



## Project Update

At the end of June the National Capital Commission (NCC) board of directors gave final design approval for the Memorial; construction can now begin!

Excavation of the site at the Garden of the Provinces and Territories site has already begun. The sculpture that was on the site has been removed, and a sod turning is expected to take place this fall.

The construction will be done through two contracts. There will be one contract with a construction company through a tendering process to construct the Memorial platform, dedication wall, gathering area, landscaping and lighting. There will be a separate contract with Paul Raff Studios for the architectural and sculptural elements of the Memorial.

The memorial will be made out of four different materials: limestone, granite, bronze and concrete, and will feature two four-metre tall bronze arches.

Please don't forget about the opportunity you have to memorialize the name of a loved one on the Wall of Remembrance which will be part of the Memorial—with a donation of \$1000. We are building this Memorial to tell the stories and preserve the memory of those who witnessed Communism firsthand. Space on the Wall is limited. Visit <http://tributetoliberty.ca/contribute> or use the last page of this newsletter to donate today!



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

Tribute to Liberty's Newsletter is published four times a year. If you would like to add an email address to our subscriber list please email [info@tributetoliberty.ca](mailto:info@tributetoliberty.ca).

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[www.tributetoliberty.ca](http://www.tributetoliberty.ca)



men stormed in, asking Father where he is hiding the illegal publications he was distributing on the streets of Bucharest. With a calm, cold voice he replied that he does not know what they are talking about. Mother was speechless. She actually did not know anything about Father's involvement with the resistance movement.

In response, the Secret Police proceeded to tear down the 3 bookcases, frenetically looking in the books in the hopes of finding the publications, while Father stood next to his desk and watched them. After searching all 3 rooms of the apartment, turning drawers and paintings and going through clothes without finding any trace of the papers, the leader decided to take Father with them, calling him a criminal and an enemy of the people—loud enough that all occupants of the 5 apartments in the villa would hear and understand.

Now, let's see who was this criminal and enemy of the people:

Born in 1915 in a small town near the Carpathian Mountains, my father George Cantuniari came from a middle-class family. His father fought with heroism during the First World War and died in the famous Battle of Mărășești in 1917, leaving a 2-year-old son (Father) and a widow.

After high school, Father was admitted at the Aviation Academy to become a pilot. When Romania entered the Second World War in 1941, Father fought the enemy with courage. His bravery was honoured with 3 prestigious medals presented by the Commander of the Army and the King of Romania. After being wounded, he retired and enrolled in aerospace engineering at the Bucharest Polytechnic Institute. At the end of his studies in 1947, he became a flight instructor for young army officers. Later on, he was hired as an engineer at the National Institute for Aerospace Research.

After Father's arrest, a military tribunal sentenced him to 25 years of prison with re-education and a fine of 15,000 lei which, in 1950, was five times the annual salary of a young engineer. The sentence was later reduced to 8 years, as the authorities were not able to find any proof of a crime other than being part of a resistance group. This group was very clear in their demands: reinstate the democratic government, return the freedom of speech and free the country from the abusive occupation of Russia.

And Father began his ordeal in some of the most

## ***History Unhidden*** **Resistance in Romania**

The Secret Police took Father during an evening of the 1950 Spring in Bucharest. At the time, Romania was under Russian occupation and the new Communist Party in power was ready to eradicate any opposition or organized resistance.

As Mother was preparing me for bed—I was 2 years old—a big commotion started in front of our apartment's door. Father opened the door and several

terrible prisons of Communist Romania, including the infamous extermination camp of the Danube-Black Sea Canal known as the “Grave” of the finest and brightest intellectuals the country had.

Most political prisoners like Father were kept first at the Jilava prison near Bucharest. Shortly later, they were dispatched to other prisons in the country.

One day I asked Mother when will Father return and where he is now. She answered that he was in a hospital, very sick from a contagious disease. Mother always had good answers to my questions and was preparing me for the visit to the Jilava “hospital”.

When I saw Father in the prison, I was 3 years old and he was 35. Through the bars that separated us, I tried to touch his hand and told him to get well soon and come home. Father made a joke about his so-called disease and I asked him to share a cookie his mother sent him. He was happy that we could do this. After a while, a guard came to take him cutting our visit short.

