

# Foreword

This is the testimony of Sara Szalit/Shalit, the daughter of Moshe Ben Szalit and Khaia Kuritzky, born in 1926 in Michaliszki (now Belarus, formerly Byelorussian SSR, formerly Poland, formerly Russian Empire, formerly the Commonwealth of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania, formerly Grand Duchy of Lithuania). Sara was a survivor of the Holocaust. Her testimony was given in May 1996 to her daughter Nancy (Field) Shedlaz who wrote and appended its *Historic Prologue* as well as translating the testimony.

After being at the Miligani and Joniskis workcamps both in Lithuania, Sara was confined at the Stutthof Concentration Camp near Gdansk (then the Free City of Danzig annexed by Nazi Germany in 1939) but, before WWI, a part of Prussia. It was from a workcamp of Stutthof that she was liberated by the Russian Army in 1945. Both her father and her mother died at Stutthof (as well as her brother-in-law, older sister and niece).\*

After liberation, Sara made her way to Eretz Israel (then British Mandate Palestine). Accompanying a group of Jewish children, her ship was turned back and sent to Cyprus. Eventually she was released from Cyprus to Palestine in 1947 where she settled near Haifa.

In Israel, she married Aaron Israeli (formerly Feldenkrajz) from Lutsk (now Ukraine), son of Chaim and Henia (Takser). He had come to Israel in 1937 as a Halutz (pioneer) and taken the surname Israeli. Two daughters were born to Sara and Aaron – Chaja (named for her maternal grandmother) and Henia (named for her paternal grandmother). Sponsored by Sara's maternal uncle Shmuilo Kuritzky (later Samuel Albert Kurtz), the Israeli family emigrated to New Haven, Connecticut in 1962 where they changed their surname to Field. Daughter Chaja became Ellen Field; her sister Henia became Nancy Field.

Sarah died in 2022 at the age of 96 at the home of her daughter Ellen (Field) Horok near Baltimore, Maryland and is buried with her husband at Columbia Memorial Park in Howard, Maryland.

\*Many years before this May 1996 testimony (thought to have been before 1962 as her name was given as Sara Yisraeli on the pages of testimony), Sara submitted to Yad Vashem pages of testimony on her mother Khaia (nee Karitsky) Szalit (Item 1614690), her father Moshe Ben Szalit (Item 453249), her brother-in-law Nute/Natan Mirski (Item 1987340), and her sister Khana (nee Szalit) Mirski (Item 709977), identifying her relationship to them respectively as daughter, daughter, sister-in-law and sister. In her pages of testimony for her father, mother, and brother-in-law, she gave their places of death as Hamburg.

The Stutthof Concentration Camp (commonly said to have been in Poland) was, during the years of its existence, technically in Germany as the Free City of Danzig had been annexed by Nazi Germany in 1939. It is thought reasonable that Sara remembering Stutthof as being in Germany near a major German port city (Gdansk/Danzig on the Baltic Sea) later confused it with Hamburg (some 500 miles to the west, another major German port city but on the North Sea).

Ruth C. Clarke

# דות של שרה פילד

ג'רסה 1

מאי, 1996

אני נולדתי במיכלישקי, עיירה על יד עיר גדולה ווילנא בפולין. במשך הזמן התיישבו ההורים שלי בכפר סוויירנקי שם היה לנו אדמה, בית גדול וחנות גדולה במיוחד לבדים, גם מכלת, נייר ועוד כל מיני דברים. זאת היתה הכנסה גדולה. תמיד היו לנו שתי פרות, זאת (אומרת), כל תוצרת תנובה היה בבית.

באדמה טיפלו השכנים שלנו. היה גורן גדול מאוד. היו לי שני אחים – אליוקום וצבי. הם מתו לפני המלחמה ולפני 1939. את אליוקים אני זוכרת, היה בכל מיני בתי הבראות לריפוי וזה לא עזר. צבי קרא לו הירשל בבית, (והוא) מת שהיה צעיר מאוד. אני בקושי זוכרת אותו, הוא מת מתאונה והיתה לי אחות חנה שהיא היתה גדולה ממני בבערך 15 שנים. כל הילדים הלכו לבית ספר עברי בפולין – אבא שלי ידע עברית וידע לקרוא את התורה ואני זוכרת איך שהוא עשה קידוש כל יום שישי בניגון כל כך יפה. אמא ידעה לקרוא עברית אבל לא שלטה בשפה. זה היה בית פתוח לכל מי שבא והיה אוכל לשובע וכל מי שהיה זקוק (זאת אומרת) אנשים עניים היו מקבלים מצרכים ואף כסף. היינו שייכים לבית כנסת במיכלישקי זה 7 ק"מ מסוורנקי שם אבא נתן צדקה ביד מלאה. הבית היה פתוח גם לפולנים. והם ידעו שיכלים לבוא ולבקש עזרה. היו קונים ב CREDIT (אשראי), ואחר כך מחזירים. השם שלנו היה ידוע בכל הסביבה. אני זוכרת שהיו באים באמצע הלילה במקרים שמישהו מת - אז היו צריכים לקנות אוכל לאבלים ובד לקבורת המת. תמיד מוכנים לעזור. כנראה גם סבתא שלי גרה שם (זאת אומרת) שההורים שלי דור שני בבית.

אחותי חנה התחתנה עם בן אדם טוב ואינטליגנטי. הם גרו פודברודז ( Pabradé )  
PODBRODZIE, עיר די גדולה על יד ווילנה. (כאשר) היא התחתנה, ההורים נתנו לה הרבה כסף, בגדים, רהיטים מצרכים וגם מעיל פרווה. הם פתחו חנות גדולה של נעלים וחיו מאוד יפה ובכבוד רב. הם עשו להם שם באותה רמה של הורי. המשפחה שלהם היתה מירסקי, נוטה שם הפרטי. נולדה להם בת בשם רחלה. הילדה גדלה והיתה חכמה. כולם חשבו שזאת אחותי הקטנה. כל קיץ הייתי באה לאחותי וביליתי שם מאוד יפה. שם למדתי לשחות. היינו הולכים עם חברים שלי בגילי לנהר ושוחים ושוכבים בשמש, ממש כמו בקייטנה. בשבת הייתי הולכת עם אחותי וגיסי ועם רחלה ליער ושוכבים לנוח. היינו קוראים ספרים או עיתונים. גיסי היה בישראל כרווק והתאכזב מהחיים הקשים בארץ וחזר הביתה לליטא והתחתן עם אחותי.

