Paulavicius, Jonas

Jonas Paulavicius hid, during the course of the war, a total of twelve Jews and two Russian prisoners of war in his house. The story began when Paulavicius took a four-year-old Jewish boy into his home. Within a few months he offered to hide the boy's parents as well. Shortly thereafter, Paulavicius and his son expanded the hiding place so that it could hold eight people. He decided to try and save Jewish academicians, in order to facilitate the rehabilitation of the Jewish community after liberation. One of the Jews saved by Paulavicius was Miriam Krakinowsky. She had been moved in August 1944 from a labor camp near Kovno, Lithuania, along with the rest of the camp's Jewish inmates. On the way, Miriam had been able to slip out of the row of prisoners. She wandered along the banks of the river. Suddenly, she noticed a man following her in a boat. He encouraged her to follow him, since he wished to help her. The man's name was Jonas Paulavicius. He led her to his home; and after she had eaten with his family, Paulavicius took her to the cellar. When they arrived there, Paulavicius bent down, removed a number of wooden planks, and knocked on the floor. "I couldn't see where I was headed, but I didn't say a word. Gradually, the room was filled with light, and I found myself in a narrow, warm room, filled with half-naked Jews. When they asked what had happened to the ghetto, I began to cry."

The hiding place was built like a sleeping compartment in a passenger train. Paulavicius installed electricity, and placed a small table in the passage, upon which he placed a map of Europe and a radio, so that the situation at the fronts could be followed. Miriam stayed in this bunker along with seven (and later ten) adults and the four-year-old child, until liberation. Every morning, Paulavicius brought them bread and coffee. Every few days, he would allow them to come into his house to wash.

Paulavicius was well aware of the risk he had taken upon himself, and understood what might happen to him. He rented a room in Kovno for his daughter, Danute, so that if he would be discovered, at least she would be saved. After liberation, the fugitives learned that Paulavicius had hidden no fewer than twelve Jews and two Russian prisoners of war in various places in

his home and yard. Jonas Paulavicius himself suffered a terrible fate: His house was destroyed in a river flood, his beloved daughter Danute died of tuberculosis two months later, and he himself was assassinated by an antisemitic Lithuanian ultra-nationalist.