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sample translation

Author / Edited by

Reinhard Kaiser  
Margarete Holzman

Title

»LET THIS CHILD LIVE«  
The Notebooks of  
Helene Holzman, 1941-1944

original title

»DIES KIND SOLL LEBEN«  
Die Aufzeichnungen der  
Helene Holzman 1941-1944

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translation

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*For the purposes of this short sample of translation from »Dies Kind soll leben«, the translator has chosen to follow the stories of Helene Holzman's husband Max and her daughter Marie from their disappearance to the certainty of their death or imprisonment. In order to do this it has been necessary to skip over other strands in the story which refer to friends of the family. This in no way implies that the other strands are not interesting in themselves.*

*The text of this book has been written by Helene Holzman immediately after the retreat of the German Wehrmacht from Lithuania, beginning in September 1994, which makes it not a diary, but a memoir covering the time 1941 - 1944. The explanatory footnotes are by the editor, Reinhard Kaiser.*

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So what had happened in 33? The Germans, who had thrived and prospered in Lithuania, suddenly started to feel dissatisfied. Suddenly they found that they were oppressed. They were not recognised, they needed new rights. After the first pogroms in Berlin <sup>1</sup>, the Jewish pupils started to leave the grammar school. And then that in itself became one more reason for the Germans to cultivate their growing anti-Semitism. The German customers stopped coming to our book shop, which up to then had been patronised equally by Lithuanians, Jews and Germans. My husband, who up to now had been considered a German by everyone, suddenly was no longer one in German eyes – he was a Jew.<sup>2</sup>

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Pages 14-19

Then came that Tuesday <sup>3</sup>. A revolution in the streets. An army with weapons, in civilian clothes, wearing armbands, suddenly sprang out of nowhere: the partisans. We had no food left at home so I went shopping. There were long queues again outside all the shops. Rumbling in the distance, shots everywhere. The Red Army filled the streets, this time in retreat. ... The German invasion had succeeded.

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<sup>1</sup> The pogroms initiated by the Nazis in the whole of Germany against Jews and Jewish institutions on 9 and 10 November 1935.

<sup>2</sup> According to Nazi classification, Max Holzman, the child of two Jewish parents, was a "full Jew". Helene Holzman, the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, was a "half Jew". However, she was not perceived by the German and Lithuanian officials as Jewish, but as German, especially as both she and her two daughters had been baptized in the Protestant church.

<sup>3</sup> 24 June 1941. On the evening of this day Kaunas was taken by the German army.

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With all the horror of a black-winged vulture, anti-Semitism had flown in ahead of the German army. Even before the German soldiers arrived, the partisans had been instructed in anti-Semitic tactics. Many Jews who tried to escape in these last few days [were] stopped by the partisans, arrested or forced to turn back. A terrible sight: the trains filled with Jews leaving the town. The bolder ones rode bicycles, aiming for central Russia. Many thought of moving to the provinces. Perhaps they hoped to find greater safety there amongst the Lithuanian people because in the country more than anywhere else Lithuanians and Jews had often lived perfectly happily together.

Marie insisted on going out that afternoon to see the mother of one of her friends. He had fled, and had asked Marie to give his love to his mother. I was determined to go as well – I didn't want her to go alone. Our street was deserted. We heard shots on all sides. As we turned into the wide road which led from the Grüner Berg <sup>4</sup> into the centre a partisan shouted out to us: "What do you think you're doing out on the street?" We said we were on an important errand and he should let us pass.

Suddenly he recognised Marie: "Aren't you the communist girl? Just you wait, now you've got it coming." <sup>5</sup> But he let us pass.

We went down a narrow flight of steps directly into the town centre. At the bottom there was another partisan. This one refused to let us through and we had to turn back.

My husband had been getting worried about us. We were all extremely relieved to be back together again and we decided not to go out at all for a few days, but simply to wait. In the evening the Germans sent up a huge white flare as a sign that the town had been taken.

