

# Silo Oberman

**Silo Oberman**

**Braila**

**Romania**

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**Reporter: Roxana Onica**



*Silo Oberman is a man with sparkling wits, being recognized by all Jews at the Jewish Community in Braila as having an extraordinary memory and as being a good storyteller. He is tall, thin, with a very rich white-grey hair. He is living with his two sisters in their family house, which is located near the Community, a one-storey house - which they will donate to the Community after they pass away. Due to the unfortunate circumstances in their life, the three siblings never managed to marry, always living together. The old furniture inside the house, the heated stove call to mind, as it were, together with the storyteller, the atmosphere of times of yore. There were many old, framed photographs in the rooms where I took the interview, but he also had tens of photographs that his aunts left him.*

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## **My family background**

The grandparents from my father's side were from Targul Namoloasa, county of Focsani [*Editor's note: located 40 km south-east of Focsani*], for that's where my father was born. It still exists to this day, this locality. My grandparents traded cereals. Their names were **Iacob** and **Betty Oberman**. I don't know much about the grandparents from my father's side. I think they were less religious as my father himself wasn't a traditionalist either, but he went to the synagogue by virtue of habit, for he knew they were celebrating certain holidays. They were from Namoloasa but then they came to Braila. I don't know where they lived here, for I didn't look into it and no one told me these things.

I didn't meet either the grandparents from my mother's side, or those from my father's side, for I was born after they died. Both the grandfather from my mother's side and the grandfather from my father's side are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Braila.

The grandfather from my father's side had many brothers who, in turn, had children who were the big moneybags of their times. Some cousins of my father's, the Oberman brothers, had a timber storehouse. Their names were: Kivu, Mandel, Marcu, Avram, and Deborah – their sister. She married her cousin, meaning one of my father's brothers, Joseph Oberman. Which is to say she was born Oberman and her married name was still Oberman. Both of them were rich, so they didn't marry for money, but for love. She was beautiful. Not all their houses were confiscated by the state, but ours were, because of the name of Oberman. They had around 30-40 buildings.

My father had many brothers and sisters: Joseph, Maurice, Rebeca, Peppi. All of them were born in Braila, after my grandfather had moved there.

**Maurice Oberman** was one of my father's younger brothers. He studied in Germany, he attended the Commercial Academy.

My father's sister, **Rebeca** (born Oberman), was younger than my father, her husband, Moritz Hertanu, was from Bacau, and aunt Rebeca was from Braila. They lived both on Sulina Boulevard, at no. 31, and at no. 20 as well. They had a druggist's shop at the corner of Cuza St., right by the hotel, on the corner. It was called Venus Druggist's Shop. The sons of aunt Rebeca were **Ionel Hertanu**, and they had yet another son, an engineer, **Iuji**, who died of TB, as he caught a cold at Lacu Sarat. And there is also **Alphonse Hertanu** and their sister, **Betty**. Ionel Hertanu had taken specialty courses to become a druggist. Alphonse Hertanu had graduated the Commercial School. All three of them are dead and they are buried here, in Braila. My cousin, **Carol Hertanu**, had his own office at Chilia Noua. He traded cereals there. He bought cereals and sent them to Braila, but during the days of the free market prices would rise or fall. He went bankrupt and owed money, and, as he couldn't honor the debt, he chose to shoot himself, he was around 35. He wasn't married, but he lived with a Christian at Chilia Noua. He was older than me.

**Peppi Bernescu**, my father's sister, resembled aunt Rebeca very much. She was married to Hemann Bernescu, who was a military man. He was the director of the Leonida Society in Bucharest. He was a remarkable manager. I think he was a bit younger than my father. They had 2 daughters. They lived in Bucharest and enjoyed a special financial situation; they had an exquisite house in Filipescu park, on Alexandru Alley, near the quarters of the Central Committee; they took away their house and now they claimed it back. I've been in that house myself. They entered a decline after they forced them to have tenants, for they called them bourgeois.

I can say that we were closer to the relatives from my mother's side than to those of my father. The relatives from my father's side considered us "the black sheep" as we were poorer. They pushed us away without having any special reasons, but merely because it was a layering due to financial situation. However, after they were persecuted because they had belonged to the higher bourgeoisie, because they were some of the great rich people of that time, they turned to me for help as I was working at the Oil Factory, in the fuel department. One of the brothers was arrested for possession of gold and he hid some of the jewelry with me, valuable items – as he knew no one would come to me to look for them, for I wasn't rich – which, of course, I returned to him after he was released from prison. Back then, owning gold was a great crime.

The great-grandparents from my mother's side were among the 14 families that were around when the city of Braila was founded, in the 1830's. [ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Br%C4%83ila> ] They are called vertzener in German. I don't know their place of origin, for I didn't look into it. My great-

grandparents from my mother's side, the **Schaffer** family, traded wool, for I have in my possession some of the documents from those days. Back then, people imported and exported wool strands. My grandfather's name was **Seilig Schaffer**, whose name I bear myself, for Silo is a markedly Romanic name, it being the name given to me by my godfather, yet the Jewish name is Seilig. My grandmother's name was **Malca Schaffer**. The grandfather from my mother's side died around 1910, for I claimed the restitution of the house that was taken from us during the 1950 nationalization [1](#), and I had to provide official papers to prove it. My grandmother died long before that and my grandfather remarried, something like that.

I don't know what brothers grandfather Schaffer might have had. The Schaffer house is located next to the Community headquarters. It belonged to my grandfather's cousin, whose name was **Herschleib Schaffer**, and his wife's name was **Netty Schaffer**. They took a loan from the bank and built a high school for post-primary education, namely complementary education, located where the "Ana Aslan" High School stands nowadays, near the Modern Bathhouse. This house was donated as a gymnasium for all nationalities, in memory of their 10 children who didn't live. That's how the gymnasium was actually called, "Herschleib and Netty Schaffer," and was founded in 1912. It functioned until 1948, until the educational reform took place [2](#), when it was taken over by the state. Then it stopped being a gymnasium and became a high school. There is also the high school's golden book where all this information is precisely recorded. I donated to the Community the photograph with the gymnasium on its opening day, in which you can also see the mayor in those days, Radu Portocala, the prefect of the city, Serban Raducan, who took part in the inauguration and who were personalities in their days. Schaffer was decorated by king Ferdinand [3](#) with the Cultural Merit first class.

In his time, my grandfather was a leading figure of the Community. He was a member of the Sacred Society [*Chevra Kaddisha*], he was the secretary of the burials commission of the Jewish cemetery. He was considered to be a personality. The house of prayer was the Great Synagogue, which has now been dismantled and bought by Mr. P., on Mihail Sebastian St. in Braila, and is now a hotel, Hotel Corona. It was dismantled – something that wasn't totally legitimate, yet as they couldn't afford the maintenance costs, they sold the plot of land and the hotel was built where the synagogue was located. It is, nevertheless, a profanation.

As he was among the leading members of the community, my grandfather had a seat in front, for they were given to members based on a selection system. His front seat was right near the pulpit [*bimah*] and he had a desk on which his name was carved. My father inherited this seat, with the title of eternal property. Everyone sat in their high chairs, located higher up, near the pulpit, and then there were benches, too. The more the seat was located in the front rows, the more expensive it was, for these were the seats people paid for. Some paid only on holidays so as to have a seat in front. The grandfather from my mother's side observed the Sabbath and attended the synagogue.

