

**An Original Source Interview with / Interviu su:**

**Bronislava Abukauskienė**

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## Translation Text

I am Bronislava Abukauskienė, Born in 1930, in the village of Remeikiai, this same village. My maiden name was Andrašytė. I was Jonas' (freedom fighter in the forest, future husband) and his associates liaison. We were friends. We knew one other from childhood. And when I was a liaison you have to be friends with someone. Then they started to take me in for interrogations. They would keep you for a couple of weeks, a week and a half or two. Then they let you go. When Jonas was registering with Soviet government (in 1952 he came out of the forest) I was in custody. I was suspicious of something because they did not interrogate me that night. They called me in for interrogation, and usually there were four interrogators. They asked me questions and you have to answer each of them. That night they brought me in for interrogation but did not interrogate me. They just ran back and forth. I thought that there was something, not like normal, then. I do not know at what time, at around 10:00 am they said that we would go to Užpaliai. We were in Dusėtai--but they did not say anything at all. Then we arrived in Užpaliai, in what was probably their headquarters. We go in, and I see Jonas and another man, his cousin, sitting there. I thought, "How can that be?" I could not believe that he/they registered. They asked me if I knew them. I answered that I knew them. How could I say that I do not know them? We grew up together. How would I not know them? I said I know them? What else they said, I do not remember. I don't know what the rank of this horrible dark Russian was, but he came to me and apologized for the interrogations. I did not answer anything when he apologized, I thought, "Thanks, you made a mess for me". Then I was told that he/they registered and let us go immediately. Later in February we registered, but I do not remember what day it was. Then we got married. They convinced us that they would forgive and not arrest.us. So we got married and lived for the time being.

### ***What year did you get married?***

In 1952, in February. I do not remember the day. It is written somewhere. I do not remember the date precisely.

### ***Was it peaceful to live? Did you really believe that everything would end this well?***

You know, we were almost convinced. They guaranteed every thing and gave us documents. Why would you not believe them? You have to believe sometimes. But this belief was stupid. Later, when his brother perished, after some time they came. We were told that someone in Dusėtai said there was someone from Vilnius or somewhere that we should meet and we were told, in jest, as we were leaving that "We won't let you" jokingly, like that. I said nothing. This was the last time I saw him. He left.

### ***Jonas registered and his brother remained in the forest?***

Yes.

### ***And after his brother perished, Jonas was arrested?***

Yes.

***One can come to the conclusion that Jonas was persuaded to register in order to arrest his brother. And after that, Jonas was no longer needed?***

Certainly, Jonas was no longer needed. They always said that he should persuade his brother to register. You registered, and are living free. Why should he endure hardships in the forest when he could be living free? I think that Jonas did not organize.

***After some time you bore a daughter after Jonas' arrest?***

No, not soon, she was born in 1953.

***And it so happened that Jonas was sentenced to 25 years?***

Yes.

***And all this time you lived alone, raised your daughter, worked in the collective farm (kolkhoz). How did you feel, how you were belittled as the wife of a bandit, the whole thing, what has stuck in your memory, what was the most painful of all this?***

The most painful was that the local people, one's own people were cruel.

***The Lithuanians themselves, the local people?***

Yes. There were various brigade leaders.

***And being the wife of a freedom fighter was difficult in the collective farm (kolkhoz)?***

You should not have asked.

***Were not some there who supported you? You said that there were some cruel local people, but not all of them were lovers of Communism?***

Not necessarily that they were lovers of Communism. Among them there were many who were very jealous. Among them, some of the brigade leaders, were very jealous. When they see that you somehow manage, then they will still stick it to you. I remember, when the collective farms were started, in order not to join a collective farm, father swept out the granaries to fulfill the norms. When you satisfy the norms- sign up for the collective farms! Still you do not sign up. Everyone resisted joining them. Then they put another levy. The granaries were swept clean, there was not even one grain for a chicken, not to speak for a human being. In Užpaliai, in order to buy bread you had to go 9 kilometers. There was a bakery there. You wait for a whole day, and it is good if you can buy a loaf of bread. There are crowds of people waiting there. It is very good if you can buy a loaf and get home with it. When the child was small, mother lived together with me. But how much can you eat of this one loaf? Next day you have to go again. Sometimes you manage for a day, next day you go again, but you have to put in your work day. I remember that I lacked six or seven workdays, so not only was I penalized for not working, but they did not credit with three years of work for these several work days. The brigade leader asked why I did not work those workdays "Because she was lazy, that's why she did not work" was the answer. How

can a human stand this? This man is dead already, but I cannot forgive him for this hurt. If you had not heard this with your own ears, it would have been better. This saddens you so totally. There were many such happenings.