משפחת מירסקי הייתה ידועה בעיר שלהם. (זאת אומרת) שזה היה שידוך מוצלח. אחותי חנה ידע לנהל ביזנס וידעה לבשל ועשתה הכל לבד. וגם הוא ידע. הם היו פרטנרים שווים. גם אני גדלתי בביזנס וידעתי לעזור (ולהיות עוזרת) טובה.

היית לי סבתה נחמה. אנשים עד היום מדברים כמה שהיא היתה חכמה ועזרה לכל אחד (וגם) למי שנסע לישראל בתור חלוצים. היית הולכת להיפרד ונותנת לכל אחד משהו ואולי גם כסף. כל הילדים שלה נסעו לאמריקה לפני מלחמת עולם הראשונה. רחלה מקליפורניה ואליוט בלונג אילנד הם הנכדים שלה. אמא שלי חיה נשארה לבד איתה וכנראה התחתנה בגיל צעיר מאוד עם אבא שלי. שניהם היו באותו גיל. היא גרה במיכלישקי ואני גרתי איתה והלכתי לבית ספר עברי. היא ידעה לבשל ולאפות טוב מאד. ההורים שלי היו דואגים לה. וכמובן הילדים באמריקה היו שולחים לה

כסף. לסבא היו קוראים אליוקים קוריצקי. הוא מת בגיל צעיר והיא נשארה עם הילדים. היא דאגה לכולם וגם לנכדים שלה.

כל בוקר היא הלכה לבית כנסת ומשאירה לי ארוחת בקר. בוקר אחד קבלה שתוק במוח בבית כנסת. הלכתי להורים, ההורים באו והזמינו רופאים מווילנה והיא היתה בגיל שמונים ושנים. אחרי כמה שבועות היא מתה. הביאו אותה לבית הכנסת, זה היה כבוד רב ועשו הספד ומשם ליווי אותה עד ל(בית קברות). אני זוכרת שהמורה שלי אמר "איזו סבתא זאת היתה". אני המשכתי ללמד במיכלישקי וגרתי אצל אשה שעשתה בשבילי הכל. הייתי תלמידה טובה בין המצטיינות. זה היה בערך ב 1937 והזמנים היו קשים בשביל היהודים האנטישמיות גדל פתאום. ההורים החליטו שאני אלך לבית ספר פולני בכדי לשלוט על השפה ולהכין אותי לגמנסיה "תיכון" פולני. המורים הפולנים שמחו שבאתי אליהם וכנראה המליצו שאני אלך לתיכון ממשלתי שהיה זכות גדולה מאד. רק הטובים שבין הטובים הלכו לשם. והנה אני מוכנה ללכת לתיכון בעיר סוונציאן (Svintsyau) ועשו לי בגדים יפים מעיל יפה וכו'. וב 1939 פרצה מלחמה עולם שנייה. אחרי כמה שבועות הפולנים הפסידו את המלחמה וחילקו את פולניה לשנים: חלק אחד הגרמנים טפסו וחלק אחד הרוסים לקחו. אנחנו היינו תחת שילטון רוסי. תכף חסלנו את החנות וההורים שלי נשארו בלי עבודה. הרוסים פתחו בתי ספר ונכנסתי לתיכון. למדתי רוסית די מהר והשתלטתי על השפה. ושוב הייתי תלמידה מצטיינת. ההורי כבר תכננו ללכת שאלך לסוונציאן לגמור את התיכון שם. והנה זה 1941 והתחילה המלחמה בין גרמניה לרוסיה. הרוסים תיכף ברחו מהשטח שלנו והגרמנים נכנסו אלינו ותכף התחילו הצרות.

תיכף גנבו לנו שתי הפרות והגרמנים באו ולקחו הרבה סחורות ודברים יקרי ערך מהבית. אבל גם הרבה נתנו לגויים. הבית נעשה ריק. וכל יום היו גזרות אחרות ללבוש מגן דוד צהוב. היתה אצלנו כנסייה גדולה ולכומר היתה השפעה גדולה על האוכלוסייה. ביום ראשון אחד, הודיע לנו הכומר לבוא אליו ולהיות אצלו כי הוא ידע שיהיו פרעות. באמת ישבנו אצלו בסלון הנפלא כל היום ושמענו את הגויים שצעקו שנצא מהבית. האישה שגרה אצל הכומר ומטפלת במשק שלו אומרה לנו "המצב הוא לא טוב אבל אנחנו לא יכולים לעזור". רק הוא ביקש שלא יעשו לנו דבר. כמובן שחיינו באי שקט ובאיזור התחילו האנטי-שמיות. אחותי ובעלה ובתה הקטנה ברחו מהעיר שלהם לפני השחיטה הגדולה ובאו אלינו. ואחר כך באו ההורים של גיסי עם 2 אחיות שלו ואח. סגרנו אותם בחדר אחד אצלנו כי אסור היה להכניס אנשים זרים. אז דאגנו להכין להם ניירות המראים שהם ממיכלישקי והם הלכו לגור שם בעיירה. ואני עם ההורים עוד נשארו בסוויורנקי. לילה אחד אני הלכתי לישון עם אמא יותר מוקדם, ואבא נשאר לקרוא עיתונים, ואנחנו נרדמנו חזק. פתאום התנפלו על הבית ורצו להיכנס הביתה. אבא צעק ולא שמענו. הוא עמד בדלת לבד ולא הכניס אותם. אמר להם אין לנו שום דבר בבית ואין לו כסף. הם עזבו והלכו. זאת היתה גבורה גדולה מאוד מצדו. אנחנו התעוררנו רק בסוף האירוע והחלנו לצעוק ולבקש עזרה. אז הגנבים הלכו והשכנים אמרו שגם הם פחדו מהם. אלו לא היו אנשים מהכפר אלא מכפרים אחרים והם גזלנים. כל יום היה משהו אחר. פתאום באו גרמנים לבית והוציאו אותנו לחצר ואמרו לאבא לחפור בור. אני ואמא עמדנו ולא הבינונו מה זה. אחר כך אמא אמרה רוצי לכומר תבקשי עזרה ואחרי שחזרתי הם עזבו אותנו.

