

# Berta Grunstein

Berta Grunstein (nee Jager)

Marosvasarhely

Romania

Interviewer: Julia Negrea and Vera Badic

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*Berta Grunstein lives near to the synagogue in Marosvasarhely, in a two-room apartment, which was always furnished with the same old pieces as far as she can remember. Her wedding photo is hung on the wall above her bed, the other walls are decorated with Gobelin tapestries some of them woven by her, and there are a few Judaism-related pictures as well, which were given to her husband as presents. There are many small trinkets in the glass-cases; she knows in case of each whose gift it was. The life of the couple was strongly connected with the Jewish community's life; they were active members to it for more than sixty years. Mrs. Grunstein's sweetest memories are linked with the preparation of festive meals organized at the community. During the interview she visibly livened up each time we talked about the festive dinners, and she detailed accurately the different recipes. These days she doesn't leave her flat anymore, and she is not able to keep the house without help.*



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### **My family background**

My paternal grandfather, **David Jager** came to Szeretfalva [Editor's note: In Romanian Saratel, a village located 146 km to the south from Maramarossziget / Sighetu Marmatiei.] somewhere from the Maramaros [in Romanian Maramures] region. As far as I know, he was a corn-dealer, and died at a young age. I ignore when he was born, all I know is that when he died [in 1915], my father was fourteen years old; he became the breadwinner, and that is why he wasn't recruited. My grandmother was called **Leni Jager**, nee Lazar, her Jewish name was Lae. She came from the surroundings of Des [in Romanian Dej]; I don't know what the occupation of her parents was, but I

think they owned a shop. My grandparents moved from the Maramaros region to Szeretfalva after they got married, and they had four children there. My father, **Joszf Jager** was born in 1901, he was the oldest. He was followed by **Mojse Jager**, he was born in 1903. Then – I don't know after how many years – the third brother was born; I don't remember his name anymore, he died at home, in Szeretfalva, before 1944. He was married already, but didn't have any children. **Smil Jager** was the youngest, I don't know when he was born.

**Mojse Jager** was a butcher. He had five daughters with his first wife – I ignore her name –, the eldest was called Eszter. They were deported, and they all died in Auschwitz. After the war Mojse married a woman called Helen, I ignore her maiden name, and they had a son. They lived in Szeretfalva, and they emigrated to Israel in 1957 together with Smil [*the little brother*], at the time of the great emigration flow [1](#). Mojse was very ill, he passed away first in the 1960s, Helen, his second wife died after him.

I don't know what **Smil** was engaged in; his wife was called Malka, and they lived in Szaszregen [*in Romanian Reghin*]. He had two sons. One was David, he died in Israel at the age of forty-eight; I don't know the other's name, but he still lives in Israel. My father was already a sick man, and he said: 'When I recover, will you take me to see Smil?' I said 'Yes'. So when my father got better, my husband told me: 'Go, for you have promised. If something will happen to your father, you will be filled with remorse.' So in 1969 we visited Smil; he was already sick, and we visited him. Helen, Mojse's wife was there too. Since then the son of Smil came here to visit us with his grandchild. Malka died in 1960, Smil in the 1970s.

Grandfather Jager died in 1914; he left behind four small children. He is buried in Szeretfalva, not in the cemetery, but in the garden of one of my grandmother's siblings; he has a carved gravestone and everything. I don't know why he isn't buried in the Jewish cemetery; I know though that before high days my father used to go to his grave. I was there too.

My grandmother never got married again. They had a big orchard along the main road, she kept animals, horses too. She didn't have any servants, her sons helped her, especially my father, since he was the oldest, and he also took care of his little brothers. They had wagons, and they brought corn to the market. When her sons got married, my grandmother distributed the land: she gave a lot for each to build houses; all this was after World War I. My father owned the front house, because he was the eldest, then followed the second son's house, and that's how the four brothers' houses were lined up. Grandmother Leni's house was in the back of the garden, it was a weak house, I remember that, but her children all had nice houses.

Grandmother died before deportation, in 1942 or 1943; she was old, but I ignore how old. She is buried in the Jewish cemetery of Szeretfalva, alike my sister, Fajge and all our relatives who had died. There was a big cemetery in Szeretfalva, it still exists.

My father was called **Joszf Jager**; he was born in 1901 in Szeretfalva. I don't know for how long he studied, because he was fourteen when his father died at a young age, and he became the breadwinner. I'm not aware of the circumstances of my parents' meeting each other; however, theirs was a love match. My mother was called **Szerena Jager**, nee Rosenfeld. My mother's family was from Harina [*in Romanian Herina*], which is a few kilometers far from Szeretfalva, and some fifteen kilometers far from Beszterce, but they were poorer than my father's family. Though she was a widow, grandmother Jager was well-off, and she didn't want my father to marry my mother,

so my father gave money to grandmother Rosenfeld to be able to buy my mother a dowry. They got married in 1923.

My maternal grandfather was called **Jozsef Rosenfeld**, and he was born in the 1880s. As far as I know, both my grandfather and my grandmother were from Herina, which is a Saxon village. I guess my grandfather had two siblings, but I don't know when they were born. My grandfather came from a very wealthy family, but his siblings cheated him, they distributed everything, the land among themselves. I ignore why all this happened, however my grandfather became poor because of this.

**David Rosenfeld** was one of his brothers; he was very well-to-do, he even had a threshing-machine, and they lived in Herina. I don't know his wife's name; they had two sons. All I can remember is that one of his sons studied at a university too. They were all deported, but only one of the boys came back, and he emigrated to Israel in the 1950s.

The other brother of my grandfather was **Jenkel Rosenfeld**, he too was very rich. He had a wife and a daughter, who was married already and had a child when they were all deported, and they died there.

The maiden name of grandmother **Hendl Rosenfeld** was Blatt, and she had four siblings. I know only one of them, because she was called **Berta Grunstein**, and she was my husband's mother. Once it was Pesach, I was a child then, and my husband's mother told my grandmother to let me go there for Pesach. I did go, but I didn't get to know my husband then, he already had his own family; back then his little brother, Mihaly courted me.

My maternal grandparents were also engaged in corn-trading; well, in fact the Jews were all engaged in trading, but they [*the grandparents*] were not so well-to-do. Their house in Herina had three rooms and a kitchen, they didn't have a servant. On Fridays, when they were coming from the fair, they dropped in to us, and my mother welcomed them with food and pies. Grandfather Rosenfeld was religious, but he wasn't bearded; my grandmother had a wig, they all had, even my mother. The synagogue in Herina was bigger than that one in Szeretfalva, because there were more Jews. There was a shochet too, and a Jewish bath next to the synagogue; in Szeretfalva there wasn't any, so people used to go to Herina to bath.

In the war of 1914 my grandfather was taken to Russia, and he was a prisoner there for I don't know how many years. He came home sickly from there. I was little when he died, but I can remember him, I visited them many times. It happened before Pesach. They had a horse-drawn wagon too, and my grandfather wanted to go somewhere. He went into the stable and said: 'I feel so bad, I presume I won't live to see the Seder.' He didn't live indeed, because he lay down and died. This happened in the 1930s. I suppose he died because of a heart attack, he was quite old.

As far as I know, my grandparents had six children. My mother, **Szerena Rosenfeld** was born in 1903 in Herina, Beszterce county. All I know about her sisters is that they all got married, their life was settled. For instance it seems to me that one of them got married in Bucharest. Only one of them stayed in Herina with my grandmother. She was called **Marta Rosenfeld**, she had a little daughter. They lived in the same house with my grandmother, her husband was Jewish, and he was also from Bucharest; I don't know how he got here. Marta was deported to Auschwitz together with her daughter and my grandmother, they died there. Nobody knows what happened to her husband.