My grandmother was a housewife. The clothes they wore had nothing special, they wore regular clothes. Men wore round hats called "joben" [top hat] with a cylinder, for that was the custom in those days. [*Editor's note: "Romanian being the only language in which the high hat has a totally different name, other than the popular name of 'cylinder.' The explanation is simple: the person who introduced the prestigious headgear in Bucharest was French, he owned a store on Calea Victoriei St., and his name was Jobin. <http://a.weblog.ro/2004-05-20/10047/Victor-Eftimiu.htm>*]. Women dressed after the fashion of those days, which is now today's fashion yet again. My

grandparents spoke Yiddish and Romanian.

My grandparents were very religious. My grandfather was very strict about religion and they observed all religious prescriptions. They had religious books at home, which are called Siddur. My grandparents celebrated the holidays at home. They organized large feasts on Seder, which is to say on Passover, to which they invited friends, relatives, acquaintances, and it was prepared to the letter. I know this from my grandparents, from what they told me. There were the Pesach dishes, there were some special glasses called coise [*koyses (cups in Yiddish)*] from which people drank wine. I still have a glass or two left. I also had a unique item in the shape of a small prayer house [*synagogue*], made from silver, something extraordinarily beautiful, which, however, I have sold.

These were the grandparents from my mother's side, who knew Hebrew extremely well. My grandfather could write in Hebrew and he was a very cultivated, traditionalist man. He had notebooks, notes that also included accounting sheets, and everything was written in Hebrew. My grandfather wasn't a member of any political party. He was a member of a cultural organization, yet wasn't a member of any political one. They got along well enough with their neighbors. Christians lived on their street as well, but it was generally a Jewish street. I don't know what friends they had, as they were no longer alive when I was born.

My mother had a brother, but I forget his name, for he was younger than my mother and died when he was young.

My mother's name was **Sarah Schaffer**, with the equivalent of Surica. In Hebrew, they say Sarah bas [*bat*] Seilig, meaning "Sarah daughter of Seilig." Her name in certain official papers was Sarah, such as on the lease. The name recorded on her identity card was Surica. I don't know in what year she was born anymore. My mother was secular. She had attended the Academy for young ladies in Braila. She could play the piano as well, her education was somewhat refined. She had learned to play the piano by taking private lessons. All I have left is the piano chair. The piano was mortgaged as we were in dire straits, and it wasn't returned to us anymore, so we only had the piano chair. However, it is a beautiful piece, with a screw, which helps to raise it.

My father's name was Elias, Hebrew name: Eli. Jews say Eli beni Iacob, meaning "Eli, son of Iacob." My father hadn't graduated high school, but only some of the high school grades, I believed he attended in Targu Namoloasa. My father was recruited in the Romanian army, in the 10th regiment infantry, and he was on the front in Bulgaria, in the 1913 war [4](#). [*Editor's note: Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915.*] He was decorated, too. Then he deserted. They looked for him afterwards for several years, but he stayed hidden, he didn't live at home.

My parents met through one of those transactions they did in those days. It was a fixed marriage, for that was the custom back then. They married after my grandfather died. They got married at the Synagogue in Braila, around 1913-1914. They organized a wedding ceremony, naturally. That canopy is called hupa [*chuppah*], and it was up near the pulpit. They perform the religious service and they break a glass on this occasion, a fact that has a certain meaning. For instance, I attended a wedding. At the temple, they had this custom that men and women should be grouped separately. The temple was full and the participants were offered fondants, and small flower bouquets, so as to throw them at the bride. It truly was a solemn event. Afterwards people had a party, they ate, just as they do at the weddings of the other nationalities.

The house I live in was built by the grandfather from my mother's side, in 1852. It was given to my mother as a dowry when she got married. But so much did my parents benefit from this dowry that my father had to work his whole life to pay for it and then he died. The house was built with money borrowed from the Land Credit. My father continued paying my grandfather's installments when he was no more. It was called a dowry, but in fact it was a burden, and he paid his whole life the installments my grandfather had to pay. The house was mortgaged, and they would have taken it away, so he had to work and pay for it. It was taken by the N.C.R., National Center for Romanianization, for all Jewish properties were taken away. *[Editor's note: A "Decree law was issued in 1940, for the Romanianization of factories' personnel – to be enforced after December 31, 1941. As a corollary, the 'National Center for Romanianization' (N.C.R.) was constituted, "the legal entity with regard to public law, whose purpose was to help integrate the property which entered state patrimony and aid the Romanianization of economic life."* <http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi1997/current10/mi47.htm>]. The house was given back to him in 1944. I have the restitution document issued by the N.C.R.

The house has three wings. I live in wing A, but there is also wing B and C. They no longer exist anymore. The house didn't have a bathroom and we lived in the 3rd wing [wing C], which was pretty modest, despite the fact that we were the owners. There were 2 rooms, a hallway, and a kitchen. The furniture was old, of Viennese make, with spring mattresses, meaning it had beds with carved frames. We also had a sideboard built in the old style. It was a large sideboard, with a marble top, it had a mirror, a sofa with velvet, flowery upholstery, which also showcased a large mirror. It was old furniture, but that's how it was done in those days.

During my grandfather's lifetime, the illumination was done using gas lamps, and then it evolved and electricity was installed. During my parents' lifetime, illumination was done both with gas lamps and with electricity as well. *[Editor's note: Coal gas was first produced at the end of the 18th century from coal. Later lighting gas was produced of oil, too, instead of coal. The gas spread light burning in so-called gas mantles. Gas lighting started to be replaced by electric lighting at the beginning of the 20th century, mainly in the cities, of course.]* For instance, during my lifetime, we had both electric lighting, but we also had gas lamps on the walls, which we lit. We drew water from the courtyard, where there was a water pump.

We also had a garden, with fruit-bearing trees. We had some very handsome apricot trees, unique in the city of Braila. We also had sour cherry trees, ungrafted apricot trees, peach trees, for the courtyard is large, with a large area. We also raised livestock, poultry and pigs. Had the grandfather from my mother's side lived, he would have been very upset that my father raised pigs. Our religion doesn't allow the raising of pigs. The pigs we raised were kosher. Yet my father didn't care for these things, and he raised and slaughtered the pigs himself. You couldn't find such pork products in the whole of Braila, that's how good they were.

My mother's financial situation was very precarious. Even if we owned the house and we had many tenants, our situation was a modest one. The only income was my father's, who worked for a cereal company and our life was hard. My mother was a housewife, but we also had a woman who helped my mother.

My parents didn't dress in any special way, they dressed according to the fashion of those days, not to show off, without any pomp. My father wore a moustache, as was fashionable in those days,



that particular moustache model was called “fork.” Most men wore this kind of moustache, for that was the fashion back then.

My parents didn’t read that much. My mother read books, but father didn’t have the time, as he was busy with his work. My mother always urged us to read. We had books at home, mainly literature. They also read newspapers, which they bought. They didn’t go to the library, for they didn’t have this habit.

In our family, which is to say in my parents’ home, only Yiddish was spoken. But after a while they stopped talking in Yiddish, the custom was lost over time. Romanian had become the language we spoke in the family.

My father didn’t have political views. My parents were on good terms with their neighbors. They also had non-Jews among their friends. My father had Christian friends, he worked mostly in the countryside, as he was sent by cereal companies to collect cereals from various locations. There were mainly Christians living in the countryside, and so he didn’t have a Jewish work environment: at Cazanesti, at Stancuta, at Valea Canepii.