במשך הזמן עשו גטו במיכלישקי והכניסו אותנו לגטו. ונתנו לנו בית ושם גרנו עם המשפחה של אחותי וגם המשפחה של גיסי. היינו בבית בערך 11 איש. ההורים שלי פרנסו את כולם והם התפלאו איך שקיבלנו אותם. הורי דאגו לאסף אוכל ולבוש לכולם. אמא שלי ואמא של גיסי עמדו ובשלו. הגויים שהיו השכנים ומכרים שלנו היו מביאים מזון וזורקים דרך הגדר של הגטו. אבא ואחותי גם היו יוצאים מהגטו לבקש

שיביאו אוכל. זה היה פחד גדול לצאת – אבל לא היתה ברירה. ישבנו בתוך הבית וכל הצעירים ישבו וקראו ספרים וחיינו בפחד. פעם אמרו שהגרמנים יבואו לגטו ויהרגו הרבה אנשים. אנשים התחילו לברוח מהגטו וגם אנחנו בתוכם. ברחנו לחפש מכסה אצל הגויים בסביבה ואחרי יומיים חזרנו לגטו. שכנים מהגטו גנבו לנו הרבה דברים שאספנו ב 10 חודשים בגטו. היהודים ניקו את השלג מהכבישים ועשו כל מיני עבודות.

אני הלכתי לעבוד עם עוד חברים מחוץ לעירה. וגם גיסי ושתי אחיות שלו עבדו במקום אחר. לפתע הגרמנים אספו את כולם ממקומות העבודה והביאו אותנו לבניין בעיר. הם סגרו אותנו בפנים וזה היה קיץ ולא יכולנו לנשום. הכל היה סגור וכמובן זאת היתה בהלה גדולה. בבוקר אספו אותנו – את כל המשפחות שלנו, והעלו אותנו על משאיות ולא ידענו עם זה למוות או לעבודה. וכך נסענו והביאו אותנו למחנה עבודה. היינו בשטח של ליטא ולמחנה עבודה קראו **מילגני**, על יד עירה ווייס / **Viewis** באזור שנקרה Elektrenai. שם עבדנו מהבוקר עד הערב וסללנו כבישים. זאת היתה עבודה קשה. היה לנו מזל שהיה לנו כסף. אנשים היו יוצאים ומביאים לנו אוכל. וזה כמובן עזר. ואת מי שהיו תופסים היו מכים כמעט עד מוות. פעם כל המחנה עמד לילה שלם בחוץ ובקור והיכו בן אדם. הרבה גברים הוצאו למוות ופעם שהיינו בעבודה באו ולקחו את הילדים אך את הבת של אחותי, רחלה, הסתתרה בין הכריות ולא יצאה. באנו ומצאנו אותה. והיא ספרה שבאו הגרמנים ואמרו לכל הילדים לצאת. היא לא יצאה, ומאז החזיקנו אותה במחבוא כאילו שהיא איננה.

אחרי שגמרנו את העבודה **במילגני**, לקחו אותנו למחנה אחר בשם **YONISKIES**. יוניסקיס גם בליטא ושם עבדנו באותו עבודה וכמעט באותם תנאים כמו במילגני. שם היינו תקופה ממושכת כל המשפחה יחד. זה היה בערך שנת 1943 1944. לפתע הוציאו אותנו מהמחנה והביאו אותנו למחנה השמדה **שטוטהאף**. שם הכניסו אותנו באיזה מקום גדול ריק. הפרידו את הנשים מהגברים וידענו שזה רע מאוד. לקחו מאתנו את הכל. העמידו אותנו בשורות. פתאום נעשה בהלה גדולה. הגברים היו במקום אחר. פתאום הופיע אבא שלי שהתגנב לחדר הגדול שלנו וניגש אלינו הסתכל אלינו ואמר שאף פעם לא נתראה יותר וזה הסוף שלנו. אבא היה איש חזק ומסור למשפחה. אחרי זה הכניסו אותנו למקלחות ונתנו לנו בגדים חדשים. ז.א. רק שמלה. אני נשארתי עם אמא. את אחותי ורחלה לקחו למקום אחר באותו מחנה. הביאו אותנו לתוך בנין ריק והשיבו אותנו בשורות על הרצפה, אחד על יד השנייה. ובכך ישבנו גם בלילה. ביום הוציאו אותנו לחצר ונתנו לנו קפה שחור עם פרוסת לחם או קצת מרק. אחותי חנה היתה בבניין השני עם הבת אז הלכתי אליה ואמרתי לה שאני עם אמא נבוא אליך ונהיה ביחד. היא אמרה בשום אופן לא. את תשמרי על אמא והגורל שלי הוא אחר כי יש לי בת קטנה. וכעבור יום או יומיים הוציאו את כל האנשים ואת חנה עם רחלה. אף אחד לא ידע איפה הם. לקחו אותם לגז – הרבה שבועות עוד הייתי לבד אם אמא. פתאום לקחו את הצעירות לעבודה ואמא נשארה לבד. לקחו אותי לעבודה במשק של גרמנים באזור ביחד עם עוד שמונה נשים איתי והיתה שם גם ילדה צעירה ושמה שרהלה. היא אומרה לי שהיא לא יודעת לעבוד. אמרתי לה בואי איתי, עזרתי לה במה שיכולתי ונתנו לנו אוכל. למדתי לנסוע עם עגלה וסוס. בדרכי עפר כמובן זה לא היה פשוט. היינו שם עד דצמבר 1944. הביאו אותנו בחזרה למחנה ריכוז שטוטהאף, וכבר לא מצאתי את אמא. לקחו אותה לגז ואחר כך לקחו אותנו עוד פעם לעבודה בחפירות כמעט בלי אוכל. עבדנו שם ועוד פעם החזירו אותנו לשטוטהאף. זה כבר תחילת 1945 הוציאו אותנו מהמחנה בלילה והיינו צריכים לדרוך על גוויות של אנשים ואף אחד לא אמר שום דבר. היה שקט. הוציאו אותנו בשלג וקור לא לבושים היינו הולכים ימים שלמים. בלילה היו סוגרים בגורן שהיה בדרך. בבוקר החוואי היה זורק רק קצת תפוחי אדמה מבושלים על הרצפה.