A month later we learnt from a freed prisoner who had been Father’s cell roommate that he was to be moved to an undisclosed prison. The ex-prisoner also brought Mother a small cross carved by Father from a chicken bone and a very small knob engraved with these words: “Look in the desk.”

That evening Mother removed all the drawers from Father’s desk and discovered a little door behind one of the drawers. That space was full of the published materials/manifests Father could not distribute. Miraculously, the police had not found them. Otherwise, Mother would have been arrested as well, even though she knew nothing of the political activities of her husband.

That night in the bathroom, Mother burnt each of the publications, one by one. When she finished in the early hours of the morning, she left for the Hospital where she worked as a physician.

A month later our own ordeal started. The Secret Police came every night to our door shouting that we had to vacate the apartment, which was rented from the Army, as Father was an officer in the Army.

Eventually, a handwritten note was left on the door. It stated: “Leave the apartment in 24 hours or we will break the door and get you”. When Mother went to the hospital that day, worry replaced her usual smile on her beautiful face. She had been so brave since Father was imprisoned that none of her patients guessed what was happening to us until that day. But

one of them, a tram driver from the Transportation Authority, asked what was going on and if he could help. Mother took the note from her purse and showed him. Without saying a word, he took the note and left.



He returned the note to her the same day. The back was now featuring another hand-written message to the Secret Police: “If anyone dares to touch Dr. Cantuniari, they will have to deal with me.” It was signed by the Manager of the Transportation Authority who probably was a high-ranking member in the Communist Party. Mother was advised to put the note behind the glass window of the door facing the stairs, so the Secret Police can see the signature. After that, the Secret Police left us alone. Silence and calm were restored in the building. We were now safe, or as safe as the wife and child of a political prisoner could be.

To keep her position and practise her profession, the Secret Police forced her to divorce Father. Most of our friends’ parents had to divorce in these circumstances as well. If you refused, the way my aunt did, you were prohibited from holding a professional job. A French teacher, she had to become a cardboard cutter in a factory.

Father agreed to the divorce. Although they were divorced, Mother waited for his return and would send him food, clothes and cigarettes when the prison

would allow it. But Father was not a model prisoner. He would rebel and the guards would punish him. One of the punishments was to return the parcels he received from us.

Meanwhile, Mother was working very hard to provide me with the best care and education a child can get. A nanny was hired to take care of me while she was working 12 and 16-hour days.

Father returned after the 8 years of his sentence, with numerous health problems but not re-educated. He was unchanged. No prison and no camp could break his spirit.

After 1989, the Secret Police made archive files available. In 2006, I was able to study Father's files and learn more.

He was under permanent surveillance from day one until his visit to USA in 1987. When he returned from prison he was able to regain the position he held before his arrest at the National Institute for Aerospace Research. It did not last long. They had the legal obligation to hire him, but let him go after 6 months. To have a former political prisoner on staff was not good PR.

After one year of looking for a job, Father was finally hired by a garage as a car washer. Nothing was available to people like him. No one wanted people like him. He washed cars for almost 2 years until he found a position in his field as a design engineer at the Bucharest Bus Factory. He retired 15 years later on medical grounds. The prisons and the camps destroyed his health but not his spirit. In fact, none of his friends or relatives who were sent to the communist gulag returned re-educated. It did not work.

As his pension was small, Father had to give English and German lessons—2 languages he was fluent in—to survive. In 1985 an American friend invited him to Atlanta, USA. The Romanian authorities would not give him a passport. After waiting for one year to get the passport issued, his friend spoke at the Free Europe radio and asked Ceausescu to let his friend come and visit him, saying that if it was denied, he was going to start an international campaign against the communist regime of Romania telling the world how international rules and engagements are broken in Romania by the very president who signed them.

A month later Father received his passport. He left on a 6-month visa to visit his friend who was very sick.

Three months after his arrival in the USA, the Romanian authorities confiscated his property, a 3-room apartment inherited from his parents, making sure he would not return to the country. The regime hated patriots, which is what Father was until his last breath. He obtained his green card in 2 months, along with political asylum. All his attempts to recover his apartment were in vain. He died in 2002 in Atlanta, USA, far away from the country he deeply loved. According to his last wish, I spread most of his ashes on his parents' grave in Romania.

