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FROZEN INFERNO

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The real-life story of a Lithuanian woman

Dalia Grinkevičius

" . . . Deportations from the Baltic states had been planned in Moscow while the countries were still free but already designated as subjects to be occupied . . . . Preparation for mass deportation, called 'the purging of Lithuania', was initiated soon after the illegal incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union on August 3, 1940 . .

"The first mass arrests were executed June 14-15, 1941, and continued until war started between Soviet Russia and Germany on June 22. The people had from half to one hour to pack the allowed household articles . . . The deportees came from all walks of life and represented all ages, not excluding infants, pregnant women, the sick or the very old. According to data collected by the Lithuanian Red Cross, 34,260 persons were deported during the 'black days of June' . . .

"The arrested were taken from their homes to railroad stations and loaded into freight cars, 50-60 persons to a car, although . . . instructions specified only 25 persons . . . . Men were separated from their wives and in many instances children from their mothers. The people, locked in the cars lacking air, without food and water, had to wait several days until all the arrested were entrained. The long journey into the depths of Russia killed many of the weak and sick. Lithuanian deportees were transported to northern Russia, western and eastern Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the Soviet Far East. Most of the deportees were confined in forced labor camps.

"The same scheme of mass deportation . . . was resumed during the second Soviet occupation from 1944 . . . ."

—Encyclopedia Lituanica

It is estimated that by 1953, one in five Lithuanians had been deported — a total of about 400,000.

Introduction

The following article appeared in 1979 in the second volume of the Russian publication P a m i a t (Memory). Material for this publication is collected by Russian dissidents in the Soviet Union and later sent to the West.

All we know about the author of this article, Dalia Grinkevičius, a former physician in the Village of Laukuva, is what she herself has told us in the article, and what the publication supplies in its introduction. We have not been able to find her name in Lithuanian underground publications.

Although in recent years there has been no small number of testimonies by witnesses about the sufferings of Lithuanians exiled to Siberia, this brief article by Dalia Grinkevičius probably surpasses all others in detail and horror.

FROZEN INFERNO

On June 14, 1941, my father, Juozas Grinkevičius, was arrested. He had worked in the Lithuanian State Bank until 1940, when he had become a high-school mathematics teacher. He was arrested because he had belonged to the Lithuanian Nationalist Party until 1940.

That same night they also arrested my mother, my seventeen-year-old brother and me. I was fourteen years old. They told us that we were being exiled for life to Siberia. My father was sent to the Sverdlovsk District—the Gari Concentration Camp. By special judgement of the court, he was sentenced to ten years' hard labor; on October 10, 1948, he died from the unbearable work and starvation. In his last letter he wrote to us, "I am dying of hunger."

In 1942, the rest of our family, along with four hundred other women and children, all exiled from Lithuania, were brought to an uninhabited island in northern Yakutia inside the Arctic Circle at the point where the Lena river flows into the Laptev Sea. This island bore no trace of man: no houses, no burrows, no tents—just the eternally frozen tundra, with a small board hammered into the ground to tell us that this island was called Trofimovsk. The guards ordered us to unload boards and bricks out of the barge. Then the steamboat pulling the barge hurried off, because the Arctic winter was near. We were left on this uninhabited island without any roof over our heads, without warm clothes, without food. The few men and older boys who were still more or less capable of working and who wanted to build barracks for us, were all seized and sent to nearby islands to catch fish for the state. Then we, the women and children, hurriedly began to build barracks. We laid down a row of bricks and covered it with a layer of moss which we had pulled with our bare hands from the permafrost. The barracks had no roofs, just plank ceilings through which the blizzards would blow so much snow that people lying on their bunks turned completely white. A space 50 cm wide was allotted for each person—a big ice grave! The ceilings were ice, the walls were ice, the floor was ice. There was no firewood because no trees grew in the tundra—no bushes, not even any grass, just a thin layer of moss on the permafrost.