Wednesday [25 June]. <sup>6</sup> My husband couldn't bear to stay at home any longer. He wanted to go to the state-run publisher's where he worked and talk things through. We had heard that some mixed marriages were allowed in Germany as a special privilege. Up to now my husband had been a highly respected member of the Leipzig Booksellers' Exchange. We had heard from Holland that Jews were sometimes allowed to stay in their jobs and, if not, I would probably be able to carry on as a teacher.

He and Marie set off together. I was to cook lunch while they were out. I went into the garden and gathered nettles and butter leaves for spinach. There were potatoes in the cellar.

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called "Green Hill", the Grüner Berg, where the Holzmanns lived at this time, was an area up above the town centre with many new houses where mainly wealthy people lived. The Holzmanns lived at 22 Vi\_inskio Strasse. The house is still there.

<sup>5</sup> During the "Soviet Year" of June 1940 to June 1941, Marie Holzmann had been involved in the Komsomol, the communist youth organisation.

<sup>6</sup> The manuscript mistakenly says 23 June.

Why on earth were Marie and Max taking so long? Impatiently, I ran out on to the street and as far as the main road. I stood there and waited and waited. At first I was just cross that they were so late but then I gradually grew more frightened. I saw the first German soldiers. People had gathered around one of them. He was explaining loudly how he had found Russians hiding and had killed them. "And the Jews. I don't see any of them about. They've all run away or gone to ground in their little holes." All of them laughed loudly and coarsely. The soldier had his shirt collar wide open and wore a brightly-coloured scarf. I'd never seen that before.

It was three o'clock. I hurried home .... The other two still hadn't returned. I ran down into town. From the hill I could see the flag with a swastika flying above the war museum. The Laisves Allee<sup>7</sup> was full of people. The German soldiers were being enthusiastically greeted as "liberators". Everyone was excited and most of them seemed to be having a good time.

I met Stancevicius the lawyer and his daughter. "Have you seen my husband?", I asked. He looked worried. Apparently large numbers of Jews had been arrested on the street.

I ran through all the streets, asked everyone I knew. No-one had seen my two. Then I rushed home again. Perhaps they'd returned while I'd been out? No-one. ... Back out on to the street until it got dark.

Next day there were reports from all sides of widespread acts of terror against Jews. There were calls to action: Jews had shot at German soldiers and for every soldier killed 100 Jews must die. The newspapers and pamphlets were all full of unspeakable acts of anti-semitic brutality.

I rushed to the Lithuanian police. At the door I met a Lithuanian detective who knew my husband well. He promised to find out where my two were and to let me know. He never contacted me. I often met him later. He avoided speaking to me.

For three days I ran backwards and forwards like this. At home, ... Gretchen helped with everything. We understood each other without the need for words. On the third day the phone rang at midday. Marie! "Mum? It's me. Is dad with you? I'm coming straight home."

But I said that it was a bad sign that Marie was alone. And then there she was, dear Marie, very hot, very dirty, her eyes unnaturally bright. First a wash, a shower, a change of clothes, then a good meal. But she'd be able to tell us everything while she was eating.

"As we went along Laisves Allee, a partisan – he'd been a colleague of mine in Sodyba<sup>8</sup> – called out to us: "You're a communist, now you'll get your punishment. Who's the gentleman? Your father? He must come along as well." We were both taken to the police

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<sup>7</sup> The Laisves Aleja (Freedom Avenue) was Kaunas' high street. Max Holzman's bookshop Priba had been at number 48.

<sup>8</sup> Literally "The Lithuanian Court", a partially state-run co-operative selling food such as fruit, vegetables and honey. Marie had worked in the office there for a while.

station. There we were separated. Dad called out to me: "Whichever of us gets out first will try to get the other out." I didn't see dad again after that.

