



reotypes, defensive and aggressive reactions surrounding the Holocaust are born of ignorance. Therefore we consider education, and programs for students and teachers to be one of our most important tasks. We have no illusions re being able to affect an inflexible mind. But we have a lot of hope in the young generation. Teaching about the Holocaust cannot be formal, it has to appeal to people's experiences - only then will it touch the heart. Your grandparents' and great-grandparents' neighbours have been living in your town or your village for hundreds of years, and their names have not been entirely forgotten, even though they've long been asleep in nameless gravel pits.

We want to establish an information centre, and a library and archive accessible to the public. We intend to collect a so-called living history, to encourage students to write down people's recollections of how Jews in their district lived before the war, and of how they were killed.

"HOUSE OF MEMORY"

Linas Vildžiūnas, Executive Chairman of the Study Centre for the Holocaust and Jewish Culture in Lithuania, speaking on Mar. 8, 2000, on the occasion of the commencement of the work of this organization.

An independent public organization, the Study Centre for the Holocaust and Jewish Culture in Lithuania, was officially registered at the end of February. We, the founders of this Centre, have called it the "House of Memory". True, we do not yet have a house in the real sense of the word, but we have decided to take the initiative in order to create one.

Initiative is always founded on an internal premise, on a personal position. And therefore I will speak only for myself.

It is probably not entirely correct to think that the Catastrophe which befell the Jews was erased from public consciousness during the decades of the Soviet occupation. Official ideology and historiography simply distorted, generalized, and labelled it the mass killing of Soviet people. But these events were always alive in memory, especially in the small towns. Perhaps we didn't know the word "Holocaust", but we were perfectly aware of the killing of Jews. We also knew that in many places it began even before the German army arrived. And yet that knowledge was somehow deadened and impersonalized. In part this was probably the result of ideological branding, for Soviet ideology always operated in terms of the anonymous mass. But at the same time, it was the expression of a traditional attitude towards the Jews as being different and foreign. Of course the brutality of the events of 1941 shocked the Lithuanian people and left an indelible impression, but this was neither your, nor your family's, nor your friends' tragedy. You were just a bystander looking on. Perhaps this psychological environment partly explains why the percentage of those killed was so high, why the Jews could hardly expect any help or shelter, and why the ground was so favourable for the Holocaust in Lithuania. The Jewish tragedy was not seen as a tragedy encountered by Lithuanian citizens or the entire nation - and all the more so when speaking of a post-war generation which had never experienced these events. Yes, intellectually we can understand that these were horrible and unprecedented events; at the same time, it seems a foreign, distant, and anonymous phenomenon which has sunk into oblivion.

To a normal way of thinking, the Holocaust is basically incomprehensible and unfathomable. It arouses a defensive and dissociative reaction - to the point where there is no cognizance vis-a-vis personal responsibility.

The turning point for me came when I visited the Yad Vashem Memorial Centre in Jerusalem in 1994 - when I stood in front of a huge photograph of the "Lietūkis garage", and suddenly felt that I, personally, am also very much connected to it. This photo with the flourishing white shirted man is well known now, it illustrates the Holocaust theme in a school history book. And that is a good thing. Only I don't know whether it has any effect on the students, for after all, everything depends on the presentation, on the emotional environment in which it is communicated.

But what affected me even more was a relatively small room in the museum, called the "Memory Archive". There is nothing in it except a great many shelves with paper files - the personal files of those who were killed. Endless papers. An infinite number of destinies turned into paper. And the files keep growing. When you come to the "Memory Archive" you can, for example, find out when and in which concentration camp your sister or your father died. Or you can leave new information about Etta Schmidt, killed in the village of Kražiai during the first days of the war - and in that way add one more page of a brutally severed life to the Archive. For some reason here you can feel in a particularly acute and clear way that those six million dead had names and surnames, and that they lived unique lives which would not be carried on by children and grandchildren.

You can understand that it all should not be forgotten, distorted, or falsified; that you cannot dissociate from it - not only in the name of the memory of the victims, but also on behalf of the spiritual regeneration and future society of your own country. Perhaps the latter motivation is the more important one, for it is the more personal.

I think that similar inner motivations rallied us all to form the founding group for the "House of Memory". I could refer to my colleagues as like-minded people who went a similar route - who at some moment discovered that this is really very important.

I am convinced that a great many of the myths, ste-

led. And finally, not all of the killing sites have been fully documented yet. This is particularly urgent, and may even be too late, for the number of living witnesses is constantly diminishing. It is also important to research and register the heritage of the vanished culture of Lithuania's Jews.

We want to develop close ties with the academic level of historians in order to initiate scientific research projects and conferences. For only in-depth studies of history will, I hope, change stereotype attitudes towards the LAF and the June 1941 uprising, reveal the scope of anti-Semitic propaganda, and formulate in a new light the issue of collaboration with the Nazis.

Ultimately, we hope that our voice will be heard by the public. After all, it's not exactly normal that the Lithuanian press, and lately the television, continue to be contemptuous regarding this difficult (though to my mind - from a moral point of view - totally clear) problem, that dark instincts be incited, and that an odd sort of phenomenon of "anti-Semitism without the Jews" be formulating. That the same old arguments - "What do the Jews want from us? We asked for forgiveness on a state level, what more do they need? We were born after the war and have nothing to do with it; at that time Lithuania had no sovereignty, so basically we're not even responsible." - continue to be repeated.

Is that really the case? Should we feel no responsibility for the great spiritual trauma (whose consequences are still being felt) which befell our whole society? The psychological motives behind such arguments - to dissociate and forget - are understandable. But the "House of Memory" would like to remind and to remember.

