

## *A Living Memorial in their own words*

## Family of Leizer Bart

**Leizer Bart** was born on June 15, 1915 in Hrubieshov Poland, a small town near Lublin. The town had about 30,000 inhabitants; one third of the population was Jewish. Most of the town's people were very poor and anti-Semitism was high among the local Polish residents. At the age of thirteen, Leizer joined the Shomer Hatzair Zionist group. Several years later he left his hometown for a farming kibbutz (haksharah) in Czestochowa, Poland. At the kibbutz he became a leader who trained younger members in farming skills in preparation to go to Palestine. Shortly after the German invasion of Poland in 1939 he fled eastward from Czestochowa back to his hometown of Hrubieshov. At home, he begged his younger brother Michael to flee with him even further away to Vilna, but his brother refused. His family's home was located next to the Bug River, which under the Non-Aggression Pact became the German-Soviet border. With members of his Zionist group, he then left his family behind and fled to Vilna which was considered a safe zone since it was under Soviet control.

The city of Vilna had a population of 220,000; over 70,000 were Jewish. On June 22, 1941 the Germans broke the Non-Aggression Pact and invaded the Soviet Union. Two days later the Germans occupied Vilna. Leizer was forced into the Vilna ghetto on September 6th. There was not enough housing in the two ghettos to accommodate the amount of Jews being forced into these sealed areas. Jews who had no family were at greater risk of being left without a place to sleep. Leizer signed up at the ghetto administration to work and was assigned the task of being a guard at the ghetto's main gate. Several months after the formation of the ghetto, he joined the F.P.O. underground movement together with other members of his Shomer Hatzair Zionist group. At the gate, he became a Sergeant and was able to help the FPO smuggle arms and other needed contraband for the growing numbers of young people who wanted to resist the German occupiers. Leizer met Zenia Lewinson at a Zionist meeting in a ghetto apartment occupied by her cousin, Fania Bulkin. Leizer and Zenia became friends, fell in love, and were married on Lag BaOmer, May 23, 1943, ninety days before the ghetto was liquidated.

On September 15, 1943 eight days before the ghetto's liquidation, a member of the underground Leon Bernstein bribed a Lithuanian guard for the use of a truck to get to the outskirts of town. Fourteen members of the underground including Leizer and Zenia then escaped the ghetto through a side gate. Once they reached the outskirts of the city, they walked all night to the edge of the Rudnicki

forest 25 miles from Vilna before going 10 miles deep into the woods. In the forest Leizer and Zenia became members of the Avengers (Nekamah) battalion commanded by Abba Kovner. Leizer was a mainline fighter who participated in many battles and took part in the mining and sabotage of enemy railway lines and trains. Leizer was very proud of his accomplishments as a partisan fighter, and of his Zionist membership. The partisan fighters fought the Nazi's and their collaborators to avenge the honor and dignity of their families.

At the war's end Leizer and Zenia traveled to his hometown. His family's home had been occupied by Poles. Leizer, hardened by war, approached his home armed with a pistol and demanded that those residing inside leave within 24 hours. After leaving his home he was approached by a local Catholic priest that had grown up nearby. The priest recommended Leizer and Zenia leave town immediately and warned them, "These people have no intention of giving back your house; there will just be another dead Jew." Leizer was very angry and they left for Lublin. No one in Leizer's family had survived. His mother Ida Bayla Gal, father Israel David Bart, brother Michael, and sister Munia were all killed.

Leizer's long time dream was to go to Palestine. Most of the partisans set sail via the Bricha to Palestine. Zenia wanted to try and find her maternal uncles living in America. They decided if she could locate her uncles' they would go to America, and if not, they would go to Palestine. Zenia was able to locate her uncles in America. In January of 1948, they sailed to New York on the USS Marine Perch. For many years Leizer continued to look for his only known relative, a maternal uncle who left for America prior to the war. He never found him and not one photo of his family survived the war.



*Taken in Hrubieshov, Poland circa 1930, Leizer Bart is in the middle of the back row.*

## Family of Leizer Bart continued



Taken at the farming kibbutz (Haksharah) in Czestochowa, Poland November 15, 1937. Leizer Bart is in the back row first person on the left.

These are members of the family who died in the Holocaust. In addition, there are countless other relatives known to Zenia and Leizer whose names have been lost.

### Vilna, Lithuania

Bluma Rosaler-Balcwinik  
Rikla (Rose) Balcwinik-Lewinson-Botwinik  
Gershon (Hillel) Botwinik  
Michael (Misha) Lewinson  
Elizabeth (Lizzie) Balcwinik-Skolnicki  
Wolf Skolnicki  
Avraham Skolnicki  
Shashka Skolnicki  
Nachum Skolnicki  
Tzila Skolnicki  
Sonia Balcwinik-Bulkin  
Avraham Bulkin  
Sima Bulkin

### Hrubieshov, Poland

Israel David Bart  
Ida Bayla Gal-Bart  
Michael Bart  
Munia (Mindy) Bart

(right)

Partisans of Vilna photo-Leizer Bart is pictured sixth from the left wearing a hat, and Zenia Bart is pictured below him holding a rifle. The photo was taken in Vilna on July 14th 1944, the day after the liberation of the city. The Partisans of Vilna was a Jewish group with 300 members in four detachments led by Abba Kovner. The partisans together with the Red Army fought the Nazi's for the liberation of Vilna. For the partisans the weeklong battle was to free remaining family held as prisoners, and to honor those who were killed; combat was personal.



Leizer and Zenia's son Michael wrote his parents' biography in 2008 called "Until our Last Breath". It received a Christopher award and is available in the Hatikvah library. For more information about the Bart's story please visit <http://www.untilourlastbreath.com/>