When the Arctic night set in, people began to die, one after another, from hunger, scurvy and cold. At the beginning almost all of them could have been saved. About 120-150 km. away, on the islands of Tumata, Bobrovsk and Sasylach there were native Evenk fishing co-operatives. They had extra supplies of fish and enough dog-sleds. They wanted to bring all of us to their tents and the burrows they had dug in the ground for the winter. But our guards would not let them do that and so condemned us to death.

One group of fifteen young men tried to escape on foot from Trofimovsk but en route all of them froze to death.

About the middle of December 1942 there were thirty people in our section, Number 10, of whom only four, three women and myself, could still stand up and go to work. They sent us to the interior of the island, about 7 to 10 kilometers away, to look for logs brought by the current from the upper part of the Lena river. When we found logs, we would chop them out of the ice, tie rope sleighs to them and drag them back to the camp. These logs were for the guards to heat their homes and offices. Our shoulders were all covered with sores.

The remaining twenty-six people lay swollen from hunger and exhaustion or they could not walk because of scurvy and the stiffness of the joints resulting from scurvy when the blood oozed into their joints. Usually the disease attacked several joints. After that stage diarrhea and death normally followed.

The sick used to ask for water, which we could get only by melting ice and snow. So every night I used to creep to the warehouse and steal a few bits of wood and drag them back to our barracks. We would light a *barabona* (half of a metal barrel), on which we boiled water and heated bricks with which we warmed the sick people's feet. When the *barabona* was lit, the ice on the ceiling would melt and would begin to drip on those lying down; people lay under a sheet of ice.

One night when I had chopped up the wood and lit the *barabona*, our guards suddenly burst into the barrack. By following my footprints in the snow, they had found the planks and the thief. They wrote down a statement and bound me over for trial. It was Christmas Eve, 1942. My mother lay almost dying on a bunk; her face was so swollen that you could not see her eyes. Her urine was full of blood; she was suffering from an inflammation of the kidneys. She lay on a cold board with a sack for a blanket. I used to warm her with my own body. The people who collected the bodies came and asked me where hers was.

At night they led me to the trial, held in the adjacent barracks. A table was covered with red cloth and lights lit. Seven people sat on a bench reserved for the accused: five for stealing boards and two because at night they had stolen into the bakery and started to eat bread; they had fainted there. One of them was Albertas Janionis, a drama student from Šiauliai. In the morning they had found them lying there. All the accused denied having stolen boards: one was taking a board to make a coffin for his child, another had found one lying on the ground, and so on. I was sitting at the end of the row. It was a military trial — very fast. Within half an hour the judge had questioned six people and then asked me if I admitted I was guilty.

"Yes, I admit it."
"Maybe one of the older people sent you to do it?"
"No."
"Then . . . maybe you don't understand Russian very well?"
"No. I understand you."

The court went out to make its decision. We waited for the verdict. Not much longer, and then our sufferings would be over. Everything would be over. They would march us to the camp 30 km. away; not one of us would make it there. We would all freeze and die in a snowbank. And finally there would be an end.

The verdict: For the bread — three years each; for the boards — one year each. Only I was acquitted, "because of my sincere confession." Why? I could not go on living, but they left me alive, while the others, who wanted to live, were going to face death. I returned to the barracks. My mother still lay there unconscious. It was cold; a fagot was burning. There was no water. I went back to steal more boards.

A few days later all those who had been condemned were sent to the punishment camp one morning under guard. Shortly afterwards a blizzard blew up. On the second day a fifteen-year-old boy, Beria Charasas, from Kaunas, returned with one arm frozen (he had been one of those condemned for a board). He told us that fourteen of the prisoners had lost their way during the storm and that probably all of them had died with their guards. They took the boy Beria by dog-sled to the harbour of Tiksi where they cut off his arm at the shoulder. That was the price he paid for one board! Among the young men who died in the blizzard were Dzikas and Luminas Bronius, condemned for trying to steal a loaf of bread. In the spring, when the Lena River broke up the ice which bound it, we would see the ice-floes carrying the frozen corpses into the Laptev Sea.

