

# Berta Finkel

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Botosani

Romania

Interviewer: Eموke Major

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Mrs. Berta Finkel is a short person who talks fast, with a Moldavian accent. After a life of hardship, typical for shepherders, she liquidated the household in 1996 when her husband died, and she moved in with her unmarried daughter in a 2-room apartment in a block of flats. But the consequences of her hard life remained: her feet ache, which is why she moves with great difficulty – even inside the house she can only move by supporting herself against the items of furniture. But, on high holidays, this doesn't stop her from walking slowly and clinging to her daughter in order to attend the synagogue in Botosani where, to her pride, her son, Gustav Finkel, performs the religious service.

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## My family history

My father's parents were handicraftsmen, my grandfather was a furrier. My grandfather's name was Moise Grimberg, and my grandmother's name was Marim. They lived in Sulita, they died many years ago. [*Sulita is located 35 km south-east of Botosani*]. I didn't know them, they died before I was born.

My father had several brothers. The first-born was Fisel Grimberg, followed by David Grimberg, the third born was my father, Marcu Grimberg, and then there was Sloim Grimberg.

Fisel Grimberg lived in Braila, and he had 3 children. I can't remember what he did for a living, what his profession was. He divorced his wife, and then he came to live here, in Botosani. He is buried here, in the Jewish cemetery in Botosani. The children were married as well, some of them left to Israel, and I believe I still have a cousin living in Israel, Ietti Grimberg, who is older than me, she is over 80 years old. But what do I know, perhaps she's no longer among us, perhaps she's no longer alive... I am no longer in touch with them. She also had a younger brother, his name was Lica Grimberg, he too was living in Israel. He came to visit his father's grave in Botosani not long ago, some 4 or 5 years ago. He died in the meantime. I don't know whether or not he has any children.

The name of the second born was David Grimberg, he lived in Sulita. He was a dyer, he dyed wool. This is how it was in days of yore [*formerly*]: people dyed wool, they weaved woolen rugs. His wife's name was Liza, and they had 4 sons: the name of the eldest son was Iancu Grimberg, the

second born was Rahmil Grimberg, the third born was Lica Grimberg, and the fourth born was Nuham Grimberg. David Grimberg died in Bucharest. He died just after the war – I believe my brother died that year as well, so it was in 1947 – he wanted to leave to Israel with his wife and children, but the old man died on the way, before boarding the airplane, and they had to bury him in Bucharest. But I don't know where he is buried, in which cemetery – there are several cemeteries in Bucharest. His wife died in Israel. Of the 4 sons, I heard that Nuham Grimberg, the youngest, died. Three of them are still alive. They are married, I think they got married in Israel.

My father had another brother, Sloim Grimberg. His wife's name was Elca, and they had 3 children. The name of one of the daughters was Cerna, and the name of her younger sister was Binca. Sloim Grimberg had a son as well, Aron Grimberg, but he died when he was young, he wasn't even married. He is buried here, in Botosani. I think about this every time I go to the cemetery: 'Aron Grimberg, I must light a candle for him.' But I don't know where his monument is [his grave]. They lived in Sulita, and then, when people were evacuated [1](#), they settled in Botosani. The old man traded fowls back then, when he lived in Sulita, he bought and sold fowls. I was living in Sulita when Elca and Aron Grimberg died. Sloim Grimberg died in Israel. He too left to Israel with his 2 daughters. The eldest of the daughters is no longer alive, she died in Israel. This cousin has 2 sons. Binca is still alive, she too is married, with children.

Fremita Segal was another of my father's sisters. Her husband's name was Leon Segal, he was my father's brother-in-law and traded in scrap iron. They left to Israel, both my aunt and uncle died there. But one of their daughters is living in Israel, she is the same age as my sister, she is married, with children.

My father's name was Marcu Grimberg, but at the shul he was called Mortha [*his Jewish name was Mortha, Mortkhe*]. I don't know in what year he was born, but he was around 5 years older than my mother [*he was probably born around 1895*]. He belonged to the 1916 contingent, but I no longer remember how old he was at that time. My father had no formal education. And he actually had other brothers as well, but I don't know if Fisul [*Fisel*] or David Grimberg went to school.

My mother's parents lived in Sulita as well. I didn't get to know them, either. I didn't get to know any of my grandparents, neither from my father's side, nor from my mother's. The name of the grandfather from my mother's side was Sulim Meerovici. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living, my mother didn't tell me. But he had a lot of children. He had my mother while he was married to his first wife, but his first wife died, and my grandfather remarried. The name of his second wife was Leia. I don't know how many husbands this grandmother had. At first, she was married to a man named Tierer, then she was married to my grandfather from Sulita, Sulim Meerovici; after Sulim Meerovici died, she left to Iasi with one of her sons, Moise Meerovici – for he wasn't married yet, he was a bachelor –, and she married once more – the name of her last husband was Ornstrein.

I had an uncle in Bucharest, Carol Meerovici, meaning one of my mother's brothers. He was the son of my grandfather's first wife. This uncle of mine was an accountant. But he died many years ago. He had 3 sons, they left to Israel. The name of the eldest son was Jinel, he was married and died in Israel. The name of the other one was Puiu, and they had yet another brother, Leonard, who left to America and got married there. At present, I have no news of them anymore.