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That same day I went along to the German security police. "Just appear confident, as a German," Marie had instructed me. I had to wait a long time in a reception room; then an official came and asked me a lot of questions. A German living in the Eastern area was rather suspect, because all Germans had been repatriated to the German Empire. "Aha. You stayed because of your Jewish husband. Come back tomorrow with a written request for his release."

Next day, a different official. The same questions all over again. "Leave your request here, we'll find out whether your husband is in prison. Come back the day after tomorrow."

Two days later – no-one knew anything about my request. Again, a different lot of SS-officials. The same questions all over again.

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Pages 23-30

Next morning I went to the market very early. There were no vegetables, no fruit. Eventually, on the very edge of town, I got fresh wild strawberries from some farmers who had come with their cart. I hurried home. Perhaps my husband would be back. No, no-one. The children and I went out into the street. As always since the Germans had arrived there were shots in the distance and close to. They were hunting down scattered Russian soldiers and Jews. We walked up and down, up and down, stood for ages at the crossroads, where I'd waited for several hours a few days before.

Every five minutes the electric lift which connects the Grüner Berg with the town released a stream of people. Sometimes we thought we recognised father. That man over there, hurrying, wearing a white panama? But no, a total stranger. We stood and stood and at last, tired to death, went off home.

We waited like this the whole of the next day. Then I went to the Lithuanian police again. They were not so friendly this time, behaved as though they knew nothing, gave vague answers, made no promises. I wondered if Algis Moschinskis might have more luck. Everyone knew him, and he had a very persuasive manner. Algis lived in Panemune, a good hour-and-a-half out of town. I walked along the dusty road in the baking heat, walked and walked. Bands of German soldiers, singing loudly, or rather bawling, "Little Ursula." This mob – were they really my countrymen?

Algis wasn't at home. His attractive wife sat sturdily in front of the house with her fresh-faced children. What do you know of my fears, I thought. But the peaceful picture was a sham. Frau Moschinskis told me that her youngest brother had been murdered by the partisans for being a member of the communist youth organisation. Her parents were in hiding in the

house. Her father, a doctor in a provincial town, was well-known as a friend of the Soviets and did not dare to go in to his practice at the moment.

Algis finally came back from his meadow, bare-chested and sunburned. He'd been mowing. He promised to come to town on his bike next morning, to go to the authorities again with me." We'll try every avenue until we succeed," he said, making an effort to comfort me.

I turned down their invitation to stay and eat with them; I wanted to be back with the children as soon as possible. The way back was even more exhausting – the burning sun, the dust, so many soldiers. At the edge of the road there was a pump. I drank the cold water. I felt dizzy, held on to a fence, saw the soldiers as if through a white veil, heard German words, saw German faces, so foreign to me, so foreign ...

We met again next day, dashed backwards and forwards, spoke, pleaded, all without getting any definite information. In the town terrible things had been happening. In Bahnhofstrasse on a garage forecourt a group of partisans had set upon around ....<sup>9</sup> Jews, who, unarmed as they were, were all slaughtered. A huge crowd had gathered to watch this brutal spectacle and to stoke up the blind rage of the murderers with shouts of encouragement. But there were some voices which spoke out their disgust at such bestiality. "It's a disgrace for Lithuania!", a few brave folk said, and were promptly silenced. News of terrible events like this reached us from all sides.

The children and I did not dare to speak of these things with one another. The glass bowl of strawberries which we'd prepared for father's homecoming still stood there. They had gone mouldy days ago, but no-one took them away.

I went again to the security police. They recalled my earlier visit and gave me a list of the Jewish inmates of the prison to look at. "If you find him on that we'll release him straight away." His name wasn't there.

I went slowly home through the hot midday sun. He isn't there any more, I kept saying to myself. How shall I tell the children? But I didn't need to say anything. They understood, and kept quiet. I threw the mouldy strawberries away, cooked a meal just like any other day ...