The youngest sister of my mother was **Piri Rosenfeld**. I don't know when she was born and whether she was married before the war or had children; however, she was the second wife of Marton Grunstein, my husband's elder brother. They got married after the war, and had a son. My brother-in-law divorced her, so in 1958 Piri left for Israel with her son, who was called Andras, and was nine years old at that time.

One of my mother's little brothers was called **Adolf Rosenfeld**; he had a wife, who had died before the war. Adolf was taken to work service; when he came back, he married his second wife, but I don't know what her name was. She came from the Maramaros region, her father was a shochet, but she was a very modern woman. They lived in Beszterce. In 1946 we celebrated our weddings together, we had the same relatives.

My mother, **Szerena Jager** [*nee Rosenfeld*] was born in 1903 in Herina. As far as I know, she finished primary school. At home they spoke Yiddish. Originally my mother had long hair, it reached her waist; I know this, because she kept her braid after she cut her hair. She had some hair at the front, and when she covered it with the wig, she still had that hair on her front. Usually when she was working at home, she wore a kerchief, and she wore a wig only on high days.

My parents got married in 1923, but I don't remember them talking about it. At the beginning they lived in lodgings in Saratel, at the parents of one of my classmates, not far from my grandmother's house; later they built a house on the lot given by grandmother Jager.

## Growing up

We were five siblings, three girls and two boys. David was born in 1925, I was born in 1927, Mirjam in 1930, Fajge in 1933, then Salamon was born in 1938.

My elder brother, **David** was two years older than me; he got his name after our grandfather. He was cross-eyed, he was born with this defect; the sun was shining and he looked into it...

**Mirjam** had a twin sister, who died during childbirth because of the umbilical cord. My poor mother cried so much; when she went to the graveyard, she used to look at the rows and say: where these are, there is room for one more; and that's what happened indeed: she gave birth after all this to Fajge, who also died as a child. Mirjam was deported together with us, and she died in Auschwitz.

**Fajge** was my favorite among my siblings; we were sleeping in the same bed, and she always went to bed earlier to heat up my place. It was war time, the Hungarians came in, and Fajge got ill right when the tanks were passing through Szeretfalva, so they couldn't take her to the doctor, we had to wait until the tanks went off, then we took her to Kolozsvar, to the Matyas hospital. *[Editor's note: The founder and physician-director of the Park sanatorium - more popularly Matyas sanatorium - was Dr. Matyas Matyas. He graduated at the Jozsef Ferenc University in Kolozsvar, he became a general surgeon, obstetrician and gynecologist there. The private sanatorium founded by him employed quite a few physicians, it was in the Furdo street. In 1948 it was nationalized and transformed into a pediatrics hospital. It still works.]* The doctor said we came too late, her appendix was perforated. Yet I stayed there with her, but later they told us to bring her home, because her abdomen got full with pus. We were so close to each other that she couldn't die until I didn't go out of the room. She was ten years old, when she died in 1943. Fajge is buried in Szeretfalva, in the Jewish cemetery. The cemetery still exists.

In 1944 **Salamon** was very little, he didn't even go to school yet, when he was deported with us, and he died in Auschwitz.

I was born in Szeretfalva in 1927. After I came here to Marosvasarhely, my husband called me Muci, because I told him I didn't like my name. My mother never called me so; however, people know me as Muci, all of my friends call me so.

In school we learnt in Romanian. I went to school in the morning, and in the afternoon I went to the cheder. From first to fourth class we had a teacher, then from fifth to tenth class we had different teachers. [2](#) In school we were together with Romanian children, we were friends. I was in the seventh or eighth degree, when Hungarians came in, and for one year I learnt in Hungarian, though I didn't speak Hungarian at all, I learnt the language only when I came to Marosvasarhely. Every Jewish girl and boy from our village attended the cheder, I even knew how to write in Hebrew. My teacher asked me to write a letter in Hebrew to my parents, and I could do it, but today I can't write in Hebrew anymore. Our school was a big one with ten classes, because there were many children in Szeretfalva, but I don't know how many inhabitants were there. There was no possibility there to learn to play the piano; when I got married after the war, and I came here, to Marosvasarhely at the age of nineteen, I learnt to play the piano at Velemenyi. *[Editor's note: At that time she was a well-known piano teacher in Marosvasarhely.]* I had a big Hohner accordion too, but I sold it.

We didn't celebrate Christmas, but Jewish holidays were observed. At Purim balls were organized in Herina, we went there from Szeretfalva; people came from other villages too, where there were more Jews. At Simchat Torah children prepared some kind of show, there was a little flag with an apple on the top of it, and there was a candle in the apple, and everybody followed the Torah, children too.

My father was a corn trader, he supplied the flourmills of Beszterce with corn. They organized corn fairs in Lekence and I don't know where else, he bought corn there too, and then sold it in Beszterce. I was some eleven years old, when once my father sent me to Beszterce to take the money. We owned some land, and had workers who cultivated it. There was a neighbor who lifted sacks for my father. My father liked horses a lot.

We had a great farm at home, we kept all kinds of animals and poultry: goose, turkey, chicken, horse, cow and calf. Back then people didn't have water and electricity in their house; water was brought from the well, and they heated with wood. Electricity was introduced when Hungarians came in, in 1940. [3](#) On Sabbath a neighbor came and he made fire in the stove. Our house was a country-house with three big rooms; we had a storeroom too. Outside we had one more room, that was the summer apartment. My parents lived in one room, we, the three girls in other, and the boys in the third one.

There was an old lady, she was called Anna, who looked after children together with my mother. She was Romanian, and on each Sunday she went home. We were crying and holding her skirt, and she told us we should not cry, because she would come back by the evening. During the week she slept in our summer flat. When my mother accompanied my father to fairs, I was the eldest girl at home, and housekeeping was put in my charge. Once I scrubbed the floor in the kitchen. We had an oven where bread was baked, its opening was inside, and its back side in the garden. I squirted water on the wall. I wanted to please my mother, but of course she was angry with me. I even



wanted to fill the goose to have goose fat. I set on it and kept on feeding it; I did the same my mother used to do, I filled it with my finger, my sisters helped me. But when we stood up, the corn was next to its crow, so I said I wouldn't ever try it. Every year we had a big firkin of fat. I still have that firkin, but since my husband had arteriosclerosis, he said we should prepare soap of the fat.

My parents were well-to-do. We didn't feel the want of money or anything else. There were poorer people than us, and they could get along. When they milked the cows, my mother told us: 'Now, you take milk here, and you there.' And we brought milk for free for people who didn't have. My parents dressed nicely, we were almost the most elegant people in the village. There was one more family, they were corn traders as well, who were well-off, then we. At the age of fifteen I was already given a golden watch. We got a new dress for each high day, sometimes we got silk dress, yet silk dresses counted for something really extraordinary. They bought it in Beszterce, not necessarily from a Jewish salesman; it only had to be nice.

My parents were religious, but not as much as people of Bnei Brak. *[Editor's note: According to a survey made in 2002 Bnei Brak is one of the most religious towns in Israel.]* They observed the Jewish tradition, and we spoke Yiddish at home. My father wasn't Orthodox; he was a gabbai, he prayed each morning at home with his tallit and tefillin. On each Friday evening, on Sabbath and on holidays they went to the synagogue. My mother went to the mikveh each month. We had a big and beautiful synagogue in Szeretfalva, it wasn't storied. It had two large rooms, one for men, the other for women, and there was a window between the two rooms. We didn't have a rabbi, only a shochet. *[Editor's note: In fact it is not clear what the interviewee means when saying that his father wasn't Orthodox: presumably she means he wasn't Hasid. Otherwise we can assume that they were rather Orthodox and not Neologs.]*

There was a kosher slaughterhouse in the village, and a shochet cut the poultry as well. My uncle, Markus Rosenfeld was the shochet, his wife, Eszter was the sister of my grandmother Jager. They came somewhere from the Maramaros region too, he was a nice bearded man, moreover, his wife was a very elegant and modern woman, she wasn't old-fashioned at all. They had a clean house; we brought the cholent there on Saturday, it was cooked in their oven alike the matzah. The shochet led the prayer, and he was our teacher in the cheder too. My father was the gabbai, he distributed the meat. At Sukkot my father invited to us everybody, and so my mother and I cooked all night, and people danced a religious dance in circle.