Peisic Meerovici was another of my mother's brothers. I no longer remember what he did for a living. Afterwards, when he left Sulita and settled here, in Botosani, this uncle of mine, Peisic Meerovici, worked at the DCA [*facility for collecting scrap iron*], and then, as he grew old, he retired. He left to Israel after he retired, he was an old man by then. Both he and my aunt died in Israel. And I had a cousin who was 8 years younger than me; he married and had 2 children. They lived in Bucharest, but they too left to Israel, and that's where he died. I don't know how he died – for he left there, so far away, I don't know.

Some of my mother's brothers died during World War II as well, I couldn't tell you which of them, I couldn't remember their names. Zeilic Meerovici was one of them, he lived here, in Botosani. He was married, had a family, and I even have a cousin, Beatrice, who settled in Israel. And I also had a cousin, his name was Lazar Meerovici, he was older than Beatrice, he too had children, but he died in Israel.

There was also Moise Meerovici, who was the son of my grandfather and of my mother's stepmother. He left to Iasi, he had a job there, he got married to a pretty woman and had 4 children – 2 daughters and 2 sons. And they all left to Israel. He died there.

My mother's maiden name was Toni Meerovici, and her Jewish name was Toba [Tobe]. She was from Sulita, she was born in 1900. She went to school in Sulita, I don't know how many classes she graduated. But my mother spoke French, she learned French in private, my grandfather hired a private teacher for her.

I don't know how my parents met, I didn't even ask. But they were both from Sulita, they probably knew each other. They certainly had a religious ceremony performed. Formerly, Sulita was a nice little borough when I was a child. 300 Jewish families lived there. Now there is no Jew left in Sulita. There were handicraftsmen, tailors, it had everything. There were several merchants in Sulita, they had large businesses, they had money. One of them was Hers Lehrer, another was Simhe Meer Schwartz. They left to Israel, but I don't know if they're still alive. One of them was David Lazarovici, he had an inn, but he passed away, he and his wife are buried here. User Goldman lived next to us, he had a large store where he sold wheat flour, candy, chocolate, scrabia [*Probably a variant for "scrumbie" (scombroid fish) used in the region of Moldavia*], all sorts of olives, lamp oil – one could always buy that there. And he had some 4 daughters and 3 sons. One of the boys is buried in Sulita, he was deaf and dumb. The other children left to Israel, and they all died, only the youngest of them is still alive, Rahmil Goldman. He came to Botosani 2 years ago and said: 'Where is little Berta, I would like to meet her so.' My name is Berta. Since we were neighbors there, in Sulita, and lived wall-to-wall, we were friends. Their father was a big millionaire. My father wasn't such a wealthy person, I couldn't say that, but we had enough to get by. And he wanted to see me. And another man living in Sulita, who is 1 or 2 years younger than me, didn't want to take him to see me, although he knew where I lived. We are not on such good terms. When I go to the shul, he doesn't even tell me 'Happy New Year!'

My mother didn't have a job, she was a housewife – that's how it was in those days. My father raised sheep. He had no other job besides that. But he didn't keep the sheep at home, there wasn't enough room, he kept them somewhere else. We also raised white cattle, and my father also had a horse, which he rode to Botosani. He also had a cart, some sort of hackney carriage, as they say, with only one horse, and he came by cart every week to Botosani and the neighboring villages – he

was familiar with all the surroundings, all the villages –, and he bought skins. For my father was trading in skins. There were all sorts of skins back then. There were also karakul skins, with finer, nicer, woollier fleece. My father sold the skins there, in Sulita. All sorts of merchants came there, from Baia Mare, Falticeni, from everywhere, from Ardeal [*Transylvania*] as well. Christians came as well, they bought merchandise and returned home by train.

80 houses burned to the ground in Sulita in 1935-1936, and our house burned down as well. We had that house from my mother's parents. Someone washed some laundry and probably left the stove outside [*burning*], and 80 houses burned to the ground. But we received no help back then, not in the slightest, so to speak, absolutely none [*not even from the authorities*]. My father worked by himself, as he was such a hard-working man, and he rebuilt that house. And by now it has already collapsed, that rebuilt house in Sulita came apart. When I travel to Sulita I'm staying at some neighbors', who live there, close by.

I had a brother, Sulim Grimberg – his Romanian name was Salo –, who was younger than me, he was born in 1927 and died in Sibiu in 1947. There were several Zionist organizations in Sulita. There was Bnei Akiva, there was Gordonia [2](#) as well, and others – there were all sorts of organizations. My brother was a member of Bnei Akiva. They did this and that, I don't remember what their activities were. I attended Bnei Akiva's meetings myself, but could one remember something that happened so many years ago? Everything gets depleted. Back then, in 1947, my brother left with the organization, he was 19 when he left to Sibiu. Several members of the organization went there on that occasion, for about 2 weeks. I've never been to Sibiu, but I heard others tell that there was a lake there, a sort of large marsh, and my brother and another young man from Botosani drowned in it. I have no idea how it happened. Probably they couldn't swim, and they both drowned there. The other young man was a nephew of Moisa's – his name was Moise Ciubotaru – he was the one who washed the dead. They distributed food at the Community back then as well, not only nowadays. When I settled here [*when I got married*], I know that he received food. They brought him from Sulita to Botosani, and he was the one who washed the dead. He too had 5 children: 3 daughters and 2 sons. All of his children left to Israel. He was an old man by then, why would he have stayed here? He and his wife applied for permission to leave, and they left to Israel. And this nephew of Moise Ciubotaru's was a friend of my brother's, they were the same age, and they both died in 1947. That's life. And afterwards, when my sister returned from Israel, she traveled to Sibiu, gave money to the Community there, and they built him a funeral monument.

