

Address by Yehudi Gaffen, Co-chair of the Bauska Memorial Committee and descendant of the Arensburg Family at the dedication of the Synagogue Garden Memorial in Bauska on October 15, 2017.

Mayor Abelnicks, Ambassadors and other dignitaries, My name is Yehudi Gaffen and I am here today as a representative of the 63 living descendants of Yehuda Pesach and Hodda Bassa Arensburg (nee Berman) who perished in the Likvertenu forest in August of 1941 along with their children and relatives. My mother (may her soul rest in peace) Ella Arensburg was born in this town in 1914 to this family who lived here continuously since at least the 1700's. I am here today to remember and honor them and the many other innocent lives mercilessly taken there just because they were Jews

I came to Latvia for the first time in 2001, landing on that fateful day known around the world as 9/11. As long as I live I will never forget that night in Grenya Arensburg's apartment watching 1000's of innocent people dying in that horrific attack, then not able to get back home and exploring the fate of my innocent family members who perished here in Bauska. Grenya was an incredible person who would not have survived were it not for the heroic and selfless acts of Janus Libke to courageously hide 53 Jews. It was with Grenya and his son Victor, who is here today, that I first visited Bauska and the forest where my family was killed and where I made a vow that I would find a way to honor their lives in this place that they lived and died.

I came here to walk the streets and smell the air of the place my mother spoke of so fondly. She referred to it in Yiddish as "in der heim" and perhaps counter-intuitively, nurtured a great love for its castle, river and streets. She vividly remembered and spoke of her house and family store close by, the activities of the town, the youth groups, synagogue and wonderful community of friends and neighbors she and her family lived among. Despite having gone to South Africa at a very young age and passing away at 86, she never stopped reminiscing and remembering. When my siblings and I visited Bauska for the first time, we remarked that it felt as if we had been here before because her descriptions had been so vivid and detailed.

Every time I come here (this is my 6th) and visit the mass grave in the forest to say kaddish I can't help thinking about what their last thoughts were before they fell just as I often wonder about what those people who died suddenly or purposefully jumped to their deaths from the towers on 9/11. I believe most thought about their children and future descendants with the hope they would not be forgotten. I am here as a testament that you have not been forgotten but remembered for the lives you led and the decisions you made ensure the continuity of your line. I hope you are proud of what your descendants and their spouses have accomplished as productive members of their new adopted communities and as warriors in the Israeli and United States military defending our freedoms to make sure that "never again" is really "never again"!

We stand here on holy ground where our ancestors celebrated weddings, barmitzvahs and the festivals of our forefathers. The story of what really happened on this site I discovered when I became acquainted with Mitzi Neiders, a Christian, now in her late 70's who was the daughter of the Bauska doctor during those dark years. Mitzi is a professor and now lives in Buffalo New York. She was a precocious young girl and befriended the Jewish and Gypsy girls her age. She remembers vividly the night that she saw the synagogue, which stood on this site burning with the human cries of people locked inside, emanating from its interior... she ran home traumatized to be told by her parents that she should go to sleep and that she was hearing things.

We mourn the loss of our grandparents and their children Mera Reva, Avraham, Yossef, Chanoch and Hena with all our hearts, and will do so until the day we die. Thank you to all who made this possible especially the Latvian Jewish Community organization led by Arcady Sucharenco and ably represented by Gita Umanovska also Jehuda Feitelsohn who unfortunately could not attend today for health reasons but who worked with me over the past 16 years to make this memorial a reality. I hope the Bauska community will protect and treasure this place as a memory of the community who contributed to this town and called it "der heim" for so many centuries.