

Ringaile Zotovas

February 24, 2017

RG-50.030.0916

Abstract

Ringaile Zotovas (née Ringaile Jongras Ynait) was born October 14, 1924 in Kaunas and was raised 50 kilometers away in Pieresteshy (?), a village in Lithuania. Her parents purchased a large farm, Kudirkos Naumiestis across the border from Kaliningrad. Her brother, Fiennes was born in 1922 and her sister Rasa was born in 1937. Her father was Zigmas and her mother Antanina Pnausinitis. Her father came from nobility but they were not wealthy and his cousin got him through high school. Her father was in charge of a regiment in World War I in the Tsar's Army and received a St. George cross for saving his friend. Her mother was an artist and got educated in St. Petersburg. Their farm was a dairy farm and they exported products through Germany. There was no school bus so during the week Ringaile lived with a Jewish family, friends of her parents. Ringaile completed high school in 1941 when she was 16. The family spoke Lithuanian and some German at home. Sometimes they crossed the bridge to Germany for a better selection of goods such as bananas and oranges and porcelain dishes which were cheaper than in Lithuania. The estate had radio, telephone, many bedrooms, parquet floors, tiles in the foyer, and a circle staircase to a second floor balcony and was heated with a brick fireplace. There was a large room on the balcony where they rode bicycles and had concerts. They sold the estate just before the Soviets came and moved to their summer home where the grandparents lived. Ringaile had a Jewish friend in high school, Suzanna Negolzeniete who she skated with and attended the movies. The last time she saw Suzanna, she was walking in the middle of the street next to the Nazis who probably shot her. Ringaile is still friendly with Suzanna's boyfriend, Ernius who is 93 and now lives in Detroit. School stopped when the Germans came and she saw the Germans taking people to the camps. When the Soviets came, her brother was an activist against them. All the farm buildings were occupied by the Soviet soldiers so the family had to sleep in one room. Her mother had to do farm work and when Ringaile tried to work, she fainted. The family sheltered many Jews temporarily and hid a 6-year-old Jewish girl, Luba Leymuter, whose parents were shot but in '43 the Germans took her and shot her. Ringaile especially liked one man they sheltered, Dr. Isaac Glick whose colleagues saw her art exhibit 50 years later. March 1, 1942 the University was locked but in '43 Ringaile studied pharmacy at the University at Kaunas and finished in June in physical education and left the country. In February '44 she married her uncle's brother, Olga Gustidas (?). Friends warned they were about to be deported so Ringaile left with her husband, brother and parents by horse and carriage and crossed the border to Germany. She took a train with her husband to Berlin where they spent nine months. Her parents crossed Germany in the same horse and carriage. When the war ended, Ringaile attended the university at Frankfurt Am Main until 1947 when she got a visa for the US. She gave birth to a daughter and first worked as a cook and next as an inspector of medication. Her husband was unemployed so the family moved to Chicago where they bought an apartment house with space for other relatives who arrived. Ringaile worked in industrial

chemistry affording her daughter to attend Loyola University. After eleven years, she divorced her husband and seven years later married Alexis Zoster, her father's doctor. She had a second daughter. Ringaile became a painter and had 23 solo exhibitions. She sold 150 paintings for Lithuanian causes. Following the interview, Ringaile shows the following items: 1) photo of her mother's family, the Pnausinaitis, including her mother, her younger sister, her mother's parents and her older sister; 2) photo of a choir with Ringaile in front flanked by two boys and her friend, Suzanna on the 3rd row right; 3) her parents, Zigmas and Antanina in 1924, and 4) medal from the Lithuanian president to her parents for saving the lives of Jews during the Holocaust in Lithuania issued in September 2014.