This brother of mine was a rabunam. These people, who read at the altar, are called rabunam – rabbies, just as priests are for Christians. Had my brother lived, he would have become a great man in Israel. He spoke Hebrew very well, he knew the prayers well. There was a great rabbi here, in Botosani, Burstein – he was an elderly man –, he tutored my brother when we lived in Botosani. My brother always went to see him in the evening, and he studied with him, may God forgive him. And he returned home late in the evening. We had to wear the yellow star, and you weren't allowed to go out, but he went there and then returned. He wasn't afraid, he went to see that rabbi. And that rabbi, Burstein, taught my brother, he taught him all that is required.

I have a sister, her name is Miriam according to the birth certificate, but people call her Marica. She is younger than me, she was born in 1936. My sister had higher education, she studied law in Iasi, and that's where she met her future husband, Falic Hermon, Foli. My brother-in-law, Foli, was from Iasi. They were 3 siblings: there was Foli, there was also a sister who was younger than Foli, and

there was Srulica, the youngest of them. Srulica Hermon lives in Israel as well, he is married, and has 2 sons. My sister married in 1961. After they married, my sister and her husband lived in Iasi, for he was from Iasi, and then, when people started leaving [3](#), they left to Israel. They left a long time ago, in 1963, for both her daughter and mine were nine months old when they left Romania. Both of them are the exact same age. My sister has 2 children, a daughter and a son. My niece's name is Solange, Sulamit – she was named after my brother, whose name was Salo, Sulim. She is married, her name is Frenkel now. They live in Ranana. The son, Dani, was born in Israel, he is 36-37 by now. He too is a jurist, a lawyer. He lives near Petah Tiqwa, but I don't know exactly where. This nephew of mine is married, he also has a son, he was born in January this year [*in 2006*]. My sister lives in Petah Tiqwa. She worked as a lawyer, but she is older now, she is in her 70's. Time passes. She visited me this year. She hadn't come to Romania for about 3 years, but this year was the 1-year anniversary of her husband's death, so she came to see us as well, to see how we are doing. But she was upset, her face looked completely different, as if she weren't my sister.

### Growing up

I, Berta Finkel, was born in Sulita in 1925. When I was little, I was a rather sickly child – I don't know why –, and my mother and father – may God rest their souls – went to the rabbi in Stefanesti, rabbi Friedman, and he told them: 'She will grow stronger in time.' They visited the rabbi in Stefanesti only once. This was a long time ago, when there were many Jews living in Stefanesti – I don't know whether there are any left there.

They were pious people, both my mother and my father. My mother didn't wear a wig, she wore her hair naturally. My mother was a tall woman. My father was a rather shortish person. They dressed appropriately. They wore good clothes, especially when they had to go to the shul. 'Metit un desensta kleidar, ve ne geitan sil ara.' [*Editor's note: This is the correct form of the Yiddish phrase: 'Me tit (zakh) un di shenste kleyde(r) [az] me geyt in shil arayn.'*] Meaning: 'We wear our most elegant dresses when we go to the shul.' That's what my father always said when they went to the synagogue.

My father was a very religious person. Not going to the shul was out of the question for my father. As a young man, he also went there during the week. People went to the shul every day in Sulita, in the morning and in the evening. There were several synagogues in Sulita. There were rabbis, and hakhamim as well – or how they called them, I can't remember anymore. There were around 3-4 synagogues back then – all the shuls have been destroyed there, as well. Some were larger, some were smaller. Only one of them had a balcony, it was located downtown. My parents attended a different shul, still a large one, where my father was a sort of a gabbai. I know that Rica Calmanovici's father [*Note: this reference is about Rifca Segal, interviewed by Centropa.*] was a gabbai, but I forget what my father was – he helped the latter, Mr. Calmanovici. Eventually, what with children being born, with this and that, my father stopped going to the shul – which is to say he didn't stop going, but he didn't go as often as he used to –, as he didn't have time, he was busy with other things.

There was also a Jewish bath in Sulita, I went there myself together with my mother. The bath in Sulita had buckets. There were small buckets, so that everyone had a small bucket to get water in order to wash themselves. There was also steam, you had to go up some stairs. There was also a small mikveh there, but I don't remember it very well. I didn't go to the mikveh for I was a child. My

mother or my father, it was they who went to the mikveh. My father always went to the mikveh, every week. Not going was out of the question. But my mother went as well. Men went there on Friday morning, while women went in the afternoon. The mikveh was open once a week.

Tradition was observed very strictly. We didn't work on Saturday. On Friday evening, if we wanted to have heat, we always called someone over, my parents gave them something in return, and they lit the fire. Christians lived nearby, and they came over. Or on Saturday morning. During the week, I would sometimes light the fire, or my mother would, or my father. And my mother prepared soup, meat for the lunch on Saturday, and someone would come, light the fire, and we heated the food on the kitchen stove. That's how it was back then.