Perhaps he was at the Seventh Fort? That was where the archive of important historical documents and books used to be kept. Some people had apparently managed to speak to their relatives there. Towards evening I went and stood outside the iron gate of the Seventh Fort. I spoke to the watchman, promised a substantial bribe. O.K., he would look. I waited and waited. At last he reappeared. "No, no Max Holzman here."

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<sup>9</sup> Helene Holzman left this space blank, obviously in order to put in the number of victims later. This massacre, at which many uniformed Germans were present and took photographs, took place on 27 June 1941 and claimed the lives of around 60 Jews. The garage belonging to the "Lietukis" co-operative was not actually in Bahnhofstrasse, as Helene Holzman reports, but in Vytautas-Prospekt, which leads to the station. Before the Soviet occupation of Lithuania this was where the Shell petrol station had stood.

Just near the Fort there was a tiny shop. The owner, Wanda, an extremely pretty young girl, was a popular figure in the whole area. Her little shop was always full of people. Not only was she a good business-woman and knew how to deal with all sorts of people, but she was also warm-hearted and clear-headed.

The partisans from the Seventh Fort used to go there, too, to buy cigarettes and to joke with Wanda. Wanda understood my position immediately and spoke to them for me. The partisans promised to find my husband and [get] him freed. But they couldn't find him. "You should have asked us earlier", one of them said, "now a lot of them aren't there any more". "Not there any more?", I said. "Where are they then?" There was no answer.

I often went to Wanda's after that, down the broad avenue of poplars along which hundreds of Jews had been driven. Most of them were now "not there any more". One of them was Max Holzman. One of them was my husband.

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Every day new horrors, more despair. A poster with huge letters was up all over town. All Jews to wear a yellow star on the left breast. No Jews to walk on the pavement, they must walk next to it on the right-hand side of the road, in single file. Special ration cards would be handed out for Jews and there would be special shops. They were to have less bread, less sugar, less cooking fat, less meat than the others.

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Mid-July. More huge posters: all Jews in the town to move to Vilijampole within the month, where they were to be "concentrated" in one place, in a ghetto, separated from the other townfolk.<sup>10</sup> Vilijampole was in the north of the town, on the other side of the Viliija; it was a poor suburb, most of the houses wooden and with no sewers or water supply. The Jews could exchange their houses and flats for places like this in Vilijampole. They were forbidden to sell their houses and furniture or their valuables.

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On the Sunday we went to the forest to pick fruit for Tante Fischel. "Don't go too far into the woods," the people who lived near by warned us, "there are still Russians hiding there; they shoot anyone they meet." But we were not afraid of Russians. Along the edges of the paths there were hundreds of strawberries and beneath the fir trees it was blue with bilberries. No one seemed to have been here. Perhaps they were all afraid of lurking Russians. Gretchen stayed close to me, but Marie kept going off and getting lost. I was always having to call her and go looking for her.

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<sup>10</sup> On 10 July 1941 the Lithuanian military commander of Kaunas, Jurgis Bobelis, and the mayor, Kazys Pal issued the command that all Jews had to move to the ghetto in Vilijampole by 15 August at the latest.

She had found some raspberry bushes in a boggy, grassy clearing. We got our arms and legs completely scratched, then we sat down at the edge of the path beneath a huge pine, just as we had sat there in the forest a hundred times before. All around us the air was full of buzzing and twittering. We could smell the flowers on the grass. A perfect, perfect July day. Then it was time to go back home and there would be no father there waiting. We had had no news of him, nothing at all. The prison was full of Jews. If he was one of them, why could he not find a way of getting a message to us?

Next day I heard how a partisan at Wanda's had said that there were almost no Jews left in the Seventh Fort. "We shot them all," he had said calmly, giving his gun to a little boy to hold. "Would you like to shoot the Jews as well?" But the child pushed the gun away and said "No, no." "That child is better than you are," Wanda said. "He knows that it's a sin to kill people." But the partisan just said calmly "Jews are not people."

