



TRIBUTE TO LIBERTY News

Commemorating the Victims of Totalitarian Communism

Volume 3, Issue 2
Spring 2011

Tribute to Liberty is a Canadian organization whose mission is to establish a memorial to the victims of totalitarian Communism in the National Capital Region.

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Tribute to Liberty
P.O. Box 84558
2336 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario M6S 4Z7
info@tributetoliberty.ca
www.tributetoliberty.ca

Charitable #: 814999660RR0001

Polish Girl Scouts Raise Funds for the Memorial

Tribute to Liberty would like to thank the generous efforts of the Polish Girl Scouts for their donation to the Memorial to Victims of Totalitarian Communism.

During World War II, Poles were displaced from their homeland and many felt they could not return to a country overtaken by the Communist regime. Therefore, many immigrated in large numbers to Canada. Polish Girl Scouts, active in Canada since the early 1950s, embrace and commemorate this history which is their own. It is fitting then, that the Canadian Commissioner of the Polish Girl Scouts challenged local troops and districts of the Polish Girl Scouts in Canada to contribute to Tribute to Liberty.

The Polish Girl Scouts Association troop "Wieliczka" made up of instructors/leaders, rangers, girl scouts, brownies and sparks is contributing \$500 towards the memorial in honour of all the scouts that contributed to the freedom and solidarity of Poland.



Druzyna Zrdlo, Druzyna Strumien and Druzyna Nurt, Szczep Wieliczka – Mississauga

The Polish Girl Scouts Association troop "Szarotki" raised \$200 for Tribute to Liberty by selling memorial candles as a way to pay respect to those who lost their lives. They sold the memorial candles the day before All Saints Day at a local cemetery, where they also held a mini memorial to pray for the lives that were lost. "Szarotki" troop decided to donate the money that was raised to Tribute to Liberty as a thank you for honouring the lives that fought for freedom.

"Szczep Kartuzy" troop contributed towards the memorial in order to remember and honour the innocent victims that suffered under Communist rule. Their roots trace back to Poland, and they all have relatives that lived through the losses, hardships and sufferings of Communism. Their donation of \$100 was earned by Christmas caroling at the homes of Polish people in Burlington.

The Polish Scouting Association in Hamilton is an organization consisting of over 40 participants. Scout leaders volunteer their time to educate youths about the importance of their heritage and to be independent individuals who contribute to the community. Communism will always be a part of Polish ancestry, and the troop recognizes the need to commemorate the lives of the victims who suffered under Communism. The troop donated \$100.



Szczep Wisla - Hamilton

The Polish Girl Scouts of the “Zarzewie” troop in Brampton collected funds and are donating \$100 to the memorial in an effort to “Remember the Past and Honour Those Who Perished, Teach the Present and Instill Hope for the Future.”

Tribute to Liberty Invited to Speak at the League of Ukrainian Canadians National Convention

The League of Ukrainian Canadians (LUC) invited Tribute to Liberty Board Chair Alide Forstmanis to speak at its national convention to educate LUC members about the memorial project. Mrs. Forstmanis attended the meeting on Friday, April 29th and made a presentation and answered questions from members.

Tribute to Liberty continues to reach out to communities to build bridges in support of the memorial.

Greetings on the 93rd Anniversary of the Reestablishment of the State of Lithuania

Tribute to Liberty extended the following greeting at a reception at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa on February 16th hosted by the Lithuanian Ambassador to Canada, H.E. Ms. Ginte Damusis. The greeting was read by Tribute to Liberty board member Teresa Berezowski.

On behalf of Tribute to Liberty, the Canadian organization building the Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa, I extend warm greetings on the occasion of the 93rd Anniversary of the Reestablishment of the State of Lithuania.

As you celebrate the independence of your country, I would like to stress the importance of commemorating the past, so as to never forget how hard-won freedom is, and what is lost—lives, property, hope—when freedom is gone.