Burials were carried out by three brigades of three people each (Mrs. Abromaitis, Mrs. Marcinkevičius, Mr. Abromaitis, Mr. Petrauskas, Mrs. Lukoševičius, Mrs. Tačiulionis, Mr. Tačiulevičius, and Mrs. Tautvaiša, who lives in Sweden now). Every day they used to drag the corpses out of the barracks, pile them onto sleighs and, harnessing themselves with ropes, drag them several hundred meters from the barracks and pile them up like firewood. The people in these burial details were in very poor shape themselves and did not have the strength to lift a corpse down from an upper bunk. So they would tie a rope to its feet and, all pulling together, they would drag it down to the ground. Not infrequently a handful of the dead person's hair would remain stuck in the ice on the wall. When a storm raged, the dead lay day and night alongside the living. The body of Mrs. Daniliauskas, the wife of the director of the Marijampole high school, lay for four days beside her son, who could not get up because of scurvy. Blowing snow filled their

barrack so completely that you could get into it only by crawling through a narrow gap in the snow. When this dead woman's body was dragged with ropes through that gap, her son Antanas shouted after her, "Forgive me, dear little mother, for being unable to follow you to your grave!"

Professor Vilkaitis, rector of the Lithuanian Agricultural Academy, worked as a guard; he guarded the barrels of fish that had been caught during the fall. Exhausted from hunger, he collapsed on the barrels and died. Out of respect for this famous scholar, people nailed together a coffin for him. But after a week the coffin disappeared and the Professor lay with the others in the pile. His wife went mad and his son and daughter were left orphans.

Once two people, a man and a woman, holding a bundle in each hand, crept into our barracks. It was dark in the barracks because there were sheets of ice in place of windows and even those were covered with drifted-over snow. They asked us if there were any children there. There were. As their eyes became used to the dark, they saw the first one: on the ground lay a dead boy, ten years old, Jonukas Borniškis, who had died the day before of scurvy and exhaustion. The couple explained that they were Leningraders who had now come to Trofimovsk. In Leningrad their only child had died of famine. It was the anniversary of his death; to mark the occasion they had saved three days' bread ration and wanted to distribute it to starving Lithuanian children. Children's hands stretched out from under rags; the Leningraders put a small piece of bread into each hand. In this way a small victim of besieged Leningrad stretched out a helpful hand to his dying fellows.

When parents died, their children were transferred to a barrack built as an orphanage. There conditions and mortality rate were the same as elsewhere. The children died one after the other. Mrs. M. Abromaitis (now living in Kaunas), who used to drag out the corpses, remembers that often they used to bring children's bodies — skeletons — out of the shelter, tied up in bags. You could not tell how many little bodies were in a bag because they used to throw those sacks onto the common pile of corpses without untying them.

Two boys, twelve and thirteen years of age (at present I cannot give their names, but they were not brothers) hung themselves in the children's shelter. Juzė Lukminaitis, now living in Kaunas, saw them die; she had been brought to the orphanage when her parents and her two older brothers had died.

One day she and a boy left the orphanage to search for food. The starving girl fell to the ground. By the time help came her chest and arm had frozen because she did not have the strength to cover them up. Because of her extreme exhaustion and lack of vitamins, bed sores appeared on her shoulders, back, spine and legs, while on her chest, sores from the cold

appeared. So for several months they nursed her by suspending her by her armpits from the ceiling. The scars remain to this day.

By February 1943 it became obvious that we were all going to die. The mortality rate reached its highest point. The cold was fierce; blizzards of hurricane proportions raged, especially as the Arctic night drew to a close. The barracks were completely unheated and the hands and the feet of the dying froze. On the bunks people lay all curled up, unable to move because scurvy had attacked their joints and because they suffered from exhaustion and internal inflammations. Most huddled in their bunks, immobile from scurvy. From dysentery, they defecated in their bunks; the stronger—from the bunk-edge onto the snow. The end approached. Just at the point when no one had any hope left, a man came to Trofimovsk who tore those still alive from the grip of death. This was a doctor named Lazar Solomonovich Samodurov. He worked his way into each barrack, examined all the sick and the piles of corpses, and threw himself energetically into the task. All alone he stood up to the administrators of Trofimovsk, well-fed, stout, dressed in warm furs and felt boots, who had calmly sent us off to the next world By taking this job, Mavrin, Sventicky, Jankovsky, Travkin, Guliaev and others were protecting their hides from the dangers of the front lines.

