



ZOFIJA (SOFIJA) BERESNEVIČIŪTĖ-SINKEVIČIENĖ

(Panevėžys, Lithuania, October 3, 1925 - Panevėžys, Lithuania, December 29, 2016)



Z. Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė in 1974.

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Zofija Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė (born Beresnevičiūtė), also known as Sofija and Sonia, was born in 1925 (in other documents – 1926) in the city of Panevėžys, Lithuania. Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė and her family lived a sedentary life in Panevėžys, where she went to primary school.

When the Second World War broke out, the family lived in number 26, Tilvyčių street. Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė remembers the persecution of Jews in the early years of the Nazi occupation of her city: "When the Jews had been executed, everything was taken and cleaned; then they started catching the others [Roma]."¹ Despite having witnessed the execution and deportation of Jews, Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė and her family still did not expect to be arrested. However, in January 1943, the whole family was taken to the **Panevėžys ghetto by Nazi soldiers**

and collaborators². After a week, they were relocated to **Pravieniškės concentration camp**.

Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė **managed to escape while walking to the forced labour camp**, and though she was shot in the leg, she walked 120 kilometres back to her family home in Panevėžys. Soon after, however, she was arrested again and tortured to give-up those who had helped her along the way. She refused and was sent back to Pravieniškės camp. There she learnt of the impending massacre and **received instructions from an acquaintance on how to survive the mass shooting**. In her testimony, she implies that those Roma who saluted Hitler when called by their name were spared: "He put 'good'

¹ Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė, Zofija. Oral history interview by Saulius Berzinis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 1998. Video file. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508587>

² Beinortienė, Vida, Daiva Tumasonytė, ed. 2016. Panevėžio romų kančių keliai 1941–1945 m. [Exploring the Untold Suffering of the Roma of Panevėžys: 1941–1945]. Panevėžys: Komunikacijos centras "Kalba. Knyga. Kūryba", p. 76.

by my last name when I raised my hand in German way.”³ **Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė saved several other Roma by instructing them both in Romanes and Lithuanian to raise their hands in the same fashion.** She also rescued some children, including two of her brothers, by physically pulling them out of the queue.

In late 1943, those Roma who survived the shooting were transported to a labour site in France. Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė remembers **attacking a German soldier who was violent towards her and other prisoners**: “He kicked me so hard, I fell backwards [...] I took a big tree branch and struck him so hard in the head, his hat fell off.”⁴ As punishment, she was thrown in a freezing pit of water, but she continued to resist the Nazi officers who came to take her back to work: “They wanted to take me from there - I didn’t go. I thought to myself, go to that water yourselves now.”⁵

On June 15, 1944, Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė was relocated to several camps across Germany, the only identified one being Buchenwald Concentration Camp⁶. She escaped the camp at least once. As mentioned in her testimony, **she ran to look for food and brought some bread to her fellow prisoners**⁷. In her witness statement, Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė recalls **sabotaging Nazi administrative activities by destroying documents** in an office facility she was ordered to clean: “That girl and I washed that floor and saw some folders there. She read the last names, everything [...] I took an inkwell from the table and poured it all over those files. The German beat me. I poured. [...] he beat me very much for that folder⁸.”

Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė remained imprisoned in Buchenwald until its **liberation in April 1945**. Before leaving Buchenwald on May 9, 1945, she was given a chance to move to the West instead of the Soviet Union, but instead she chose to come back to occupied Lithuania⁹. It is known that she spent an unspecified period of time in an NKVD inspection station Nr 8129 in Luckenwalde. She returned to Panevėžys on October 15, 1945¹⁰.

Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė’s story is a **rare example of documented resistance of a Lithuanian Roma**. Her continuous effort not only to survive but to actively resist the persecution by interrupting Nazi punitive and administrative activities, helping fellow prisoners, escaping from labour and concentration camps, and physically retaliating against persecutors shows incredible bravery and will during the Second World War.

3 Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė, Zofija. Oral history interview.

4 Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė, Zofija. Oral history interview.

5 Ibid.

6 Beinortienė, Vida, Daiva Tumasonytė, p. 86; Romų Platforma. n.d. “Romų Holokaustas Lietuvoje [Roma Holocaust in Lithuania].” Accessed March 9, 2020. <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/holokaustas/romu-holokaustas-lietuvoje/>

7 Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė, Zofija. Oral history interview.

8 Ibid.

9 Certificate No. 12/200-96 issued by the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Lithuania on 19 February 1996.

10 Central State Archive of Lithuania, LCVA. F. R-754. Ap. 4. B. 431. L. 10.

The life of Zofija Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė is documented in an oral history interview kept in USHMM Collection. Her testimony is featured in a book on Panevėžys Roma victims of Nazi persecution, Exploring the Untold Suffering of the Roma of Panevėžys: 1941–1945. Nevertheless, her story has not been commemorated.

Sources and further information:

1. Beinortienė, Vida, Daiva Tumasonytė, ed. 2016. Panevėžio romų kančių keliai 1941–1945 m. [Exploring the Untold Suffering of the Roma of Panevėžys: 1941–1945]. Panevėžys: Komunikacijos centras “Kalba. Knyga. Kūryba”).
2. Beresnevičiūtė-Sinkevičienė, Zofija. Oral history interview by Saulius Berzinis. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 1998. Video file, 5 videocassettes. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn508587>
3. Nanook journalist collective, 2019. Podcast “Juodojo paukščio žinia: romų genocidas Lietuvoje [A Message from the Black Bird: Roma genocide in Lithuania].” Accessed March 2, 2020. <https://nanook.lt/podcast/juodojo-paukscio-zinia-romu-genocidas-lietuvoje/>
4. Romų Platforma. n.d. “Romų Holokaustas Lietuvoje [Roma Holocaust in Lithuania].” Accessed March 9, 2020. <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/holokaustas/romu-holokaustas-lietuvoje/>

This biography has been written by Aurėja Jutelytė