My mother was a great cook, she was a good housewife, she enjoyed cooking. I remember that in my childhood, at Pesach we had separate dishes we kept in a chest. Each of us had their own plate, every child knew which was their own. We had meat-soup made of beef. We didn't eat bread at all for eight days; we had fried matzah, 'reminyi'; we cooked beet soup with potatoes. I often prepare beet soup as well. The beet needs to be grated and boiled a little in salted water. It gets white within a few minutes, then it has to be strained; but it mustn't be cooked for long, because it would lose its color. The strained soup must be put back on fire, you put some vinegar and a little sugar, and an egg stirred in it. You serve it with potatoes cut into cubes. That's all. They used to make 'pdlit' for the meat soup, balls from matzah meal. That's very tasty. You beat an egg, you add a little salt, pepper and matzah meal; it must be somewhat thicker than the pancake dough, but not much more, because it will grow, and the 'pdlit' would get hard - it's not like semolina, that's not so substantial -, so it needs more egg. So you put it into the meat soup. It is very tasty.

On each Friday night my father prayed, my mother prepared fish in aspic, meat soup and challah. On Fridays it was us, children who brought the cholent to the shochet, and at Sabbath noon we brought it home. On Sabbath my father and my brother went to the synagogue; on high days women went to the synagogue as well, nobody worked. At Chanukkah we lit seven candles *[Editor's note: instead of the usual eight plus one candles]*.

In Romanian Szeretfalva was called Saratel, and it had Romanian and Jewish population. The village was on the main road, which goes to Beszterce, Kolozsvár and Des. It was a somewhat big and wealthy village situated ten kilometers far from Beszterce. There were many Jews, there were two minyans, so twenty, twenty five families, but all of them were deported. The Jewish houses weren't in a separate part of the village, but among the Romanians. Poor Jews usually had some profession. There were shops, but not only on the main road, there was a street which led to the railway station. There were shops too, which belonged rather to Jews. One of my grandmother's sisters, Mirjam Lazar – I don't know her name after her husband – had such a grocery. Jews owned the land in that village, and the mill too, but the miller wasn't Jewish. It was a water-mill, the Beszterce flew there, I was born there, because we lived on the riverside. All the children used to bath in the river; I learnt how to swim there. When it rained, the water was deep, but when it was drought, it wasn't deep.

My parents never took a holiday. However, there was a salted bath not far from Saratel, the water emerged from the ground, there was 'namol' *[mud, in Romanian]* people smeared with. I used to go there with my mother and grandmother. My mother told me: 'I will give you one lei, come with me', so I did. Everybody went there from the village, one didn't have to pay anything.

We had a post office in the village, but there wasn't any doctor or pharmacy, people went to see a doctor in Beszterce. We didn't have electricity, we did listen to the radio though. My uncle Mojse had a gramophone and records, he liked music. If I remember well, he even took it to Israel. At home we had mainly old Jewish books, inherited from father to son. My parents weren't engaged in politics, well there weren't parties then! People respected my father a lot, they came to ask for his advice. They used to ask him if his daughter or son wanted to get married. Somebody came from the village: 'You're well-to-do, just as I do – he told my father –, let your daughter marry my son.' My father answered: 'I won't let my daughter get married yet', he talked about me. Back then Jews married only Jews, mixed marriages didn't exist.

In Saratel there were Romanians, but there wasn't any anti-Semite manifestation. People got on well in those times. Hitler didn't exist yet. We didn't know, we wouldn't have thought that something was to come, we had no reason to believe this. We had Romanian newspapers in the village, but one couldn't find out anything from those, and when Hungarians were in, we didn't really have Hungarian newspapers.

### **During the war**

When in 1940 the Hungarians came in [4](#), out of a childish trick my brother David broke the window of a Hungarian army car with a stone. My parents paid it, and that was it. He didn't have troubles.

In 1940 men were taken to work service [5](#); my father was taken somewhere across Budapest. I don't know exactly when he was taken. We wrote to each other. Before 1944 he came home, then they deported him. David was also taken to a concentration camp; he died, because he couldn't

bear starving.

I was seventeen years old, when they gathered us, and emptied the entire village. We went to Beszterce by a horsed wagon. We had nothing to pack in, because they didn't let us take anything, the gendarmes stood next to us until we got ready. They didn't inform us in advance, but entered the village and drew out the Jewish families. They took us to Beszterce to the brick factory, the ghetto was there. Jews from all the surrounding villages were taken there, from Herina as well.

Our family entered the ghetto united. It was big, Jews from Beszterce were also there. We lived under awful conditions, we lived in barracks. It was surrounded with barbed wire fence. We had an acquaintance who wasn't Jewish, and who brought us a package; they didn't take it from him, but didn't let him give it to us; we ate what they gave us.

We were in the ghetto from May 3rd 1944 until June 4th, then they took us away. We traveled in the same carriage, the whole family, with grandma Rosenfeld, Marta, her daughter and grandchild and all the Jews from Herina, they separated us only in Auschwitz. Nobody knew where they were taking us, though it was a long time they had been doing this in Warsaw, from 1939. But television and such things didn't exist yet, so we had no source of information.

We arrived to Auschwitz at midnight. I ignore for how many days the journey lasted; however they didn't give us anything to eat or drink. Gendarmes with cock-feathered hats escorted us until the Czech border, and there they handed us over to the Germans. *[Editor's note: Presumably the Gendarmes escorted the deportation train until Kosice, and they passed it there to the Germans. In those times the Hungarian-Slovak border was near Kosice. The Czech Republic didn't exist; there was the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, but Hungary didn't have any common border with it.]* In Auschwitz there was Mengele, and they kept on saying: to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left, although nobody knew what left or right meant. One group to the crematorium, and the other was selected for work, so to life or death. I was sent to one group, my father to other. They took my mother, my little brother, Salamon and grandma Rosenfeld to the crematorium that very night. My brother was very little, he didn't even go to school yet.

I was quite well developed, I had got used to work, so they selected me for work, but I wasn't together with any of my relatives. I was there for about two more days, then they took me to work. I was in several concentration camps. I was in Germany, in Glowen - this was on the other side of the Main. *[Editor's note: Perhaps Berta Grunstein means Glowen, a place in the state of Brandenburg. However, this is near the Elbe river, and not across it, but near its hither (that is eastern) side. In fact we did manage to identify neither the place, nor the concentration camp.]* I was there from July 1944 until February 1945, for eight months. We were only women in that camp. I met there Kati, the younger sister of doctor Dengelegi. She was deported from Nagyvarad; she was very nice, we were taken to work together. We were building a railway, we were carrying heavy rails and beams, and they also ordered us to dig bunkers for the soldiers, so they could put the munitions there. I was the youngest, and Kati descended *[into the mound]* and helped me dig it out. When I told her after the war, when I related all this to her, she said: 'Oh, it is such a good feeling to hear what I had done.' There was an old Saxon man from Nagyszeben, they were taken there to help, he was a Wehrmacht *[soldier]*, and he used to give me stealthily apple or a piece of bread, he was nice. I was in Glowen for the whole winter. At five in the morning we had to go to the 'appel' *[lining up for the checking of the number]*, in shoes with wooden sole, its upper part was



made of tent-cloth. Many people got frozen there, but one ought not to even look there, because at eight they came to count us, then they took us to work.

