

Yahrzeits For Those Who Died in The Shoah by Beulah Gross

Far too many of us lost family and loved ones during the Shoah, but how many know the exact date they died? As I was always told that all members of my maternal family died during the Shoah, I had little hope of tracing anyone when I began collecting material for a family history. All I had to go on were stories my grandmother told me and old photos and postcards she gave me before she died.

Then, some years ago I found two sisters, Asia and Henny, in San Diego. Their grandmother had been a sister of my mother's grandmother. Letters flew between us for some time and when I visited San Diego I spent a wonderful afternoon with them. I took with me old photos and copies of very old postcards of Libau (Liepaja) sent to my grandmother in South Africa as I wanted the subjects and scenes identified.

Asia and Henny were active, charming ladies in their early seventies. They welcomed me with open arms and were entranced with the pictures, but did not want to keep them as they brought back too many memories.

They made many corrections and additions to my family stories, filled in numerous names of family members and explained their relationships to each other. They also supplied the names, dates of birth, marriage and death of all these people.

The date of death for many of them was December 15, 1941. I asked Asia and Henny how they knew this date so exactly. They told me that all these members of their and my family and including their father and younger sister, had been murdered by the Nazis on that day in Libau.

Henny escaped death but was sent to a camp and sterilised when she was barely twenty years old. After the liberation of the camps, Henny went to Riga where she remained until she went to live with Asia in San Diego. Asia escaped because she was already married and living in Israel.

When I returned home, I checked Simon Wiesenthal's excellent book *Every Day, Remembrance Day* to find that on December 14 and 15, 1941, the Nazis and their Latvian collaborators, had massacred 3500 Jews in Libau.

I felt I should do something more than remember these people on the High Holy Days and Yom HaShoah, so I asked our Rabbi if it would be appropriate to have them named for Kaddish at the Shabbat service closest to the date of their death. He discussed this at a Services Committee meeting where it was decided to make yahrzeits like mine a feature of future Shabbat services. This decision not only perpetuates the memory of our martyrs but will also make naming them will make the Shoah more real for our children.

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