



## Project Update

Tribute to Liberty is pleased to announce that a sign stating the upcoming construction of the *Memorial to the Victims of Communism, Canada – A Land of Refuge* has been placed on-site at the Garden of the Provinces and Territories. The Garden has been called the “western gateway to the Parliament buildings,” and foot traffic entering Confederation Boulevard from the west, site of the War Museum and LeBreton Flats (and eventually, the new home arena of the Ottawa Senators!), all goes past the site.

This summer, Tribute to Liberty has had the pleasure of hosting two delegations (pictured below and on the next page). In June, Hungarian Minister of Human Capacities Zoltan Balog and Hungarian Minister of State for Family, Youth and International Affairs Katalin Novak were part of a group hosted by the Hungarian Ambassador to Canada Balint Odor. In August, Tribute to Liberty Chair Ludwik Klimkowski visited the site with Jan Dziedzicz, Poland’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

A site dedication is expected to take place this fall with completion of major elements expected in late 2018.

## Memorialize Your Loved Ones—Donate to the Wall of Remembrance

The start date for the construction of the memorial is fast approaching, but it’s not too late to forever memorialize the name of a loved one on the National Memorial to the Victim’s of Communism Wall of Remembrance with a \$1,000 donation. Space on the wall is limited. Make your donation today to ensure the world never forgets the suffering endured under Communism. Please see the end of this newsletter for information on how to donate.

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).

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 84558, 2336 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6S 4Z7

Charitable #: 814999660RR0001

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



Tribute to Liberty Board Chair Ludwik Klimkowski talks to the Hungarian delegation as they visit the Memorial site.



Meeting with the Polish delegation.



The Polish delegation views the Memorial site.

## Tribute to Liberty Participates in Commemorations

This spring and summer Tribute to Liberty participated in a number of commemorations of victims of Communism.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> Tribute to Liberty Treasurer Alide Forstmanis spoke at an event to commemorate the Bleiburg genocide. The event took place at City Hall in Mississauga, Ontario, and was organized by the Croatian Heritage Association.





On June 4<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Forstmanis participated in the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre commemoration at Hart House, at the University of Toronto. Over 200 people were in attendance. Mrs. Forstmanis gave an update about the Memorial and encouraged people to donate.



On June 13<sup>th</sup> Tribute to Liberty attended the commemoration of the June 14, 1941 deportations in the Baltic states at Nathan Phillips Square at Toronto City Hall. Over 500 people were in attendance for the candlelight rally. Mrs. Forstmanis spoke at the event giving an update on the Memorial and encouraging donations.



On June 14<sup>th</sup> Mrs. Forstmanis also attended a service for the remembrance of people from the Baltic countries deported to Siberia, held at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Latvian Church in Hamilton, Ontario. Over 50 people attended the service.



## History Unhidden

### Memories of Yugoslav Communist Terror Still Linger More Than 70 Years Later

Many decades have passed, but my grandfather, a merry, pleasant and likeable man, who is always joyful and good-humoured, still cannot erase the horrors of more than 70 years ago, when he survived what was to eventually become the greatest suffering of the Croatian people in their history.

This October, my dida (grandpa), Franjo Kasic will turn 90, and while he suffers from dementia and struggles with recognizing any of his 13 grandchildren, and even his own children when they come to visit him in his nursing home in central Croatia, there are some things he does remember vividly.

He still remembers very clearly the months and years when he witnessed atrocities committed by the ruthless and bloody so-called anti-fascist, more accurately Communist Yugoslav People's Liberation Movement and Army.

Franjo was born into a Croatian family in a small village in neighbouring Herzegovina in October 1927. On Christmas Eve in 1943, his father Bosiljko, who was only 40, was forcibly taken from their home, in front of his wife and six children, by a group of eight Moslem Partisans. The Communist Partisans skinned Bosiljko alive and would not allow his remains to be

returned to our family for burial. Franjo never found out where his father's remains were discarded. He never had a proper grave where he could go and pray and mourn his beloved father.

My grandfather Franjo retained a strong faith throughout his life, thanks to his solid Catholic upbringing. I remember my grandfather telling me that his father always taught him to forgive, for Christianity teaches us this. Yet, he was unable to forget the immense pain and brutality of losing his cherished father.

At the young age of 17, to avoid his father's destiny, Franjo joined the Croatian Army and became part of the Ustasha movement. After a few months of battling against the Communist Partisans, Franjo and his fellow soldiers were forced to retreat north, mostly on foot, for hundreds and hundreds of kilometres. They travelled from Herzegovina through Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia, into a shadowy and unpredictable future.

On May 14 and 15, 1945, after the war had ended, he joined hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war near the town of Bleiburg in the Austrian region of Carinthia. From there the prisoners of war, both civilians and soldiers, were forcibly repatriated to Communist Yugoslavia after a decision was made by British officers who stopped them there. Sadly, this decision on the treatment and forced repatriation of prisoners of war including civilians, was in contravention to the Geneva Convention. Bleiburg, Austria is where the "Way of the Cross" began. Tens of thousands were tortured and executed by the Communist Partisans. Others were forced to walk the long march back to Yugoslavia. Many died along the way from starvation, dehydration, or severe beatings.