My mother lit 5 candles on Friday evening. [*Ed. note: It is customary to light two candles, although some families light more, sometimes in accordance with the number of children.*] When father returned from the shul, we, all the children of our household, would sit down to eat, and mother served soup, meat, what she cooked in advance. My mother baked bread every Friday. We had an oven when we lived in Sulita, and she baked homemade bread. It used to last us for the whole week, and we didn't buy bread from the bakery. For Saturday and holidays, she baked kneaded bread, colilici. [*Editor's note: Colilici is a variant for challah, similar to the word "kajlics" used by some Hungarian-speaking Jews in Romania. Both words have the origin of the Hungarian word "kalacs".*] My mother used to buy fowl. We had a cage in the back, and that's where she kept the fowl until they had to be slaughtered. For back then, when I was a young woman, there were hakhamim in Sulita as well. It was father who took the fowl to the hakham.

We performed the kapuras before Yom Kippur. [*Editor's note: Kaparot is a ceremony performed by some Jews on the evening before Yom Kippur, when sins symbolically transfer from individuals to a white rooster and to a white chicken in the case of women.*] We performed it at home. My father, may God forgive him, gave me the chicken or the hen, depending on what we had, opened the prayer book for me, and I recited the necessary prayers and spun around three times holding the hen. Afterwards, he took those fowl to the hakham to be sacrificed. This tradition was observed in Botosani as well, as long as there was a hakham. We went to the canteen, and the hakham slaughtered the fowl that we previously used to perform the kapuras ceremony. But since nowadays there is no hakham anymore, where could I take the fowl to be slaughtered? I can't simply take them to just anybody...

We didn't build a sukkah on Sukkot. People didn't do that in Sulita. Later, when I came here, to Botosani, they built a tent for Sukkot. It was made out of reed, in the open air, it extended to a side, adjacent to the canteen. The women who worked at the canteen prepared meatballs and other dishes, and the meals were served inside the sukkah. I never ate there, only the men who went to the shul ate there.

On Chanukkah, father lit a candle and called us: 'Come, children, light candles yourselves.' The candles were placed on a brick that lay on the table. And every child lit a candle. We lit candles for 8 days, an extra candle was lit on each successive evening. Our parents didn't give us chanukkah gelt. They said: 'Work and you will earn it.' I didn't have a spinning top. Our parents didn't give us toys.

On Purim, people baked all sorts of cookies. My mother's baked cookies were very good. She didn't send cookies to wealthy people, she gave them to women whom she knew were poor and couldn't



send her cookies of their own in return. [Editor's note: It is about the custom of *mishloach manot*, "sending of gifts", on Purim, which is sending ready-to-eat foods like cakes, fruits.] For she didn't like to exchange cakes, she didn't want to receive cookies in return. She gave them away so that the people to whom she sent the cakes didn't have to send her others in return. People wore masks on Purim and called on households, and they made merry. Everyone made merry as they saw fit, songs were sung as well. People came to our parents' house as well, back in the days when I was a young lady. And those whom they visited had to guess who they were. For you couldn't recognize everybody, given the fact that they wore all sorts of masks. I never wore a mask on Purim. I remember that when I lived in my parents' home in Sulita many people came to Sulita from Botosani in order to celebrate Purim there. They came to visit their relatives - for there were 300 Jewish families in Sulita, and not just one or two persons -, and they made merry. They called on people wearing masks, they also called on our home. We sometimes recognized some of them, and then we invited them in and offered them something to eat and drink.

Everyone celebrated Pesach at home. People cleaned their homes very thoroughly before Pesach. We cleaned every nook and cranny, so that no cornmeal or wheat flour was left in the house. If there was some flour left, we placed it somewhere in the attic and left it there until Pesach was over. We had a set of dishes for Pesach, which was used only on that occasion. People didn't bake matzah in Sulita, they bought it here, in Botosani. I remember that when I was a child my father used to come to Botosani before Pesach and bought a lot of matzah, for there was plenty of it in those days. And not only him, everyone who lived in Sulita bought matzah here, in Botosani. Back then, matzah was cheap, too. But they made all sorts of matzah varieties in those days. They also made matzah for the afikoman. This type of matzah was more special, it was for the people who were more pious. My father bought regular matzot, and matzah for the afikoman as well.

Only family members attended the seder ceremony. Namely my parents, myself, my brother and sister. We went to the shul first, then we returned home and recited the seder prayer and everything else. My father was the one who recited it, he recited the entire Haggadah in Hebrew. We placed an extra glass of wine on the table and opened the door for Elijah ha-nevi to enter. I used to open the door if I wasn't tired, my mother opened it if she happened to be near it, in front. Then, my father hid the afikoman. Afterwards, everyone received a piece of the afikoman to eat. Usually, my father bought 2-3 pieces of matzah for the afikoman so that there was enough to last until the following evening, for he had to recite the seder the following day as well. But if it so happened that he didn't buy enough, he hid a piece of the afikoman from the first evening for the following day. When my brother was alive, it was he who recited the mah nishtanah. And we ate, my mother served soup, meat, latkes prepared traditionally using matzah flour. My mother prepared all sorts of dishes for Pesach, I helped her a bit as well. She made latkes from matzah flour, "malaies" from potatoes, this and that, whatever she could. "Malaies" is made either from boiled or raw potatoes that are run through the mincing machine after which you add eggs, salt and pepper to the mix, and fry them as you do meatballs. And that's what we served with meat. And when the meal was over, after we finished eating, father also had to recite the prayers that are recited at the end of the seder evening. And it took a while until he finished reciting the prayer, and we went to bed very late, around 11, 12 in the night.