In our family, father was the one who was in charge of buying things from the market. There was the Hristo Botev Market, the Main Market, the Halls Market, the market on Victoriei St., and the market on Galati St., which was called the Poor Market. There was also Concordiei Market one on Calarasilor St., and one on Sfantu’ Constantin St. The ones selling products in the markets were the peasants living in the villages within the county, who came to the markets by cart.

My parents didn’t go on holidays for the material situation didn’t allow them to do so. They visited their relatives in Husi, and they also took us, children. We didn’t go to any restaurant with our parents, nor on holidays, as we couldn’t afford it. We cooked and ate at home.

An assimilation took place after my parents got married, which is to say people didn’t consider us to be very religious, but we were secular. My mother had separate dishes. My mother wanted everything to be kosher and we always tinned all the trays before Passover. Gypsies used to come to tin pans. My mother always had special dishes for the Pesach holiday. We celebrated the holidays at home. The Seder was also celebrated at the Community, but that time [*during the war*] was a period of racial restrictions and the Pesach wasn’t celebrated at the Community anymore.

My parents were Community members, they paid membership fees. They weren’t involved in any cultural activities. They occasionally received matzah on Passover, unleavened bread, for there was a Factory here, in the courtyard of the Temple, and they didn’t bring it from abroad. It was rudimentary, but they prepared it here.

We observed the autumn holidays, meaning Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. On holidays, we went to the Main Synagogue, and we inherited that from the grandfather from my mother’s side. Grandfather was the main efor there and I also went there and sat in the pulpit. My mother went, too, she sat in the balcony. The men were seated on the ground floor, and the women in the balcony. As long as mother was alive, she went to the synagogue with my father on holidays, and they also took us, children. We were children and, as such, we didn’t go there out of a religious belief. There were children who were raised in the spirit of the Hebrew religion, with traditions, but we, children, didn’t receive a typical Jewish education. My mother has been educated more strictly

in the Jewish spirit in her family, but she was assimilated after she got married, some of this faith waned. There were somehow arguments in this respect, but there was a certain assimilation.

I had a bar mitzvah, too. I studied with a teacher but I didn't attend anymore. There had to be a lecture, but I didn't like these events. On the occasion of a child's coming of age, they place on the child's breast, near the heart, on the left hand and on the forehead, the so-called tefillin. There is a book written by Bruckmayer which records all the data regarding Jewish customs and traditions, including the bar mitzvah and the tefillin. The bat mitzvah is performed for women, but my sisters didn't have it, either.

I liked the holidays as I ate sweets, for there was Purim when they organized a masked ball. On Purim, there was a game involving masks: Haman's, Ahasuerus'. There was a house on Frumoasa St. where one could rent Purim costumes. People masked themselves and dressed as officers, domino, and you couldn't recognize them. I took part in Purim balls myself, and I wore a domino mask and I was mistaken for a friend of mine. It was a sort of merry-making. Women wore masks as well. There were some traditional holidays that were organized at the Communal Theatre. They recruited a poet who wrote humoristic pieces, which were in fashion in those days, his name was Ion Pribeagu, and there were very interesting rhymed chronicles. *[Editor's note: Ion Pribeagu (b. 1887, in Sulita, Botosani county - d. 1971, Tel Aviv) was the literary pseudonym of Isac Lazarovici, Romanian-born Jewish poet and humorist. [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ion\\_Pribeagu](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ion_Pribeagu)].* People liked these poems very much, they were rhymed chronicles that were published in the newspapers 'Dimineata' (*the Morning*) and 'Adevarul' (*the Truth*). (These were the newspapers published in Braila: 'Curierul' [the Courier], 'Evenimentul' [the Event], 'Timpul' [the Time], 'Romania,' and many other newspapers, for the press in Braila had a very busy life. There was Leon Feraru, who subsequently left to America; there was Cora Bergovici who also left to America; there was Valeriu Popovici).

We celebrated Chanukkah before the war, the holiday of the Light, the equivalent of Christmas in Romania. Children were given gifts, which were called Chanukkah gelt, meaning Chanukkah money. We played for money using a spinning top that we called dreidel. Each facet had a meaning of its own, and the spinning top turned and fell on one of the facets, one of them read 'Niemt Roma,' meaning 'Take everything,' and then you took all the money that was on the table. *[Editor's note: Denderlior trenderli in Yiddish is 'dreidl'. Four-sided top. During Chanukkah children play with it for money that has been given to them during the holiday. Money was often substituted by other commodities, such as for example fruit or candy. Mr. Oberman remembers one version of the dreidel game in which the „Nun” - nim - means "take" - the player takes one from the pot. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>]*

There was a hakham in Braila, too. Years ago, around 1939-1940, there was a hakham on Tamplari St., where there were Jewish butcher's shops, dedicated to the Mosaic religion. There was a man who slaughtered the fowl and sold kosher meat. That's where people took the birds to be slaughtered, and those who observed religious prescriptions didn't eat meat one could buy in the city, they only ate this meat that the hakham prepared. And now, on holidays, a man comes from Bucharest, as there is the custom on New Year's Eve for the Community members to eat kosher meat. A fowl is slaughtered for the forgiving of one's sins. *[Editor's note: This is called kaparot - a ceremony performed by some Jews on the evening before Yom Kippur, when sins symbolically transfer from individuals to a white rooster and a white chicken for women].* Also, the

slaughterhouse paid a great deal of attention to the slaughtering of cattle. They chose the animal, which had to be healthy, perfect, approved by a veterinarian, and the meat they gave to the Community was called kosher meat.

## Growing up

I was born in Braila, on February 17, 1917, in the house where I still live to this day. I have 2 sisters: Beatrice and Melanie Oberman. Beatrice was born on February 19, 1919. Melanie was born on March 10, 1924.

As a child, I did all the mischief children do. I played in a certain place called "The Grass Courtyard," and all the children in the street played there. We played with balls, a game called "la chioc." We dug a hole in the ground and tried to throw the ball in there, which was called "la chioc." In addition, we played with clothes' buttons, postal stamps. These were about all the games we played as children.

We were 3 siblings: me and 2 sisters. My mother and that Romanian woman she hired looked after us. I didn't go to kindergarten, but directly to the Primary School for Boys no. 1. Back then, people paid schooling fees both for primary school, and for high school as well, because you paid to go to state schools as well, for they had their own budgets, they weren't subsidized by the ministry. Depending on what the school administration deemed fit, they told you: "You are richer, you will pay this much..." The fees were decided by the administration board of the school and they asked you to pay schooling fees, depending on the family's material situation, which was a very subjective, very relative estimate. It was very hard to send three children to school with just one salary.

In school, my favorite class was arithmetic. I had an eminent teacher in secondary school, Oscar Kreindler, and I learned the lesson in class already. He was Jewish and he was an emeritus teacher which had been the principal of Balcescu High School, chairman of the baccalaureate commission. He left Braila years later, and became a university professor at the Polytechnic, at the Military Academy. I also had his wife for a teacher, her name was Ana Kreindler, she taught biology. He was an eminent teacher, which had such a good teaching method that you practically learned the lesson during his arithmetic class. That's why I actually liked mathematics, it didn't require any efforts on my part. There weren't any teachers whom I didn't like. I had a very nice teacher of geography, he came from Transylvania; his name was Corneliu Guseila, he was the father of actress Lili Guseila Carandino, the wife of Nicolae Carandino. *[Editor's note: Nicolae Carandino (1905-1996) was a Romanian journalist, pamphleteer, translator, dramatist, and politician. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolae\\_Carandino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolae_Carandino)].* As an actress, she was special, but she suffered because of her husband's political activity and because of his fleeing the country.