On the very next day we each got a bowl of hot pea soup and half a kilogram of frozen fish, which the doctor advised us to eat raw so that we would not lose any vitamins. He requisitioned several bags of peas from the storehouse and soaked these in water—after a few days medical orderlies came to the barracks with green sprouting peas. Each person received half a glassful. Scurvy and famine lost their grip on us. Death retreated as well. The people who had survived until the arrival of Dr. Samodurov remained alive.

The steam bath began working and the burial details became orderlies who carried the sick on their backs to the bath. Every day they bathed one section (barracks). Men and women washed together. People had reached such a point that they had no sex, just something vaguely resembling a human body, skeletons whose teeth had fallen out with skin ulcers and little tails. Yes, each person had a little tail bone. Our clothes were baked in a disinfecting room. Every day you could see a stew of baked lice on the floor of this room.

On the ninth of February we saw the first bit of sun. We realized that we had survived.

After a month Dr. Samodurov left. We heard that he died on the warfront. But perhaps that is not true. We bow profoundly to you, Dr. Samudorov!

In the spring the administration decided to move the pile of corpses away. They brought prisoners who were able to work; these chopped a

ditch in the permafrost which became a common grave for the victims of Trofimovsk.

During the winter of 1942-3 the death rate on the island of Trofimovsk was higher than in Leningrad besieged by the Germans. Here every second person died, exiled without trial, investigation or guilt. Whole families died. All six members of the Baranauskas family died. Only one boy survived of the seven people in the Augustinas family. All four members of the Žygelis family died. Of seven in the Geidonis family, only the mother survived. Šiurkus — of five, only one boy. Markevičius — only the mother and a daughter, of a family of seven. And so on. After the death of her son the pianist, Mrs. Vidokleris used to go every day to visit the pile of corpses. One day she didn't return — she had frozen to death there herself.

For me Trofimovsk is not part of the forgotten past; it is still an open wound. Perhaps there was only a handful of people there — some hundreds—but their sufferings were no less for that. And they too were human beings whom we have to remember, as we have to remember the millions of other unnecessary sacrifices.

But Trofimovsk was not an isolated case. Within the Arctic Circle in northern Yakutia, also in Kolyma, on the Yana River, in Oimekon, the coldest point in the Circle — everywhere there were settlements of exiles expelled from Lithuania in 1941. Apparently, Stalin considered these places the most suitable for Baltic women and children. Today the island is empty. The cemetery bears no marker. No hand has placed flowers there; no mourning music plays on this island of death. But its memory is alive in me and I want to erect if only the humblest of monuments to it.

At the beginning of February 1943 we were all sent to catch fish. Summer and winter we used to cut holes in the ice and let nets down. In the spring the ice was up to one-and-a-half or two meters thick. Every day we would check the nets; we would chop a hole in the ice and in temperatures of 45-50 degrees below zero Celsius we would pull up the nets with our bare hands and disentangle the fish that had been caught. If the frozen fish saved us from scurvy, then nothing could save our hands. We could not help getting frozen fingers, covered with blisters and sores and, when the following day and all the days after, you had to pull up the nets and fish in the worst cold, you felt an agonizing pain — as though you had stuck your hand in boiling water. We had to check the nets daily because if we did not for a day or two, they could have frozen for good to the ice.

In our fishing expeditions dog-sleds took us from one island to the next. As we travelled we would build earthen dwellings for ourselves and then travel onwards, leaving our "homes" when the fish would disappear.

In this way we wandered on the shores of the Laptev Sea. Sometimes a storm would catch people en route; when they lost their way, they froze to death. Algis Apanavičius from Kedainiai, Ernestas Vanagas from Panevėžys, Mrs. Ona Baltrukonis, Petrikas, Jonas Kazlauskas and others.

