



INFORMATION SERVICES TEAM

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## PARTISAN, ACADEMIC AND WRITER

Sara Ginaite is best known as a partisan who helped rescue Jews from Nazi persecution during the Second World War.

**Early life**

Born in Kaunas (then Kovno) on March 17, 1924, Ginaite was brought up in an affluent family. Her father, Yosef Ginas, was an engineer who had graduated in France while her mother, Rebecca Virovitch, had matriculated from a Polish high-school. She was about to complete her secondary school education when Germany invaded Lithuania in 1941.

**WW2**

After three of her uncles had been killed in the Kaunas pogrom, she was imprisoned with the surviving members of her family in the Kaunas ghetto where 40,000 Jews were imprisoned.

During the first large Aktion of October 1941, the local Gestapo selected 9,200 Kaunas Jews, including 4,273 children, to murder in the nearby Ninth Fort.

Sara, then a teenager, survived and joined the Anti-Fascist Fighting Organization (AFO) in 1942. She met the charismatic teenage leader of her cell, Misha Rubinson, the commander of a unit with seven cells, whom she married in 1943.

**Escape**

Sara and Misha were among the first group of 11 young Jewish fighters who escaped the Kaunas ghetto and joined up with Russian partisans in the Rudnikai Forest, about 50 kilometers away, by using the ruse of picking up Jewish workers with a truck for a work detail. This was with the assistance of Jewish ghetto police who told the German guards that workers were needed for a night shift, and made a show of manhandling the 'workers' and pushing them into the truck.

In the forest the Jewish youths joined a partisan unit which consisted of about 40 fighters including these Jews, Lithuanian paratroopers from Moscow, Poles, and escaped Soviet POWs.

Over time more Jews escaped from the ghetto, some of whom joined Sara's unit (named 'Death to the Occupiers') which increased to about 300 members, most of whom were Jewish.

This unit attacked German garrisons, cut lines of communication and sought supplies. One of her assignments was to return to the ghetto to bring out more young people.

**Vilnius**

As the Red Army began pushing the German army out of Lithuania in 1944 the partisans joined Soviet forces in liberating the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius in street battles against German forces, where a Soviet captain (Yasha Riumkin) took her photo (pictured); one of the most famous images of a female partisan during WW2.

**Kaunas**

Sara also participated in the liberation of Kaunas where most of the Jews had been killed by the German invaders and their collaborators in the Jewish ghetto, as was the case in Vilnius.

Only Sara, Misha, Sara's older sister, Alice, Alice's husband, and a young niece left hidden with neighbors survived the Holocaust. Her father died in during the destruction of the Kaunas ghetto while her mother and sister were deported to a concentration camp. Only her sister survived the war.



Sara stands guard during the liberation of Vilnius, August 1944.

**Post WW2**

In spite of rampant anti-Semitism, Sara completed her doctoral studies in political economics and obtained an appointment as a professor at Vilnius University. There she published studies in her field and on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

**Canada**

Her husband died in 1977, after which she joined her two daughters in Canada in 1983. For the next 15 years she was an Adjunct Professor at York University and lectured widely in Canada, Israel, Europe and the United States about her WW2 experiences.

**Books**

Sara is the author of five books on economics and two books on the Holocaust. Her book *Resistance and Survival: The Jewish Community in Kaunas, 1941-1944*, won the Canadian Jewish Book Award for Holocaust History in 2006.

## KEY FACTS

- Born: March 17, 1924, in Kaunas, Lithuania.
- Parents: Yosef Ginas and Rebecca Virovitch.
- Sibling: Alice Ginaite.
- Spouse: Misha Rubinson.
- Offspring: Two daughters.
- Religion: Judaism.
- Occupation: Academic and writer.
- WW2 activity: Partisan.
- Post WW2 activity: Professor of political economics at Vilnius University, Adjunct Professor at York University, author.

"Do not yield or give in to evil, but proceed against it ever more boldly."

- Virgil

## PRIMARY SOURCES

*From Partisan to Professor* (online article), Canadian Society for Yad Vashem, access date: 2018-05-25.

*Resistance and Survival: The Jewish Community in Kaunas 1941-1944* (Second Edition), Sara Ginaite-Rubinson, Mosaic Press, 2011.

*War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, Rowman & Littlefield, Doris L. Bergen, 2016.

*Witness, Sara Ginaite Lithuanian Partisan Fighter* (online interview, BBC World Service, 13/12/2016, access date: 2018-05-27.