I didn't take piano lessons, yet I tried to take private violin lessons, but I discontinued them because of the hardships of those days, too. The teacher used to come to our home. My sisters tried to learn to play the piano, also in private, but they discontinued them.

I didn't feel the anti-Semitism as a child. There weren't any problems with the teachers, either. I attended the Primary School for Boys no. 1, opposite the Haunted House, meaning the Oancea residence - which is actually the Home for the elderly. I had very good teachers at this school. I was a classmate of Eugen Spileriu and of Mihail Sebastian's brother. *[Editor's note: Mihail*



*Sebastian (born Iosif Hechter; 1907–1945) was a Romanian playwright, essayist, journalist and novelist. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail\\_Sebastian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail_Sebastian)*. I donated my school year photograph to the State Archives. I wrote on the back the names of my classmates. Then I attended the Schaffer secondary school, followed by the Commercial High School. This was a mixed school, for I didn't go to the Jewish School.

I had friends at school, of course I did. There was Marcel Florianu, who was later vice-president of UCECOM [*Editor's note: Uniunea Nationala a Cooperatiei Mestesugaresti (the National Union of Handicraft Cooperative) was established in 1951. It is the representative of the whole system of handicraft cooperatives organizations of Romania in relation to Romanian authorities, other internal or international bodies*]. I had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Serafimov was my best friend, he died last year in Rome. He was married to Mirela, Miha Dragomir's sister. I have some volumes of poetry in Italian, which Mirela sent me from Rome, she is a person of many talents: painter, sculptor, with a degree in law, and she is also a writer in Rome. She wrote 5 volumes, and had painting exhibitions in Italy.

For a while, I was a librarian at the "Nordau and Derera" Library, where Mihail Sebastian worked as a librarian as well, long before I worked there, for he was 10 years older than me. I met him myself, but he was studying in Paris when I grew up. I was a classmate of his brother, Beni, who was the holder of Mihail Sebastian's diary.

At the time when I was going to school, there were around 2-3 cars in the city of Braila. One belonged to a ship-owner, his name was Moreno Blaskel, and one belonged to some director from Forestiera, nowadays's P.A.L., and there was yet another one that belonged to Dudeleanu, the director of the I. G. Cantacuzino Cement Factory, formerly Stanca. There were 3 cars, and it was a real event when they drove past. Other than that, there were carriages. I first rode in a car around 1930. I traveled very little by train, for we didn't travel that much as our material situation didn't allow it.

Formerly, the people of Braila strolled along the Corso, along Regala St., downtown. I used to go with my mother to the Small garden, which was called Tiriplicu, nowadays it is called the Holy Archangels Garden. And we sat on a bench. We used to go with my mother to the confectioner's as well, and it was an event for us. There were many confectioner's shops, among which was the famous Andronic confectioner's shop, located downtown, where the Syndicates' Cultural Club stands nowadays. There were tables outside, in the open air, and there was also an orchestra playing music, and we had a good time because of the music, and ate Marshal ice cream or Marghiloman cakes. It was a feast.

The street on which we live is called "the Jewish Street," and it was described by Uri Benador, the writer, in one of his books; he was an inhabitant of Braila by adoption, for he was born in Moldova. His name was Schmidt, and he Uri Schmidt's father, the conductor of the Galati Philharmonic. Naturally, the Jews in Braila lived in other neighborhoods as well, for they represented a numerous and important population as Braila was a Danube port where there were many Jewish cereal traders, ship-owners, manufacturers. The "Laminorul" Factory was built by the Goldenberg family and it was called "Herman Goldenberg and Sons." From an economic point of view, this factory was the creation of some former hardware traders.

Until 1940, there were 14 houses of prayer in Braila, temples and synagogues included. The Frankische Schul synagogue, today's Choral Temple, was built in 1837. It was rebuilt in 1862. The Main Synagogue was built on Coroanei St. no. 25 (today, Mihail Sebastian St.) in 1833. There were 2 representative synagogues in the city, among which was the Main Synagogue as well, which has been dismantled in the meantime and the plot of land was sold, and turned into Hotel Corona nowadays.

In 1882, the brothers Abraham and David Schwartzman donated the building located on Al. I. Cuza Boulevard for the foundation of the Jewish-Romanian Primary School for Boys. The Clara Baroness of Hirsh Primary School for Girls was founded in 1896-1897. Girls attended Romanian schools until then, where girls of all religious beliefs could attend, just as my sisters did. The Herschleib and Netty Schaffer Gymnasium for Boys was founded in 1912. As a cultural activity, the Nordau and Derera Library was founded in 1912. Max Nordau was a Jewish writer, and Nissim Emanuel Derera, who was a cultured man, was teaching at the Schwartzman School and he translated Cicero for the first edition of Library for All. Nordau wrote "Conventional Lies," which is very interesting. This library had 3 sections: Romanian, French, and German.

The Jewish Community of Braila always had presidents, for it is first and foremost a legal entity. During the war, it was called the Jewish Central, and then it resumed the name of the Jewish Community of Braila. Its higher structure is the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania, and the communities can do absolutely nothing without the approval of the central structure. There were several rabbis along the years in Braila, who had a vast Hebrew culture. There were also religious performers, there were choir singers, and on holidays they sang so nice you could say it was an opera recital. They sang in Hebrew using opera arias.

During the persecutions, Joseph Schmidt, the famous singer, was a refugee here, he was coming from his native city in Moldova; he ran for the position of performer here, in Braila. Yet he was rejected by the president of the community of that time who was an illiterate person and didn't appreciate Schmidt because he was a short person and wore high heels. In order to earn his living, he traveled through various places across the country, and that's how he ran for a position in Braila, as the population here was richer and they could pay him a salary.

Mayer Thenen was the penultimate rabbi [*Editor's note: Rabbi Dr. Mayer Thenen one of the great personalities of the Braila Jews and of all the Romanian Jews, who was a pastor until 1940; he was the author of the first Romanian translation of the Ros Hasana and Yom Kippur prayers.*

[http://www.romanianjewish.org/en/mosteniri\\_ale\\_culturii\\_iudaice\\_03\\_11\\_12.html](http://www.romanianjewish.org/en/mosteniri_ale_culturii_iudaice_03_11_12.html)], followed by the last rabbi, Michel Dobruschim, during 195-1954, when he left to Israel. There is also a photograph at the Community of Braila's last rabbi and the former chief rabbi of all the Jews of Romania, Rosen [5](#). I met him myself. However, Thenen is more famous and compiled a Siddur of his own, which was republished in Israel. The rabbi didn't only officiate weddings, but was also the patron of the Jewish community on holidays. I attended marriages officiated by a rabbi myself. Formerly, religious wedding ceremonies were performed, and we were invited as well. There was a different rabbi, Mihailovici, and I was actually a witness, which is to say I signed that document, which is called a ketubah in Hebrew. I also had my father's sister wedding document, which was officiated in Bacau, for she married a man from Bacau, his name was Hertanu. It was a very beautiful document, written with elaborate letters.

Jews had many professions in Braila: there were craftsmen, handicraftsmen, and intellectuals. There was the Port of Braila and there were important cereal traders, ship-owners... There were the stone quarries at Turcoaia owned by the Daniel brothers, by Michael Daniel. The present headquarters of the Securitate located on Ana Aslan St. was the property of Michael Daniel and sons: George, Ion, and Otto Daniel.

