



The Survivor Mitzvah Project

Yudel Ronder

A Life in Search of Justice



Yudel Ronder - A protector, a fighter, a seeker of the truth and a man in relentless pursuit of the murderers of the thousands of Jewish men, women, and children brutally killed in Lithuania by their neighbors. The dead included Yudel's entire family.

I met Yudel Ronder in 2007, and right then and there I knew I was in the presence of a true "Jewish Lion".

Yudel, a large, imposing man, well over six feet tall, was just a teenager when the war started. He and his friends ran away to escape the mass killings being perpetrated by antisemitic Lithuanians who were intent on attacking and killing all the Jewish families in Lithuania. Soon, as in other cities and villages across the country, the entire Jewish population of Yudel's town was murdered by Lithuanian collaborators – every single man, woman, and child, including Yudel's bedridden brother, his mother, grandmother and his young sister and her children were rounded up and shot or buried alive.

Yudel and his friends were arrested in a nearby town but managed to get released. He fought as a partisan and then as a soldier, and when the war ended, he went to university and became a lawyer. But his number one objective was not his career, its was revenge for the murder of his family and others. He was solely focused on finding and killing every one of the Lithuanians who were responsible. He was intent on doing this, but his friend cautioned against it because Lithuania was now in the Russian zone, and the KGB would surely find Yudel and execute him. So he devised another plan.

Yudel made a list of all the murderers, using his own knowledge, eyewitnesses, and Gestapo records. He dressed up as a KGB agent and tucked a broken starter pistol into his pocket with just the butt sticking out. He then went door-to-door, to each house where the murderers lived, who were now all back home with their families living pleasant lives. He informed each one that the KGB knew exactly what they had done, handed them paper and pen, ordered them to write a complete confession of their crimes, and warned them that if they left out even the slightest detail, they would be executed or sent to Siberia. Each and every Lithuanian murderer gave him a full confession. This became known as "YUDEL'S LIST." *(Pages from the list are pictured at right)*



Yudel's plan was to turn the information over to the authorities so that the murderers would be punished for their crimes.

At last, justice would be served.

At the same time, the US State Department was allowing these same murderers to leave Lithuania and enter the US, granting them citizenship. They reasoned that since the Lithuanians and the Russians were enemies, the Russians would kill the Lithuanians if they were not allowed to emigrate. Although it was nearly impossible for Jewish survivors to enter the US, these Nazis, fascists, and collaborators were welcomed.

Yudel knew he was running out of time. Soon there would be no justice.

He started writing hundreds of anonymous letters to the the murderers. They all started, “I know what you did,” and went on to list in detail all of the atrocities they committed, taken from their own words.

One letter came to a home and the teenage daughter opened it. She was horrified by what she read and went to her father, brandishing the letter, asking him if it was true. The father looked at her and said, “Have I been a good father?” The daughter replied, “Yes.” The father then went into his study and hung himself. The daughter took the letter to the police saying her father received this and then killed himself.



Shortly after that, an actual KGB agent knocked on Yudel’s door. Luckily, this agent was “Misha,” someone Yudel knew from his brigade, a Jewish soldier with whom he had shared a foxhole. Misha asked Yudel if he wrote an anonymous letter. Yudel answered that he had written hundreds, including that one. Misha said, “Yudel, two things. One, be very careful. Two, thank you very much. You have saved us a lot of work, a long trial, and an execution. Keep up the good work.”

Yudel continued his work, expanding his list, and in the 1980s, he smuggled his list out of Lithuania to government officials in the US State Department. They did nothing, refusing to prosecute the murderers because those Lithuanians were now US citizens. Even American Jewish leaders did nothing.

In 1991, Yudel submitted his list to the Lithuanian government when the country gained independence from Russia. But the government did nothing - the murderers still living in Lithuania had fought for Lithuania’s independence and were now considered “war heroes.”

In 2001, when I first went to Lithuania, Ephraim Zuroff, chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, made a public plea to Lithuania to bring the murderers to justice, but nothing was done. Over 90% of the Jewish population of Lithuania was murdered during the Holocaust, yet there has never been a war crimes tribunal in Lithuania. The Holocaust is not taught in Lithuanian schools, and there is no mention of the Holocaust in the *Museum of Genocide* in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. The list Yudel made so long ago was his life’s work and is known to governments and high-ranking officials around the globe. But Yudel never saw justice.

To this day, not one of the perpetrators on YUDEL’S LIST has ever been held responsible for their crimes.

“YUDEL’S LIST” is a small book in which Yudel carefully wrote the names of the Lithuanian murderers in alphabetical order, along with notes naming the Jewish people each had so viciously killed. Yudel graciously allowed The Survivor Mitzvah Project to photograph the pages.

I interviewed Yudel in 2007, 2011 and 2016. He never stopped trying to get justice. It is Yudel’s relentless spirit that is a great inspiration for me as I continue to work with all of you to help last survivors of the Holocaust. In his name, please make a special donation to honor a great man, a true Jewish Lion.

Donate online at www.survivormitzvah.org or send a check to:

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The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a 501c3 non-profit public charity.

Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

100% of your donation goes directly into the hands of Holocaust survivors in need.

\$150 supports 1 survivor for 1 month. \$1800 supports 1 survivor for 1 year.

Donations in any amount save lives!

It is vital that we continue to support these last survivors both physically and emotionally, and through acts of kindness and compassion, include them in our communal family of people who care. It truly means the world to them.

Please help make sure the last survivors of the Holocaust have heat, electricity, food, and medications. Ask your friends and colleagues, your children and grandchildren to help, too. Every dollar counts. - Zane Buzby