



### **Val's Story, Chapter 3**

The German secret police arrived and they began their purges. From the word go, from the very beginning they were determined to exterminate the Lithuanian Jewry. And how do they go about it? They decided to soften us up for the kill first. We were deprived of every basic human right. Time and time again they kept introducing measures to limit our rights, to persecute us, we were prohibited of stepping into a public place, we were not allowed to walk on the pavement, we were not allowed to use public transport, we were not allowed to use communications, a bus or telephone or anything, we were not allowed to have pets. And most, what hurt us a lot, was the access to food was restricted, and they knew that hungry people can be easily demoralised and deprived of any will to resist. It was morale-sapping, hunger, and you reduce people to the level of animal. And that's what they did. They deprived us of food and the other measure they introduced was to make us wear yellow stars front and back. That was bad enough, but what really frightened us were the excesses, were the arrests and the executions. The population, the Jewish population of my town Kaunas was 35,000. Within 2 months of the Gestapo, of the SS, of the Nazi shock troops coming in the 35,000 were reduced to 30,000. 5,000 were executed, arrested and executed. And that was really terrifying.

The Germans decided to lock us into, to imprison us in a ghetto to facilitate the extermination and to have complete control of the Jewish people they built and they organised a ghetto for the Kovno Jews and 30,000 people were crowded into a small suburb of Kaunas which was separated from the population by barbed wire and by armed sentries. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1941 the ghetto gates were shut, we were prisoners in the Kaunas ghetto at the mercy of the German conquerors. The rations were starvation rations. There was hunger, there was no fuel, conditions were shocking. And then just as we were wondering how are we going to survive the Nazis unwittingly threw us a lifeline. They told us to register for forced labour and that saved our lives. Why? The reason was work was in town. We could leave our prison and we could scrounge for food. Lithuania was a rich agricultural country with plenty of food around, it's just that we didn't get it. So we started to scrounge for food and I had a big jacket with deep pockets and I used to cram it with potato peel. That was easily available and I used to smuggle it into the ghetto. My mother used to clean it, used to cook it and it helped us to survive. In fact it tasted bitter but it gave us nourishment. So we were still hungry but we were not

dying of hunger. Now some lucky Jews managed to find hiding places in town. It was very risky, they had to have Lithuanian friends who were willing to risk their lives to save Jewish lives but some dedicated Lithuanian people did just that. In fact they could... for hiding a Jew the penalty was death. So despite the continuous demands for Jewish slave labour the executions continued while we were in the ghetto. In fact it was easier to select victims, it was easier to arrest and execute people while we are imprisoned in that ghetto.