אנשים אכלו אך אני לא אכלתי. זה היה מצעד המוות וזה המשיך די הרבה זמן. הרבה אנשים נפלו ויראו בהם. בסוף הביאו אותנו שוב לגורן גדול סגרו אותנו וצוות ה-SS עמדו ושמרו בחוץ. שבכנו שם כמו סרדיניים. בבוקר היו מוציאים אותנו ונתנו לנו קפה שחור עם פרוסת לחם.

במצעד הזה פגשתי את אמא של גיסי ושתי האחיות. אחת מהם היתה מורה והשניה היתה יפהפייה וכשרונית מאד. אז היינו כבר יחד. אמא של גיסי נעשתה חלשה אז הינדה הבת שלה, החליטה לצאת בלילה אחד ולחפש אכל לאמא שלה. אמרנו לה לא לצאת. בבוקר אמרו למשפחה לצאת ולראות איך שהינדה שוכבת מתה. אמא שלה ואחותה חיה התחילו לבכות ולצעוק נורא. אני נשברתי ולא יכולתי כבר לצאת ולקום. וכך שכתבי כאילו מתה. אמא של גיסי והבת שלה גם נרצחו בחוץ. וכך נמשך הזמן בגורן. פתאום לילה אחת אני שומעת מרחוק קולות של חיילים צועדים ולא ידענו מי הם. בבקר כבר לא אמרו לנו חיילי ה-SS לצאת. וכך שבכנו ולא ידענו מה נעשה. והרגשני שזה כבר מאוחר ואנשים הבריאים החליטו לפתוח את דלת הגורן ואף אחד מה-SS לא היה. אנשים התחילו לרוץ מהגורן ואני בתוכם. הלכתי כמה מטר ונפלתי ומחולשה וקור לא יכולתי לחזור לגורן. ועוד שלג כבד היה ובקושי רב חזרתי לגורן. החולים מביננו שכבו בגורן ולא ידעו מה שנעשה. זה שכחתי לכתוב שבגורן היה מגפיה של טיפוס. חלק גדול מת. חלק קטן מאד נשאר. לפנות ערב נכנסו הרוסים לגורן ואמרו לנו שאנו משוחררים. אתם חופשיים הם אמרו. נעשו צעקות גדולות מרוב שמחה האנשים נשקו את החיילים. הם לקחו אותנו במכוניות והביאו אותנו לכפר הסמוך ושמו אותנו בבית העשיר של הכפר. כל ערב באו ונתנו לנו אוכל. הרבה אנשים היו חולים מאוד והם לא יכלו לתת עזרה רפואית. הם הכינו בית חולים שדה אבל זה גם לקח זמן. סוף כל סוף הביאו אותנו לבית חולים ועשו לי בדיקות וראו שאני מאוד חלשה וסובלת מתת תזונה. שכבתי שם כשבועיים. ואחרי שבועיים שלחו אותי ועוד בחורה הונגרית לבית של גרמנים שם. נתנו לנו חדר והם טפלו באנו עם אוכל ונקון. אחרי כמה שבועות אנחנו היינו צריכים לעזוב ולנסוע לאן שאנו רוצים. אני השתחררתי במרץ 1945. היו רכבות ואנשים יכלו לעלות ולנסוע לבד. עליתי על הרכבת ופגשתי אישה עם בת גדולה והחלטנו לנסוע ביחד. נסענו ולא ידענו לאן ופתאום אנשים אמרו שיורדים בפולניה בעיר גדולה לודז'. הגענו ללודז' וירדנו. הלכנו לאיזה מרכז ליהודים. לא היה להם מקום בשבילנו וכל אחד יחפש לאיפה ללכת. היה איזה יהודי והכניס אותנו לביתו למשך שבוע. ואחר כך הלכנו לגטו בלודז'. שם מצאנו מקום להיות. פתאום פגשתי בחורה והיא אמרה לי שיש פה קיבוץ שהם בעצם קבוצה להכשרה. הלכתי לשם ומצאת שם הרבה חברה צעירים והייתי איתם עד שעלינו לארץ בשנת 1947. ב 1948 הלכתי לצבא ושרטתי שנה שלמה. אחרי זה הכרתי את אבא והתחתנתי ב 28 בפברואר 1950. עבדתי במשרד בחיפה עד שנולדה חיה.

לננסי היקרה מאמא

### **Historic prologue:**

**Vilna** had already become a prominent center for rabbinical studies by the beginning of the 17th century. Vilna's preeminence as the seat of Jewish learning continued in the 19th century.

The restriction limiting Jewish residence to certain streets in Vilna was abrogated under Alexander I in 1861. It was in this period that the first Jewish socialists in Russia began to be active in the official Rabbinical seminary, among them Aaron Samuel Liebermann and his associates. Anti-Jewish riots took place in 1881 when a band of military conscripts attacked Jewish shops. The Jewish butchers, who organized themselves to oppose the attackers, turned them over to the police. The 1897 census shows 63,831 Jewish inhabitants, 41.9% of the total population. The congested conditions and increasing unemployment led to large-scale emigration. Large numbers left for the United States and South Africa, and a few went to Palestine.

### **A Center of Jewish Political Activity**

Vilna became an active meeting ground for Jewish socialists in the 1890s. A convention of Jewish social democrats was held in 1895, while in 1897 the Bund Labor Party held its founding convention and Vilna became the center of its activities. At the beginning of the 20th century Vilna became the center of the Zionist movement in Russia, and saw the rise of a flourishing Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

As a center for Jewish life and culture, these three ideological grounds existed side by side:

1. Religious Hassidic study
2. Jewish socialists
3. Jewish secularists (the Bund)

### **During World War II and Afterwards**

In 1940 Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union, becoming a Soviet Republic. The factories in the city, some of which belonged to Jews, were nationalized. Most of the shops were also nationalized. All the Zionist parties and youth organizations were disbanded and the Hebrew educational institutions were shut down. The supply of goods decreased and prices skyrocketed as a result. The middle class, composed mostly of Jews, suffered a severe setback and its standard of living declined gradually.