In February 1945, when the Russian tanks and the army were approaching, the Germans started to evacuate us from Glowen; in daytime they kept us in the wood, and transported us only in the night. British airplanes kept on dropping those searchlights to see what was going on.

We were still in Germany; we arrived into a small town, a former concentration camp, I don't know what its name was; however it was deserted, empty. There were barracks where prisoners had been kept before us, I think they were Ukrainians. The Germans wanted us to stay in that concentration camp for one night. But in the meantime the Russians arrived. The Germans gathered us to take us away. In the rear there were reeds. And a girl, who was from Borsa – that is in Maramaros – told me: 'Come, let's go and hide there, until the Germans leave.' I was still a child and I was afraid to go, but all the others ran away. And whoever didn't run away, she was taken further. So I ran there too, and we stayed hidden in the reeds until four in the morning, then we went back to the barrack. There was hay and straw on the ground. We sat down; there was gun-fight all around us, and we were waiting. Later Russians came in holding their guns ahead. They saw we weren't Germans, so they didn't care much, and went away. We stayed there, then we went into the town to look for some food. It was a very small town, I don't know what it was called. The houses were empty, the Germans all fled, the whole town was empty. We entered the houses, we were looking for the larders, for food. Bread or whatever we could find in the larders, jams and things like that. We took some clothes, shoes to get dressed... We went back to the concentration camp into the barracks until things cooled down, and after two days we left.

We were many, some thirteen. We looked for a cart and put on it what we had: food we had taken from that town; we were pulling the cart, and we walked until we found a railway station. I don't remember the station's name; once in a day passed there a freight train, but that day the train had already gone. So we went to the first house. And we asked them to let us sleep there for one night. Germans already were moved in. And they didn't let us in. So we called a Russian soldier, and he said they should leave the house, and we could stay in. We said we didn't want this, just give us a place. Thus they carried some hay into the stable, and we stayed there until next morning, when we went to the railway station, and we stood there until a train came, and we got onto. It was a freight train, it took us to Neubrandenburg [*Editor's note: a place situated in the state of Mecklenburg, which is to the north from the state of Brandenburg*], there were some English army posts. The English were already left, so we were lodged and kept there in quarantine for three months.

There were Russians, guards were keeping the gate. Some of us got sick, and were in hospital. If we wanted to go out, they were supposed to give us a certificate that we could go to the hospital, and we had to go back by a certain time. Many died there... Because they suffered of starvation, ate too much and got dysentery.

## **After the war**

On May 9th 1945 the war ended. My father was liberated by Americans, I was liberated by Russians. The Russians let us go, so you got a paper saying who you were, where you came from, what you did, and they took us to a train, these were freight-cars as well, to take us home. There

were people from many countries. There were people from Bohemia, Romania, but not only Jews, there were Italians who weren't Jewish. There were both women and men. We traveled across Poland. The Poles were very vicious: the train stopped because they always sent it to a side-track, and we stationed there for one or two days. We left the train, again to look for some food... And they said they would blow up the train for we had dared to go to the town. So we went back and stayed there for one day, one night.

Then we passed to the Czech Republic. The Czechs welcomed us with loaf and milk. We stayed there too for one day. Then we arrived to Hungary; in Budapest we wanted to find the Jewish community. In the tram they wanted us to show our tickets. Well, we said we came from Auschwitz, we didn't have any money. We were quite a lot, who all came from there... We came together from Germany. A man stood up and asked: 'How many are you?', and he paid the ticket for all of us. We got some papers in Budapest too from the community, but I don't remember the details anymore, and we came to Arad to the border. We got some papers in Arad too, and we came by train to Kolozsvár. We got down there.

In the railway station I met by chance Nussbacher, who later courted me, and who had been together with my father in the concentration camp. He told me to wait for my father, because he was to come. Adolf, my mother's brother arrived as well, we waited for my father, and we came home together. My father was in Dachau, as far as I know; he didn't tell me much about it, I don't remember anymore. He was liberated by the Americans. Only after we came home, we found out that the other members of our family didn't survive. We didn't even think of staying in Germany or to go somewhere else, we came home to meet the other members of our families. We were some ten persons. They came not only from Saratel, but from the surrounding villages and Beszterce. We hired a microbus together and came back to Beszterce, from there we went home directly. Only three of the twenty-five families had members who came home.

Everything was taken away from our house. They took everything that was made of wood, even the stairs and the well. The neighbors didn't tell a word, and they didn't give back what we had left there. Nobody had lived in the house, they only carried off everything. We didn't find any photos or papers, anything. We left the valuable things, the bed-linen at a person from Saratel, but they didn't give them back. Only my father and I survived, and we had to start again. We began to run a farm again, I even whitewashed the house, I painted patterns on the wall. Although we had the farm, one could not make a living of it, so my father started crop trading again, and he was transporting wheat to Beszterce to the same mills. The millers weren't Jewish, I think, but I'm not sure.

I spent my eighteenth birthday at home. I spent one year at home, then I got married and moved to Marosvasarhely. My father stayed in Saratel. After we came home from deportation, my father started farming again, and he bought horses too. When I visited him with my husband, I always used to tell him: 'Take a look at the stable and praise his horses!' I hired a skillful woman for my father, a Saxon woman, who did the housekeeping. When I went home, my father was always complaining: 'Now tell me, how I can sit idle?' I answered: 'You'd worked enough. Are your grandchildren crying?'

My step-mother was called **Lujza Adler** after her first husband, and Lae was her Jewish name. I don't know what his first husband's name or occupation was. Before the war they lived in Torda.

Her husband was ill, and died at a young age. Lujza wasn't deported, because she lived in Torda; she came to Marosvasarhely after the war, and worked in the kosher canteen. *[Editor's note: Torda was part of Romania between 1940 and 1944, the Hungarian-Romanian border was some 20 kilometers far from it. Concerning Jews from Romania see 6, 7, 8.]* There was a kosher canteen next to the synagogue, at its back, it served mainly Jewish students, but not only. She came to visit his brother-in-law, Arisztid Adler, who was the friend of my brother-in-law, Marton Grunstein; the later presented my mom *[step-mother]* to my father. She offered him cholent. When he came home, I asked him where he had been for so long. He answered: 'I was to look for a wife.' He added that we were supposed to pay a visit to them at five. That's what happened, we visited them on Saturday afternoon, and I took such a liking for her, because she was a very skilful woman, a clean housewife; Lujza was also a very nice woman. I told her: 'Listen, dear, my father needs nothing but a woman. You mustn't bring there even a needle.' Mom visited my father in Saratel with Arisztid's mother. They took a look, they were pleased, the house was supplied with everything; so they agreed to get married in two weeks.

Lujza had a son and two daughters. By that time her children had already established their own families. I don't know when his son, **Joszif Adler** was born. He lives in Jerusalem, he left for Israel in 1846 *[Editor's note: At that time it was Palestine yet. The State of Israel was established in 1948; between 1920 and 1948 it was the British Mandate of Palestine.]*, so he was taking part in the fights of 1948 [9](#), and he was shot. He emigrated alone, entered a kibbutz, got married there; he has two daughters.

One of Lujza's daughters is called **Piri [Piroska] Adler**. I don't know her husband's surname, only his first name, Bandi *[Andras]*; he called mom *[Lujza]* aunt Lujza, he didn't call her mom. Piri has two sons. One of them is called Ivan, he studied in Bucharest; he was editing illustrated magazines. I don't know the other's name; he became a doctor. In the 1970s Piri emigrated to Israel, because her sons were already living there.

