

# Deported, but not Broken

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By Rasa Goštautaitė



The Kazlauskai family in the exile. Courtesy of Valerija Jokubauskienė.

Valerija Kazlauskaitė – Jokubauskienė, who was the youngest out of six children, was born in Loviai, a small village, in Lithuania. Together with her parents, she lived in there until turning five years old. The hardships of Kazlauskai family started in 1948 when 5-year-old Valerija's father was arrested and imprisoned for helping the partisans.

## Three attempts to deport

The Soviet government attempted to deport the rest of the family three times. The first two times, Valerija's mother was warned about the deportations and fled from the house and hid. Meanwhile, the Soviet troops would take her children to the train station and wait for their mother to appear. The police could not deport underage children without an adult. Knowing this, their mother would hide until her children were taken back home.

Valerija remembers that after a night spent at the train station they would come back home and see their neighbours taking her family's belongings and dismantling furniture. When the troops attempted to deport their family for the 3rd time, Valerija's mother did not run anymore and gave in. That decisive evening of 25 March 1949 the eldest brother Alfonsas (19 year-old) was not at home and avoided the deportation. Later, he joined the partisan resistance troops, while his mother, together with five

children, aged from 5 to 17, was deported.

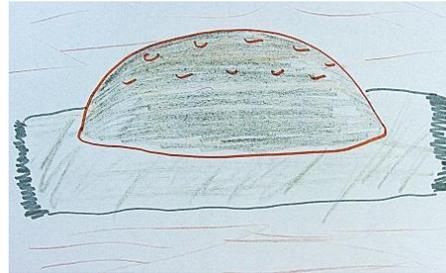
### Settling at the new home

Before being taken away, the mother managed to pack the last, most needed things – 120 eggs, a piece of ham, a rabbit’s fur coat, a blanket and a manual spinner. She also took with them a 70 centimetres tall sculpture of St. Mary. After a long journey the train stopped at Pavalyna station, which was 8 kilometres away from the Uzkyj Lug village, where they had start their lives as deportees. The family was accommodated in a stable with two other families. In total, 12 people shared this humble home. Each family separated their space by stretching the blankets from one wall to another.

The stable was only a temporary accommodation and after approximately one year Valerija’s family was given a small room on the other side of the same house. However, the conditions there were not satisfactory - water leaked through the roof, windows were covered in a thick layer of ice and stacks of hay served as beds.

### Sacred bread

The little sisters would stay at home while their mother would work at the farm. In the evening, as Valerija remembers, the mother would bring them a few potatoes, which was a very valued food. Not many other deported families could gain access to it. Food, in general, was a sensitive issue to many



families. Valerija still remembers how she and her sisters were falsely accused of eating the neighbours’ bread. The bread was a rare food on Kazlauskai table and up to this day it is difficult for Valerija to speak about it. “The bread is...” her voice gets stuck and she cannot say anything else, as it is still a too sensitive topic.

**"The bread is..." Suddenly, her voice got stuck. Drawing by Rasa Goštautaitė**

### School’s memories - rocks and books

Valerija did not feel accepted by the local community, as stones would often fly at them. Children would shout at them and calling them “fascists”. Valerija’s head was split twice by stones thrown at her, which later evoked a great anxiety in her. She could not even go to the toilet without her mother. Unlike her peers in Lithuania, Valerija was not sent to school when she was 7 years old. She did not have the right shoes or clothes to wear. The situation got better after a year and she started school at the age of 8 with her 1,5 years older sister: “When we did our homework the books always faced my sister and I had to read upside down. And now I can read upside down. I had to obey, she was older than me.”



The 4th graders – 9 of them were Lithuanians. Valerija is sitting on the right of the teacher Olga Danilova, besides her is her sister. Courtesy of Valerija Jokubauskienė.

In total, there were nine Lithuanians studying in her class and, as Valerija remembers, none of them had a lower grade than three (in a 5 point system). This was impressive taking into consideration that they had to study in a foreign language. Moreover, getting hold on books was an issue for the exiled children. In the beginning, Valerija did not have any books to study from, only after Stalin's death, the family received books from Lithuania. The whole village would gather in the evenings to listen to Valerija's brother reading Lazdynų Pelėda's texts. Also, Lithuanian youth would gather on the weekends and organise dances. In total in Uzkyj Lug village lived 36 Lithuanian families.



Valerija remembers how every spring, once the sun had started to shine; the pasqueflowers would arise from the soil. "For me a pasqueflower is like childhood, like a memory. Perhaps they remind me of the sky... I have a piece of land – it is full off pasqueflowers. But they are a bit different than the ones in Siberia".

"For me a pasqueflower is like a childhood, like a memory." Drawing by Rasa Goštautaitė

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### The father returned

Valerija's brothers, in order to make the ends meet, would weave baskets. The baskets would be sold for one rouble each. Her older sisters would knit scarves. In addition, the manual spinner, which was taken by Valerija's mother on the night of the deportation, became the breadwinner of the family.

Even though Valerija did not know all the Lithuanian letters, she would still write to her father. "I grew up without a father for almost ten years", she remembers. The father's role was taken by her older brother. Her mother would always consult him when it came to making important decisions. "My father really loved me and I was as well

longing for him. But we were used to live only with the mother. And now a stranger came... And I had to listen to him! It was difficult for us to get used to that again.”

### Coming back to another world

The Kazlauskai family decided to return to Lithuania in 1957, straight after they got a permission to go home. However, they had to postpone their journey for a year, as they first had to save enough of money. So, the family came back in 1958. Valerija recalls: “When we came back to Lithuania we were astonished. Mother was always crying, the brothers were extremely upset. Here, in Lithuania, were not the same Lithuanians. Here was a different life; we came back to another world. No one wanted us. It was a vicious circle. The money was melting. It was extremely difficult.”



The Kazlauskai family is leaving to Lithuania, February 1958.  
Source: Courtesy of Valerija Jokubauskienė

However, time passed by and Kazlauskai family managed to settle down. Valerija finished high school and started studying the Russian language at the University. Nevertheless, her deportee’s past never left her and she was often reminded of it in the official institutions. Valerija worked as a Russian teacher for 45 years in Kužiai and now, after the retirement, she helps to run the Šiauliai branch of the Lithuanian Union for Political Prisoners and Deportees. This centre represents and unites the deportees and other people who have suffered from the Soviet repressions. There, these people gather to talk, drink a cup of tea together and share their memories. As Valerija told me, it is easy for them to understand each other, their experience of being deported and growing up in Siberia unites them.

#### Sources:

Kavaliauskaitė Živilė: Sibiro užgrūdinti: Kazlauskų šeimos likimas, in: *Šiaulių Kraštas*, 13 June 2015.  
Pictures from Valerija Jokubauskienė’s personal archive