In the testimony which follows, my mother writes about several towns surrounding Vilna. She mentions Michalishki,

### **Svěřenecký:**

### **Svintsyan:**

**Pabradė** :About 850 Jews lived in the town in 1939, comprising one third of the total population. After June 1941, at the very beginning of the occupation, about a dozen Jews were executed for alleged collaboration with the Soviets. In the middle of July, Lithuanian policemen arrested about 60 Jews and shot them behind the mill. On September 1, the rest of the Jewish population was moved into a ghetto that was

established on two streets, previously inhabited by Christians. The ghetto was open, so many of its residents escaped at the end of the month, after rumors about the forthcoming perils had spread. Over 100 Jews who were interred in the ghetto or who were recaptured were escorted to the military training camp in Švenčionėliai and shot on October 8–10, along with thousands of other Jews assembled there.[1] Policemen continued searching for Jewish escapees, gathered them in groups and shot them on the outskirts of town.[2]

### **Miligani** near Vievas

**Joniskis:** The German army entered on June 24, 1941, two days after the war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. Within days, Lithuanian nationalists took control of the local institutions. On June 28, they established a department that specialized in Jewish matters and supervised all the tortures that befell the Jews. On July 11, 1941, a decree was published ordering all the Jews who fled to the villages in the surrounding areas to return to their homes and to wear a yellow patch. They were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks, to converse with non-Jews, etc. On July 18, another decree was published, ordering the Jews to pay, by the following day at noon, a fine of 20,000 rubles because they did not comply with the orders that were published on July 11. After the money was collected and paid, the Jews were driven out of their homes and were concentrated in the synagogue. 150 Jewish men were taken out of the synagogue and were led to Vilkiausis Forest, about 5 km outside of the city. They were forced to dig pits there and were then shot and buried in those pits. On August 27, 1941 (4 Elul, 5701), after being forced to handover all their valuables and belongings, the remaining Jewish men, women and children were taken out of the synagogue and were led to the same forest, where they were all murdered. It has been told that the murderers forced the old Rabbi, Rabbi Nakhum-Bezalel Dzimitrovsky, to stand at the edge of the pit and count the number of Jews who were murdered. 355 men, women and children were murdered on that day. On September 1, the mayor of Joniskis wrote a letter to the mayor of Zagare, notifying him that during August 24-29, 150 Jews were transferred to Zagare. The names of the Lithuanian murderers are kept in the Yad Vashem Archives.

The Germans established two ghettos—ghetto # 1 and ghetto # 2—in Vilna in early September 1941. Jews considered incapable of work were concentrated in ghetto # 2. In October 1941, German Einsatzgruppe detachments and Lithuanian auxiliaries destroyed ghetto # 2, killing the ghetto population in Ponary. Lukiszki Prison served as a collection center for Jews who were to be taken to Ponary and shot. By the end of 1941, the Einsatzgruppen had killed about 40,000 Jews in Ponary.

The Jews in ghetto # 1 were forced to work in factories or in construction projects outside the ghetto. Some Jews were sent to labor camps in the Vilna region. In periodic killing operations, most of the ghetto's inhabitants were massacred at Ponary. From the spring of 1942 until the spring of 1943, there were no mass killing operations in Vilna. The Germans renewed the killings during the final liquidation of ghetto # 1 in late September 1943. Children, the elderly, and the sick were sent to the Sobibor killing center or were shot at Ponary. The surviving men were sent to labor camps in Estonia, while the women were sent to labor camps in Latvia.

Joniskis was built along both banks of the Neris River, 30 km northeast of Kaunas. After the war, the municipality of Joniskis erected a memorial on the mass grave with

an inscription in Lithuanian: “In this place, in 1941, 493 Soviet citizens were murdered and buried by Fascist killers”.

During the German occupation, tens of thousands of Jews from Vilna and the surrounding area, as well as Soviet prisoners of war and others suspected of opposing the Germans, were massacred at Ponary. Soviet forces liberated Vilna in July 1944.

**Stutthof** was a Nazi German concentration camp established in a secluded, wet, and wooded area near the small town of Sztutowo (German: Stutthof) 34 km (21 mi) east of the city of Danzig in the former territory of the Free City of Danzig. The camp was set up around existing structures after the invasion of Poland in World War II, used for the imprisonment of Polish leaders and intelligentsia.[1][2] The actual barracks were built the following year by hundreds of prisoners.[3] Stutthof was the first Nazi concentration camp set up outside German borders in World War II, in operation from 2 September 1939. It was also the last camp liberated by the Allies on 9 May 1945.[4] It is estimated that between 63,000 and 65,000 prisoners of Stutthof concentration camp and its subcamps died as a result of murder, epidemics, extreme labour conditions, evacuations, and lack of medical help. Some 28,000 of them were Jews. In total, as many as 110,000 people were deported there in the course of the camp's existence. About 24,600 were transferred from Stutthof to other locations.[3]

The camp was established in connection with the ethnic cleansing project that included the [liquidation of Polish elites](#) (members of the intelligentsia, religious and political leaders) in the Danzig area and Western Prussia.<sup>[1]</sup> Even before the war began, the German [Selbstschutz](#) in [Pomerania](#) created lists of people to be arrested,<sup>[3]</sup> and the Nazi authorities were secretly reviewing suitable places to set up concentration camps in their area.