The ideal of the democratic state is continually under threat from totalitarian governments that seek to enslave their people, rather than give them the freedom that is

their due. Lithuanians, who have struggled at different points in history to gain freedom and independence, know about the fragility of freedom. Lithuania suffered under the terrible yoke of Communism for a large part of the 20th century. Your community is one of those that will be commemorated by the Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa.

As we gather here together to commemorate Lithuania's independence, let us remember her hard-won freedom, and let us think of Lithuania as an example of what the victory of liberty looks like.

Tribute to Liberty in the News

Tribute to Liberty and the memorial project has received wide media coverage over the past two years, including articles in the *National Post*, *Maclean's*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Many of these articles can be found on Tribute to Liberty's website on the Latest News page.

Tribute to Liberty also reaches out to communities through their newspapers. Recent coverage includes articles in: *Nasha Doroha*, *Magyar Elet - Hungarian Life*, *Neue Welt*, *Das Echo*, *Jewish Tribune* and *Catholic Insight*.

History Unhidden: Willi Ristau's Story

My name is Willi Ristau and I am very pleased and quite proud to see a monument being built in Ottawa to recognize the victims of communism. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to share my own experiences in this free country, my adopted homeland Canada. Having lived in Waterloo region ever since my emigration in 1957, I am often asked about my nationality to which I reply that I am Latvian by birth, German by origin and Canadian by choice—with all my heart!

I would like to dedicate this to my late father who, at the age of 53, was the driving force behind my family's emigration to Canada, and who started a new life for us from scratch five times over—the easiest time in Latvia and the most difficult in Canada. He often told us children that the short time spent in Latvia working the small farm given to him as a wedding present, living off the land—a simple, carefree life, was the best time of his life.

This peaceful life changed very quickly in 1939 when the Soviet Red Army invaded Latvia as a result of Russia's takeover of Latvia (Latvia had been an independent country since the 1920 Paris Peace Treaty, and is now again as I was able to witness firsthand in 1993 during a visit to the beautiful city of Riga with my son, Harold). The German Reich annexed part of Poland and the people of German origin were given the choice to leave or remain under Russian control. During the Russian Civil War (1918-1920) the Red Communist Army marched through Latvia murdering, stealing food and burning buildings,

while my parents hid themselves and their livestock deep in the woods. This experience made the choice to leave an easy one for my parents.

Our life farming under German rule was prosperous but unsettled.



Willi's family in Latvia in the mid-1930s

In 1944, my father was drafted into the German army to fight against Russia, which retreated back to Berlin and in the fall of 1945 marched by foot all the way to Moscow. Due to malnutrition, just a quarter of the prisoners of war survived, my father being one of them. However, after becoming ill in 1947 he was sent home. He told us many times how he prayed to be returned to his family of eight children, and when the good Lord granted him his wish he was grateful although very sick.

It took my father six months to recover enough to work the small farm my mother had received from the large piece of land expropriated by the Communist government. Until then we had survived on bread and potatoes—we did not starve but were always hungry. Through his hard work my father managed to increase the land from six to nine hectares, yet most of the produce had to be sold to the Communist government. The Communists also told each farmer what and how much to grow and where to live and work. After finishing grade eight, I was assigned to learn a woodworking trade. For the next three years I travelled seven km on gravel roads, four days a week, and spent two days in trade school in the city of Halle which for me was the best part of learning a trade.

On June 17, 1953, a two-day rebellion against the Communist Regime ended with Russian tanks moving into the city to restore order. Many leaders of the revolt escaped to West Germany to avoid persecution but others were shot. The local Communist newspaper reported the event as the West trying to invade the East to destroy the Communist labour paradise.

At this time the East German mark was worth just one quarter of the West German mark.

Meanwhile, in the 1950s, the Communist government of East Germany had decided to conglomerate the small farms to create the large, more economically viable farms of Russia. Films of beautiful Russian farms shown at town hall meetings to promote the idea were questioned by my father as he'd never seen any of these while in Russia. Those expressing opposition to the idea were picked up by police and never seen or heard from again.