In the summer of 1944 my brother and I were picked to go to the island of Tumata for fishing. I could not leave because my mother was lying in the hospital with acute nephritis. Then, on the administration's orders, Dr. Griko signed my mother out of the hospital. Together we — my brother and I — carried her to the cabin of the barge — where a bunk had been set up. Under the bunk was cold sea water up to the knees. When the barge rocked, that water splashed and soaked her clothes. It took three days and three nights to travel the 150 kilometer distance. Inside it was unbearably cold; here, even in the summer, you could not take off your padded jacket. For a whole week, despite all my efforts, I could not get a drop of hot water for my mother. Her face and legs became swollen again. It seemed to me that she was leaving on her last voyage. But in reality her last voyage was to be in 1949.

My mother often asked that her place of exile be changed because of her poor health — either to Altai or to the region of Krasnoyarsk, or to that of Irkutsk. But all her applications were turned down. Finally she understood that she was doomed to die in Yakutia. Her disappointment was without bounds and she begged me to take her away and bury her in Lithuania.

In 1949 we escaped by plane without any papers and made it back to Lithuania. As soon as we had escaped, word went out to find us, so that we had to live illegally. Our relatives and friends, at their own risk, hid us. It was very dangerous, especially because of the night checks of dwellings. Often it happened that I with my sick mother had to change our hiding-place because we thought someone had noticed us.

By spring of 1950 the state of my mother's health became hopeless. She asked to be taken back to our old home in Kaunas. Doctors who knew her used to come at night without other people suspecting anything. Once, just before her death, as though she had recovered from her acute uremia, she asked me, "How are you going to bury me? You'll go to prison." On May 5, 1950, she closed her eyes forever. Her last words were, "Why didn't they shoot the four of us at the door of the train?" (i.e. on June 14, 1941).

Where and how was I to bury her? I had no papers, and the secret police were after us. A priest agreed to bury her without papers under an alias in a country graveyard. But how was I going to carry the body out of the house and take it out of the city? The neighbors were right at hand. Bury her in the yard under the windows? But it was a May night — too

light, impossible to dig a hole near the neighbors' windows without anyone noticing.

My aunt had one last idea: she would go to the police and tell them that at night her sick sister had knocked on the door — she couldn't refuse to let her in — and during the day she had died. I would leave the apartment, and she would not know my wherebouts. They would examine the body and grant permission for burial. But I would not be able to attend my mother's funeral or visit her grave: no doubt a trap would be laid there. Aside from that, they would not believe my aunt and she would not escape persecution. The worst thought of all was this: my mother's executioners would come and look at my dead mother and I would not be there for the last hours with her. What was to be done? Even when she was dead, there was no room in her own country for my mother.

I went downstairs to the cellar. I would bury her there. With a chisel and axe I hacked at the floor, chipping away at the cement bit by bit. It was hard and thick. The work went very slowly, though I was working as hard as I could. I had to stop every time someone came in upstairs. Underneath the cement there was clay. The second day and night I worked without a break. The next day was May 7th — Mother's Day. Look, mother dear, — my last present to you!

We needed a coffin. I chopped up a wardrobe; part of it would make a coffin, and the door—a lid for the coffin. Before dawn we carried the coffin down into the hole and I lined it. The time came to carry her there. I tried several times but I could not carry her, light martyr though she was. It was not within my power. My aunt fell into despair: what was going to happen? After a couple of hours my aunt returned with a man whom she could trust. He picked Mother up and carried her downstairs.

During the whole following week, at night, I carried cement and clay outside. Later I poured a layer of cement — no trace of activity could be seen.

In the fall of the same year, 1950, they caught up with me, arrested me and put me in the interrogating prison in Kaunas; they charged me with running away from my place of exile. The interrogators wanted to know where my mother was, who had hidden us, who had helped us materially. I could not answer a single question without implicating the people who had helped us. So I told my questioners that I refused to answer any of the questions put to me, because I could not tell the truth and did not want to lie. I could not return evil for the good that had been done. As for my mother — she had died on May 5, 1950 — that was all I could tell them.