Lujza's other daughter is **Julianna Adler**, she was called Juci. She got married too, if I remember well, her husband was called Bratislau. They lived in Torda, and they had two children. Their daughter, Eva studied medicine in Kolozsvar. It was not much after their son, Ervin had left for Israel, when something happened to him in the army, and he got partly paralyzed. Yet he got married later, he married the daughter of a doctor from Marosvasarhely. Approximately in the 1970s Juci died here, in Marosvasarhely, but we didn't tell mom. We kept telling her that Juci was in a sanatorium here and there. After Juci died, her children and her husband left for Israel.

My parents got married in 1947. Before the war Lujza worked in Torda. She learnt how to make the upper part of shoes, and she worked as a shoemaker in order to provide for her children. Poor Lujza had nothing. She had a coat she had refashioned from the coat of her ex-husband; she had only a little suitcase. Her son-in-law from Kolozsvar came to the wedding; they got married here, in Marosvasarhely, in the synagogue. According to Judaism, when parents get married for the second time, children mustn't be present, so I prepared a dinner at home, and I invited her son-in-law and my brother-in-law's family; otherwise there wasn't any party organized. The next day they went to Torda and Kolozsvar to meet Lujza's children, and from there they went home to Saratel. After my step-mother got married, she quitted her job at the canteen; what became of it later, I don't know that.

In 1949 my father and Lujza left for Israel with a permit to leave definitely. After my father arrived to Israel, he took out his stepson, Jozzif from the kibbutz. He told him: you're here for so many years, and you don't even have underpants, because there people shared everything. But Jozzif didn't treat him nicely. In Israel both my father and Lujza worked, I think in a leather factory. He even bought animals and established a farm, but he threw up everything and came home in 1953; he said for him Israel was where his kid was, and so he came home. Lujza came with him, her daughters still lived here, but all in vain, they didn't bother much for her. They settled in Saratel; there was a small shop, my father set it up, and ran it. Later they moved to Beszterce, he quitted his house and everything. Gypsy people moved into his former house. It is still there, but I didn't get it back yet.

After I came home, I spent my eighteenth birthday at home. Two men courted me at the same time. One of them was Nussbacher, whom I had met at the railway station in Kolozsvar, when we were coming home, the other was Joska Grunstein, my future husband. They were of the same age, and they were in the army together.

Nussbacher fell desperately in love with me. For my eighteenth birthday he brought me a manicure set and a photo of him; he was like a film star, yet I liked my husband better. I told him clearly that I loved him as my brother, but I wouldn't prefer him to be my husband. He had a brother in Kolozsvar who owned a chocolate factory; he also had a brother in Beszterce, so he stayed at them; this brother of him had a mill. The Bussbachers were very well-to-do Jewish people, they had a horse-drawn carriage. Later he changed his name into Alex. I didn't want to stay in the countryside. He told me: 'No problem, Beszterce is ten kilometers far. I'll buy you a cab, a car with driver, whenever you want, you can go to Beszterce. I'll take you to the cinema, to the theatre, wherever you may wish to go.' But I didn't want to. I told him: 'There are so many beautiful girls in Kolozsvar', but he answered he wanted none of them, just me. He was so reticent, in turn I was chatty. He told me I was like a chirping bird. However I didn't want to marry him.

I knew my husband before the war already; he was the cousin of my mother. He already had had a family. Once I visited Piri, my mother's sister in Marosvasarhely; she was the wife of my future brother-in-law. They lived in the Kossuth street. We came from the concentration camp, we didn't have any clothes. We had to have shoes, coats, everything made, so I went to buy materials with my aunt. My husband and I met at Piri's. My mother's little brother, Adolf was about to get married for the second time. All these people were relatives, we all got married with relatives in those times. She told Joska: 'Well, you should get married...', and she kept on praising me and telling how good housewife I was and how decent a girl I was. My husband lost his family in the concentration camp, and he was much grieved about it. But he started to think about us... For me, who I had lost my mother and siblings, he meant compensation. I was eighteen, and he was thirty-two years old. He was such a warm-hearted and kind man, there are just a few husbands like him. I became fond of him not as of a man, but because he was so kind-hearted. So finally I decided to marry Grunstein.

Nussbacher told me he would commit suicide if I didn't marry him. I didn't take him for serious. Many people said that I was a very pretty girl. I wasn't money-oriented, so I chose my husband, because if I had been selfish, I would have chosen the other. Nussbacher went to Kolozsvar, and committed suicide in his brother's bathroom. I was visiting my aunt, and my father came and told my aunt what had happened, and they didn't dare to tell me... Finally my aunt told me. I was

struck dumb. They had to take me to a doctor.

Before I got married, I went to the baths [*that is to the mikveh*] in Beszterce, otherwise they wouldn't have marry me. We got married on December 1st 1946, on the same day as my uncle Adolf. The wedding was organized in Beszterce, in the courtyard of the Jewish restaurant, under a chupa. First they married the other couple, because they were older, then us. I don't know whether there was a rabbi or only a shochet, but I think it was the shochet from Beszterce. It was a great snow; I was wearing a fur-coat and a white dress. There were a lot of people at the wedding, the room was hardly enough at the restaurant; half of the country knew my father, so people came. It was a kosher restaurant. They didn't serve up any special meal, just the usual: we had starter, meat, soup too, we had garnishing, cakes, drinks. We were given smaller gifts. After the wedding we moved to Marosvasarhely; we lived in the Lajos Kossuth street, it was a hired apartment. We were there from December until June or July, and we moved later into this house.

My husband, **Jozsef Grunstein** was born in Chiuza [*in Hungarian Kozepfalva*], in Beszterce county, in 1914. His father was called Mendel Grunstein. They lived in Bethlen, in Romanian Beclean, which is a village near Des; I don't know what the occupation of his father was, or where his family came from. He had two brothers, the oldest was Marton. Marton was born in 1909, Joska, my husband in 1913, Mihaly, his little brother in the 1920s. His parents were religious. I don't know whether they were Orthodox or Neolog, but they were religious like us. They had the animals cut by the shochet, they used separate dishes for milky and for meat.

I don't know what education **Marton** had; however, he worked at the food-supply administration as a bookkeeper. He established a family here, in Marosvasarhely - I don't know the name of his first wife -, and he had a daughter. They were deported from Marosvasarhely, his daughter was four years old. My brother-in-law was a very miserly person. My husband, when he came here to work [*before the war*], didn't stay at them, just ate at them, and he told me his brother had taken the money for the meals. His second wife was Piri Grunstein, nee Rosenfeld; she was the little sister of my mother. They had a son, he's called Andras. My brother-in-law divorced her, thus in 1958 my aunt and the boy, who was eight years old then, emigrated to Israel, and there she changed her name into Peled. When we visited them in 1969, her son was in the army. I don't remember where he lived and what he did for a living. Both my husband and I loved very much this aunt of mine. I don't know what the name of my brother-in-law's third wife was; she wasn't Jewish, and my brother-in-law divorced my aunt because of her. Marton died in Marosvasarhely in 1992.

All I know about **Mihaly**, my husband's little brother is that he died during deportation somewhere in Germany. My husband tried to arrange that Mihaly would get enlisted in 1943, though he wasn't of the proper age yet. They took him, and he wrote from the army that he intended to escape. My husband answered him not to do so, because his fellow-soldiers would get punished. Nevertheless later he was taken to Auschwitz, and he died somewhere in Germany.

