



Sofija Binkienė.

On April 5, 1984, following the death in Vilnius of journalist Sofija Binkienė, an obituary entitled "Soldiers without weapons" appeared in the Israeli Russian newspaper "Our Land". It was written by Adina and Samuel Segal, Gita Judelevičiūtė, Raja Judelevičienė, Beba Shtenstein-Taborisky, and Margalit Stender-Lonke, who had been saved during the war by Sofija Binkienė. They wrote the following:

"...Those who survived the German occupation understand the significance for Jews of the kind of home that one could go to in the most difficult moments of one's life. For us that's what "aunt Zosia's" home was - we used to joke about it being the Jewish hotel. There we found not only shelter but also a warm-hearted atmosphere and a desire to help, and that gave us courage and faith. Which was ever so important at that time!

We still can't understand how, out of her less than modest earnings, Sofija Binkienė was able to feed so many hungry and rejected people. Once we found her sleeping on the floor because she'd given her bed to a woman who had fled the ghetto that day.

For us dear "aunt Zosia" will always represent those courageous and selfless Lithuanians who were not afraid to challenge the Hitlerite butchers and who became symbols of soldiers without weapons..."

Sofija Binkienė's compiled book, "Soldiers without weapons" - a collection of accounts, testimonials and documents from survivors of the war - appeared in Vilnius in 1967, over forty years ago. In it, people who had suffered so much speak out for the first time about the Catastrophe, the murder of their families, their own miraculous survival, and the people who saved them - people who did not push them away, but gave them a helping hand when they were threatened with annihilation.

In one of the loveliest accounts ("The writer's home") in the "Soldiers without weapons" book, Gita

Judelevičiūtė, who spent nearly the entire war period with the Binkis family, describes the humanitarian deeds of Sofija Binkienė and her husband Kazys Binkis, the anti-Hitlerite resolve of the entire family, its resistance to the "new order", and its decision to ignore the cannibal-like laws of the time.

hout weapons" becomes invaluable. Most of the rescuers of Jews who are mentioned in this publication were acknowledged Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem3 in Jerusalem during 2004-2008. What the authors of this book wrote about their rescuers in 1966-1967 was referred to and studied more

wish Museum, and information that emerges is handed over to the commission for verification of the Righteous in Yad Vashem, and Jewish rescuers are presented as candidates for the Lithuanian State Cross for the Rescue of the Dying4.

An important stimulus for information gathering in this sphere is

their past. Many find it unbearably difficult to talk about the past, and some are unable to do so even now, more than sixty years after the war. It is symbolic that, having recreated the experiences of a Jewish child during the war, back in 1960, Yitzhak Meras, author of "Yellow Patch", the first book about the Catastrophe to be published in Lithuania, began an active search in 2004 for the Righteous and for those who had been saved (thereby also providing the museum with invaluable help). It is also symbolic that the ongoing publication about rescuers of the Jews is named after words written by Yitzhak Meras - "hands bringing life and bread". These words first appeared in the book that Sofija Binkienė had compiled, in the writer's story "On heroism". In thanking and presenting him with the publication, Sofija Binkienė dedicated it with the words: "To my dear friend Yitzhak Meras, thank you for the perfect crowning wreath for this book."

We extend our deepest thanks to all of the authors of this book, to everyone who wrote articles or their memories, and who allowed us to use photographs from their personal archives: Yitzhak Meras and Yonina Meras-Gersh, Dalia Striogaitė, Kama Ginkas, Sulamita Gordonaitė-Lyrovienė, Gita Judelevičiūtė, Fruma Kučinskienė, Rozian Zerner, Jan and Barbara Bruner, Shmuel Chalozin, Dalija Epšteinaitė, Jakovas Gurvičius, Telesforas Laucevičius, Rolandas Gustaitis, Polia and Moshe Musel, Josifas Judelevičius, Leonidas Goldbergas and Dalia Gelumbauskienė, Margaret Kagan, Irena Veisaitė, Violeta-Rakauskaitė-Štromienė, Henry Kopelman-Gidoni, Lilija Kopach and Sergej Korablikov-Kovarski, Roza Lamdanskytė-Riaikkenen, Tamara Lazersonaitė-Rostovskaja, Judita Mackevičienė, Ranana Malchanova and Milda Putnienė, Dovydas and Jakovas Kalamickas, Ira Reiches-Roth and Irina Ostjanko, Moshe Rosenblum, Frida Arinovski and Maksimas Rudėkas, Margalit Stender-Lonke, Dora Shapira-Nidel, Dita Šperlingienė, Rina Wolbe, Rut Peer, Tamara Levi, Vladimir Katz, Jakov Zoreff, Elvyra Baublienė and Rita Satrovaitė, Grigorij (Stanislav) Shershnevski, Jehoshua Shochot, Jozel Trauberg.