Originally, **Stutthof** was a civilian internment camp under the [Danzig police](#) chief, before its subsequent massive expansion. In November 1941, it became a "labor education" camp (like [Dachau](#)), administered by the [German Security Police](#).<sup>[citation needed]</sup> Finally, in January 1942, Stutthof became a regular concentration camp.<sup>[1]</sup>

The original camp (known as the old camp) was surrounded by the barbed-wire fence. It comprised eight barracks for the inmates and a "Kommandantur" for the [SS](#)guards, totaling 120,000 m<sup>2</sup>. In 1943, the camp was enlarged and a new camp was constructed alongside the earlier one. It was also surrounded by electrified barbed-wire fence and contained thirty new barracks, raising the total area to 1.2 km<sup>2</sup> (0.5 sq mi). A crematorium and gas chamber<sup>[citation needed]</sup> were added in 1943, just in time to start mass executions when Stutthof was included in the "[Final Solution](#)" in June 1944. Mobile [gas wagons](#) were also used to complement the maximum capacity of the gas chamber (150 people per execution) when needed.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

**Death march:** The evacuation of prisoners from the Stutthof camp system in northern Poland began on 25 January 1945. When the final evacuation began, there were nearly 50,000 prisoners, the majority of them Jews, in the Stutthof camp system. About 5,000 prisoners from Stutthof subcamps were marched to the Baltic Sea coast, forced into the water, and machine-gunned. The rest of the prisoners were marched in the direction of Lauenburg in eastern Germany. Cut off by advancing Soviet forces the Germans forced the surviving prisoners back to Stutthof. Marching in severe winter conditions and brutal treatment by SS guards led to thousands of deaths.



## TESTIMONY OF SARA FIELD

VERSION 1

May, 1996

I was born in **Mikháleshik (Michalishki)**, a town near a bigger city Vilna which was in Lita and at the time part of Poland. In time, my parents settled in a village called **Svěřenecký** where we had grounds, a large house and a large store selling textile, produce, paper products and more. This provided a large income. We always had 2 cows which means we always had milk products at home.

The land was maintained by neighbors. We had a large barn. I had 2 brothers – Eliokim and Tzvi. They passed away before the war and before 1939. I remember Eliokim, he was in many convalescent homes for recuperation and it didn't help. Tzvi called him Hershel at home and he passed away being sick. Tzvi died very young too. I barely remember him, he died due to an accident. I also had a sister Hanna who was older than me by perhaps 15 years. All the (Jewish) children in Poland went to Hebrew School – my father knew the language well and to read Torah and I remember how he would make Kiddush every Friday night in a melody that was beautiful. My mother knew how to read Hebrew but wasn't fluent in the language. It was an open house to all who came and food was plenty and anyone who was needy or poor knew to come and get provisions and sometimes money. We belonged to the synagogue in Michalishki and this was 7 Km. from Sverniki and my father gave to the synagogue with a wide hand. Our home was open to Polish as well. They knew they can come to ask for help. They would buy on credit and pay later. We were known in the region and I remember sometimes people would come in the middle of night when someone died – they would need to buy food for those mourning and cloth for burial. My family was always ready to help. I guess my grandmother lived there before us and we were second generation in the house.

My sister Hannah married a good and intelligent man. They lived in **פודברודזי** **PODBRODZIE ( Pabradé)** . When she married, my parents gave her much money, clothes, furniture and things as well as a fur coat, they opened a large shoe store, and they lived a good and dignified life. They lived a lifestyle much like my parents. Their family name was Mirsky, Nota was his given name. They had a daughter called Rachele, she grew up to be a smart little girl. Everyone thought she was my sister. Every summer I would go to my sister and had a wonderful time there. I learned to swim there. I would go with friend my age to the river, swim, and bask in the sun. It was like a resort. On Saturdays, I would go with my sister and her husband and Rachele to the woods and rest there. We would read books and newspapers. My brother-in-law was in (Israel) years before while still single, was disappointed from the difficult life there, returned home to Lita, and married my sister.

The Mirsky family was very well known in their city and from that point of view we can say that it was a good shiduch – match. My sister Hannah knew how to manage the business and she knew how to cook and did everything on her own. He knew as well.

They were equal partners. I too was raised in the business and know how to assist. At my sister's too I helped in the store even though I was young.

I had a grandmother by the name of Nachama. Even today people talk fondly of her and talk about how smart she was and helped everyone. She would go see off whoever went to Israel as a Halutz – a pioneer, and she would give each something to take with them – sometimes money. All her children emigrated to America before WWI. Rachele from California and Elliot from Long Island were also her grandchildren. My mother Haya stayed alone with her as her last child home and she married young. My parents were of the same age. My grandmother Nahama lived in Michalishki and I lived with her and went to Hebrew school there. She cooked and baked very well. My parents would look after her. Her children in America would support her financially. My grandfather was Eliokim Kuritzky. He died at a young age. She was left with the children and took care of them as well as the grandchildren much later.

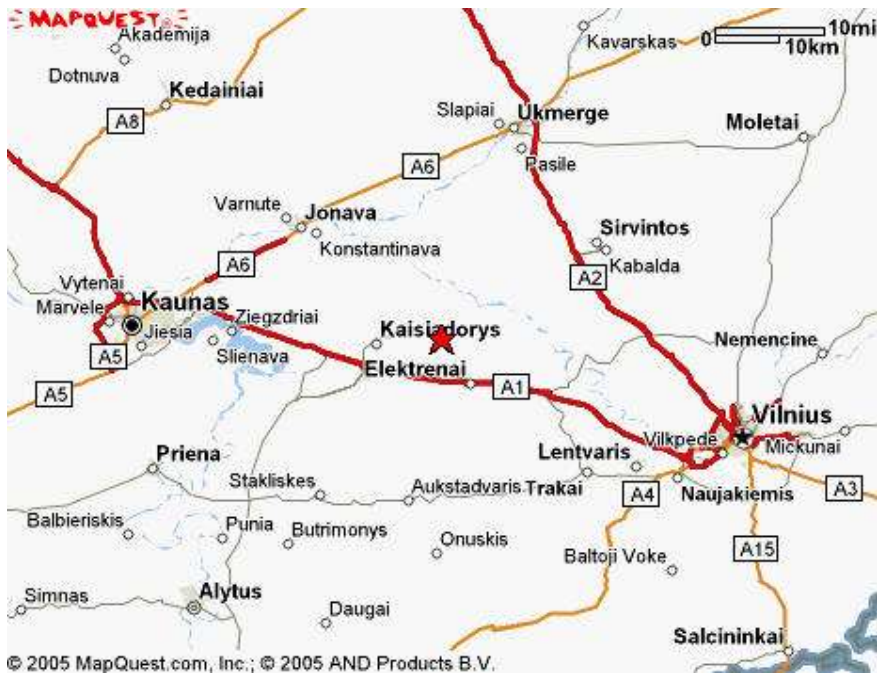
Every morning grandmother Nahama went to the synagogue and left me breakfast. One morning she suffered a brain stroke in the synagogue. I notified my parents; they came and called the doctor from Vilna. She was 82 at the time. After a few weeks, she passed away. They brought her body to the synagogue and she was eulogized there. This was a great honor and from there she was escorted on her last journey to be buried. I remember the teacher saying, "what a great grandmother you had". I continued studying at the school and went to live with a woman who tended to all my needs. I was a good student and amongst those that excelled. This was approximately in 1937 and the times were hard for the Jews and anti-Semitism grew all of a sudden.