***And when did you see Jonas?***

We saw each other for the first time after the trial. When he was sentenced to death, there was no meeting. After they changed it to 25 years. The penalty was not changed for more than half a year. Then they allowed us to meet for the first time.

***And they deported him to the camps (gulags)?***

After some time they deported him. At first they accepted food but one time they did not accept it.

***He was deported?***

Yes. Then from the journey, I don't know, he dropped a letter. I got a letter saying that he was deported. Then we corresponded to some extent by letters. But then they would not allow to write these letters. I don't remember, it was long ago, how many they were allowed to write. I believe it was not every month, maybe every two or three a year, but maybe they mailed them on the side. Life was, let God not allow it, (awful).

***Could you tell more about the most difficult times raising your daughter alone. You have told about the bread, how you stood in the bread line, more about such moments?***

Moments, there were different moments. Life was hard. Just your own people. I am not as angry at the government as the heartache caused by our own people. The government... I don't know, one time from Utena... They got the brigade leader drunk as a joke and convinced him that he should not give horses to work on my plot. They harmed me in all sorts of ways. It was already June, like now, it was maybe the middle of June. The plot has not been worked on. They do not give me horses, and that is all. Then, and then, but they do not give me the horses. You go and you ask, and they tell you, "Not today. Come back again another day." I thought that nothing would happen, so I thought to go to the director. The director said that it is the brigade leader who takes care of everything. The brigade leader takes care of things. The plot is not worked, so how would I live if I cannot plant the potatoes? "Come back in the afternoon. Someone from Utena would be here, superior to us, would come. We would talk then." I go back home. I go again in the afternoon. The director opened the door and said, "Here is Abukauskienė again." I said how would I not come? They asked me in. The one from Utena started to question how things are. "They do not give me horses, and that is all", I said. Then the one from Utena, I do not know what his duties were, said, "What do you think, not giving her horses? How would you feel if someone do such thing to you? Would you be very happy? Then the director said, "We would. We would give her horses to do it." The one from Utena said that the horses were to be there the next day so she could work on her plot until she is finished, and not to disturb her. The two were unhappy and hung their noses, how the guest from Utena could protect me? I cannot imagine how that one could protect me.. What his duties were, I do not know.

***But they listened to him?***

Yes, he told them sternly. They gave the horses to work on the plot, but they were very displeased that I complained. I did not complain. I only went to the director to ask. What else should I have done? There was nothing that I could have done. There were various such happenings, but what can I remember? How would one tell everything?

***You said that people were forced to go to kolkhozes. People did not want to join the kolkhozes, and you still remained to live in the same house, but the land was taken away. Yes?***

Animals, implements, everything. They took everything.

***How does one feel when someone comes suddenly one day and takes away everything, everything now goes to the kolkhoz, it is not yours, not the land ... ?***

It is not that they come. You were told to deliver the horses, the implements, the hitches, everything. Everything. There is a saying that I felt as if hit by a sack. How can one feel when all your earned goods are taken away? They promised that everything would be shared, everybody would work, you would be able to take animals, the horses, when you need to work or go somewhere. Not only did they take away everything, they were good at telling stories. When you needed it, you could get it, but the pleasure... If one were told that everyone had to give away everything, then how would you feel? You would feel great?

***Do you remember how it was in 1944, when the Germans retreated, when the battle lines were here and the Russians came again, what was the mood? Were the people sad that the Germans were leaving, or were they afraid of Russians since they knew what they did in 1940? What was the mood in the village?***

The mood in the family... And... in the village there were all sorts of people with various moods. For some it was good, and there were some who got on their knees and crossed themselves. It was good for them that Russians came. Moods of the people... Here, in the village there was one who got on his knees and crossed himself, "It was good that Russians came. Now we would be able to live." He was not the only one. There were more people like that.