In 1954, my father sent me to a youth rally in East Berlin to plan an escape route to West Germany. I was 17 and scared but enjoyed it very much as it was the first time I could remember ever having enough to eat! All day we marched through the streets chanting Communist slogans which none of us believed. At night I slipped away from camp and took the U-Bahn, the subway which circled underneath Berlin, to West Berlin which felt like heaven with its well-lit streets and shops filled with goods. I stayed just a few hours before returning. The next morning, several youths who had been caught going to West Germany as I had done were forced to publicly condemn Western ideas while the fashionable t-shirts they had purchased were burned for all to see.

One afternoon in 1954, my father announced that we would be escaping to West Berlin immediately. Taking only the clothes on our backs and three gallons of pork fat, we boarded a train first to Halle and then to East Berlin. Our family separated on the train. When questioned by the police I told them we were heading to the wedding of a relative in North Germany. When asked why the tickets went only to Berlin, I told them that I had attended a youth rally this past May and wanted to show my brother the accomplishments of the East German Communist workers. As proof of my story I pointed out the Communist shirt I was wearing, and we were let go. Others trying to escape were found and sent to labour camps. After arriving at our friend's home in the free city of West Berlin, my father told us that if the police had wound up capturing him on the train, he would not have let them take him alive because after having the experience of brutality as a Russian prisoner of war he would rather be dead than Red! Soon we were housed in West Berlin refugee camps, and later I was grateful to attend a West German college for eight weeks. The Democratic Constitution I learned about at this college was in direct contrast to the Communist philosophy I was forced to study to receive my journeyman papers. In East Germany we were taught that the Communists would take over the world in the near future, yet as one living in a Christian family I did not believe it. Still, we had to belong to a Communist youth group in order to graduate.

In the end, the good Lord has brought me and my family to the beautiful country of Canada after wandering and living as a teenager through four different countries and four different political systems. I've told my four children often how grateful they should be to have been born in this rich country of abundance. The good Lord has blessed me, my family and their families in more ways than we could have ever hoped or prayed for in this great, free land—the land of milk and honey!

Submitted by Willi Ristau

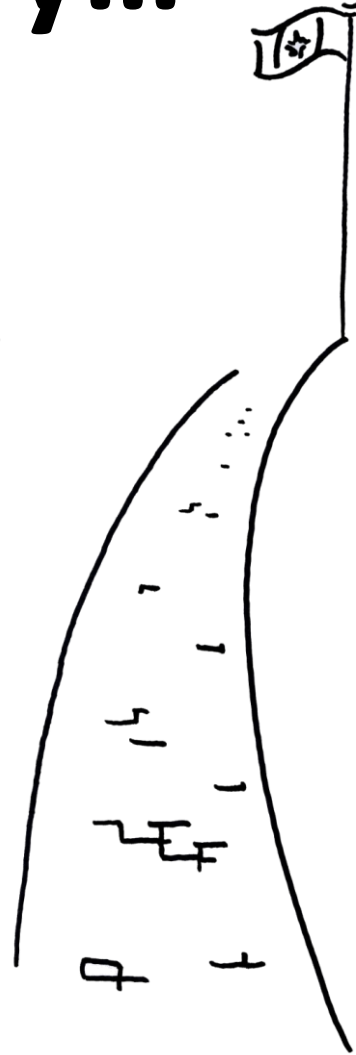
Tell Your Story...

And help build the Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa.

A donation of \$100 buys a brick for the virtual Pathway to Liberty that leads to the Memorial.

Each brick can be donated with a story of a victim of Communism, a message or a dedication. Donate today at: tributetoliberty.ca.

For more information about Tribute to Liberty and the Memorial to Victims of Communism, visit tributetoliberty.ca.



Mail-in Contribution Form

**Don't forget to enclose your story,
message or dedication!**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Phone (____) _____ Email _____

Donation Amount: \$1000 _____ \$500 _____ \$100 _____ Other _____ **I wish to remain anonymous:** _____

Please make cheque payable to Tribute to Liberty and mail to:
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