I am especially grateful to Sofija Binkienė's family and friends, who helped us to remember aunt Zosia, so beloved by everyone she had saved: Sofija's daughter Lilijana Binkytė-Mozūriūnienė, the now deceased Vladas Varčikas, and the guardian of Sofija's written heritage, her beloved granddaughter - Lilijana Binkytė's and Vladas Varčikas' daughter Sofija Ligija Makutėnienė, who graciously allowed us to use Sofija Binkienė's archival material.

Danutė SELCINSKAJA

THEY ALSO FOUGHT WITHOUT WEAPONS

In memory of Sofija Binkienė

The sense of humanitarianism, which was lost to much of the Lithuanian population in those brutal times, was never alien to Sofija Binkienė. This exceptionally humble and good woman was very accurately described by Margalit Stender-Lonke: "<...>I was helped by many people: frau Holzman, Natalija Pavlovna, Olga Pavlovna Dauguvietienė, Mrs. Mongirdienė, the Satkevičius family, Vladas Varčikas, who made contact with that family in order to help me. They all hid me. But Sofija Binkienė hid everyone. She was dedicated in the true sense of the word in her aim to save everyone - everyone that she could..."²

The entire Binkis family became those soldiers without weapons who risked their lives and well-being in order to help the condemned. The survivors never forgot the Binkis family, and it was at their request that Sofija Binkienė, Kazys Binkis, and their children Lilijana, Irena, Eleonora and Gerdas were decreed Righteous Among the Nations.

When talking about the Righteous, one cannot forget the historical context of the painful past: back then the newspapers in Lithuania were full of ferocious anti-Semitic agitation, the occupational regime declared anti-Jewish orders, and worst of all, there were massive and systematic shootings of the Jews, with the participation, as documents show, of a fair number of local collaborators.

The rescuers of the Jews went against the flow, against the line taken by the occupational authorities, against the opinions and wishes of a fairly large sector of society. It was hard for them to expect help from those around them, they had to be careful of informers, and of saying something by accident - which could have happened unintentionally. Only especially courageous and noble people were able to, and did help those who were suffering. With the passing of over sixty years since the war, and the death of the last witnesses of the Holocaust, Sofija Binkienė's book "Soldiers with-

than once.

In her introduction to "Soldiers without weapons", Sofija Binkienė wrote:

"...And although I tried to collect as much information about as many people as possible, it's far from everything. Even now I keep finding out about more and more "soldiers without weapons" who were active in various corners of the republic. And how many of them remain and perhaps will remain unknown, including because some were killed (both the rescuers and those they helped), while others ended up abroad. Many of them simply do not have the opportunity to tell anyone anywhere about themselves, while others think that what they did was simply a matter of human responsibility. To inform the public about the as yet unknown "soldiers without weapons" is a task for similar future publications..."

Seeking to honour the noble work of Sofija Binkienė, and to continue the ongoing relevant search for "soldiers without weapons", we dedicate the fourth book in the series called "Hands Carrying Life and Bread", a compilation on the basis of testimonials by rescued people, to her bright memory.

Unfortunately, for many reasons, even now we do not have accurate and systematised information on the rescue of Jews. One reason is the fact that during the time of the Soviet occupation, when many who had survived the war were still alive, the topic of the Holocaust was not a priority for Lithuanian historians. Also, like all publications during the Soviet time, Sofija Binkienė's book was censored.

Today, it is very difficult to revive and amend information about the rescue of Jews during the German occupation in Lithuania for other obvious reasons: sixty years after the war, it is difficult to find people who could, and who would, agree to share their painful experiences. With so many of the witnesses from that time dying, it is no longer possible to verify existing information. Nevertheless, this work is being carried on by the State Vilna Gaon Je-

related to a project called "Rescuers of the Jews - Righteous Among the Nations", initiated on June 9, 2004, by the writer Yitzhak Meras. In an appeal to the chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, director of the State Vilna Gaon Jewish Museum, prominent Lithuanian public figures, and emigrants from Lithuania in Israel, Yitzhak Meras gathered together a group of volunteers who embarked on a search for survivors living in Israel, urging them to write down their memories and to send them to the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem and to the Jewish Museum in Vilnius.

In response to Yitzhak Meras' initiative, quite a number of people who were saved during the war wrote to the museum. Descendants of people who rescued the Jews, now living in various countries around the world - Israel, Lithuania, Canada, Russia, Australia - also wrote. They became the authors of the fourth book in the "Hands Bringing Life and Bread" series.

In this book you will, for the first time, also find Sofija Binkienė's unfinished memoirs, filmmaker Kama Ginkas' colourful accounts of the Binkis family and the time he spent with them, and other recollections by her contemporaries and people she helped.

