

A Living Memorial in their own words

The Kur and Rotholz Families

Meilach (Misha) Rotholz was born in Ryki Poland in 1921 to Aron Dovid and Sara Rotholz. He was the youngest of eight children and the only one to survive the Holocaust. His sisters and brothers were Pearl, Leah, Yechiel, Chatzkel, Bluma, Chaya and Reyzl. The entire family perished in Majdanek concentration camp.

As a teenager he and his Jewish friends encountered anti-Semitism, hostility and physical attacks from their gentile peers. When the Germans entered Ryki, Jews were initially rounded up to do menial work. Many times cruel psychological tactics were employed such as rigging a bridge with explosives and forcing the workers to jump up and down on it.

Meilach fled to Russia where he was detained as a non citizen and imprisoned in a Soviet Labor camp in Archangelsk, Siberia. There he worked in a coal mine and timber forest. An agreement between the Polish government in exile and the Soviet regime allowed Polish prisoners to be released to serve in the army. Hearing of anti-Semitism in the army, Meilach fled across the war ravaged landscape to Tashkent, Uzbekistan where he met Brina Kur.

When the war ended they were anxious to return to Ryki. As they approached, they were advised to retreat because Poles had occupied Jewish homes and murdered returning family members who had survived, fearing that they would try to reclaim their homes.

Meilach and Brina arrived as immigrants to South Africa on the Toscana a barely seaworthy ship that sailed from Genoa, Italy. They sailed through the Suez Canal during the period of the Israeli War for Independence in 1948 and settled in Paarl, South Africa. They retired to Cape Town, then immigrated to Baltimore, Maryland in 1994 to live close to their married daughters, Shirley Avin, (Baltimore, MD) and Pearl-Anne Margalit (Amherst, MA)

There are no photographs of anyone in Meilach Rotholz's family.



Kur family picture and friends – Jakob Hirsh Kur, in center with beard; Sarah Reyzl Kur on extreme left passenger seat; Brina in front window wearing a necklace. This was the first Volvo in Rukashik and used for family and a transport business, circa 1930.

Brina (Bronia) Kur Rotholz was born on February 1, 1925 in Rakishok (Rokiskis), Lithuania to Jakob Hirsh and Sarah Reyzl Kur. She was the second youngest of twelve children (six boys and six girls.) Her oldest sibling, Solly (Shaul) left for Cape Town, South Africa as a young man, followed by a brother Joe (Josef), who moved to Senekal, and a sister Leah Kur Riback who moved to Johannesburg. Another sister, Dvora Abel moved to Palestine. Brina fled Rakishok on June 25th and later learned that her parents and musically talented brother Fyvus were tortured and murdered by the Germans and Lithuanian collaborators in the gardens of the mansion of Lithuanian Count, Jan Pshezkzetski.

Brina's parents had urged her to flee with her sister Golda, Golda's infant son, and a sister-in-law, Zlata Jakobsen Kur, who was married to Leybl Mendel who was serving in the Red Army. All three, and Golda's husband Shmuel Rif immigrated to Israel in the early 1970's.

Brina fled through Anikshot-Kurland where the border was open. She went through Jacobshtot to Rezhshitseh, about 500 kilometers then pushed toward Velikeh-Luki-Apatsk. For 90 kilometers she struggled through a swamp. From there she rode 22 days on the troop train toward Kazan. Refugees were distributed among the villages and "kolkhoz," (collective farms) where Brina found her three brothers. Because of the continuous German conquests, people went deeper and deeper into the Soviet interior until they reached Uzbekistan, where they found a community near the Iranian border. Brina remained there throughout the war.

Early in 1945, Brina Kur met her husband Meilach Rotholz while working on a *kolkhoz* close to Tashkent, Uzbekistan where they were both refugees. They married in June 1945. In November, 1945 Brina returned to her hometown and witnessed the destruction of her Jewish community. She and her husband lived in various Displaced People's camps in Steyer, Austria and Linz. With the help of her siblings in South Africa she and her husband obtained visas and emigrated there in 1948.

Jakob and Sarah Kur, circa 1904



Meilach and Brina's Visa for South Africa. It includes authorization stamps from the Italian embassy in Vienna, British legation in Vienna, Austria, entry in Durban, South Africa. The bureaucracy was enormous.