During my childhood, electricity and running water weren't available in the entire city, but only in parts of it, it depended on the neighborhood. There were neighborhoods at the outskirts of the city where there was no electricity or running water: in Dorobanti, in Mihai Bravu, lighting was mostly done using gas lamps.

There were military parades in Braila: on May 10th there were sumptuous parades that were organized along the main street. The grand stand was located on Calarasilor St., in front of the Prefect's Office, which stood where the Faculty of Engineering stands nowadays, and the parade started there and continued past the Holy Archangels Kindergarten and along the main street called Regala (*Royal*) street, which was dreamlike. They simply ruined it afterwards, for nowadays' architects went abroad and then came up with these "pies." In days of yore, the street was exquisite. The tramlines went along the main street up to Obor, and there were acacia trees on both sides, along the sidewalk. It was a beauty. There were many acacia trees on Cuza Boulevard as well, and Mihail Sebastian nicknamed Braila "the City with acacias," after the street of his childhood, the Cuza Boulevard. These acacia trees are gone as well.

We didn't learn so many patriotic songs at school. For instance, the Macabi Jewish Sports Organization, which had branches in many cities, took part in the parade on May 10th. Nowadays, the organization has been revived in Braila as well. It was representative back then, and one of a kind in those days, in the 1930's. The headquarters of this organization, "Macabi," was on Mihail Sebastian Street, where there is now a wrestling hall. That building was built especially for the "Macabi" Organization.

Hitler's rise to power had outcomes that we know all too well. We felt these effects, as Jews were allowed to go to the market only after 10 o'clock, our bread ratios were reduced by half, we weren't allowed to have radios or bicycles. *[It was not allowed for Jews to have radio in their own house, Jewish physicians could continue their praxis only with Jewish patients. All Jews were obliged to surrender clothes to the authorities with the reason that the (Romanian) army and society needs them. Jewish properties, business, factories, lands, farms were confiscated. In the area of Banat this process had started in December 1940. Although these were governmental decisions, they were not totally legal, actually did not have a proper law on the base. Usually the orders were followed on the basis of verbal commands of the legionary leaders. With the Antonescu regime all these decisions became authorized and continued during 1941 and 1942. (Source: Victor Neuman „Evreii din Banat și Transilvania de Sud în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial” (Jews from Banat and South Transylvania during the years of World War II), in România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2004, Bucharest, p.152)].* There was a whole series of interdictions. We were allowed to receive medical care only from Jewish physicians. My family had a family physician: doctor Schor. This started in 1937 during the Goga-Cuza regime [6](#). There was the royal dictatorship of Carol II [7](#), who promoted a pro-German policy, even though Elena Lupescu was his unofficial wife. *[Editor's note: The woman was Elena Magda Lupescu, daughter of a Christianized Jew. Carol met her in 1922. She was known under various names, including Lupeasca*

or Dudaia – the latter was the one by which Carol used to address her.] That was his political maneuver, and then the Goga-Cuza regime took away our citizenship and we had to reclaim it afterwards. Then they revised all the people who were granted Romanian citizenship. There were both Romanian and Jewish stores, and Jewish stores had to place a sign in the window, reading “Romanian Store.”

On the orders of Hitler, a census was conducted to count the numbers of those of Jewish descent, with Auschwitz as destination, meaning they were inventorying all those of Jewish descent. At the time when the census was conducted, in 1942, there were still around 5075 Jewish people. Among them was Mrs. Enachescu as well (the mother of Dan Enachescu, former minister of health) [*Editor’s note: Minister of health between January 8 – June 28, 1990 in the Petre Roman Government, which was a council of ministers that governed Romania during December 26, 1989 – June 28, 1990. [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul\\_Petre\\_Roman\\_\(1\)](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul_Petre_Roman_(1))]; she was married to colonel Enachescu who was the head of the Military Hospital in Braila. There was also the father of the poet Mihail Crama. [*Editor’s note: Mihail Crama (1923-1994), literary pseudonym of Eugen Enachescu, is the known award-winner of the Royal Foundations Award (Penitent Scenery, 1947) and of the Romanian Academy, the Mihai Eminescu Award for the anthology Evening Kingdom, 1979*]. The latter, being a poet, wrote a romanced account of the legionnaires’ rebellion in Braila, in the novel “Forgotten Loneliness.” Among those inventoried in Braila was the mother of the lawyer Tino as well, Paulina Berman, who was of Jewish origin. There was also a prefect of Braila, the lawyer Varnaf, whose wife was Jewish.*

We were persecuted. He whom you won’t let die won’t let you live – I had a mishap to that effect. Namely, I was stationed in the front area in 1940. Nobody knew if we were going to be at war with Bulgaria and we were sent out in the Cadrilater area. I was a military clerk in 1939 when I did my military service, namely a secretary for the 1st Company. I was very good friends with a military comrade, Leopold Voica, a Czech, his literary pseudonym was L. Voicu. He was published after August 23, 1944 [8](#) in the magazine “Orizonturi” (Horizons). He was also a war correspondent, which is to say that after we, Jews, were kicked out of the army, he was a correspondent for the newspaper “Currentul” during the war, which newspaper was run by pamfil Seicaru, and he wrote columns from the front line. The day before leaving for the front line, Armand Calinescu was assassinated by the legionnaires. [*Editor’s note: Armand Călinescu (1893 – September 21, 1939) was a [Romanian](#) economist and politician, who served as Prime Minister between March 1939 and the time of his death*]. And then, a circular letter was issued throughout the country to the effect that legionnaires be shot and placed on display in public squares, it was a measure issued by Gabriel Marinescu, minister of internal affairs. The assigned task for Braila was to shoot 5 legionnaires. Among these legionnaires was a certain Raducanu, whom I didn’t meet. The previous year, when he was in the army, he had been caught distributing legionnaires’ manifestos and sentenced for his activity as a legionnaire. So he was on the list of the Security, for that was the name of Securitate in those days [9](#), State Security. And so, this Raducanu was among the 5. Some of them were shot in Braila, among whom was a mattress maker, but they couldn’t find this Raducanu. He fled the regiment where he did his military service and wasn’t found anymore, he fled and couldn’t be found.

My friend came, he was the battalion’s clerk, which outranked the company, and told me: “What should I do, Silo, look, Raducanu came to my office asking me to hide him. He’s like a rat in a trap

and it's a shame, for we're talking about a man's life. Hide him!" It was crazy in those days, there was a full military mobilization, for we were leaving for the front the following day. My friend had a degree in Law, but he was very fearful citizen by nature. He trusted me. I told him: "Look Poldi - for that's how I called him -, but what if they catch me?" "They won't catch you, can't you see how crazy things are..." There were orders for military mobilization back then, they were aired in the press, on the radio, and we had to enlist. We said that we were leaving the following day and we hid him, and thus they didn't find him.