Submitted by Adina Cantuniari, on behalf of her courageous parents Carmen and George Cantuniari.

## ***History Unhidden*** **Two Romanian Stories**

### **Jean Arnautu's Story**

My uncle, Jean Arnautu, was a Romanian army officer. After the Communists seized power, together with his parents, sisters and brother, he was sentenced to compulsory residence order in a Romanian city called Roman. Becoming an opponent of the regime, he left the city and became the leader of an anti-communist resistance group in the northern Romanian mountains, in the province of Bucovina.



After 1 year of fighting, he was captured and condemned to a life sentence, being imprisoned at Ramnicu Sarat, one of the worst Communist prisons—a real Gulag. The isolation was total; the miracle of survival can be explained by strong characters, the usage of Morse communications, but also, by pure chance. Some prisoners died or ended their own lives. Jean Arnautu died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1959, after a prolonged hunger strike—132 days—an unique case in Communist prisons. He was 26 years old when he was sent to prison and 36 when he died. Five years after his death, in 1964, the family found the truth about his fate and after another five years they were able to find and bury him in the family crypt.



From “The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile” site: *The prison in Râmnicu Sărat has operated for several years as a transit point for political prisoners who were being transferred to other detention centres to serve their sentence. A series of representatives of political parties, clergymen, as well as other unwanted persons were afterwards incarcerated for longer periods of time in “The Prison of Silence”. Among the most famous prisoners were former leaders of democratic parties, such as Ion Mihalache, Ilie Lazăr, Victor Rădulescu Pogoneanu or Corneliu Coposu.*

### **Boris Cernev’s Story**

My maternal grandfather, Boris Cernev, was a student at the Polytechnic University of Saint Petersburg. Coming from a Romanian province, Bessarabia, occupied at that time by Russia, he was conscripted in the Tsarist Army in 1917. When the Bolshevik Revolution erupted, and the Tsarist officers were being brutally assassinated by the Reds, he was saved by the members of his platoon by removing his officer insignia to look like a simple soldier. After the end of the war, he returned home completely changed by the horrors he had witnessed. Boris went into Law

Studies, thus becoming a judge. Due to his political neutrality, he was elected Mayor of Ismail, a town in Bessarabia.



Because of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Bessarabia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. Consequently, the Romanian population of Bessarabia had three days to leave the province. My grandmother and mother found refuge in Romania. My grandfather remained to hand the symbolic Key of the City to the Soviet occupants. The naivety of considering the Soviets as civilized participants in the city authority transfer cost him his freedom and later his life; Boris was arrested and sent to a gulag in Siberia where he died of cancer in 1956. The family was not able to locate his grave or find any details about his tragic end.

Submitted by Julia Petruescu

## **History Unhidden A Mennonite Story**

Tobias (born 1865, died 1932?) and Katharina Voth (née Reghr, born 1862, died 1921) lived in the German-speaking Mennonite colony of Neu Samara, in Orenburg Oblast. They were successful farmers, and community leaders, with Tobias operating the town mill of their village of Lugowsk and serving as a travelling minister for the church. They had five children, Jakob, Anna, Katarina, Johannes, and Susanna. Katharina died of an illness during the Russian Civil War years and Tobias remarried to the Widow Braun in 1921 (died 1932).

After the Russian Civil War, with the Bolsheviks’ religious persecution and ‘dekulakization’ threatening their way of life, Tobias sought passage for his three youngest children and their families outside of the

Soviet Union. From 1924 to 1925, Katarina (with husband Franz Klassen and one small child), Johannes (with wife Katharina Baergen and three small children), and Susanna joined the wave of Mennonite refugees migrating to Canada, settling initially in Manitoba.

Tobias and his wife were tragically unable to escape the Soviet Union with the rest of their family. Tobias was arrested in 1929 while seeking a passport in Moscow and sent to the Siberian gulags, where he likely died over the winter of 1932 at the age of 67. The Widow Braun returned to Lugowsk and was likely lost to the famine that began when agricultural production was collectivized starting in 1931. There is no record as to what happened to Jakob. Anna would die in Kazakhstan in 1943.