My husband went to school in Bethlen; he was studying a lot using electric light, until he went blind. All this happened when he was some fifteen-sixteen years old; so they took him to Kolozsvár, and he was operated. They told him he must stop learning. Thus he learnt to work in leather, but I don't know where. Before the war he worked already in leather in Bethlen, then he moved to Marosvasarhely. Here he was selling broadcloth in a private shop; he met his first wife, **Helen Grun** there. She was from Beszterce. In Kolozsvár she stayed at an uncle, who raised her, then she



came to Marosvasarhely to work, she was an employee in a hardware shop. In the meantime, in 1935 my husband was enrolled in the army. He was in the Romanian army in Szatmarnemeti; he was twenty-one at that time. He was allowed to leave for one day, when they got married. After he demobilized – this was around 1937 –, they lived in Marosvasarhely in the Cuza Voda street, in his wife's house until deportation. He had a son, he was called Erno, and was born in 1940. *[Editor's note: According to photo number Erno Grunstein was born approximately in March 1941.]* They were deported together with the wife and daughter of Marci. My husband and my brother-in-law, Marci were taken to work service; the two of them came back, but their wives and children perished in Auschwitz.

The forced labor camp was in Maramarossziget *[in fact in the Maramures region]*, up in the mountains; they were digging out bunkers. From Nagybanya they were taken to Borsa, then to Maramarossziget, they were liberated there. There were thirty-two in the camp who were from Marosvasarhely, and they were all good friends. My husband was working in the canteen; every evening he was returning *[to the camp]* with a rucksack on his back, he was carrying bread and food for all the thirty-two people.

After the wedding first we lived in lodgings. I didn't know the owner. Previously a girl had lived there, but she had left for Israel *[Palestine]*, that's how we could move in. Later we bought the apartment where I live at the present. It had only one room and a kitchen, we built the rest later in order to have room when my father and step-mother came to visit us, on holidays or on Sabbath. We wanted them to move here, but they didn't want to. He used to come here to the synagogue, he knew everybody, and everybody knew him. Yet he kept on telling that 'At home I look out the window and I know everybody around', he was a sociable person. My poor father used to say that he would come only when he would be carried. That's exactly what happened.

At the age of seventy-five he was already sick, and he was grieved about the fact that he couldn't work anymore. He always worked as a self-employed person, so he didn't have any employment to retire of; he didn't care much about it in fact, because he had means to live of. He was taken to a hospital in Kolozsvar, and he died there in 1978. It was just then that Pop Mihai, we called him Misi, a good friend of us took us to Kovaszna to a treatment. I had given our keys to the neighbor so that he would pick up our post. One day he heard the phone ringing. He came in, and he was given the message that the cleaning woman had called my step-mother from Kolozsvar to tell her that my father had died. The neighbors went to Misi, who called my step-mother; he got into the car again with his wife, he took some money with him, he came for us to Kovaszna, then we traveled all night to Kolozsvar from there. We arrived at daybreak, at five o'clock, but it was still dark at Bandi's, the son-in-law of my mom. Bandi told us that we could bury my father there at noon already. I answered: 'You won't bury anybody. You won't dispose over him, but I will.' My husband and I went to the synagogue; in its courtyard a cousin of mine lived. I asked him where my father was. He said he was in the morgue. I said to this: 'Wasn't there room enough in Bandi's house to take him home?' For this is the tradition. In turn all the belongings of my father were packed up in a big case. So we started to make arrangements: we found a car to transport the dead, a car to transport us, then we went to the People's Council to ask for the paper *[the death certificate]*. I gave a phone call at home, Scheiner was the president at that time *[Editor's note: that is the president of the Jewish community; Centropa interviewed her wife, Julia Scheiner as well]*, to organize the funerals at four o'clock. So we got in the car, and we brought my father. We transported him up in the

Jewish cemetery.

In case of every Jewish person who dies at home they put the dead on a sheet, and cover him with another; they put a candlestick and candle next to him. The mirror is covered, and they keep a deep mourning for eight days, yet they bury him the next day of his death. My father had brought sand from Israel, and they made a pillow of it. The dead is washed, for this purpose every cemetery has some kind of washbasin made of cement, and the people who wash him say a prayer for him. Formerly there was a person who did this here too, but now there isn't. There was a man called Mendel, he worked at the post, he delivered newspapers. Then it was Lederer who did this for a while. The coffin is made of rough board. The dead is dressed up properly in a clean, white linen, which is sewed just then, and they put stockings, shirt, cap [*kippah*] on him, which is made of the same linen. And they put on the dead person's own tales.

My father and my step-mother lived together for thirty years. After his death her daughter, Piri took Lujza to them in Kolozsvár. Misi's daughter studied in Kolozsvár, and when she visited them on Sundays, I always went with her to see my mom, when she was there too. However Piri and her husband were never at home, they always went to play rummy. Mom was livery; the poor creature used to tell me she wasn't allowed to scream, because Piri, her daughter would shout on her. She was malicious, not like Juci, her daughter in Torda, who had died. In the 1980s Piri and her family took mom with them to Israel; she died there.

After our wedding I didn't work, my husband didn't let me; it is true though that he made me work enough at home. Before I got married, my father supplied me with money so that I didn't have to work; after that I didn't need to work, because my husband earned well.

Before the war my husband worked in the leather factory. I don't know what the factory's name was before the war. After the war an enterprise was established, it was called 'Intreprindere de sortare' [*sorting enterprise*], and he was its director. They sorted out the leather. He had fifty employees; the enterprise was across the Maros bridge, on the right side. They got the leather from our county and from other six counties. They sorted the leathers and they sent them to factories to process them. He worked there forty-two years. They didn't let him retire; they issued his papers only after two months, because there weren't many people in the country who were such good experts, who knew so well the leathers, maybe four or five only. When they didn't accomplish the plan by the end of the month, he had a driver, so they brought leather from elsewhere so that people could get their entire wages. There was a time when fifty people worked under his guidance, both men and women. People loved him a lot. He was in trouble once, when the flood drew out the leathers from the cave; when the water drew back, the army found the leathers; after all it wasn't his fault.

My husband wasn't a party member, and still he was a director, because he was a very good expert, they needed him. In those times it meant a huge thing to be director without being a party member. He was denounced, and they called him in to the Securitate. They even came to our house; we weren't at home. They looked in through the window, and they said we had Persian carpets up to the ankles. So they called him in to the party office; for there were people who informed about everything, but there were people who knew these; so at the end my husband found out who had turned him in. They didn't harm him, because they needed him.

My husband attended the Jewish community for sixty years; he was there with every occasion. While he was working, he went to the synagogue each Friday and Saturday; after he retired, they prayed each day in the synagogue until they were enough persons. Later he took part in the prayers only on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. When he was still working, he entered the synagogue through the neighboring yard, yet they watched him and reported him. In the communist era, during services women came to us, because they were afraid, so they waited for their husbands here to come from the synagogue. We weren't afraid. In those times Scheiner was the leader of the Jewish community, then it was Sauber. *[Editor's note: Centropa made an interview with Bernat Sauber as well.]* My husband led the funerals, the weddings, he was the cantor. He died at Pesach, in March 2002.

The holocaust memorial was built a long time ago in the cemetery of Marosvasarhely; people light candles there in memory of people died in Auschwitz. The commemoration is organized yearly. Before they emigrated, a lot of Jews lived in the town, and we marched by fives from the centre up to the cemetery, just like in Auschwitz. However, in recent years they keep the commemoration in the synagogue; we are not able to march up there anymore.

I started to work at the Jewish community a very long time ago; I worked for thirty-one years. Without anyone sending me, unasked I started to visit elder people, I wrote reports, I was some kind of social worker. I visited elder people; there were many old persons, so I brought them challah made by me. Poor people, they always used to tell me I should not bring them anything, just go and visit them. Whether they got any support from the Jewish community of Bucharest, I don't know that, it was a long time ago.