Of course, they did not believe me. They wanted me to tell them in what cemetery and under what name she had been buried, and the names of the doctors who had attended her. I refused to answer these questions too. The interrogator stated that all the death registry offices in Lithuania had been

checked, and the reply had been that on that day there had been no registration of the death of a woman that age; therefore he could not believe she was dead. Since the investigation was making no progress, the interrogators changed one after another. They used to summon me for interrogation almost every night after the signal was given for everyone to go to bed; that is, when I myself was just falling asleep — and we had to get up at six o'clock. During the day I was not allowed to fall asleep even sitting up; they would throw me into a punishment cell. The lack of sleep tormented me terribly. For whole weeks the interrogators and I went over the same ground. Finally one examiner — I do not know which one — tired of torturing himself and me, closed my case at the point where it had begun. Doctors who attended my mother and other people who helped us hide are alive in Kaunas. I am glad that not one of them suffered because of us.

One day, about five o'clock in the evening, they ordered me to get dressed and to leave my cell. The guard led me through corridors and stairs into the prison yard. Near the door that led to the street and the city stood a young man wearing civilian clothes, perhaps 27 years old, attractive and elegant, waiting for me. Smiling, he greeted me and introduced himself as Mr. Stankevičius. He asked me to come with him, but not to keep my hands behind my back. He opened the door and we found ourselves on the street. It was an autumn evening; people were returning home from work and going shopping. Students — a cheerful group of medical students — poured out of their faculty building. We melted into the crowd of passers-by. How beautiful and infinitely beloved my native city was on that autumn evening! We walked quietly, not hurrying. In the square in front of the War Museum we sat down on a bench. It was all like a marvellous dream for me. Who had given me this wonderful farewell walk through my native city?

That evening, we entered some office building or other. We did not see any employees. We went into an office. Mr. Stankevičius asked me outright if I would like to live in Kaunas and study. Apparently this was a very simple matter. If I liked, then after a few days I would leave prison, my case would not be sent to Moscow for special consideration, I would not return to Yakutia—I would stay at home. I would live legally and I could study. In return they asked for only a small favor — my help for the secret police. Everything became clear. I would have to visit my parents' friends and aquaintances. They would open their doors to a friend but in reality a serpent would crawl in, planning to send them to prison and the thorny paths of exile. Now I understood what ministry my companion belonged to. I answered that I was choosing the three years' punishment for running away, and exile forever. He smiled calmly and said that I had made a little mistake about the three years in prison for escaping; what was waiting for me was twenty years' hard labor in the Arctic wilderness, and I myself

was was sealing the verdict. He handed me a piece of paper bearing my own signature. I remembered that a week before we had escaped, an announcement had been made to all the exiles that a new decree set the punishment for escaping from exile at twenty years' hard labor in the Arctic wilderness. I had acknowledged that the decree had been announced to me. Now the Yakutia MVD had sent this paper on the request of the Lithuanian MVD. Twenty years' hard labor in the *katorga* . . . I was 23 at the time. I could not even imagine it. I handed the paper back. The whole world seemed to crumble. My companion quietly waited for an answer. So this was why they had given me this farewell walk! A subtle new method — a reminder of the life which had been taken away from me, which would never be mine, but which they offered in exchange for my honor and my conscience. I asked him to take me back to prison. We returned slowly and without speaking.

After I had spent half a year in the investigatory prison of Kaunas, my sentence came from the special court in Moscow. They led me into an office where there were two Security officers and read the sentence to me: three years in prison for running away; then I would be returned to my place of exile in Yakutia. I refused to sign this sentence: "This verdict has no legal basis. According to Soviet law, exile is a form of punishment which can be imposed only by sentence of the court. I was exiled unjustly, while still a minor, having committed no crime, without a trial, just because I was born into one family rather than another. Therefore my leaving Yakutia broke no law."

"We'll force you to sign!" the MGB colonel said, and ordered that the warden be called. But when I still refused to sign, they wrote down that I had refused. Shortly afterwards, they took me, via the prisons of Vilnius and Moscow, to a place called Suchobezvodno in the District of Gorki and placed me in a labor camp where I served my three years' sentence. After the camp they brought me back, in stages over three months through the prisons of Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk and Kirensk, to exile in Yakutsk in September 1953.