The term "Bleiburg" is a symbol, a kind of metaphor, for all the tribulations Croatsians suffered under Tito's Communists, even though only a smaller number of victims were killed near the town and the surrounding area.

In May 1945, Franjo was a desolate and frightened 18-year-old soldier together with more than half a million others -- former soldiers, non-combatants, women, children, the elderly -- all awaiting their destiny. He contemplated suicide, but rejected the idea because his parents and priest taught him that taking one's life was a grave sin and that life was worth living.

After the surrender, Franjo was forced to join a 13-kilometre-long column of prisoners lined up in rows of four. They were forced to walk for kilometres and for

days, which turned into months. Along the way, thousands were killed and thrown into mass graves by the Communists. These graves are still being discovered today, more than 70 years after the end of World War Two. The massive group of people was made to walk south and then east through Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia, all the way to the Romanian border, around 900 kilometres, exhausted and hungry, beaten and mistreated, abused, and humiliated.

Often, some could not bear the fatigue, excruciating pain, or thirst, and they would voluntarily step out of the columns only to attract a barrage of bullets from the Communist guards. It was a way out of that hell on earth. Or they would run to a water well spotted along the way and jump inside to satisfy their agonizing thirst, knowing there was no way out. Every night people disappeared. To survive, the victims ate grass and leaves to supplement their meagre food provisions.



Franjo Kasic.

My grandfather Franjo told me many more harrowing stories and tragic details from this horrific period of his youth.

I often wondered how Franjo survived this terrible suffering. He often said it was the hand of the Almighty who saved him and gave him the strength and courage to continue and someday return home. He lived to tell his story to us, his grandchildren, and anyone who wanted to listen. Franjo still thanks God daily for keeping him alive and his soul free from hatred for his enemies and tormentors.

I am grateful to the Tribute to Liberty team for allowing us to tell Canadians the stories about how



our family members suffered under the evils of communism; to commemorate their tribulations; and to thank Canada for the freedoms we enjoy today.

*Submitted by: Rev. Tomislav Kasić*

## History Unhidden

### An Albanian Nightmare

Albania became a communist regime at the end of World War II. And, communism destroyed my childhood. I was born in December 1974 in Tirana, the capital city of Albania. I was born free, but 6 months later I lost that freedom.

My grandfather, Abdyl Kellezi, whom I never knew, was a high-ranking member of the ruling communist party. One day, the almighty communist "god" of Albania, Enver Hoxha, declared him a traitor and the ordeal of my family started.



Holta with her mother.

My entire family, including myself, a 6-month-old baby, was deported from Tirana to a remote village in the south of Albania. Stripped of everything they had, their homes, belongings, hopes and dreams, they were told they were guilty.

But guilty of what? My grandfather was imprisoned to be later executed, and to this day no one knows where his remains are. To this day no one knows what he did, what his crimes were. However, my family knew that one thing was certain: there was no future for us! My parents and uncles became farmers despite

their university degrees and other qualifications, and my brother and I would grow up to be farmers too, as we were not allowed to get a higher education no matter how hard we studied or how well we performed.

There was an ongoing everyday struggle to survive physically and emotionally. No one was allowed to interact with us and we were in a constant state of persecution. Communism was hard enough for every person that lived in Albania at that time, but for us, the persecuted ones, life was a living hell:

Daughter be careful, don't talk!  
Daughter be careful, don't think aloud!  
Daughter be careful, everyone is watching us!

These cautionary words were stuck in my head from the moment I began to understand the meaning of words in general.

I had no friends, freedom, dreams, and most importantly, I had no hope. All I had were questions in my mind:

Why us? What did we do? Is it ever going to end? Will I ever get to live a normal life? And there were never any answers, only a dark and hopeless future.

16 years later, communism fell in Eastern Europe. I was lucky because I was still young and able to see a different world, unlike many people that died in prison, or although alive, their health and mind was destroyed by years of torment and persecution. I was lucky to have a second chance, as many didn't—many were left behind.

In my late 20s I immigrated to Canada where I found what I had sought all my life: freedom, endless opportunities and countless open doors.

I realized I had a voice, a strong voice that would not get me in trouble if I spoke my mind. I didn't need to be afraid.

I call Canada home because a home is a place filled with warm memories and this is what Canada has given me! Communism took everything away from my family, but I was lucky to survive. Communism beat me down but my spirit remained unchanged. I was, I am and will always be a free spirit that finally found a home I belong to!

*Submitted by: Holta Kellezi*

# 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, P.O. Box 84558, 2336 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6S 4Z7

**Tribute to Liberty is a registered charity. Charitable Number: 814999660RR0001**