Once leaders came from the Bucharest community, and they chose me and appointed me as an assistant at the Jewish community; they said a person was needed there - the community was large, the synagogue was full, it was some thirty years ago. I spoke and asked them why they didn't establish a kosher canteen. There were many students here, and a kosher canteen would have been in a good place, but they said it was too late, there weren't enough people.

On high days it was me who organized the festive dinner. On Yom Kippur, when fasting was over, they made grilled meat for dinner, and I baked the cake, three or four hundred hamantashen, which is the specialty of Purim. I baked them at home, for the most part alone; I baked a few days earlier, because it had crumbly dough, so it got soften. It has to be cut out in circle, then folded in triangle.

For Seder night I prepared dinner from thirty or thirty-five kilograms of meat, sixty kilos of potatoes and thirty kilos of beet. I presented the list of what I needed at the community, and they bought the things. They gave eggs, oil and meat as well. I had to buy the rest, but it was well organized. There was a Hungarian family, who for each Pesach brought us thirty kilos of beet for pickles, but I had bought the horse-radish in advance. The entire preparations started one week before the high day, because the horse-radish and the beet had to mix well. I put on the flowers and the decoration on the last day to make it fresh. We were cooking khremzlakh for two hours, but it was the last thing to prepare, because it had to be fresh.

During the Ceausescu era Jewish shochets came to Marosvasarhely to cut kosher meat for Israel at the slaughterhouse, and they exported it to Israel. Three shochets came together with their families, and a mashgiach, who had lived for two years in Vienna before, then he came here. He's

the person who supervises whether the meat is kosher or not. They lived here for about two years; they all stayed in the Furnica block of flats [*in the block which is near to the store called Furnica*], because the Securitate usually watched the strangers, everywhere in the town.

After the Jews emigrated, during the 1950s there wasn't anybody in Marosvasarhely to cut the animals, so a shochet came from Bucharest or Kolozsvar; later people traveled to Kolozsvar to buy meat. We always prepared different meat, depending on the raw material; we made meatballs, stew with potatoes, horse-radish, we always had beet, starter, eggs; everybody was given two eggs. I put lettuce under the eggs, parsley on its top, fresh radish, if we already had; we cut out tulips of the radish. Sometimes people said that in spring it was costly, yet I bought as much as I needed. I have a knife with a reticulated edge, I used that knife when I cut up the cucumbers, and I put two slices on the plate.

While my husband was alive, I prepared dinner for each Seder night. I organized the last dinner in 2001 – I was doing this for thirty years. There were a hundred and thirty persons at the last dinner I organized. They always used to say there wouldn't be many people. 'Don't spend much money, don't buy much stuff.' Nevertheless I always bought the quantity that was needed, because I already knew; luckily I did it well, because at the end there was nothing left for the staff. I had assistance, but not much; I did by myself what was the most important part of it, because I wanted it to be as it had to be. We worked a few days in advance, then on the last day I was up and working for sixteen hours. When Seder was over, men made order in the room, women did the dishes, made order in the kitchen, and we came home at midnight. During the night I always had cramp in my legs. My poor husband, when I had cramp, I cried, so he brought spirit and did a massage for me.

I invited several times everybody who worked at the Jewish community; there wasn't any special occasion, I just promised them to make a big challah, and birds, flowers made of cake and many other things. I baked it at home, it is some kind of braid, it can replace bread: it has salt and a little oil in it. That's how they do it, that's how my mother prepared it. First, when they wash hands, they recite a prayer, then they cut a little piece of challah for everybody, they dip it into honey, and everybody is given a piece, so that the whole year would be sweet. [*Editor's note: So this must have been on Rosh Hashanah.*] Then I served up a lot of cookies, and we had liqueur and brandy. Then we had fish in aspic, which I prepared of ten kilos of fish; all these people ate fish in aspic only when dining at me. After that I served stuffed cabbage from kosher beef and fine home-made wine, that's the custom. When meat was brought to the community, I bought some and I used it. Then we had coffee, I have a very nice German porcelain coffee-set, I served it up in that, then we had two or three kinds of cakes made of different creams.

Poor Laci [*Laszlo*] Grun, how much he liked it. [*Editor's note: Centropa interviewed Laszlo Grun as well.*] Rita, his wife used to tell me: 'This is Laci's favorite; you are so good in it, and mine is never so tasty.' Rita was very skilful, she always jumped to helped me out. I prepared these meals alone, during several days, but sometimes I called an aid for the last day.

On high days **rabbi Rosen** [10](#) sometimes came here from Bucharest together with his wife. She was a real lady. She was also a lawyer like Mr. Rosen, that's how they got to know each other. They always came by plane, and I welcomed them at the airport with flowers. Sometimes it was only his wife who came by plane from Bucharest, and the rabbi came by car from Moldova. Generally they

traveled further to Kolozsvár. If they stayed overnight, they stayed at the Continental Hotel, that was the most elegant hotel back then. So we rented a room there, and we laid the table, we had tea, coffee, sardine, cheese, olives, bread, things like that.

When we celebrated a wedding in the synagogue, there is an armchair in the little room, where Seder night is organized today, so we covered it nicely, I put a carpet in front of it I had brought from home, and the bride was sitting in that armchair. A rabbi of small stature came, I think from Kolozsvár, and he married the couple inside. From there they went over the synagogue, to the large room, and the chupa was installed there: it had four columns supported by four boys. The last wedding celebrated in Marosvásárhely, as far as I remember, was the wedding of Aladar Scheiner; his first wife had died, then he married Juci Mestitz [*Julia Scheiner*]. A shochet came then too. And it wasn't organized in the synagogue, but in the small room. I was asked to make the cookies.

We organized baptism too. [*Editor's note: Of course she doesn't talk about baptism, but circumcision ceremony.*] Once a student came, because their baby had been born, and he wanted the baby have baptized. They studied here; they weren't from the surroundings, I think they were from Moldova. I don't remember their name anymore, and I also don't remember when this happened. In fact I didn't know them, they just simply came in to the community. We were talking, once they asked about baptism. Of course we would do it, I said. I was in for every such occasion. The brit milah, the circumcision was kept in the great hole. Somebody came, I don't remember anymore who, and he did it. After the couple finished the university, they emigrated to Canada; we kept on corresponding for a long time, because after the baptism I invited them for lunch several times.

In every year I went to a health resort for treatment, always to a place where the doctor, Imre Lax sent me. I was in Olanesti at the wells, because I had stone, I was at Felix baths for several times in private. The trade union sent me and my husband once with a holiday voucher to Sinaia and once to Kovaszna. Every year Imre's family went to Tusnad, and I went with them. Beri [*Bernat Sauber*] and Maria, his wife were also with us. Doctor Lax undertook to x-ray at the hospital there, thus he could keep there his family too for one month. We were in good terms; I even stayed in the same villa with them. There was a single room opposite to theirs, and if it wasn't empty, I slept in their room. While my husband was working, I went alone. My husband went repeatedly to Buzias with a ticket because of his heart disease.

In 1957 we applied too for permit to go to Israel, but they didn't let my husband go. We didn't try for a second time, it wouldn't have had any reason. I was in Israel for three times. First I went there in 1969 with Marci, my brother-in-law, because they didn't let me go with my husband. Since we didn't have children, his son counted always as our son. When Andris left, my husband told him: 'When we will have the possibility to go, you will be the first we will visit.' After I came home, I obtained the papers, and in 1970 I sent there my husband. For instance when I was in Israel, my husband would have had to go to Greece to take over some goods, but they didn't let him go; he had to send someone else, because they thought he would go across to Israel. For the second time I went to Israel with my father in 1977, one year before he died. His brother, Smil was still alive, he was younger than my father, but Mojse had died. They let us go together with my husband only in 1980, after he retired. We took a trip, so that my husband could see Israel.