Once, in I cannot remember which station of Siberia, I asked the military guard who escorted us to smuggle a letter to Beria. In this letter I asked not to be sent to Yakutsk, but to some Siberian town which had a medical institute.

A year went by. During that time Beria was shot and killed. In the summer of 1954 they summoned me to the Yakutsk MVD office and asked me if I had written to Beria.

"Yes, I wrote to him."

"Your request was turned down. But we'll let you study. Choose any town as far as the Urals. In an hour you'll get your permit," Colonel Sazonov, commander of the special section told me.

In the city of Omsk (where I arrived nine days before the entrance examinations) the MVD officers told me that I had been accepted conditionally and that if I failed the examinations, they would return me.

I passed all the examinations with a grade of "very good", but admission was determined by an entrance commission. This commission asked me why I had gone from Lithuania to Siberia in 1941. I understood: if I told the truth, despite my good marks, the institute would not accept me. I dissimulated the fact that I was a "special exile" and they did not ask to see my pass, which I never had. After three months of studies, the institute's Party section called me in and attacked me as a serious offender, "You got into the Institute through deceit." I answered, "You forced me to tell lies. The Constitution gives me the right to education, but if I had told the truth, you wouldn't have accepted me."

In 1956 I was allowed to return to Lithuania and continued my studies there in the Kaunas Medical Institute, where I finished in 1960 with honors. I was sent to work in a rural hospital.

All that time my mother lay in her strange grave about which no one knew. The search for her was abandoned as hopeless. After the twenty-second Party Congress (during which Stalin was demythologized—Tr. Note) of the Party, the time had come to consider her re-burial. I went to the Kaunas KGB office with a petition. I showed them my mother's burial site and asked them for a permit for exhumation. My petition came as an unpleasant surprise for the KGB. You felt they were somehow amazed, confused and wanted to conclude the matter as quickly and as quietly as possible.

The exhumation was carried out by the office of the City Attorney of Kaunas under the supervision of Professor Nainius, Director of the School of Forensic Medicine with a group of medical students participating.

On February 13, 1963, relatives and friends attended my mother to her final resting place, in the Kaunas cemetery, on the shores of the river Neris.

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Translated from Russian into Lithuanian by
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Afterword

While working as a country doctor in Laukuva in the region of Šilalė (Lithuania SSR) (Miss) Dalia Grinkevičius began to collect material about the fate of Lithuanians exiled to Siberia "because she thought that this was a small part of Lithuanian national history and that the names of the dead should not be forgotten," as she writes in her notes. Dr. Grinkevičius' interest in a forbidden subject resulted in renewed persecution by the local party organs, surveillance by the KGB and slander in local newspaper. Showing little ingenuity, they accused her of "illegal medical treatment", of bourgeois nationalism, of a criminal past, etc. Although there was no basis for any of these accusations, Dr. Grinkevičius became unemployed in 1974. Rumors were spread that she had left the Catholic Church and become a member of a religious sect, and led by religious excesses, had buried her mother in the basement.

