



## **Margaret's Story, Chapter 2**

In 1940 the Soviets came into Lithuania. And it's funny because I was in an all-girls high school and when the Soviets entered they didn't believe in all that so they mixed us all up. So I was transferred, half of the girls were transferred to the sister boys' school and the boys were transferred to the Lithuanian girls school so I swapped schools but I was still in a Lithuanian state school. It was supposed to be one of my last years before exams but in June 1941 as we all know, Germany attacked the Soviet Union and Lithuania is right on the border and German troops entered Lithuania. My little brother was in a children's summer camp holiday somewhere near the border and I remember my father waking up, we all woke up to hear the news that war had been declared and he rang the people that were in charge of those children's camps and he said "Look, what are you doing to the children who are right on the border?" and they said "Why are you panicking? It's manoeuvres", and I remember my father getting so upset, he said "It isn't manoeuvres", we had had a lot of manoeuvres, "It is war, I'm telling you, you need to evacuate the children". Anyway that's the way the war was met. And we didn't know anything about Alik but a lot of Jewish people and non-Jewish people started fleeing. Particularly Jewish people because they knew already that the Nazi regime wouldn't be the sort of holiday camp for Jews in Lithuania. So my father came to my mother from work, the first day he went to surrender his keys, he was a director of a co-operative Parama then he came back he said "well, we'll have to go, bring a cart and we'll go. Shall we?" and my mother and they we all deliberated, "What about Alik? Alik is in the children's camp. If they send them, evacuate them to the Soviet Union all well and good but what if they send them back to Kaunas and he can't find his parents?" So of course we decided to stay. We stayed and my father went to Parama the first day and he was arrested and he never came back. My mother was arrested in the street. It was havoc, shall I say? I mean you daren't go in the street, you daren't go to shops, people were catching [---], my mother was arrested by a so-called partisan. You see I don't know whether you realise that Lithuania was an independent state only for a very short time. For many, many a year it has been part of Tsarist Russia so the Russians were occupiers and they were rather tough occupiers. They were not allowed to read or write in Lithuanian so there was a very strong hatred of Russians. And now when the Soviets came it was Russia again occupying Lithuania. So the Germans were looked at as liberators from the Russian yoke. So they were hoping for independence and they greeted the

Germans with flowers, as they claimed the Jews greeted the Soviets. So the whole myth formed that the Jews had sold Lithuania to the Communists, to the Russians. That was the perception. So they started what they now claim or have claimed always after the war, catching Communists. Collaborators with Soviets. And that is the story because it was a terrible time for Jews, this few first weeks of Nazi occupation. And even before the Germans took proper control, of course the Germans were encouraging this. There was a report written by Jager which said "It's fine, they've nearly done the job for us". They were taking people, they were arresting them, they were taking them to the fortifications and shooting them.

The thing that disproves that they were only catching communists is that the first – do you know the word 'pogrom'? – the first pogrom that took place in Lithuania was in the suburb, in Kaunas suburb, which is called Slobodka, where there was a very famous yeshiva. A yeshiva is a religious school as you may know, and they looted and slaughtered people and they cut off the head of the rabbi and they put it on a stalk. Now no way were the Jewish yeshiva students Communists, as you can understand. Now it's amazing how few people it needs to create such a situation because of course it wasn't the majority of Lithuanians. A) when the Germans entered the first thing they did, they opened prisons. They let all the people go – I don't know about all but they opened prisons. A lot of the people in the prisons they said were political prisoners. But a lot of them weren't so that the street was not only full of Lithuanians who hated Jews but of criminals. Real criminals. So what I am trying to explain that a minority – I mean this is the dreadful story about Lithuania had acquired a reputation of Jew-shooters because of a small minority who did indeed create havoc. So when the Germans announced that in, by August 15<sup>th</sup> every Jew had to move himself into a circumscribed area in Vilijampole which was to be the ghetto, we looked forward to it. We felt that at last we'll be safe and sound somewhere. As you know, it wasn't to be but that's how we felt. It was a relief.