### **During the war**

The legionnaires came to power in 1940, in September, and they came to search my house on November 7, they came to arrest me. I wasn't at home. This Raducanu was a big chief at the Police Precinct, as it was called back then, and that's how he sent men over to perform these searches. All young Jews who were found were arrested and convicted to be tried by the Martial Court for their imaginary Communist activity. I had no Communist activity, but they called us Communist Jews based on the mere fact that we were Jewish. There was a newspaper then, called "Porunca Vremii" (the Times' Commandment) and it promoted anti-Jewish propaganda. Just as well, we were also called Plutocrat Jews or Masonic Jews. That was the formula, nationalistic and false, for I was neither a Plutocrat Jew, nor did I belong to the ranks of the very wealthy, nor was I a member of any Communist organization. But being a Jew was synonymous with being a Communist. And then they sent people to find me, but I was fortunate they didn't find me as I was in the port in my uncle's office, who also had a bridge there. I hid for a month as they patrolled in the area around our house in order to find me. I hid at my father's sister's place and my uncle's place, Maurice, on Pomilor St. I stayed there locked indoors as they were looking for me day after day. Not to mention the fact that wardrobes, mattresses were being turned upside down at home. They didn't know where I was hiding.

I didn't know this Raducanu in person, and he didn't know I saved his life, either. Among others, he sent them to bring me in as well. A citizen, Suli Goldenberg, was beaten and they pummeled his chin with a revolver to give away the place where I was hiding. And this is how a whole series of legionnaires were sent after Jews. There were the blood brotherhoods whose members walked around the city wearing capes from a traditional fabric, with a large cross on the back. They were free at the time, and they had revolvers. They were idealistic young people, for there was a strong pro-legionary trend in those days.

They didn't find me and that's how I survived. All those who were found were put inside the cellars of today's National Bank. Mr. Wolf was caught and he was beaten until he fainted. [*Editor's note: Reference is made here to Max Wolf, Centropa interviewed him as well.*] After you regained consciousness, they beat you again and then they splashed buckets of water on you. Back then there were 2 police structures: the official police and legionary police. That's where they kept the Jews. I was fortunate I wasn't home at the time and I got away. The others were sent to concentration camps, at Vapniarka [*Editor's note: in Transnistria*], some didn't return, others came back sick with lathyrism, as they gave them fodder sweet peas to eat. I was a friend of and grew up with Lica Stefan, who was among that lot made up of those who were found home and arrested, despite having no Communist activity. Then he was taken to Vapniarka. L. Stefan ran the newspaper "Inainte" [Onwards] in Braila. He was then an editor for the "Informatia Bucurestiului" [Bucharest Information], and he died in Bucharest, as he had been to Vpniarka and contracted



lathyrism. Also, his son died recently in Greece at 51; he too was a journalist.

The son of Vasile Bancila, the famous philosophy professor, was a genuine legionnaire [*Editor's note: Vasile Bancila (b. 1897, Braila - d. 1979), Romanian philosopher, pedagogue and essayist.*] He was visiting a classmate whose name was Heins Rottenberg and they caught him. They asked him: "Where are the Communist manifestos?" But he was a scoffer by nature and directed them to dig in the courtyard. He said: "They are buried there," then "Wait, no, they are buried here..." They found "compromising evidence," as that man played the piano. He was from a bourgeois family and they found "Serenade" by Moskovski, who was a music composer in his days, but as they were so "brimming" with musical culture they said Moskovski was something compromising.

I was arrested in 1942 as someone denounced me. All Jews performed forced labor and I worked at the Military Bakery as a porter. I hauled sacks of wheat flour, I kneaded dough, for I was also a baker at a certain point in my life. One night, they came to look for me at around 3 A.M. They searched the house and took me to the police station. They also arrested someone who worked for the national railway company on that occasion, who was a front-ranking Communist, indeed. His name was Popescu and he was the father of Tudor Popescu, a university professor. They also arrested a boxer, Zinopol, me, and many others.

I had the good fortune to escape punishment, for we were still headed for the Court Martial to be convicted for imaginary communist activity. Tudor Popescu was a colleague and friend of Antonescu, and then they made a phone call to Bucharest from the Police Precinct in Braila (which was located on Calarasi St., where the Commercial Bank now stands), to the effect that the entire lot be released. It was the disposition issued by the vice-president of the council of ministers, for that's how it was called back then, for he was the assistant of marshal Antonescu and that's how I escaped in 1942 as well. I escaped being court-martialed twice, without being guilty of anything and without having any communist activity.

### **After the war**

I couldn't get ahead in my career after August 23, 1944 [8](#). Still, I was head of a department, but I was under very strict supervision because of my little-bourgeois origin. For instance, the Securitate came to force me to become an informer. They even gave me a nickname, Trandafirescu. I had to go to Jewish funerals. And they also came on another occasion and told me: "Your friend Crisan will receive his brother's visit from Israel. You are to tell us exactly what he said and did." And I was enraged and at various meetings I told them: "I don't know this, I don't know that." They even took me to a house for secret meetings and I was baffled. In order for them to let him keep his house, the town's mayor, Tomulescu, had to establish a place for secret meetings. He used to call me on the phone and tell me: "I'll meet you at the corner of the Catholic Church, for the boss wants to meet you." He lived on Cetatii St. The boss met me, and of course the tape-recorder was on and he asked me this, that, but I informed on absolutely no one. At a certain point, they asked me: "What did Crisan, your friend, do?" "You should know I won't sell my friends!"

Those who were weaker, those who were administrators and employed were forced to give statements, lest they were removed from their jobs. They were hunting those with certain sins: one was released from jail after being convicted because he couldn't account for some money in the bookkeeping registers, another had done I don't know what. They couldn't find anything to hold against me as I did my duty at work, at the Onwards Cooperative. For instance, the president of the

cooperative wanted to see me: “Someone from the Department of Labor is here to see you.” They sent someone from that department who worked for the Securitate and he asked me as an introduction: “How many workers are employed here?” and then approached entirely different subjects.

My parents were almost taken out of the house and evacuated to somewhere else, to Brailita. Owing to some good, Christian friends, the Margarit family – he was a judge –, who worked at the National Center for Romanization, we were saved and didn’t move anymore, which is to say we stayed here, but under very difficult circumstances. We didn’t even have bread, for father didn’t have a job anymore for no Jew could be employed any longer. And what could they do to earn their living... They sold things from the house and the circumstances were very trying. Especially since we were forced to pay military taxes during the war, provide items for the front. We had to give bed linen, blankets that we bought in stores. We sold other things from the house so that we could buy them. You were convicted if you didn’t provide these things. I owed military taxes and I couldn’t pay the military tax on time and at a certain point a former classmate of mine from primary school came to our house and found one of my suits of clothes, which hadn’t even been worn once. He confiscated it to be sold. He worked for the internal revenue department, in the financial department, at the Tax Collector’s Office, as it was then called, and he wanted to sell my only suit.

We weren’t educated in the spirit of marrying only Jewish people. Such were the circumstances that when I was about to get married the period of hardship commenced and marriage was the last thing on my mind. We were in dire straits and we couldn’t afford to take someone else to look after, given the fact that we had no jobs and no material means. It was one hardship after another. It was the same for my sisters, and they didn’t marry either.

Beatrice, my elder sister, graduated the High School for Girls, now Murgoci High School. She also studied at Sancta Maria. Afterwards, she was a remarkable teacher of mathematics, even though she couldn’t go to the faculty, still because of racial persecutions. She was a self-taught woman. She is listed in the monograph of Murgoci High School. She worked in the educational system and then retired as there was too much patriotic work to be done and the pay was small and it was more profitable to give private lessons to pupils. She paid her due taxes to the Financial Department. She had 4-5 pupils and could barely meet the demand. Had she had 5 times as much spare time as she had, she would have earned very well. She also taught pupils for admission to the faculty. She also tutored the sons of Mr. Andrei Niculescu, the former principal of Murgoci High School. There were hundreds of remarkable pupils. All those who had a good financial situation asked my sister to tutor their children. When she was of retirement age, she retired from the Handicrafts Cooperative, where she paid very small contributions and now, after all the raises, she receives 1 million lei as retirement pension [*100 RON in the recently adopted Romanian currency*], after 20 years of working as a teacher.

