



## Val's Story, Chapter 1

My name is Waldemar Ginsburg, short Val Ginsburg and I come, I hail from Lithuania. I lived most of my youth in the capital of Lithuania called Kaunas or Kovno. Now I would like to take this opportunity to focus on the consequences of prejudice, discrimination, racial and religious hatred and to make my point I would like to point out, and I would like to explain, the suffering, the fate of my community, of my family and my experiences. What we have experienced was growing prejudice escalating into violence and then even escalating into genocide. Of course events I'm trying to describe took place many years back but I'm afraid the message, the lesson is as relevant today as it was then. Unfortunately evil, terror, genocide is still very much with us.

Now let me tell you about my country. It's a small country called Lithuania and the inter-war years were quite, we were on a political, actually on a political fault line. It was a tiny country of 3 million surrounded by 2 superpowers, one power on the western side, Nazi Germany, the other power Communist Russia on the East, one as aggressive as the other, both countries ruled by homicidal dictators and each of them relied on terror and fear to keep in power. There wasn't much to choose between the two dictators, between Stalin and Hitler. It was bad enough to have one of them next to you, we had both of them and fate was for us to suffer from both of them in turn, we were occupied by each one.

Now our losses during the Holocaust, Lithuanian Jewry losses, were up to 94% so I am one of the 6% to survive. So how could we account for a community of not large one, what were we, the Jewish community of Lithuania was quarter of a million, up to quarter of a million, a bit less, but our losses were catastrophic as I mentioned to you. It was a systematic cold-blooded murder of a civilian population, children, women, men, everybody, babies, everybody was involved in it. How can we explain such an outbreak of savagery, of barbarity, of hatred, in the centre of Europe, the most civilised place in the world, how can we explain it? Where did this rot start? How did it come about?

Let me go back to 1933 when Hitler and his gang got power in Germany and they started their persecution of certain groups of people who were hostile to him by introducing a drive, a reign of terror. So who were the people? First of all he started persecuting Communists, then trade unionists, then Democratic parties. Gypsies, homosexuals, and the main target, the main lunatic racial

target were the Jews. He began by slowly reducing their rights in Germany and his anti-Semitic influence spread over the border into Lithuania so we felt some of this racial anti-Semitism in my country as well. Now what he introduced was a new racial anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was nothing new, it was going on for centuries, but what Hitler decided is that religion was not important. He didn't take much notice of religion. What was important for Hitler was the racial inheritance, the bloodline and the ancestry. So this racial lunacy went so far as to target devout churchgoing Christians, baptised Christians who happened to have Jewish ancestry. They were also persecuted. Now this craze became the catalyst for the destruction of the European Jewry. So that was the Nazi party and Hitler as head of them.