank was already prepared by the commander of his brigade, but due to the quick tempo of events, the citation was overlooked and did not reach Yosel. Had it happened it would have been equivalent to Hero of the Soviet Union, which is the highest honor in Soviet Russia. His soldier's tunic was duly decorated with many medals, testifying to his bravery in battle.

Feverish times followed the war. Building was brisk and people needed homes, and Yosel as building inspector, applied his artistic energies, his creative hand. He recalled when he was a little boy he spent nights and days at the old shoemaker's home, Modechai Lazer, who used to love telling stories while holding in his lips, small wooden slivers. Yosel lived then in the magical world of the creative imagination and throughout his life he has a deep respect for the workers who loved art.

Once in the forest he stumbled upon a tree (*pinyak*) of strange form and shape — two figures like two dancers interlocked in a dance. Yosel took out the little knife from his pocket and began to cut away the branches. He barely reached the door of his home when the sculpture was already complete.

Who is the author? Man or nature? Presumably it is the human being who possesses the ability to improve on nature. With time, Yosel's home became full with his small sculptures. The gifted hands of a master enhanced not a few of his friends' homes.

Yosel returned to the art that captivated him in his early youth and childhood. He began to sculpt artworks of the forest. He became one of the most original craftsmen of souvenir output in Plungyan. His sculptures can be found in many museums in Lithuania. They also have been exhibited with great success in Moscow, Leningrad, Montreal, Milan, Prague, Warsaw and other cities.

Each day from morning to night Yosel sits and searches, in a piece of dead wood, the forms which will pour life into it.

2. Lithuanian Collaborators

Things became worse for the Jews on July 22, 1941 when World War II began. Entire communities of Jews, unable to flee, were massacred — in Plungyan and other towns in Lithuania. You can't really explain how there happened to be so many murderers among the Lithuanians and that these were the same people with whom we lived in peace for hundreds of years. But one cannot escape the facts. Various explanations concerning the collective guilt of the Jewish people with respect to the Lithuanian population are not valid and are without foundation, as are similar claims of Lithuanian collective guilt with respect to the Jewish population. Blame cannot simply be thrown around at random. Individual murderers and traitors can be personally held accountable for the extermination of innocent men, women and children.

Also responsible are the *Uebermenschen* who orchestrated the whole plan. They felt it was their right to condemn to death and murder an entire people in the most gruesome way possible without proving their guilt. They — the innocents—were condemned solely because they were Jews.

*

The following is a partial list of those who took part in atrocities against the Jews of Plungyan and surrounding areas:

Kvedaris, Livdas — Convicted, died in Gordzh
Faresha, Adolfas — Leader in the shootings, lived in Australia
Grismanuskas, Stasis — Escaped, lived in America
Laevis ? — Convicted, died in Plungyan
Rudis, Kazis — Condemned to death
Matzkus — Shot in flight from Lithuania
Groysalis — With his sons, searched the clothing of the murdered
Dirvanakia Petros — Instigator of the murders
Simkus ? — His life afterward not known to me
Szialitas ? — His life afterward not known to me
Fuluskas, Antoyas — Was tried, died in Shavel
Strapus — His later life not known to me
Varnelis, Petros (Praphylis) — His later life not known to me
Balteyus — Tried in Plungyan, condemned to death
Rudanis — Tried, lives still in Plungyan

Murderers in Riteve Shtetl near Plungyan:

Whether they were brought to trial is unknown to me. Several were arrested. The following are the names of the murderers:

Abukevitch, Yonas — Was until 1940 an officer
Kontveinis, Lessnas — Was a doctor
Galdikoskas, ? — His first name not remembered
Robustus, Micholas
Smilgevitch — [First] Name not known to me
Strobalis, ? — [First] name not known to me
Garsiks, Antonas
Alutis, Jesph

Murderers in Salanter Shtetl and Kratinga Area:

Rekus, Albertas — Had 40 hectares of land; in Imberia and
Los Angeles, California
Meskus, Vargis — Eight hectares, village Gedodish
Sendroyskas, Pheligoss — Village Hetshu
Tsekanoyas, Kas — Had 45 hectares, village Arbaitschai
Stantsas — Fled to America
Buda, Kazis — Village Shtaykiai

Erminas, Anatonas — Village Perkun, Akaimis
 Kuzis, Petros — Village Erlai
 Scritzulle, Tsiprayonas — Shtetl Flatelialai
 Bentos, Jonas
 Baltone, Franas

It is unknown to me who was brought to trial. Aside from the 405 Jews murdered in Salant, there were about 100 from Salant who were killed in the village of Shataykiai in the vicinity of Plungyan.

The [preceding] is my own personal research concerning the murderers of Plungyan, Salant and Riteve.

3. Righteous Gentiles

One must also recall the many Lithuanians who risked their lives and the lives of their entire families to save Jews from certain death. Such Lithuanians were also to be found in the Plungyan area as well.

The following are some of the Lithuanians, worthy to be given the name, Righteous Gentiles. They protected and saved the lives of Jews in Plungyan and surroundings during World War II. May their names be for a blessing.