Their relatives in Canada awaited news of their family in the Soviet Union for years. As the head of the family in Canada, Johannes had kept a room at the ready in the homestead in Springstein for his parents to stay in when they finally arrived in Canada, decorated with a tapestry that was the only heirloom they had brought with them. It was not until 1931 that the family received letters from Tobias in the work camps, in which he described the slow starvation he was being subjected to. An attempt to send supplies to him failed, and he died in 1932, news relayed to the family in Canada by other prisoners. Famine in Lugowsk led to the death of his wife.

The legacy of their service to their community, their faith, and their devotion to their family, inspired a commitment to serving God and their fellow man. Herta and younger brother Alvin (the first Voth born in Canada) became nurses, and served as Mennonite Brethren missionaries in South America. Faith, family, and fellowship were Tobias and Katharina's principles and Canada allowed their 3 surviving children, 17 of their grandchildren, their 54 great grandchildren, and their 76 great-great grandchildren the freedom to embody those principles in their lives, and to work at

empowering others around the world to do the same.

Stories like those of Katharina, Tobias, the almost 50,000 other Mennonite refugees to Canada, and the over 100,000 souls who were forced to stay in the Soviet Union must not be forgotten. What must also be remembered is the joy and hope that people can find even among the devastation of communism.

As Katarina told Herta later, safe in Canada, about a freezing night in Neu Samara after the revolution but before the exodus, when the Voths were travelling to combat the effects of the ongoing famine:

*We were taken to their family home, where we were watched from the corner of the room, where some small children, nearly naked, skeletal, huddled together on a pile of straw and rags, too weary to move.*

*Despite all the misery we had already witnessed, our hearts still threatened to break at the sight of their listless eyes staring from too-big sockets. We longed to take them away from their cruel world and give them all that the children in our land take for granted. Instead, we could only offer them the very last of our supplies of food and a small garment for each child. As I bent over each form to put that gift into the small hand, I felt in my soul that this piece of clothing would, in all likelihood, be the last that child would ever need in this world. There was nothing more we could do and prepared to leave.*

*Suddenly, we were startled by sounds of joy from the children's corner. The oldest boy was sitting up. He had pulled his new shirt over his head and with the hint of a grin on his shrunken lips, he forced his voice to shout "Shirt on!" Then, slipping the shirt off over his head, he mumbled sadly: "Shirt off." Within seconds, the shirt was back over his head and again his cheery shout: "Shirt on!"*

*This shirt on, shirt off continued for a long time, becoming more joyful with each turn. This child's joy seeped into all of us and banished some of the gloom that was bogging us down. If a child's joy could revive in such circumstances, perhaps there was hope after all! Perhaps a new spring would find a seed still alive, having survived winter's grip of death.*

Submitted by the Voth Family

# Canada's National Memorial to the Victims of Communism

is about people, families, and the suffering they endured under Communism.

Memorialize the name of a loved one forever on the Memorial's Wall of Remembrance with a donation of \$1,000.

Tell the story of a victim of Communism by buying a brick on the virtual Pathway to Liberty that leads to the Memorial with a donation of \$200.

Donate today at [www.tributetoliberty.ca](http://www.tributetoliberty.ca) or use the mail-in form below.

To contribute to the Memorial to Victims of Communism in Ottawa you can:

**1. Become a Brick Donor - \$200.00**

- With each brick purchased you can submit the story of a victim of Communism, or a message or dedication
- Please email your story, message or dedication to [info@tributetoliberty.ca](mailto:info@tributetoliberty.ca) or include it on a separate piece of paper when you mail this form
- Submissions will be published on the Tribute to Liberty website along with donor's names.  
**Donors who wish to remain anonymous must indicate this in the space provided below**

**2. Donate to the Wall of Remembrance - \$1,000.00**

**3. Donations in any amount are welcome**

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## Mail-in Contribution Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Amount: \$1000 \_\_\_\_\_ \$200 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**I wish to remain anonymous:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque payable to: Tribute to Liberty

Please mail in to: Tribute to Liberty, 629 Mill Park Drive, Kitchener, ON, N2P 1V4

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