Melanie graduated high school in private and then worked at the Oil Factory, and then she worked as a rate-setter in the local industry, which is now called “Mozaic,” and that’s where she retired from.

I worked at the “Zimbrul” Oil Factory in Braila. It was first called “Sezonov,” then “Zimbrul,” then it merged with the “Prutul” Factory in Galati and I worked there as well, I commuted to Galati. I

worked as head of the planning and labor organization department. For there I had an argument as well with A., accountant-in-chief, who was a high-class thief. He was fresh out of jail and didn't have anything else to eat. He was accountant-in-chief at "Prutul," but they caught him with big dilapidations, and, out of compassion, I talked to the director and said we should hire him, as I was in charge of labor organization; but after we hired him he was bent only on tricks. He wanted us to build a canteen. I didn't have a head for business. He hired a worker to do some self-administered repairs, and he wanted to take his share of the money as well. Yet he didn't like the fact that he had to go through me for every job. I told him that if we administered the repairs ourselves, "This costs that much, that costs that much, and we need a cost estimate" and thus I inconvenienced him in his affairs. And then, as I was commuting I would sometimes arrive late at work, and he convinced the director and filed a complaint to the effect they should terminate my employment contract. I took them to court and it was a whole story as I was unemployed for about 8 months, and I won in the end. The law stated that during these months you were entitled to only a salary and a half. I won, and the amount was to be paid by the director. The legal system decided in my favor. He brought the syndicate to court, for it was fine and dandy with those from the syndicate who received gifts. This was during the days after Ana Pauker's regime [10](#), a period of communism favorable to the persecution of Jews, just as the period of the legionnaires had been. That's when I had to face anti-Semitism. It was a rough time, and many Jews were leaving to Israel. For instance, the former engineer-in-chief, who worked there at the same time as I did, hauled sacks on his back for having filed an official request for permission to leave to Israel.

Afterwards, I worked at the Popular Art Cooperative, in the rugs department, still as head of the planning department, and then I worked at the Onwards Cooperative. The people in Bucharest noticed me and sent me to Arad, as instructor in that branch. They noticed me for doing my job well in the Ministry of Foods Industry too, and I also received a diploma, I was awarded a 10. I lectured both in Cluj and in Oradea when I was working for the Ministry of Foods Industry. I held special courses in Arad about the standardization of work, where they sent people from Bucharest and from across the country. I attended those lectures myself for 2 months.

Those were the only problems. I wasn't a member of the Communist Party, nor of any other party. I didn't oppose the system, I wasn't a dissident, but looked after my professional career. I didn't enter politics despite being asked to do so, I was promised a director's position, but I said I wasn't interested.

During communism, agricultural work was unavoidable, and I went to help transport corn. As head of the department for labor organization, I was forced to assign a person or two who should go to the gathering of corn, but in order not to send my female subordinates, I volunteered and went instead of them. None of them was Jewish, but we got along very well as they were nice team players.

Life was hard after 1950 as we lived on small salaries and we had to support our ailing parents as well. We didn't lead a wealthy life. Our house had been taken from us, and we were glad they had seized it as we couldn't cover the maintenance costs from what we gained by renting it to tenants, for the rents were limited by state regulations. This house of ours that we had from our grandparents and which was built with many hardships was a real nuisance for us. I even have documents stating that my father paid a lot of money for the house my mother had received as her dowry. Instead of it being an advantage, he had to work to pay the installments at the land credit,

for otherwise the house would have been sold as it was mortgaged.

We are the only ones who live upstairs, and we had some tenants living downstairs who didn't pay rent for 5 years after the house was returned to us. We weren't used to our parents' evacuating someone from the house, even if they didn't pay the rent. For instance, when refugee Jews came from Bessarabia we offered some poor souls a place to live without asking any rent from them; they were crossing our country on their way to Israel. We had a very nice tenant in the back of the house, her husband died. He was a member of the Communist Party, but we got along very well. She pays as much as she wants, for that was our arrangement. We have a tenant who pays rent living on the ground floor for 35 years, but he doesn't pay us large sums of money.

I never had to hide my Jewish origin, neither at the workplace, nor anywhere else. I didn't have political beliefs, neither in favor of communism, nor against it after it was over, meaning my beliefs didn't change at all when Stalin died. We were informed about what was happening in the Soviet Union; I read literature, I kept myself up-to-date, but I couldn't say I had an anti-Stalinist attitude after the Stalinist period.

I felt joy when the state of Israel was constituted, as it was somewhat of a fulfilled dream. I went to visit some friends in Israel in 1982, they paid for the trip and for my stay there. Not all of us could leave, meaning I couldn't leave with my sisters, as there was no one who could take care of the house while we were away. I had a good time there, but I didn't like the inhabitants, I mean their outlook on things. They are educated differently: they are all to themselves, individualist. I was thrilled by the state of Israel, but not by its inhabitants as well. This is generally speaking, but I was very impressed by my friends. My friends were from Braila. I stayed with several of them: at Felicia Wender's and wherever I was invited, for I stayed there for 3 months. I traveled then more than they themselves had until then, despite the fact they were there for many years. They took me everywhere and I saw some very beautiful places. They invited me again on several occasions, but I didn't go as I couldn't leave my sisters alone here, even though they urged me to go. I was in charge of supplies and they were in charge of housekeeping. These friends ask me even today whether I need medicine supplies. I receive packages from friends, they send them against my will, for I refuse them every time.

Formerly, I listened to foreign radio stations: Free Europe, Voice of America [11](#). I didn't read Jewish newspapers as, unfortunately, I don't speak the language, to my shame. I read the newspaper published by the federation, of course I do, and it is pretty good. Dorel Dorian started running the newspaper on Chanukkah, he is a science-fiction writer, a former editor-in-chief of the Magazin magazine; he has volumes of science-fiction literature. He is a well-read person, of very good training, and he runs the newspaper very competently. At the same time, he is our deputy in the Great National Gathering, so he is a representative figure. *[Editor's note: Dorel Dorian is a playwright, fiction writer, columnist; he was born in Piatra Neamt, in 1930. Editor-in-chief at "Realitatea Evreiasca" magazine, from 1995; from 1996 - deputy in the Romanian Parliament, as F.C.E.R. representative.]*

My parents died in 1968 and 1972, respectively. My mother was in her 80's when she died [88 years old]. My father died before my mother. When my parents died, the religious service was performed by a religious official, as there was no rabbi in Braila anymore by then. As a son, I recited the Kaddish, for that is the custom. It isn't allowed for daughters to do it.

I performed the Yahrzeit, meaning the commemoration of the dead, within a year of my parents' death, I observed this custom, but I haven't performed it lately. You take there some home-made cookies, something to drink. Those who want to do so can also organize a meal in the memory of the dead, which is called sorosides, using kosher food. You aren't allowed to place cheese and meat on the same plate, but they must be placed on special plates. You bring wine, strong spirits, and there are no restrictions regarding the dishes served at this meal, it can be as copious as you want. The more you give, the larger the meal is and it is in the memory of the person who died. It is a sort of a gathering in the memory of the dead.

