

So many years have passed...

My Mom was a very young and pretty lady. She had an unusual combination of blue eyes and dark hair. Her elegant hands had long fingers. She had a slim figure and nice legs. She liked nice, elegant dresses. She looked young for her age of thirty nine and on the street, many mistook her for an older sister next to her son - my older brother Reuven, who was eighteen.

That's how Leah (Liza) Gordon remained in our memory - young and pretty. Nobody ever seen her growing old - she was murdered just after reaching forty years of age.

It was the summer of 1941. The war started for us on Sunday, June 22, 1941, as the Germans began shelling Lithuania from the air. The entire world was turned upside down shockingly fast. The Red Army was running away, the officers leaving behind their wives and children. Evacuation of civilians was out of the question because no transportation was available and the Germans advanced very quickly, reaching Kaunas already on Tuesday, June 24th.

Few people managed to run away on time because of the lack of transportation. My family was among the "lucky" few who managed to get onto an over-packed train going East on Monday, June 23rd. When they reached Vilnius the next morning, they left the train because I got lost behind in Kraziai, about 50 miles West from Kaunas, and they walked back to Kaunas looking for me. The roads were crowded with returning people that missed their chance to escape, and the Lithuanian "partisans" (baltaraisciai) who, ahead of Nazi direction, were hunting down, torturing, and murdering Jews. These "partisans" arrested my parents, sent my mother to Kaunas prison, but for some miraculous coincidence, allowed my father and brother leave in the morning.

My Mom never returned from Kaunas prison. Most Jewish women were taken to the 7th Fort near Kaunas and murdered there...She was the first victim in our family.

I arrived to Kaunas Ghetto together with my father and brother. The Nazis murdered my brother in the summer of 1944, during the liquidation of the Kaunas Ghetto, few weeks before its liberation by the Red Army. My father (Haim Gordon) managed to escape from the slave train to Germany and hid in the forest for two weeks until the liberation.

I escaped from the Kaunas Ghetto in early January 1944 and survived thanks to courage and determination of a few wonderful people and thanks to my Arian looks. These people were Drs. Elena and Viktor Kutorga, Priest Povilas Jakas, Mrs. Elzbieta Miniotiene, and Ms. Zaksaitė.

On my request, Drs Elena and Viktoras Kutorga, Elzbieta Miniotiene, and Priest Povilas Jakas, received the awards of Hasidei Umot haOlam - the Righteous Among the Nations of the World by Yad Vashem (Israel's Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Memorial Authority) and their names are engraved on the Honor Wall in Jerusalem, Israel. Additionally, they received Zuvusiuju Gelbejimo Kryzius - the Lithuanian Life Saviour's Cross.

My grandparents, Eidl and Reuven Segal from my mother's side, used to live in Dukstai, Ukmerge region, Lithuania, and both died before WWII. They had eight children, including six daughters - Frida, Nadia, Liza, Dvoira, Sonia, and Etel - and two sons - Osher and Shneyer.

Only three families - those of Frida Bloshtein, Nadia Zibuts, and Sonia Ptashek - managed to escape the approaching Nazis into the Soviet Union, and survived WWII. The other five families got trapped in the Nazi occupied Lithuania and lost twelve members:

1. Liza Gordon (my mother) was murdered in 1941 at age 40.
2. Reuven Gordon (my bother) was murdered in 1944 at age 21.
3. Dvoira Himmelfarb with her daughter Rivka (Rita) were taken from Vilnius Ghetto to Estonia and murdered in 1944 in Estonia.
4. Osher Segal, his wife Edzia and 12-year old daughter Sarah were taken from Vilnius Ghetto to Estonia and murdered in 1944 in Estonia.
5. Ettl Schmidt and her husband Dr. Osher Schmidt and their 4-year old son Benia Schmidt were murdered in Kraziai in August 1941 (See "The Hill," by Antanas Jonynas, Affinity Billing, 2007)
6. Shneyer Segal was murdered in Vilnius in July 1941.
7. Aleksandr Handin, Esia Zibuts's husband, was murdered in Dachau concentration camp.

My father, Haim Gordon died in Israel in 1978 at age 84. Esia Zibuts, Nadia's daughter, survived Stuthoff concentration camp. She died in Israel at age 73. Shenyer's wife Mania and their son Arie were saved by a Polish family in Vilnius and emigrated to Israel in the fifties.

Shulamit Liorov
(Gordon)