After my husband's death I didn't assume any community tasks. I was ill for a long time, and now I can't leave the house anymore. I have an aid for housekeeping and for daily work, the Jewish community too sends me an assistant. I'm receiving material support from the Jewish Federation in Bucharest due to my thirty years activity for the behalf of the community, and I'm granted the German Claims [11](#) assistance as well.

## Glossary

### **[1](#) Mass emigration from Romania after World War II**

After World War II the number of Jewish people emigrating from Romania to Israel was much higher than in earlier periods. This was urged not only by the establishment in 1948 of Israel , and thus by the embodiment of an own state, but also by the general disillusionment caused by the attitude of the receiving country and nation during World War II. Between 1919 and 1948 a number of 41,000 Jews from Romania left for Israel , while between May 1948 (the establishment of Israel ) and 1995 this number increased to 272,300. The emigration flow was significantly influenced after 1948 by the current attitude of the communist regime towards the aliyah issue, and by its diplomatic relations with Israel . The main emigration flows were between 1948-1951 (116,500 persons), 1958-1966 (106,200 persons) and 1969-1974 (17,800 persons).

### **[2](#) Romanian educational policy between the two World Wars**

One of the main directions of the Romanian educational policy in the period between the two World Wars was the dissimilation of Transylvanian Jews. Romanian was declared the only language of state education (1928/Monitorul Oficial nr. 105). In special cases (in cities where national minorities made up the majority of the inhabitants) the establishment of sections in the language of minorities was allowed. The ecclesiastical schools had no right anymore to accept the enrollment of students belonging to other religions. Hebrew and Romanian became the only permissible languages of Jewish high school education starting in 1925 (1925/Monitorul Oficial 283,36). The university system allowed the access of Jews until 1938, but the violent actions of the Iron Guard made their attendance technically impossible.

### **[3](#) Hungarian era (1940-1944)**

The expression Hungarian era refers to the period between 30 August 1940 - 15 October 1944 in Transylvania. As a result of the Trianon peace treaties in 1920 the eastern part of Hungary (Maramures, Crisana, Banat, Transylvania) was annexed to Romania. Two million inhabitants of Hungarian nationality came under Romanian rule. In the summer of 1940, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, the Romanian government agreed to return Northern Transylvania, where the majority of the Hungarians lived, to Hungary. The anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1938 and 1939 in Hungary were also applied in Northern Transylvania. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19th March 1944, Jews from Northern Transylvania were deported to and killed in concentration camps along with Jews from all over Hungary except for Budapest. Northern Transylvania belonged to Hungary until the fall of 1944, when the Soviet troops entered and introduced a regime of military administration that sustained local autonomy. The military administration ended on 9th March 1945 when the Romanian administration was reintroduced in all the Western territories lost in 1940.

#### **4 Second Vienna Dictate**

The Romanian and Hungarian governments carried on negotiations about the territorial partition of Transylvania in August 1940. Due to their conflict of interests, the negotiations turned out to be fruitless. In order to avoid violent conflict a German-Italian court of arbitration was set up, following Hitler's directives, which was also accepted by the parties. The verdict was pronounced on 30th August 1940 in Vienna: Hungary got back a territory of 43,000 km<sup>2</sup> with 2,5 million inhabitants. This territory (Northern Transylvania, Seklerland) was populated mainly by Hungarians (52% according to the Hungarian census and 38% according to the Romanian one) but at the same time more than 1 million Romanians got under the authority of Hungary. Although Romania had 19 days for capitulation, the Hungarian troops entered Transylvania on 5th September. The verdict was disapproved by several Western European countries and the US; the UK considered it a forced dictate and refused to recognize its validity.

#### **5 Working Battalion**

According to a Hungarian law passed in 1939, those unable to serve in the military were obliged to do 'work service'. The Jews not drafted into the Hungarian army for armed service were to join these 'special work battalions'. A decree in 1941 obliged all Jewish men to be recruited to work battalions instead of regular army units. In 1942 more than 50,000 of them were taken to the Ukrainian front, along with the Second Hungarian Army; only 6-7,000 of them survived.

#### **6 Statute of the Romanian Jews**

Decree no. 2650 issued on 8th August 1940 referring to the rights of Jews in Romania. The statute empowered the authorities to reconsider and even withdraw the citizenship of Jews, and legalized their exclusion from universities and other public educational institutions. According to the 7th paragraph of the law, Jews were forbidden to practice any public-related profession such as lawyer and professor. They were excluded from the board of directors of every company and had no right to carry on trade in villages, trade with alcohol, be soldiers, own or rent cinemas and publishing houses, be members of national sport clubs or own any real estates in Romania. Jews were prohibited to marry Romanians or to assume a Romanian name.

#### **7 Jews in North and South Transylvania**

According to the Second Vienna Dictate N Transylvania was given to Hungary while S Transylvania remained Romanian territory. Not only the Hungarians, but a majority of the Jewish population there was pleased by this decision, though they knew of anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary. Approx. 165,000 Jews lived in N Transylvania, of whom an estimated 130,000 became victims of the Holocaust. The Jewish population of S Transylvania was 30-35,000. As to the anti-Jewish measures, the situation was the same including the preparations for the deportations. On March 12, 1943, however, the Romanian government informed the German Embassy in Bucharest in a memorandum about "the only solution to the Romanian Jewish problem is considered to be emigration and not deportation."

## **8 Anti-Jewish laws in Romania**

The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime. According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery. More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish property, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city, were confiscated by the state, as part of the 'Romanisation campaign'. Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc. Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

## **9 1948 War of Independence in Israel (First Arab-Israeli War; May 15, 1948 - January 1949)**

The UN resolution of 1947, which divided Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, was rejected by the Arabs. After the British withdrawal and the proclamation of the State of Israel (14th May 1947), Arab forces from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Transjordan (later Jordan) invaded Palestine's southern and eastern regions inhabited chiefly by Arabs. On the initiative of the USA and Great Britain, since they were not interested in the formation of a strong Jewish state, peace talks resulted in armistice agreements between the hostile parties by February-July 1949, but no formal peace. A sovereign Palestinian state was not established. Israel had increased its territory by about one-half. Jordan annexed the Arab-held area adjoining its territory (West Bank) and Egypt occupied a coastal strip in the SW including Gaza. In addition, about 750,000 Arabs had fled from Israel and were settled in refugee camps near in the neighboring countries.

## **10 Rosen, Moses (1912-1994)**

Chief Rabbi of Romania and president of the Association of Jewish Religious Communities during communism. A controversial figure of the postwar Romanian Jewish public life. On the one hand he was criticized because of his connections with several leaders of the Romanian communist regime, on the other hand even his critics recognized his great efforts in the interest of Romanian Jews. He was elected chief rabbi of Romania in 1948 and fulfilled this function till his death in 1994. During this period he organized the religious and cultural education of Jewish youth and facilitated the emigration to Israel by using his influence. His efforts made possible the launch of the only Romanian Jewish newspaper, Revista Cultului Mozaic (Realitatea Evreiască after 1995) in 1956. As the leader of Romanian Israelites he was a permanent member of the Romanian Parliament from 1957-1989. He was member of the Executive Board of the Jewish World Congress. His works on Judaist issues were published in Romanian, Hebrew and English.

## **11 Claims Conference**

Founded in 1951, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, or Claims Conference, represents world Jewry in negotiating for compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs. The Claims Conference administers compensation funds, recovers unclaimed Jewish property, and allocates funds to institutions that provide social welfare services to Holocaust survivors and preserve the memory and lessons of the Shoah. (Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claims\\_Conference](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claims_Conference))