Gintalis, Ignaz (awarded a medal from shtetl Riteve)

Gadaykte, Vile (village Bersjare)(also awarded a medal for saving Jews)

Gedeikis, Franas (village Bersjare)

Vitkevitch, Emilia (a teacher from outside of Lithuania, tortured by Nazis)

Vitkevitch, Kazis, son of Emilia (he hid daughters of Rabbi Bloch of Telz in a pithouse)

Shimkeve, Alexandria

Serafinos, Ludas

Serafinos' uncles

Kareiva, Fronas (shtetl Plotl)

Barshinshki, Yonas

Lioythsi, Adomas

Spiristsavitzy, Victoria (village Jsoiblaytshai)

Spritsavitsus

Stantsatte, Magadalena

Rimaikiene, Ovneh

Smilgr, Vitshene Yuzefa (Kapadishay)

Klevinskiene, Levida (Kapadishay)

Feldsjus (shtetl Alsad)

Stass (a priest, shtetl Alsad)

Badoikiss, Martinas (shtetl Alsad)

Butkus (village Tirloykai)

Nalakoykiene, Stase (foeign shtetl)

Kerposkis, Yoses

Those who devoted themselves in the protection and saving of Jews, every way they could, are known all over with much love and respect.

4. Jews who Fell in Battle

Of the 72 Jews who fought on the various fronts of World War II, the following are those who fell in battle:

Mottl Sher — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Irveh Sher — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Bere Odes — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 167
Manes Odes — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 156
Hirsche Eliashev — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 156
Bunis Shafir — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?
Yankis Kaplan — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?
Shloime Kroyt — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Meir Karpu — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?
Khome Rest — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 167
Zunde Hurzon — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 296
Nochem Levinson — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Leibe Bunka — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, 156
Avrom Bunka — Field Post 54, 64194, Kalinengrad
Shoel Karabelnik — Latvian Division
Itzik Gornstein — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 156
Berke Levine — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 156
Benze Segal — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 294
Moshe Segal — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 167
Itik Segal — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 167
Hirsche Senderovitch — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 294
Pesach Zunes — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B Motorate
Motte Khananovitch — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 156
Yankel Zik — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Pesach Garb — ?
Yisroel Zik — ?
Yosel Hotz — ?
Hirsch Garbe — ?
Lazer Bad — ?
Moshe Karg — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?
Shloime Dimont — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 167
Moishe Bunis — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 249
Shoel Vistoff — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, Zeniti Battery
Manes Rasavsky — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, Zeniti Battery
Bere Fish — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 224
Velve Flex — ?
Hirsch Minde — ?
Binyomin Sher — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 294
Hirsch Herzon — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B 267
Betse Zaak — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division
Itzik Rabinovitch — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?
Leibe Arenovitch — Sixteenth Lithuanian Division, B ?

5. Jews Exiled to Siberia

On July 14, 1941, 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

Isaac Pomer
 Ega Katin
 Lasse Shpita
 Davar Kats
 Hava Rastovsk
 Janet Kol
 Hirsch Yaffa
 Lasse Hara
 Aron Alshvang
 Bluma Brode
 Julia & Jacob Ber
 Mena Kaponovitch
 Moshe Cohen
 David Friedl
 Zeile Feivelovitch
 Yehuda Leib
 Otto Geller
 Moise Boch
 Mordechai Karon
 Yosef Gordon
 Yane Rostovsky
 Leah Jacka
 Eliezer Valler
 Rachel & Simcha Ruzovsky
 Bella Yaffa
 Mordechai Kirsch
 Michel Zarkin
 Shana Leibovitch
 Samuel Shleg
 Moise Meir Grol
 Samuel Feinstain
 Eva Zolkind
 Samuel Yaffa
 Nechama Minch Leibovitch
 Eimon Gordon
 Meir Grol
 Michel Feinstain
 Anne Levin
 Paul
 Elton
 Shapira
 Yona
 Jack
 we
 F. David
 ...

6. Gravestones

Of the 89 gravestones I assembled it is possible to decipher only the following names. Some of the gravestones are dated in the years 1760, 1796, 1865, 1881, 1882, 1887, 1899, 1933.

Itzik Peres
Ega Kirsh
Lesse Shpitz
Davis Zaks
Have Rastovski
Israel Kol
Hirsche Yaffe
Lazer Hats
Aron Alshvang
Bluma Brude
Gutte & Jacob Ber
Motte Kapenovitch
Moshe Cohen
David Freidl
Zelik Feivelovitch
Yehudah Leib
Gitte Geller
Moishe Boch
Mordechai Zaron
Yosel Gordon
Yane Rostovsky
Leah Jacks
Eliezer Valfert
Rachel & Simcha Rustovsky
Bella Yaffa
Mordechai Kirsch
Michel Zarkind
Shana Leibovitch
Samuel Shleg
Moishe Meir Groll
Samuel Feinstein
Ette Zolkind
Samuel Yaffe
Nechoma Mineh Leibovitch
Efrom Gordon
Meir Gral
Michl Feinstein
Natte Levitt
Leibe Feitl
Yakov Valfert
Moshe Shapiro
Rivke Garb
Rivke Meitz
Eliyahu Mark
Itzhk Frank
Yehudah Eliezer Dorfman
Shlomo Neimark
Tzvira Fine

Yaakov Shuv
Ephraim Moshe Alshwang
Tadeh Alshwang
Yisroel Israelovitch
Shana-Ette Israelovitch
Leah Freiham
Zusman Levit (of Riteve)
David Katzen
Moshe-Aryeh Lazerovitch
Metz Nochven