



Margaret's Story, Chapter 1

I am now Margaret Kagan. I was born in 1924 in Riga, which was the capital of Latvia, but we lived in Lithuania in what was then always referred to as the temporary capital which was Kaunas.

My father was at the Liege college in Brussels, in Belgium, and he then was joined or was enrolled or joined the French army during the First World War and then he went back to Lithuania and was sent to Germany as a member of the Lithuanian Embassy in Berlin. My mother was born in St Petersburg, fled during the revolution, 1917, and settled in Berlin. Until that my mother went to a girlfriend's house and said "Oh who sent you this beautiful beautiful bunch of roses?" and she said "It's a very nice man called George Strom, he is a member of the Lithuanian embassy, would you like to meet him?" And she said "Yes, I'd love to". That then was a whirlwind romance and he whisked her off to Lithuania and they got married. Now I'm telling you all this to explain to you that, how was Kaunas? My mother hated Kaunas. She hated Lithuania. She hated the province, she was used to life in St Petersburg which was glamorous and cultural and that, in her eyes, Kaunas was a godforsaken province. It wasn't; a lot of people thought Kaunas was the Paris of the East, you know? It had nice shops, it had a nice theatre, it had a good ballet. It had quite a lot of things. Of course it wasn't anything outstanding when you compared it to St Petersburg but it was a nice town. And it had a, quite a nice atmosphere, it had a nice diverse population, quite a lot of Jews lived in Kaunas. We lived in the centre of Kaunas and Kaunas was strange as far – Kaunas had 5 Jewish schools. Now 3 of them, which were everything was taught in Hebrew. One where everything was taught in Yiddish. And one which was called the Lithuanian Jewish High School where everything was taught in Lithuanian. In spite of all that, where do you think I was sent? To a Lithuanian state school, not to a Jewish, because my parents were fairly assimilated and my father was brought up, and my mother, in the wake of the First World War which was the war to finish all wars and we were all citizens of the world, not of any one religion or not members of a religion or a sect or a country and that's how I felt. I was a citizen of the world and I lived in a state which was Lithuania and I went to a Lithuanian state school.