We observed the same holidays after the war. As a child, I used to go to the Synagogue with my family, but we stopped going there during and after the war. I'm not a religious person, this is my nature, unfortunately. We still go there and occupy seats there like that, as if we were extras.

I haven't been to the Jewish cemetery in several years now. When there are funerals, I visit the graves of my parents, of my acquaintances and relatives, but I haven't been there just for visiting their graves in a long time.

Jewish origin didn't matter for me when it came to the choosing of my friends. I had more Christian friends than Jewish. I didn't talk about Judaism with my friends.

I couldn't say that my life changed for the better after the Revolution, I would be telling a lie. Retirement pensions are what they are, and that's the long and short of it.

With regard to my Jewish identity, my life hasn't changed in any way.

At present, the secretary of the Community, Mr. David, wants to make the members of the Community get actively involved, but everything is artificial as very many of those who make themselves available come from mixed marriages, which is to say they are people who come there somewhat interested to receive a package now and then. There is a mixed choir which is made up of persons who are Christians rather than Jewish, 90 percent of them. It is a rather interesting adaptation, it isn't something genuine, it isn't the Jewish life as it is laid down by the book. It is a sort of a Purim game. There is the "Piram spiel" on Purim, which is to say a game people play on Purim when everybody wears masks. In the case in question, a Jewish mask is worn on a body that isn't quite Jewish.

Nowadays, I go to the Community relatively often. I receive support, packages, for I donated my house and drew up my last will and testament. These packages aren't exactly useful to me. We receive oil, flour, sugar, rice, macaroni on a monthly basis, but the rest are things that aren't fit for our diet at our age. We also received compensation money. The community was large before World War I, when 11,000 Jews lived here. Now there are barely 60 souls living here, and they are generally around 60-70 years old. The demographic evolution of the Community's Jewish population is on a decreasing trajectory, it can't be helped, it's the aging process, for one couldn't be talking about births, as there is no Jewish youth anymore.

## **Glossary**

### **1 Nationalization in Romania**



The nationalization of industry and natural resources in Romania was laid down by the law of 11th June 1948. It was correlated with the forced collectivization of agriculture and the introduction of planned economy.

## **2 Educational reform in Romania in 1948**

Based on the new Romanian constitution, introduced in 1948, the 1948 'educational reform' stated that public education is organized by the state only, and that public education is secular (this way the denominational and private schools were outlawed, and were soon nationalized), and at the same time it introduced compulsory and free elementary education for everyone. According to the law it was compulsory to learn the Romanian language from the 1st grade, and in place of the French or Italian language the Russian language was introduced from the 4th grade. The compulsory elementary school became a 7-grade school, and was followed by a 4-grade high school. According to the educational reform, ownership of school buildings, dormitories, canteens was transferred to the state, and the Ministry of Public Education became their administrant.

## **3 King Ferdinand I (1865-1927)**

King of Romania (1914-1927). He supported Romania's engaging in World War I on the side of the Entente, against the Central Powers, thus putting the interest of the nation beyond his own German origin. The disintegration of empires in the aftermath of the war made it possible for several provinces to unite with Romania in 1918, after a democratic referendum: Bessarabia (in April), Bukovina (in November) and Transylvania (in December). On 15th October 1922, Ferdinand was crowned king of the Great Romania at the Reunification Cathedral in Alba Iulia, a symbol of the unification of all the Romanian provinces under the rule of a single monarch.

## **4 Bulgaria in World War I**

Bulgaria entered the war in October 1915 on the side of the Central Powers. Its main aim was the revision of the Treaty of Bucharest: the acquisition of Macedonia. Bulgaria quickly overran most of Serbian Macedonia as well as parts of Serbia; in 1916 with German backing it entered Greece (Western Thrace and the hinterlands of Salonika). After Romania surrendered to the Central Powers Bulgaria also recovered Southern Dobrudzha, which had been lost to Romania after the First Balkan War. The Bulgarian advance to Greece was halted after British, French and Serbian troops landed in Salonika, while in the north Romania joined the Allies in 1916. Conditions at the front deteriorated rapidly and political support for the war eroded. The agrarians and socialist workers intensified their antiwar campaigns, and soldier committees were formed in the army. A battle at Dobro Pole brought total retreat, and in ten days the Allies entered Bulgaria. On 29th September 1918 Bulgaria signed an armistice and withdrew from the war. The Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919) imposed by the Allies on Bulgaria, deprived the country of its World War I gains as well as its outlet to the Aegean Sea (Eastern Thrace).

## **5 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.

## **6 Goga-Cuza government**

Anti-Jewish and chauvinist government established in 1937, led by Octavian Goga, poet and Romanian nationalist, and Alexandru C. Cuza, professor of the University of Iasi, and well known for its radical anti-Semitic view. Goga and Cuza were the leaders of the National Christian Party, an extremist right-wing organization founded in 1935. After the elections of 1937 the Romanian king, Carol II, appointed the National Christian Party to form a minority government. The Goga-Cuza government had radically limited the rights of the Jewish population during their short rule; they barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. In February 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system.

## **7 King Carol II (1893-1953)**

King of Romania from 1930 to 1940. During his reign he tried to influence the course of Romanian political life, first through the manipulation of the rival Peasants' Party, the National Liberal Party and anti-Semitic factions. In 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system. A contest between the king and the fascist [Iron Guard](#) ensued, with assassinations and massacres on both sides. Under Soviet and Hungarian pressure, Carol had to surrender parts of Romania to foreign rule in 1940 (Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR, the Cadrilater to Bulgaria and Northern Transylvania to Hungary). He was abdicated in favor of his son, Michael, and he fled abroad. He died in Portugal.

## **8 23 August 1944**

On that day the Romanian Army switched sides and changed its World War II alliances, which resulted in the state of war against the German Third Reich. The Royal head of the Romanian state, King Michael I, arrested the head of government, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was unwilling to accept an unconditional surrender to the Allies.

## **9 Securitate (in Romanian**

DGSP - Directia generala a Securitatii Poporului): General Board of the People's Security. Its structure was established in 1948 with direct participation of Soviet advisors named by the NKVD.

The primary purpose was to 'defend all democratic accomplishments and to ensure the security of the Romanian Popular Republic against plots of both domestic and foreign enemies'. Its leader was Pantelimon Bondarenko, later known as Gheorghe Pintilie, a former NKVD agent. It carried out the arrests, physical torture and brutal imprisonment of people who became undesirable for the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party, and also kept the life of ordinary civilians under strict observation.

#### **10 Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group**

After 1945 there were two major groupings in the Romanian communist leadership: the Muscovites led by Ana Pauker, and the former illegal communists led by Gheorghe Dej. Ana Pauker arrived in Romania the day after the entry of the Soviet army as the leader of the group of communists returning from Moscow; the Muscovites were the major political rivals of Gheorghe Dej. As a result of their rivalry, three out of the four members of the Political Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party were convicted on trumped-up charges in show trials in 1952. The anti-Semitic campaign launched by Stalin in 1952, which also spread over to Romania, created a good opportunity to launch such a trial - both Luca and Pauker were of Jewish origin. Georgescu was executed. Luca was also sentenced to death but the sentence was changed to lifetime forced labor. He died in prison in 1960. Pauker was released after Stalin's death and lived in internal exile until her death.

#### **11 Voice of America**

International broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Voice of America has been broadcasting since 1942, initially to Europe in various European languages from the US on short wave. During the cold war it grew increasingly popular in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe as an information source.