

Aristide Streja And Estera Wechsler



The photo was taken in Calimanesti, in the 1930s. On the left side there is my mother, Estera Wechsler, and me, Aristide Wechsler. Estera Wechsler [nee Letzler], my mother, was born in 1888, in Ploiesti. My mother's culture was rather rich. She spoke foreign languages and she read literature in Romanian and in other languages too. She interrupted her studies and had to get married at an early age. My parents had three children: Stefania, Sebastian and Aristide Wechsler. My father's intention was to send us to school to get some education, but it was my mother who insisted that we go all the way from elementary school to college. I, Aristide Streja [Ed. note: He changed his name from Wechsler to Streja after World War II.], was born in Bucharest on 19th December 1922, in a house on the River Dambovita's banks, on the Unirii Embankment [Ed. note:

The area was relatively close to the center of the city and had a rather large Jewish population.]. I was well looked after and educated by my parents. I had a sister who was 7 years older than me and a brother who was 6 years older. My school was on the Independentei Embankment, opposite from a tanning factory, the Mociornita factory. It was a public school and I went there for 4 years. I don't have any friends from that period, and I can't remember if I made friends with anyone in that school - I was too young. I was a relatively good student. While in primary school, I didn't enjoy any subject in particular, except maybe Math. When there was no school, I would play in the neighboring streets, like Aurora St., with some friends who lived nearby. My sister and brother looked after me to a certain extent, but they didn't take me play with them - they just helped me with my homework. They made my parents look after me; they didn't really like to do it themselves because they thought they wasted their time on me. But they loved me and I didn't have any conflicts with them. I went to the Matei Basarab High School, because my brother had gone there too. [Ed. note: The Matei Basarab High School is one of the oldest and most prestigious secondary schools in Bucharest. It was located in the vicinity of the Great Synagogue and of the Jewish quarter. The children of many outstanding Jewish families went to this high school.] I studied there from the 1st year until the 6th year, when I was kicked out because I was a Jew - this happened in 1939-1940. We didn't have enough money for the tuition; my mother kept postponing the payment from one day to the next and I would get kicked out from classes when I didn't pay. My mother would go to the secretary's office and plead: 'I beg of you, look, my boy is a pretty good student, please, give me some more time because I can't pay right now.' It wasn't easy to get a postponement, because our situation was pretty poor. I would wear my school outfit for 2-3 years in a row, until it didn't fit me anymore. But I didn't miss school and I was never expelled because of the tuition. I always paid; it's true that I usually was behind schedule, but I would get postponements. I didn't owe the school one penny. And when I got kicked out, it was because all the other Jews had been kicked out from high schools. For my final years of high school, I went to the Jewish school [Cultura B].