My parents spoke Jewish, Yiddish. They taught us, children, Yiddish as well, but, since we learned Romanian in school, we spoke Romanian. Our parents spoke Yiddish to each other, but we spoke

Romanian. We studied Hebrew in school. We didn't go to the cheder – there was no cheder in Sulita. But we attended the Jewish school, and that's where we learned Hebrew. Our Hebrew teacher was a certain Mates lui, he was an old man, and there was another teacher, Balter, who was from Bessarabia. And afterwards, when the war broke out, Balter returned to Bessarabia <sup>4</sup>. He was the younger of the two. And we had another 2 teachers, who were Jewish, but we learned Romanian at the Jewish school. And Hebrew was a separate subject matter. And then, if we didn't make progress, my father would call the rabbi, Mates lui, to visit us at home, and he taught us to read Hebrew, both my brother and me.

The Jewish school consisted of no more than 4 grades. The attending children were rather numerous, there were several grades: 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, but after so many years I cannot remember how many classes there were in each grade. The boys and the girls were mixed, we learned together. All in all, I graduated 8 grades there, in Sulita. I graduated 4 years at the Jewish school and 4 at the Romanian school. I graduated 8th grade in 1937-1938.

Afterwards, my parents' condition depreciated, they were broke, and we had to move to a village, to Hlipiceni. [*Hlipiceni is located 57 km south-east of Botosani, and 22 km south-east of Sulita, respectively.*] And we had our share of misfortunes... many of them, so to speak. We had a sort of a grocer's shop, a small shop where we sold a bit of everything. Just like in the countryside: you sold this, you sold that. And my father was a butcher, he slaughtered cattle there, in Hlipiceni. He had a partnership with one of his older brothers' brother-in-law, David Grimberg, who lived there, in Hlipiceni. The name of that in-law was Srul Rotstein, and he too had a grocer's shop, he too sold this and that in addition to being my father's partner at the butcher's shop. He bought the cattle, and my father slaughtered them. There was an army stationed at Halta Rauseni, and it consisted of vagrants – that's how they called those soldiers. [*Rauseni is located 5 km south-east of Hlipiceni, and 63 km south-east of Botosani, respectively.*] And someone came every week, someone with a higher rank, who was captain or colonel, I'm not sure, and he bought meat for those vagrants.

We lived in Hlipiceni for less than 2 years. There weren't too many Jews living there, only Christians. There was another family, but eventually they too left. And as the village was inhabited by Christians, and they knew we were Jewish, people started mocking us. We lived at a Lipovan's, and we had a large gate, which I had to close in the evening. And they came and smeared the gate – forgive my saying this – with faeces, with excrement – to use such a word. When he saw something like this happened, my father told my mother: 'We're moving back to Sulita, for we can't live here.' We dropped everything and returned to Sulita. In 1938-1939 we returned to Sulita.

As long as we lived in Hlipiceni, one of my mother's cousins, who had a manufacture store, lived in our house. His name was David Saia. I don't know whether he was a first-degree cousin of my mother's or whether he was a more distant cousin, I can't remember. He left when we returned. In Sulita, my father continued his trade as a butcher. He slaughtered the animals at the slaughterhouse, and sold the meat at the butcher's shop. We had a store there, where the house was located as well, my father had a chopping block and an axe, and all the necessary equipment.

## During the War

Then the war broke out, and from Sulita we came here, to Botosani. At first, Jewish people came to Sulita from Stefanesti, from Harlau, from all corners across the country. And where could you lodge so many people? We had it rough, we, Jewish people. And then, we all came here to Botosani in



1940. [Ed. note: *The Jews from Sulita were evacuated to Botosani in June 1941. [1](#) Mrs. Finkel isn't accurate with dates, in most cases she approximates them.*] They informed us that we had to leave, I believe it was the police – I no longer remember, I was still a child. It took us a whole day to get there. It took a while, as we were a file of around 80 families. We set out at 8 o'clock in the morning, and we arrived in a file in Botosani at 10 o'clock in the evening, as it was dark by then. For evening comes at half past nine, ten o'clock during the summer. We came by cart. The carts were supplied by the state, I believe, we rented them. And what could we take with us? We left everything behind, at home, and it went to smithereens, as they say. We brought a sack or two of corn flour, and a bit of grain that we kept in the attic. I no longer remember if soldiers came with us or not.

In Botosani, we lived at one of my mother's sister-in-laws, the wife of Zeilic Meerovici. Afterwards, we lived at one of my mother's nieces, Beatrice, the daughter of Zeilic Meerovici. We lived there for a while, then we moved on Bratianu St., we rented the place. Meanwhile, my father was sent to Tiraspol, for he had declared he was a furrier by trade. And those who knew a trade had to go to Tiraspol. I don't know what he did there, I think they gave him other jobs. Did my father know the furrier's trade? My grandfather knew the furrier's trade, may God forgive him, but my father didn't. But he left there as a handicraftsman. He wasn't the only one, several Jews from Botosani were taken to Tiraspol. My father stayed there for 3 or 4 years.