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Pages 38-40

A few days later Marie went out in the afternoon again. She said she had to meet her friend, Nina, to whom she was giving German lessons. Evening came. Marie had still not got back. After nine. I stood by the side of the garden gate, looked to right and left, ran up and down the road. Gretchen came out. We grew more and more anxious. She had promised so faithfully not to be late. It was gradually getting dark. In the distance a quick, light figure appeared, coming down the road. No, not her. Fewer and fewer people were about. We couldn't see much now, we could only listen anxiously for approaching steps. It struck ten. After ten there was a strict curfew. We waited another quarter of an hour, then we went inside without speaking.

A night of agony, a day of agony. The next morning I went to her workplace. No-one knew anything. Nina said, no, Marie had not been to see her the previous afternoon. I asked the Director to ring the police. He refused coldly. He wanted nothing to do with this. I ran to all Marie's friends. No-one had seen her.

The following morning I went to the Lithuanian police headquarters. I had to wait ages in a reception room before they would let me in. A young officer looked through a long list. Yes, the day before yesterday, on 4 August Marie Holzman had been arrested and sent to prison. He tried to get me to calm down. Many people were being arrested at the moment and, if they had done nothing wrong, were set free again. However, if she had belonged to Komsomol, things didn't look so good. But still, I should bring her something to eat the next day, Thursday.

Terrible though the situation was, still I was a little comforted by the officer's friendly manner. At least I now knew where to place her in my mind. I hurried off to tell Gretchen so she needn't suffer the agony of uncertainty any longer. Next morning we packed a little



basket with food: butter, four hard-boiled eggs, sausage, sugar, redcurrants, bread. Opposite the prison was a big yard. A large crowd of people stood there, mainly women with their gifts of food for the prisoners. We joined the queue.

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At last we approached the shed where the food parcels were registered and taken in. Holzman? Surely that was a Jewish name? Jews were dealt with [on] another day. No, a German name, I said. The official searched in his big notebook, found something, made a note, gave us a number. We had to wait with this number in another shed. The food we had brought was weighed. No more than two kilograms was allowed. Bread and butter were cut through to check for forbidden objects. Then we had to go with a porter, a very young man, across the road to the prison gate. We were to wait there.

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This fear, this terrible fear, always the same fear, our frightful secret. Then the messenger came back, gave us our empty basket and a slip of paper on which Marie had written her name. "She was so pleased," he said "she wanted to write more but it's strictly forbidden." The immediacy of this message was very moving. We went home, feeling calmer.

From this time on we lived for each Thursday. The whole week we collected nourishing and tasty things in our straw shopping bag. The most difficult things to get were butter and ham but we always managed it and we even managed to get sweets. And every time the long wait in the huge yard in the sun, the rude officials, who addressed the frightened relatives with the familiar "Du" and treated them almost like convicts. That terrified wait for the sign of life that would put our minds at rest. She wrote in Lithuanian: Maryte Holcmanaite. And every time I studied it carefully, trying to read her state of mind in it. Would my little girl manage to keep up her courage, would she be strong? Would she be brave and stand up to the terrible hardships of prison?

In the mean time her boyfriend, Viktor, had found out that on that fateful day she had been in the hospital, visiting some German soldiers she had got to know. The conversation had turned to her usual topic: peace at any price. A German army doctor heard what was said and joined in the conversation. She was just a young girl, speaking out for freedom, but he suspected her of being an enemy agent and had her arrested.

I went to see the police again. No, not their responsibility, I should go to the German police. But they were extremely unfriendly. They remembered how often I had been to see them about my husband. They would need to find out whether my daughter was really as innocent as [she] maintained. I need not come back, that would do no good at all. I had a terrible sinking feeling as I left. Those hard, fanatical faces, that cold, cutting tone, that horrible Nazi uniform with its unspeakable swastika. These people spoke our native language,

but nevertheless there was no hope of getting through to them. All we could do was avoid them, turn our backs, run away. And our Marie was in their hands.

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