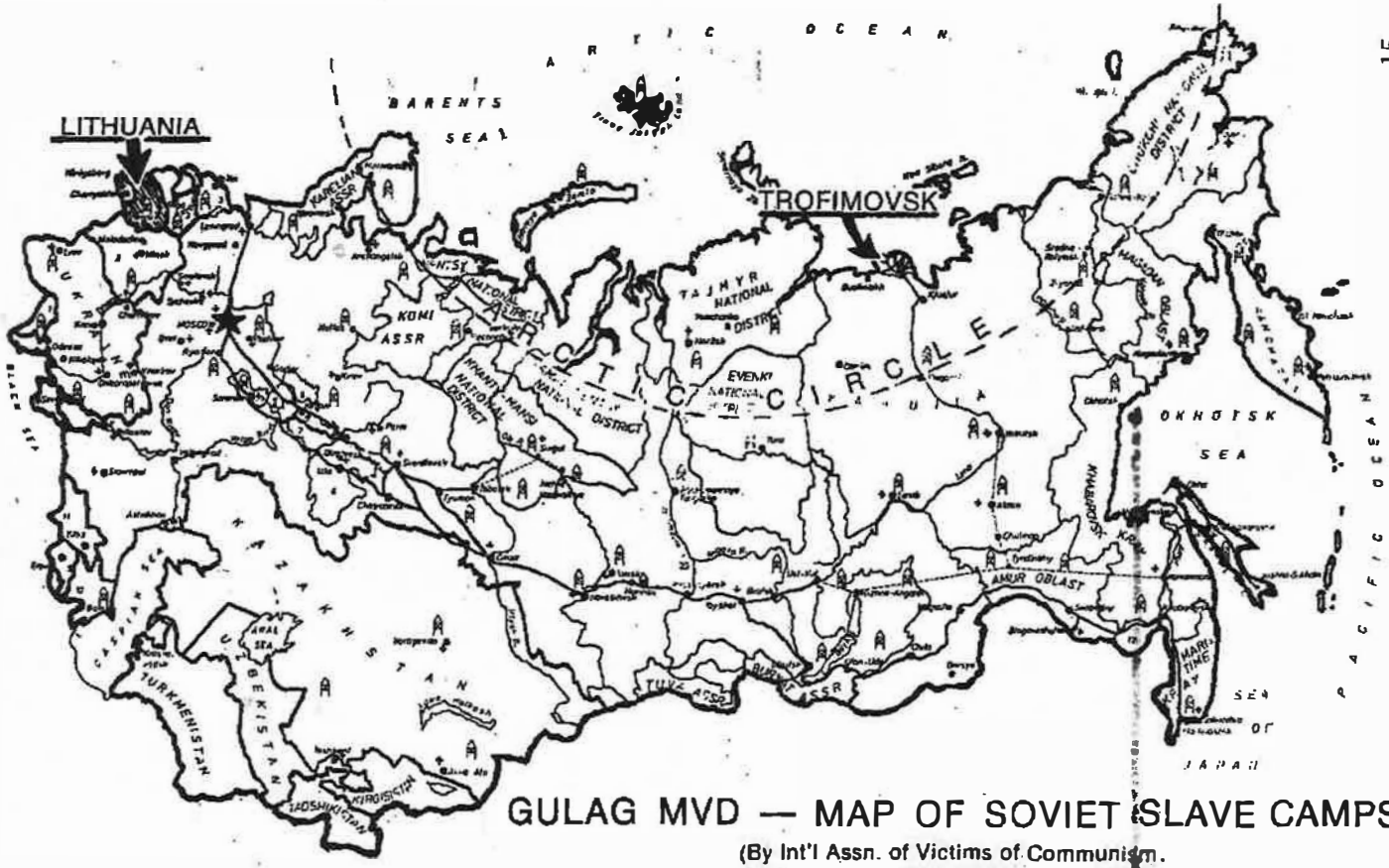
In publishing this extract — the larger part of Dalia Grinkevičius' autobiographical notes — some pages are omitted describing her current problems. The text is written in Russian, apparently by Dr. Grinkevičius herself; in this version we have respected the author's style.

What we know about Lithuanian deportees (special exiles) from verbal accounts confirms Miss Grinkevičius' testimony that those deported, mostly women and children, were condemned to death by starvation. This happened not only in 1942-3 but also at the end of the 1950's and the beginning of the 1960's, not only in Yakutia but also everywhere else. The truthfulness of her testimony is beyond doubt: the author gives the true names of the living and the dead, is correct in her dates and identifies events geographically. The moderate, and even laconic, way in which she writes about the horror of many episodes in the deportation of people from Lithuania makes these notes virtually a juridical document.

At the same time Dalia Grinkevičius' notes constitute a significant human record. Future historians will find in them not only facts but also examples of the strength, courage and goodness of ordinary people — namely "the stuff of history".

M.I.

Additional free copies of this booklet are available, on request, from TUU Lithuanian Studies Society, P.O. Box 777, Sandy Bay, Tas. 7006, Australia; or by E-mail: ~~aktaskunas@gmail.com~~ aktas1929@outlook.com



GULAG MVD — MAP OF SOVIET SLAVE CAMPS

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by Dalia Grinkevičius

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