And we lived without him. We had our share of misfortune as well. We had a cow, which we kept somewhere in a stable. I can't remember exactly, but I believe we bought the cow in Botosani, we didn't bring it from Sulita. I couldn't milk a cow, nor could my mother, and I believe a neighbor used to come and milk our cow, and then we strained the milk, took it and sold it, so that we could have some money, so that we could support ourselves. We had to wear the yellow star [5](#). We weren't allowed to go to the market in the morning until 10 o'clock. And what could one find at 10 o'clock?

## After the War

But I don't even remember how the war ended. It was over... We stayed on in Botosani for a while, and in 1949 or 1950 – I don't even remember when – we left to Sulita again. In Sulita, my father continued the butcher's trade, he sold meat, just as he did before the war. We found the house destroyed, the doors and everything we left there had been removed. We rebuilt it. We had to earn money, this and that, so that we managed to rebuild the house the way it was. And what good came of it? Now my parents' house is demolished, in a ruin. The house is no more. When father left to Israel, he sold everything.

Together with my mother, my father submitted a request to go to Israel; my mother died in the meantime, and my father left to Israel by himself, he stayed at my sister's, and he died in 1981. My mother died here, at my place, in Botosani, on Zimbrului St. After she fell ill, they took her to Iasi, then they brought her here, to Botosani. My mother died in January 1973, she is buried here, in the cemetery.

I married here, in Botosani, in 1951. I met my husband through some relatives, namely one of my father's brothers-in-laws, Leon Segal. This uncle of mine was in the scrap iron business, and my husband was passing by, across that market, my uncle knew him, and told him: 'I have a niece, would you like to get married?' For he had 2 sisters who left to Israel, and he stayed here, and his

parents were elderly people. And I came to Botosani, my aunt, Fremita, was still living here; I stayed at their place for a day or two, and I met him, somewhere downtown. I am old now, but I was beautiful back then, and I was dressed neatly, elegantly, and he liked me.

My husband was born here, in the city of Botosani. His name was Mikel Finkel, Mahal [Makl] was his Jewish name. He was born in 1925, just like me. He attended 4 grades here in Botosani, that was all. There was a Jewish school on Karl Marx St., that's where he went to school. And from where he lived, on Zimbrului St., it was very far for him to come home to eat. But there was a kitchen there, at the school, and, in order for him not to come home to eat lunch, he ate there. My father-in-law gave them beans, this and that, so that he could study. My husband said: 'I ate there until I entered 5th grade.' That was all. They wanted him to continue his studies, but there were no spots available, he couldn't fit somewhere, at a school, so that he could continue his studies. His parents were old, also, he started working this and that. What could he do? I used to tell him: 'You see, if you had gone to school, perhaps you would have married a girl that was more well-read, more refined. But since you didn't?'

I met his parents. My mother-in-law's name was Gitla Finkel. I know that my mother-in-law had a younger sister, Clara, who left to America and married an upholsterer there, his name was Abram Zamist. They had a daughter and a son. They sent word for my husband to go there, to America, but he didn't want to leave his parents here, for they were elderly people, and he said he wouldn't leave. My father-in-law's name was Alter Finkel - his Jewish name was Haim Iosuf -, he was born in Cernivtsi. He was a rather severe person, he didn't talk much with younger people, namely with me. My mother-in-law did, she talked with me. As they say, she was a smart woman, my mother-in-law. They weren't too well-off, my father-in-law bought cereals, he traded cereals. When I got married, my father-in-law was an egg-checker, meaning he checked the eggs in a store. That's how it was in those days, this was a job, too.

My husband was the youngest of the children. He had 2 older sisters, both of whom married here, in Botosani, and they left to Israel; both of them died there. But they have children. The name of the oldest was Janeta, she was married to Froim Blaicher. Froim Blaicher was the youngest of the brothers. Itic Blaicher was the oldest of the brothers; he had 2 daughters, but has passed away. They had another brother, Meer Blaicher, and a sister, Mina Blaicher. Janeta had an only son, Haimut, who keeps in touch with us by phone. The name of my father's other sister was Fany, she was married to Joil Goldfracht; she had 2 daughters, Beatrice and Anica, who live in Israel, too. Beatrice has an only son, who studied in some far-away country and then, people say, returned to Israel. [That's what] My niece, the lad's mother, told me [on the telephone], as she calls me now and then.

We lived with my parents-in-law, at their place on Zimbrului St. My parents-in-law lived in the kitchen, which was a separate building, and we lived in two rooms. My mother-in-law died in 1955, and my father-in-law died in 1960.

