



Margaret's Story, Chapter 4

Joseph was in the ghetto and he got a message from a man called Johannes Bruess who was a German who he had known before the Germans occupied Lithuania.

He was horrified to find Joseph in a ghetto and he wrote him a note and he said "How can I help you?" and Joseph said "Only by forming a slave labour brigade in the foundry that you are made a director of, and we'll come and I'll form a brigade and come and work". Johannes said, "I can't do a thing like that, why should you be coming as a slave labourer? I want to help you." Joseph said, "That's the only, the best way you can help me." And so it came to pass that Joseph had a brigade which went to this iron foundry which was in Vilijampole which is the suburb where the ghetto was and he went to work and the slave brigades in a way were our line to survival, our save, you know, because you could bring in food, you could take out bits of stuff that you had left, maybe a skirt or some clothing or whatever and barter it for bread, for butter, for anything.

Joseph then gets to work in the brigade at Johannes Bruess-directed iron foundry and he there meets one of the foremen, very somehow attracts him by the way he looks and they get talking and his name is Vytautas Rinkevicius. And slowly they develop a relationship and eventually he, Vytautas, helps build a little hideout on the loft of the iron foundry by dividing the end of the loft up with a false wall in which he builds a little thing. Joseph was also allowed to go up and help him and of course none of it would have been possible without the connivance of Bruess. Bruess was the director of the factory and knew what was going on but of course didn't let on, as did Garkauskas, who was the bookkeeper, another Lithuanian, there you go another wonderful Lithuanian, nice German, see? These people exist, I need to point it out again and again. And they built that and I think quite amusingly Mr Bruess, who was the director, and who was a seventh-day Adventist, he was only afraid of God and Hitler, and he used to say to Vytautas – open windows, there are some people about – he used to say "Now when you go on your rounds make sure there aren't any Jews hiding in the factory!" so he was protecting himself, you see? He pretended he didn't know, but he knew. He knew what was going on. And eventually came the day when the hideout was ready and Joseph got his mother and me to come in the brigade with him and we got the glimpse of the

building what was to be our home. And we never went back with the brigade, we stayed there, and slowly slowly we had to get used to quite a strange eerie existence because we weren't move in the daytime because somebody may hear things and start looking where the noise comes from so we developed slowly, surely some sort of routine to be quiet during the day and do things at night. I taught Joseph Russian, he taught me English and so we had a really quite a productive nine months in a way. But it was difficult and it was stressful and my mother-in-law particularly was more stressed out, she was older and she thought she was going to die. She kept saying she was going to die if she had to stay any longer. Anyway we got Vytautas to organise a little holiday for her, we had carved out a little gate in the fence which she could escape from, she could come down at night and go for a week's holiday. Live in a normal house, you know. And then she came back. Somebody agreed to harbour her for a week in their house. At the end we already started hearing that the Allies are advancing, there was no nicer sound than air raid alarm, it was wonderful, they hadn't quite forgotten, they were still coming, flying over us and there was hope that the war may end. And so it did in 1944 in July the war came to an end. Our war because it was still carrying on in the rest of Europe.

We went for the last few days to Mr Macenavicius's house where my little brother was and eventually the Soviet troops reached Kaunas and then Vilijampole and we were free.

Now you know how much freedom should and does mean. But on one hand there was this euphoric happening that we were now no longer under threat, our lives seemed to be more or less secured and saved. But at what cost? It was really slowly and very soon it dawned on us, the sort of things that had happened. The ghetto was burned down by the Germans before they retreated. I found out about my father's death from somebody who – I mean we were told that he was somewhere working in Germany. Somebody said even that they had seen a note from him that he was sorting some archives in Prussia for the Germans, which was all invented. Now how subtle were the Germans to even invent rumours that these people were still alive? My father was killed in the first days of the occupation in the now quite infamous massacre in the Lietukis garage.

I think it was at least as stressful coming out as being in because we, the enormity of what had happened while we were in hiding was totally totally upsetting, upsetting is the wrong word, I don't know, it was traumatised, traumatic. Really. But I still didn't know what happened to my mother for instance, I didn't know until we got to Poland and when I met some people who had been in the same camp as her and got liberated from the camp and

they had survived, and my mother hadn't. She had committed suicide in the camp in November. She always said that if she couldn't stand it any more she wouldn't go on. So I learnt about my mother's death. There was still a sort of, because there were people coming from the camps and I sort of had these hopes and visions. But these were personal hopes but also there were national disasters, you know we heard about all sorts of things, we learnt about the extermination, about the gas chambers, never mind our own ghetto, so there was not a nice time. So that was the end of the hideout, the tragic end of the hideout. Our personal end was a good one, on a narrow scale, but on a wider horizon it was, on a wider scale it was quite horrific to find out.