The majority of the authors of the fourth book in the "Hands Bringing Life and Bread" series come from the most vulnerable group during the war - Jewish children condemned to die as a result of Hitlerite ideology. In the aforementioned account by Kama Ginkas, he repeats his mother's memorable words: "Kama, to Hitler's annoyance, you are alive. Hitler came to Lithuania to kill you, and you are alive!" Most of the children who were saved during the war were left with no parents or loved ones - in many cases they lost their entire family. To them Lithuania is usually associated with the names of their rescuers, and it is their memory that accompanies them throughout their lifetime.

Accompanying them as well are extremely painful images of

COUNTRYMEN HONOUR THE MEMORY OF JUOZAS STAKAUSKAS

The 110th year since the birth of Juozas Stakauskas (1900-1972) was celebrated in Mielagėnai (Ignalina region) on June 27 of this year. Juozas Stakauskas was one of Lithuania's real national heroes, who risked his life during the time of the Nazi occupation to rescue Jews from an inevitable death.

The anniversary of J. Stakauskas' birth coincided with the traditional Midsummer Eve celebration, and many of the local residents and visitors came to Mielagėnai for the event. During mass, the local priest, Marijonas Savickas, urged parishioners to remember and to honour the memory of the esteemed Juozas Stakauskas.

J. Stakauskas' nephew Benediktas Stakauskas, member of the Lithuanian Supreme Court, shared his recollections of his distinguished relative.

Jonas Juodagalvis, who was born in this part of the country, and who now lives in Vilnius, talked about J. Stakauskas' life, and especially emphasised his contribution to education and to the study

of Lithuanian history. He spoke of the priest's humanitarian activities, and about the Jewish children that he saved during the Second World War.

As director of the Vilnius State Archives during the time of the Nazi occupation, father Juozas Stakauskas installed a secret hideaway, a small room, beside the archive depository in the Benedictine monastery. He and teacher Vladas Žemaitis and sister Marija Mikulska settled twelve people in that hideaway - Jewish children who had been condemned by the Nazis for annihilation.

"The idea to help the condemned developed slowly, - J. Stakauskas would recall. - I thought about it when the occupying authorities suggested that I form a group of assistants to help work in the archives, and when they told me to find a location for the archives... I decided that the monastery was an appropriate place for a hideaway. But I knew that I couldn't do it on my own. For me, Vladas (Žemaitis - ed.) was like a staff to a blind man..." Although the premises above the room where

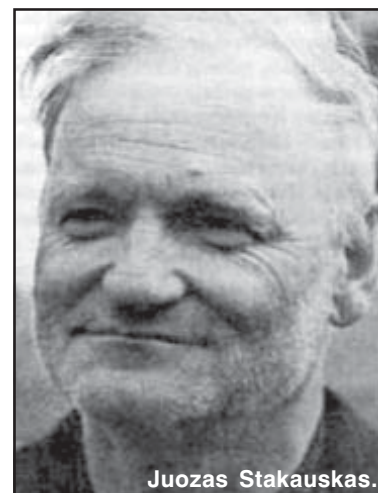
the twelve people were hiding from death was occupied by the Nazis, the rescuers succeeded in saving the lives of all of the condemned.

The National Yad Vashem Institute decreed that father Juozas Stakauskas, sister Marija Mikulska, and teacher Vladas Žemaitis were acknowledged as Righteous Among the Nations. Olive trees grow in memory of these righteous people in the Yad Vashem Garden of the Righteous in Jerusalem. Ten years ago, on September 21, 2000, on the eve of the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jews of Lithuania, a plaque in honour of these three Righteous Among the Nations was unveiled on the building in the courtyard at 5 Šv. Ignoto St. in Vilnius, where the children who had been rescued by J. Stakauskas once hid.

On the occasion of the unveiling of the memorial plaque, Samuel Bak, one of the twelve rescued children, now a famous artist living in the USA, sent a letter in which he emphasised the nobility of the heroic deed of the

three Righteous Among the Nations, and expressed his eternal gratitude to his rescuers:

"Over half a century ago, in the bleakest of times, they preserved the sparkle of a deep humanity. By opposing the murderous schemes of the then ruling forces of evil, they were ready to pay for it with the most precious thing a person possesses - with their own lives. Although all of us must be grateful to the ones who keep the light of humanity glowing, however feeble it may seem, my personal debt to our heroes has no limits. That I am alive today, that I am able to send you this message is something I was granted by these three guardian angels of mine. Their readiness for self-sacrifice, audacity and ingenuity, which created on these ancient premises a clandestine oasis, permitted a young Jewish woman and her ten-year-old boy to find temporary refuge. Had it not been for their presence in our lives - the story of my mother and myself would have been quite different. It would have been part of the bleak destiny of many members



Juozas Stakauskas.

of my own family, as well as of those thousands of Vilnius Jews who were then sent to their death in the woods of Paneriai." - wrote Samuel Bak.

Ed. note: Our sincere thanks to Mr. Jonas Juodagalvis for informing us of the celebration in Mielagėnai of the anniversary of the birth of Juozas Stakauskas.

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