

**LETTER TO THE SURVIVOR MITZVAH PROJECT
FROM HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR FANYA BRANCOVSKAYA IN LITHUANIA**

"I am Fanya Brancovskaya from Vilna.

I survived the Holocaust in the Vilna ghetto. I was a member of an underground organization, then a fighter in "The Avengers", a partisan detachment of teenagers - where we fought the enemy and tried to protect the honor of our people. We were not sheep that go to be slaughtered.

Today is very hard on my heart. It's over 70 years since the Vilnius ghetto was liquidated. That was the day when I saw my relatives, parents and my sister for the last time. I was only 17. I ran to the woods, to the Partisans' detachment, not knowing that it was to be forever.

I am the only one left of my big family.

Today, as every year on Remembrance Day, I went to the pits in Ponary – the place where 100,000 people were killed – young, old, children. There are very few of us left, just a few. We stood there by the pits and our hearts were torn into pieces, eyes were full of tears...

We sang the Jewish Partisan's song as we remembered our perished family members and those who survived and protected our people - with weapons in their hands. I am proud to have been among them. We didn't just die, we protected the honor of our people!

Someone asked if I could see my family again, what would I say? I would tell them, "I fought for you."

I am sorry for such a long and confused letter, but the last events stirred my memory. I am asked if it's not difficult for me to go often to Ponary, to the killing fields. My answer is: those who lie there can't say anything, so this is my duty to them, to tell their story.

There is a Yiddish saying, "until my feet drag" and I remember this at my age of 89. Till the last minute, this will be my credo.

I hug you all, at my age I have right to do this! Kisses, gratitude for your warmth and attention. Yours... Forgive me my letter, so sentimental. I just wanted to share my thoughts with you on this day.

Be happy my dear ones. With love, Fanya"