My parents decided that I should go to a Polish school in order to better learn the Polish language and to prepare me for the Polish High School. The Polish teachers were happy I came to study with them and recommended I continue to the Polish Government High School. This was a great privilege and honor. Only the best went there. I was ready to go to school in **Svintsyon**. They made me nice clothes and a coat and more. In 1939, WWII erupted. After a few weeks the Polish army lost the war and Poland was divided into two parts: part was now German and the other part the Russians took. We were under the Russians. We immediately closed the business and the store and my parents were without work or income. The Russians opened a school and I started studying at the Russian High School. I learned Russian quickly and became fluent in the language. I was again an honor student. It was now 1941 and the war between Germany and Russia began. My parents fled our area once the Germans took control and this is where the trouble began.

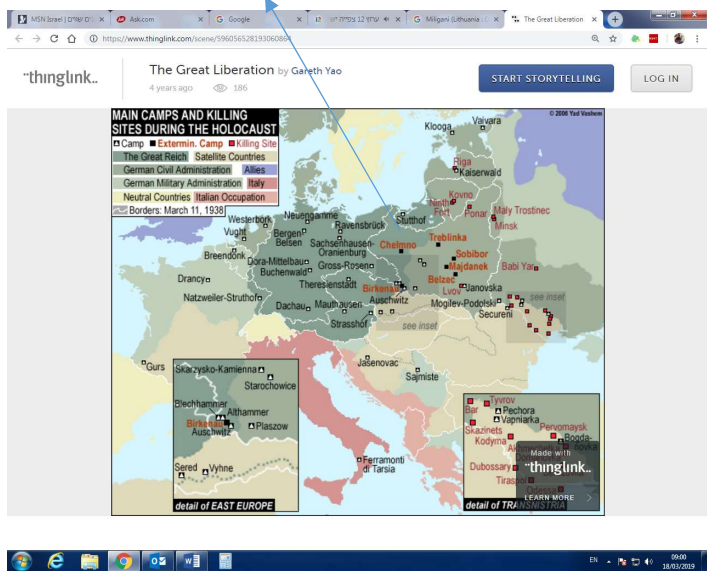
Immediately the Germans stole our 2 cows and they came and took merchandise and products as well as valuable items from our home. Many things we also gave to gentile neighbors. The house was now empty. Every day there were new ordinances and laws and now we had to wear the yellow Star of David. There was a big church near us and the Priest had a lot of influence in the area. One Sunday, the Priest told us to come to his home and be with him because a pogrom is expected. We were with him in his beautiful living room all day and we heard how the gentiles were yelling outside

demanding that we get out of the house. The female caretaker of the house told us "the situation is not good but we cannot help you". Only he asked that nothing bad be done to us. Of course we were worried and uneasy. Then the anti-Semitism grew more and my sister and her husband with the child Rachele fled their home and village before they slaughtered the Jewish population there. They came to live with us. Then my brother-in-law's parents and their two daughters and son came to stay with us. We sealed them all in one room in the house because it was forbidden to accommodate non-residents in the house. We had certificates and documents made showing they were from the district of **Michalishki** and they went to live there. Me and my parents stayed in **Svěřenecký**. One night my mother and I went to sleep early, and my father stayed up to read the newspapers. We fell into a deep sleep. All of a sudden, a mob outside made noise outside and wanted to enter the house. My father yelled and we didn't hear. He stood at the doorway alone, blocked the entrance and didn't let them in. He told them that we don't have anything in the house and we don't have any more money. Before it ended, we woke up and we yelled out calling for neighbors to help. After all was done and the mob dispersed, our neighbors told us how they also feared for their lives as well. They left and I remember how I was struck by his heroism. The robbers were not from our area but were robbers from far away. Every day something else happened. One day the Germans came to the house and made us stand outside in the yard and they told my father to start digging a hole. My mother and I watched and we didn't understand what was happening. My mother told me to run to the Priest and to request his help. When I came back, they left us.

In the meantime, they made a ghetto in **Michalishki** and we were deported to the ghetto. The Germans gave us a home and there we lived with all of my sister's in-laws as well as my sister, her husband and Rachele. We were 11 people. My parents provided for everyone and they were amazed on how we took them in. My parents took care to gather food and clothing. My mother cooked together with my brother-in-law's mother. The gentiles would bring food and throw it over the fence of the ghetto for us. My sister and my father would sometimes leave the ghetto and arrange to have the food thrown over the fence. It was frightening but they did not have a choice. The rest of us stayed in the house and we read books, as we were scared for our lives. There were rumors that the Germans will come to the ghetto and kill many people. People started to flee the ghetto and we did too. We fled looking for shelter in the homes of our gentile neighbors and after two days, we came back to the ghetto. Our neighbors in the ghetto in the meantime ransacked our home and stole many things which we gathered in our ten months in the ghetto. Jews worked in odd manual jobs and plowing snow off the roads. I went to work outside the ghetto with friends. My brother-in-law and his two sisters worked in a different area outside the ghetto. All of a sudden one day, the Germans gathered all the Jews from their various places of work. They brought us to the ghetto and closed us all in a house. It was summer and the windows were shut. We could not breathe. There was a great commotion. In the morning, they gathered all the families together and loaded us onto trucks and we did not know if we are going towards our death or to work. So it began that we were transported to a work camp. This was in Lithuania, to a place called **Miligani Labor Camp, which** was near town of **Vievis** in an area also known as Elektrenai.