***And most people?***

Most people did not want it at all.

***The directors and the brigade leaders, were they local? Were they sent from somewhere? Were they Lithuanian, were they Russian or Jews?***

Not one of ours was Russian, and the ones who were sent, laughingly, we asked ourselves if they had drunk themselves, so that they were sent there. When they ruin a kolkhoz, then they are transferred by the region to another. The brigade leaders were local. They did not send the brigade leaders. They sent the directors.

***The brigade leaders, were they of Communist leaning, or just people who had nowhere to go, who reconciled themselves with everything and chose this life?***

They wanted to be brigade leaders. They had freedom and could do as they pleased. The brigade leaders embezzled from the kolkhozes, built houses for themselves. Things were better for the brigade leaders. They could get what others could not.

***What kind of people were the brigade leaders? Were they simple people from the village or educated people?***

Uneducated. Simple locals. Maybe somewhere there were other kinds. But I am talking about ours, the ones that I know about. They were simple people from our village. When a brigade leader commits an offense and is fired, then another one from the village is appointed. We had no outsider as a brigade leader. Directors were sent from outside. The directors were locals at the beginning. Later they were changed by the districts.

***What year did the collectivization establish itself? How long did the people try to hold out and not go to the collective farms?***

They could not hold out for long. They could not afford to. They cleaned out the granaries. They levied taxes. So how long could one live like this? It ended soon, and later they did not resist. We ourselves enrolled in the kolchoz. There was nothing that you could do. How can you protest? We had no way to protest.

***People who did not want to join the kolkhozes but nevertheless were forced, because the grains and everything was taken away, were they feeling like slaves because they did not work for themselves?***

How not for themselves? You were paid (irony). You work and at the end of the two years you get two or three kilos of low quality grain for a year of work... not real grain. Well, that is salary! You got a little plot, I think half a hectare, I don't remember exactly. What you are able to raise in these acres, that is your entire food. You were allowed to keep a cow.

***And a second cow was not permitted?***

No, under no circumstances. Only the brigade leaders could have two cows.

***So that things would not be too good?***

Yes, yes. You could not even keep a calf, not to speak, another cow. Later, you could keep the calf. Much later, when things became a little better, when there were earnings. And when there were earnings, after some years, the kolkhozes got a bit stronger. You work and work, but still you get something. You got paid with money for workdays in rubles, so you get a couple of rubles.

***When Soviet times ended ... how did the people react then, maybe they did not know how to live without the kolkhozes, how was all of that?***

Interesting question. There were all sorts. There are some who now miss the kolkhozes. Most said: "We lived well there." The ones who miss the kolkhozes were those who drank. When they earned some money, they had something for drinking. Now they have to earn it themselves. There is not enough for drinking so much. It used to be that those who worked in the kolkhozes, when they got some money, got drunk and rolled on the ground. There are various opinions. There also are people who are happy. There are all kinds. The ones who lead orderly lives, they are happy. For example the ones living in this house. This was bought, not owned. There lived four families, no, three. Then one family remained to live here at the other end of the house. A roof tile slipped out. It was raining, but they are not repairing it. Why would they repair it? The young ones would say that it is impossible to live here. So they would go someplace else, (snickering). See how good it used to be to live? So how would one not regret these times? You really have to miss these times. No one gives you anything. You have to deal with things yourself. It was the worst thing for the "pratianiakai", as they were called. They would ruin the housing, then would go and get another place to live. They would ruin that place, and this is how things got ruined. There is no way that you could convince these people that it is better now. And you could not convince the drunks. "It was better then. Now it is completely bad." How would it not be bad for them if they do not apply themselves to work?

***What do you think, should the Communists ask to be forgiven, should they be sorry for all these fifty years, for Lithuania's people's ruined lives, for the people's ruined fates?***

I don't know how to say it. Saying that they are sorry, that would not help anything anymore. But should they be tried or not, there were all kinds of people.

***Do you in your soul forgive them? Hold anger? Accept?***

Those who hurt me terribly, those I can never forgive under any circumstances. I can manage when I do not talk about them. And when I talk about them, my heart aches... How could they do it the way they did? How can you forgive? That I do not know.