We took an old man in the house when my mother-in-law died - his name was Haim Meer Hersch -, so that my father-in-law didn't sleep alone. In former days, there were poor people who begged for alms. And this man had the habit of doing that, he begged with yet another person. But after we took him in, we didn't let him beg anymore. And there was a canteen in those days [*the canteen of the Jewish Community in Botosani*], he went to the canteen every day, they served him meals, and

the Community [*the Jewish Community in Botosani*] gave him food as well, they gave him everything he needed, for he was a poor man, even if he lived with us. For I couldn't provide for him. But since there was the Community and they could spare... They also gave him clothes, they gave him everything. I don't remember the year when he died, my own children were of school age, they were grown by then.

I wasn't a member of the Communist Party, nor was my husband. I didn't have a job. We raised sheep. That's what my husband did for a living before we got married. We had a large garden where we lived, we also had an enclosure in the back, and he had room for the sheep. And there was this man, who didn't live with us, he only came during spring to milk the sheep. Then, around May, when sheep are put to pasture, they constructed a sheepfold, and we sent the sheep to the sheepfold. There, at the sheepfold, on the pasture, it was a different matter, it was out of the city. I used to go to the sheepfold myself, I went on foot, I sometimes brought my daughter along, even though it wasn't nearby. That's what I mean, each of us worked, for I don't know how to describe the work that I did. But I seem to remember we had many sheep. We had 20, 30 sheep. You couldn't keep too many sheep, for the number of sheep you could keep was very strictly regulated during the Ceausescu's regime [6](#). You weren't allowed to put the sheep to pasture in the spring, when the grass starts growing. You weren't even allowed to let them out of the courtyard until it was time to put them to pasture. People always put the sheep to pasture as late as May, you weren't allowed to do it sooner. I had to keep them at home, feed them. And I did, what could I do? And I had to keep the homestead clean, the courtyard as well, I couldn't let it get dirty. They didn't come to check every day, but still, they did so when they remembered to do it, the courtyard had to be clean as well, everything had to be clean. That's how it was during the Ceausescu regime. They erected the sheepfolds in May - everyone brought planks, this and that. That's where the sheep were kept until autumn, when the cold sets in, and then the sheepfold was dismantled. Two shepherds lived there, and people took milk by turn. When your turn came, you went to the sheepfold, and took as much milk as you were due. It was very hard. We had a hard time raising sheep as we did, stop asking me questions about it.

We raised sheep until my husband died, and then we sold them, we stopped raising sheep. Ten years have passed since my husband passed away, he died in 1996. That's when we also sold the house where we lived in Botosani. We had 2 rooms there, the porch was in front of the house, and the kitchen was in the back. And we had to go out in the cold during winter, and we cooked there, for that's where we had the cooking stove and everything else. And in 1996 I moved in a block of flats where I live with my daughter.

I didn't have children right away, it took a while. My son, Gustav Finkel, was born in 1958. He went to the talmud torah. There was this man, Haim Aranovici, who eventually taught him. I sent my son to study, and he studied. My son is very skilled at reading the Torah, he also performs the religious service at the synagogue. When my son was 16-17 - I don't remember what grade he was in, but he attended the Laurian High School -, rabbi Moses Rosen [7](#) - who has also died - came to Botosani, and he wanted to send him to study in France, to learn Ivrit there. In fact, he knew Ivrit, for he learned it here, but... And my husband said he wouldn't send him there, that he should first go to university. He graduated the Faculty of Polytechnics in Iasi, he's an engineer. He served his military service before going to the faculty, when he was 18-19. He served in Buzau, he was part of the transmissions unit. He got married in 1992. His wife is Jewish, too, her maiden name was

Beatrice Brif. They also had a religious ceremony performed at the synagogue in Botosani, I think Bruchmaier came from Bucharest to perform the service. I have a grandson from my son, Avi, he was born in November 1992.

I also have a daughter, Carola Finkel, she was born in 1963. She isn't married, we live together.

My husband and I observed traditions. We had separate dishes for milk, for meat. We took the fowl to the hakham to be slaughtered. A hakham lived here, a certain Moscovici, who performed the slaughtering every Thursday. And my mother bought fowls in Sulita, she sent or brought them here, I took them to the hakham, he slaughtered them, then I plucked off the feathers, did all that was necessary, and sent them home. This hakham, Moscovici, was from Stefanesti. When he lived in Stefanesti, he was a sort of a traveling salesman. I believe his first wife died in Stefanesti, he had no wife when he settled here, in Botosani, he had only his children with him – he had a daughter and a son. And probably the Community gave him a place to live somewhere, and he got married again. But this hakham left to Israel too, with his second wife and two children, and he and his wife died there. Nowadays we still have a hakham in Bucharest, his name is Bruckmaier, but he is old, he is in his 80's, and he won't come to perform the slaughtering.

There was a Jewish bathhouse here in Botosani, too; when mother came here, I used to go with her to the bathhouse. But now that we live in a block of flats, we all have a bathtub, we take a bath in it every week, do you think I still go there and pay an entrance fee? In fact, there is a central bathhouse here, but it is state-owned. There no longer is a Jewish bathhouse.

On holidays, we always went to the shul in Botosani too. My husband went there more often. He went there twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. My son always accompanied him on Friday evening and on Saturday. The shul was there, close to where we lived – a house of prayer –, on Zimbrului St., just a bit further up the road. My husband went there twice a day. Formerly, people went to the shul both in the morning and in the evening, as well as during the week. Nowadays, they don't do that anymore. Here, men go to the shul only once a week. They only go there on Friday and on Saturday, that is all. There aren't even so many Jews, many of them died, and most of them are older, elderly people. I still go to the shul during the autumn holidays – on Rosh Hashanah, on Yom Kippur; we don't go there on Sukkot, but we go there on Simchat Torah. But when we go there, do women participate in the prayers? They sit there and chat. How one of them made fruit preserve, how another made zacusca [*Ed. note: traditional Romanian vegetable spread*]...