STUTTHOF CONCENTRATION



At **Miligani** Labor Camp we worked from morning to night as we built roads. It was very hard labor. We were lucky we had money hidden. We were able to pay people who went and brought food. This of course, helped and sustained us. Those caught would be beaten until they almost died. Once all the camp had to stand a whole night out in the cold and they beat someone. Many men were murdered and once, while we were at work the Germans came and took the children. My sister's daughter,

Rachelle, hid between the pillows and didn't come out. We came home and found her. She told how the Germans came and called all the children to come out but she didn't. After that we kept her closed up in the house and pretended we didn't know where she was.

After we finished the work we had to do, we were taken to another camp called **Joniskis**. At **Joniskis** we which is also in Lita we worked under the same conditions and work as in Miligani. At this time, the family was still together. This was about 1943 or 1944. Without notice, all of a sudden they took us from the Labor Camp to the Stutthoff concentration camp. There we were forced into an empty large room. They separated the men from the women and we knew that was bad. They took all our possessions. They had us stand in lines. All of a sudden there was commotion. The men were in a different room. My father managed to get close to us and told us that this was the last time we would see each other and this will be our demise. My father was strong and devoted to his family. After this, we steered into the shower rooms and we were given clean dresses. We each got one. I was with my mother. They took my sister and Rachelle to another place in the camp. We came into an empty building and we sat on the floor, one next to another. We sat there all night as well. At dawn we forced to the yard and they gave us a cup of black coffee with a piece of bread or soup. My sister and Rachelle were in the building next to ours. I went to her and told her that mother and I would like to join them and then we will be together. She refused and said that under no circumstance should we come. She told me to take care of mother and said that my destiny was different from hers because she has a child. A day or two later, everyone disappeared from my sister's building including my sister Hannah and Rachelle. No one knew where they were taken. It wasn't long before we understand they were taken to the gas chambers. I was still with my mother for a few more weeks. One day they took all the young women to work and my mother was left behind in the building. They took eight of us to work at a German farm and with us was a young girl and her name was Sarale. Sarale said she didn't know how to work the land so I told her I would do what I can for her. I tried to do what I could and we were fed there. We both worked in the field. As part of my job, I learned to ride [drive] a horse and carriage. On dirt roads, it was not easy. We were there until December and when I returned I didn't find my mother. She too was taken to the gas chamber. Then we were taken again to work digging ditches almost without food. We worked there and again taken to Stutthof. This was already beginning of 1945. One night they took out out of the camp and we had to walk on corpses and no one said anything. All was silent. They took us out in the snow and cold with warm garments and like this we walked for days. At night they locked us up in a barn along the way. In the morning, the farmer would throw a few boiled potatoes on the floor. People ran to catch and eat but I refused. This was the **Death March** and it continued a long time. Many people collapsed or fell and they were shot by the Germans. In the end, they brought us to a large barn and closed us in and the SS stood and guarded outside as we lay like sardines inside. In the morning they let us out and gave us black coffee with a piece of bread. During this march, I met my brother-in-law's mother and two sisters. One was previously a teacher and the younger was beautiful and talented. So at least we were together. My brother-

in-law's mother was weak so Hinda, her daughter, decided to go outside and look for food. We told her it was dangerous and forbidden. In the morning, they called the family to come outside and see Hinda's dead body. The mother and Haya, the sister, were crying and screaming in pain. I started to fall apart and couldn't find the strength to go out or even stand up. I lay on the barn floor devastated and almost dead. The mother and daughter were killed outside by Hinda's body. This continued for a period I cannot discern. All of a sudden one night I could hear infantry from afar and in the morning, no one told us to come out. So, we stayed down on the floor not knowing what is going on. We knew it was late and the strong ones decided to open the door of the barn and none of the SS were there. People started running out and I was amongst them. I walked a few meters and then fell, and due to the cold and heavy snow I couldn't get back to the barn. It snowed so heavily I barely found my way to the barn. As I entered, I saw the sickly on the barn floor and they didn't know what was happening. I forgot to mention earlier that in the barn people were sick with typhus and it was an epidemic. Many died. Only a few of those that were sick survived. Before evening, the Russians came to the barn and told us that we were liberated. You are free they said. People yelled with joy and we kissed the soldiers. They took us in vehicles to the nearby village and put us in the local mansion to recover. Every day we got fed with food drinks. Many people need medical attention but there wasn't a field hospital. It had to be prepared and it took time. Later, I was taken to the hospital and tests were made. Because I was so weak from malnutrition, they kept me there two weeks. After two weeks, they sent me and another girl from Hungary to a German home. There we got a room and they tended to us giving us food and proper sanitary conditions. Once better, they told us we are free to go where we want.

I was liberated in 1945. There were trains and people could board on their own. I boarded the train and met a woman with a daughter. We decided to travel together. We didn't know where to go and then we heard people talking about getting off the train at the big city of Lodz. We arrived at Lodz and got off the train. We found a Jewish Center there and they said they didn't have room for us and that we were on our own. There was a Jewish man who allowed us to stay with him a week. Then we went where the Lodz ghetto was and we found a place to stay. Outside I met a young woman and she told me that there was a "kibbutz" meaning a group living together and preparing to go to Palestine. I went and found many young people, survivors, and I stayed with them until I came to Israel in 1947. In 1948 I went into the army and I year later I met your father and married on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 1950. I worked at an office in Haifa until Haya was born.

## Relatives of Survivor Sara (Szalit/Shalit) Field



Nechama Kuritzky, maternal grandmother,  
the wife of Eliakium Kuritzky  
(maiden name unknown)

Chaya (Kuritzky) Szalit, mother of Sara



Shmuilo Kuritzky (later Samuel Albert Kurtz)  
maternal uncle of Sara Szalit  
with his wife Sarah