And it is also not quite normal that this pseudo-argument background be extended via public statements by the known representatives of our society - Ph.D.'s in history, law, sociology and the humanities, professors, academics, and Parliament members - who pretend to be its spiritual elite. Their arguments come as if from a higher, "scientific" level, but it's always the same theory of symmetry and double genocide, with echoes of the old "Jew-bolshevik" propaganda. This, for example, is what is being said in a statement from the intellectuals in defence of A. Lileikis' human rights: "Was the genocide of the Jews in Lithuania thought up by the Lithuanians? When the bolsheviks conquered the Lithuanians and began their bloody repressions, were the Lithuanians in charge of the situation? In their soul and in their nature, do these individuals, motivated back then by love for Lithuania, and now delivered to the courts, resemble real criminals?"

This is our present-day public opinion. There are hardly any arguments to the contrary, and there is hardly any presentation in public of another opinion. And that is a very sad, perhaps even shameful situation. We would like to hope that this will slowly change.

The goals laid out here are thus far based on good intentions. But only our actions will prove to the public the need for a "House of Memory". We hope that concrete proposals from our honorary council - composed of chairwoman of the Open Lithuania Society Fund prof. Irena Veisaitė, VDU prof. Liudas Truska, VU assoc. prof. Alfredas Bumblauskas, Vilnius Franciscan Church priest Julius Sasnauskas, poets Marcellijus Martinaitis and Tomas Venclova, "Lietuvos rytas" assistant to the editor Rimvydas Valatka, Kėdainiai History Museum director Rimas Žirgulis, and head of the "Beth Shalom" Holocaust Memorial Centre in Britain Stephen Smith - will assist us in our work. After his studies in theology, Stephen Smith perceived the suffering of the Holocaust as a challenge to contemporary Christian civilization, and he devoted his work to bringing meaning to this experience in order that nothing of the sort ever happen again. We have been in close contact with him for several years now. He has visited Lithuania many times, and has delved into our historical and psychological background; he is very concerned with helping to improve Lithuania's image in the world. One could say that the "House of Memory" is being founded on the level of "Beth Shalom". It is a non-governmental, independent institution, determined to work together in the name of creating a civic society with all partners in Lithuania and abroad who support this same goal.

Linas VILDŽIŪNAS,
Executive Chairman of the "House of Memory" Study Centre for the Holocaust and Jewish Culture in Lithuania

"A book about the Holocaust for schools"

Lithuanian readers - first of all Lithuanian schools - have been given a gift entitled "A book about the Holocaust for schools. How to teach the history of the Holocaust." by the Jewish B'nai B'rith organization and the USA Holocaust Memorial Museum. Part One is now available: it is designed primarily for teachers, but will be of interest to the general public as well. The book is prepared on the basis of a publication by the Holocaust Memorial Museum entitled "Teaching about the Holocaust". It accurately and reasonably formulates teaching principles for various aspects of the Holocaust, and includes a comprehensive bibliography to assist in choosing other appropriate materials.

The compilers of "A book about the Holocaust for schools" recommend that the Holocaust theme not be taught as a separate section or subject, but together with other subjects - national or world history, world culture, government systems, contemporary world problems, literature, art history. Teachers of each subject are presented with a mandatory set of questions: here the teacher will find a great deal of methodological and factual material to assist in preparing for the lesson.

Based on the experiences of American schools, the compilers of "A book about the Holocaust" feel that the introduction of this theme helps to implement one of the most important principles of the American educational system - the fostering of a civic attitude. "Silence and indifference to the suffering of people, and an indifference to the violation of people's rights can lay the groundwork for much more important problems," they write. - It is very important to show that the Holocaust is not a historical coincidence. It became a tragic reality because people, organizations, and governments chose behavioral norms which legitimized discrimination and prejudice; that is how the grounds for mass killings emerged."

Along with teaching materials, the book presents essays entitled "The Holocaust. A brief historical survey," and "Children and the Holocaust", as well as a chronology of events starting from Jan. 30, 1933 (Hitler's accession to power in Germany) and ending with May 14, 1948 (the formation of the State of Israel). A chapter on illustrations includes emotionally very powerful photographs.

Released on the eve of the Holocaust Forum which took place on Jan. 26-28, the first part of "A Book about the Holocaust" will help the Lithuanian public formulate new attitudes vis-a-vis an evaluation of the events of the Second World War.

"JL" info.

"Saulėlydis Lietuvoje" ("Sunset in Lithuania")

This is the title given to their film about pre-war Lithuania and the annihilation of nearly the entire Jewish community during the period of the Second World War, by film director Vaidotas Reivytis and scenario author Jonas Morkus. The film uses a great



deal of documentation and archival film and photo chronicles; much of the material is being presented for the first time. But the most important merit of the film is the account of those times and events by witnesses who speak about their neighbours the Jews - about their lifestyle, traditions, and culture - and about the relations between them and the Lithuanians.

Apparently one of the most important successes of "Sunset in Lithuania", if one can call it such, is the choice of "location": it was filmed not in the large cities, where in a certain sense people can protect their anonymity, or embellish

their role, or even simply lie, but in small villages, where life is an open book, and where one cannot not fear being unmasked by neighbours should one digress from life's truths - from the truth which was seen or heard. And that is why the accounts by today's elderly people, once living alongside the Jews, rings so convincingly natural and sincere.

The film was conceived in four parts; each part has its own independent significance, but at the same time is a component of a continuous work. Each section is from 23 to 36 minutes long, as per the function of the film: it is an educational film, created so that teachers can present the Jewish tragedy in Lithuania to students in a graphic, emotional, and accessible way, to discuss it, and to assist in formulating civic and moral positions.

We would like to thank the film group, and to wish them good luck and success in their noble work. We would also like to thank the Catholic TV Studio, which sponsored the filmmakers.

"JL" info.