On Yahrzeit, when I mourn after my parents, after my husband's parents, I always commemorate them in a prayer at the synagogue. I just commemorated my husband's death this Saturday. I bought brandy, I baked ginger bread, sliced it, wrapped it nicely in napkins, and I gave them away to people at the shul. What can we do? The dead must be remembered every now and then.

I light candles on Friday evening. I light 5 candles myself, just like my mother. I do that, as I have several in-laws [*who are dead*]. My sister's husband died a year ago, and I also light a candle for him – even though he is so far away, in Israel, and I am here. I also say a prayer when I light the candles on Friday evening. I say it in Hebrew, for I can read Hebrew. I have a small prayer book, someone gave it to me before leaving to Israel, that's where I read the prayer from. My daughter lights candles as well. She uses two smaller candlesticks for doing that. I light the bigger ones. She says a prayer as well, she reads her own prayer, we don't read the prayer together.

I sometimes bake bread for Saturday as well. Now I no longer have the patience to bake kneaded bread, but if I do, I have a small baking tray where I can fit 6 small loaves of bread, and I bake 6 loaves of bread from 1 kg of flour that I buy at the store, and I give some to my son as well. And it rises so nicely, as if I used some special ingredient or something. I no longer bake cookies on Purim. It isn't even convenient to bake cookies – to have them there in order to eat something. You can still bake them today, but it's only for those with better financial means. Formerly, people used to bake cookies, hamantashen, there were many varieties. Hamantashen are very delicate to bake, believe me. I can cook them, but then they go dry after a day or two. It's either because of the flour I use, or... I don't know what to say.

Formerly, we celebrated seder at home. I always celebrated seder with my husband. Just us, the family – we, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, when they were still alive. Now, they don't celebrate it as they once used to. Now people no longer celebrate it at home, now they invite us at the Canteen, and that's where we celebrate the seder evening. I go there myself, and my children do too, every year. That's when we eat a piece of kosher meat, for they send meat from Bucharest. And they cook soup at the canteen, they do everything that is required for Pesach, and they serve us a nice a plate of soup, and meat, matzah, potatoes, latkes, this and that. Formerly, they made matzah for Passover here in Botosani as well, but now they send it over from Israel. And they give us rations, they don't give us as much as we need. They invite us at the Canteen, when we celebrate Chanukkah, the Light of Lights, they call us then and serve us all sorts of dishes, especially dumplings filled with potatoes. The Canteen is located on 7 Aprilie St. There was also a synagogue there, ran by Moscovici, but it no longer exists now. The Canteen is near the old cemetery, a little further up the road. But it is no longer functioning, only on Passover, on the first seder evening, and on Chanukkah, when they organize a meal – that is all. The rest of the time the Canteen is no longer functioning.

Now they no longer observe tradition as they once used to. Everything has been shattered. But we all remember just a little bit.

None of my relatives are still living here. I only have my son and daughter. The others have all left abroad, most of them to Israel. I've been to Israel in 1996 myself. I also have a sister there, it is through her that I learn some news about my family. What can we do, since we're so far apart from one another? I'd go to live there myself with my daughter, but how can you go there if there's a war? I don't even know the name of that president, for I hold such a grudge against him that I can't even begin to describe it. How so? At this day and age, in 2006, it will be 2007 soon – may God hold us in good stead – the war is still going on, still going on? This war will never end, God forgive me, it's neither black, nor white – as they say.

And time passes. And we live for as long as God will suffer us to live.

## Glossary

### **1 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.

## **2 Gordonia**

Pioneering Zionist youth movement founded in Galicia at the end of 1923. It became a world movement, which meticulously maintained its unique character as a Jewish, Zionist, and Erez Israel-oriented movement.

## **3 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).

## **4 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dneestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

## **5 Yellow star in Romania**

On 8th July 1941, Hitler decided that all Jews from the age of 6 from the Eastern territories had to wear the Star of David, made of yellow cloth and sewed onto the left side of their clothes. The Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced this 'law' on 10th September 1941. Strangely enough, Marshal Antonescu made a decision on that very day ordering Jews not to wear the yellow star. Because of these contradicting orders, this 'law' was only implemented in a few counties in Bukovina and Bessarabia, and Jews there were forced to wear the yellow star.



## **6 Ceausescu, Nicolae (1918-1989)**

Communist head of Romania between 1965 and 1989. He followed a policy of nationalism and non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries. The internal political, economic and social situation was marked by the cult of his personality, as well as by terror, institutionalized by the Securitate, the Romanian political police. The Ceausescu regime was marked by disastrous economic schemes and became increasingly repressive and corrupt. There were frequent food shortages, lack of electricity and heating, which made everyday life unbearable. In December 1989 a popular uprising, joined by the army, led to the arrest and execution of both Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, who had been deputy Prime Minister since 1980.

## **7 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.