

### C. Grische Bregstein interview 1991<sup>1</sup>

Moise Bregsteinas, born in 1894, had served as an officer in the Lithuanian army during the Lithuanian Independence War in 1919. Following the war, he was a reserve officer, and president of the Kaunas chapter of the Association of Lithuanian Independence War Jewish veterans.<sup>2</sup> He worked as a bookkeeper at the Liwella factory in Kaunas.

In 1940, during WWII, Lithuania became a socialist republic of the U.S.S.R. In 1941, Russia began the process of exiling known Lithuanian nationalists. Moise was charged with "counter-revolutionary" activities, and was sentenced to eight years in labour camps.<sup>3</sup> On June 17, 1941, together with 212 others from Kaunas, he was exiled to Siberia, together with his wife, Lisa and sons, Grisha and David.<sup>4</sup> "They came late at night with trucks, completely unexpectedly, loaded us on to them and drove us to the station. We were allowed twenty kilos of luggage. I had nothing but a short coat. We lost everything. At the station they split us up."<sup>5</sup>

Moise was sent to a Severuralag camp in the north of Siberia, where he remained until 1949.<sup>6</sup> It was very cold. He survived by becoming a bookkeeper in the camp.

His sons Grisha and David, together with his wife, Lisa, were sent to a series of sovkhos, state farms, in Siberia, near the Mongolian border. These farms were insulated in the woods and under the control of the KGB, so one could not get away. They suffered from hunger for many years. Grisha worked on a tractor, dragging tree trunks. In 1945, Lisa died of malnutrition in Ozjorki farm, near Barnaul.

In 1949, Moise was relocated to the isolated village of Schutzje, in Kazakhstan, not far from Bravaria. He became a teacher of mathematics at a technical school there and lived with a Hungarian woman who was with him in the Gulag.

In 1956, Grisha was able to visit his father for the first time. That same year, Moise's sentence was commuted. The woman he had been living with decided to return to Budapest to live with her daughter. Moise went back to visit Kaunas and Vilnius and "was very shocked to discover that the grandmother's house and land had been sold by far removed family members after the war, and that he could not claim anything." He moved in with Grisha in Barnaul and lived there until his death in 1975.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the following information from Grisha Bregstein interview, ca. 1991 by Philo Bregstein.

<sup>2</sup> See Bregsteinas, M., Ed., Almanachas "Skydas", Kaunas, 1934, pp. 10,15,24,32.

<sup>3</sup> See Bregsteinas, Moise File, JUNE 14, 1941, KGB House, Vilnius.

<sup>4</sup> See Wolf Bregstein letters to Jeffrey A. Marx, 3/87, 4/30/87, 7/4/87, 7/15/87 and 2/5/89; "Lithuanian Jew", American Federation for Lithuanian Jews, New York, June, 1943; Yahadut Lita, Vol. 4, Op. Cit., p.456.

<sup>5</sup> Grisha Bregstein interview with Philo Bregstein, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> "Village of Gari, village of Katyrykul in the Chyuchensk District in the Kokchetav region", according to Moise Bregsteinas KGB File, Former KGB House, Vilnius.