

Saul Rotariu

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Botosani

Romania

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Interviewer: Major Eموke

My first meeting with Mr. Saul Rotariu took place at the Jewish Community in Botosani where he agreed to come at the first calling of the community's president, Mr. Iosif David, to tell me his life story. He is rather short, with quick movements and a hurried step, and has a very friendly and kind disposition. For our next meetings I was invited at their home, in an apartment where I also had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of his wife, a Christian, with a soul just as warm and hospitable as Mr. Rotariu. In their home the relics, the accessories of the two religions – Mosaic and Orthodox Christian – blend seamlessly; for instance, in the drawing-room there are both chandeliers for lighting candles on Friday night and Chanukkah, as well as icons and painted Easter eggs typical for the Romanian Orthodox tradition.



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My family background

Let me start with my father's family, what I know of it. I know that my father's father was a craftsman, a blacksmith. Which is to say he shoed horses, made carts, installed wheels on them, things like these. That's why we are named Rotaru [Romanian for 'wheel maker'], as in those years town halls in small towns and villages were probably run by clerks lacking proper training and instead of registering the Jewish name – which is different from Romanian names – that was then our name, they said: 'What does he do? He is a wheel maker. Let's register his name as Rotaru.'

I don't know the former name. This [the changing of the name] probably comes from our forefathers, from times immemorial. So that's what they did for a living. My grandfather also treated animal disease – empirically, as they did in those days. Back then, craftsmen were considered poor people. A handicraftsman would earn enough to support his family, put food on

the table, have a roof above his head. But they took care of their children's upbringing and would educate them as much as they could in those days. My grandfather's name was Iancu Rotaru, and my grandmother's, Devoira. I didn't get to know them [too well], even though they were still alive when I was born. They died in Transnistria [1](#), but I was only three to four years old at the time of their death and I have no memory left of them.

My grandparents lived in Saveni [37 km south-west of Botosani]. Back then it was a rural town – just as it is today, in fact. The town itself, with houses that had no courtyards – in order to be distinct from those in the village – was as follows: if you set out from one end, where the City Hall was, it would take you less than half an hour to reach the town limits barrier. The people lived a traditional Jewish life.

There were five to six synagogues in this little town on several streets. Two of these were proper synagogues: a large one that still exists today, and another one, smaller yet apt. The remaining ones were houses where people had formerly lived and were later turned into synagogues [prayer houses] to meet the demands. Formerly, in the days when the Jewish city was populated, religious services were held twice a day in the synagogues – in the morning and in the evening. The morning service was held before the working hours started, and the point was that the place of prayer be as close as possible to people's homes so that they could go and pray, and go to work afterwards. There were services every evening, too, as well as on holidays, on Saturdays.

My father had only one brother and four sisters. I don't know the birthdates of all of them, but they were born between 1908 and 1925. The eldest was Hache Veinis, followed by the brother, Moise Rotaru, and then Beti Lutfach, Sura Barbieru and Estera Vinter, the youngest of them.

The brother, Moise Rotaru, lived in a village near Dorohoi – the village of Saveni. He was a farmer, he owned land and animals. Later on, he went to Israel: when the aliyah started after World War II and people began leaving for Israel [2](#), he left, too. He died in Israel in a car accident. [He was run over by a car on the pedestrian crossing.] He was married, had a boy and a girl who are still living there.

All my father's four sisters lived in Saveni [until they made aliyah] and were housewives. All my father's sisters [and their husbands] have passed away by now. The eldest sister, Hache Veinis, died in Israel, she had one child. Beti Lutfach's husband was a strap maker: he manufactured leather products, harnesses for horses, things like these. They also went to Israel and lived somewhere in a locality near Tel Aviv, I forget the name of it. Another sister, Sura Barbieru, also went to Israel with her husband and their son, and lived in Zefat. In Romania, Surica Barbieru's husband administered a co-operative somewhere in a village, and in Israel he worked in an [instant] coffee factory. Estera Vinter – Vinter was her married name – left for Israel with two children – a son named Marcel and a daughter named Dorineta – and they lived in Sederot. Aunt Estera's husband, David Vinter, was also an administrator in Saveni, and in Israel he worked in a dehydrated vegetal products factory. All our relatives left for Israel, both on my mother's side of the family and on my father's.

My father's name was Mochiu Rotaru, but they called him Marcu in the family. He was born in Saveni on 7th September 1910. My father finished elementary school. That's about all the education a child coming from a poor family could get in those days. Thus, my father finished the four elementary grades. Then he worked with my grandfather – his father – in his workshop, as a blacksmith. Afterwards, he started an apprenticeship in a shop. There was a manufacture shop

right there, in Saveni – a manufacture in those days was a shop where they sold fabrics, cloth, accessories for clothes, for tailoring. Well, he worked there for several years. In the beginning, he was basically the owner's servant for the first two or three years; he took care of the owner's children – he took them to and from school – he did the shopping for the shop owner's wife. I'll admit, employers in these small towns were not great businessmen or what not, but compared to the rest of the people... [they were wealthy].

He worked there for a while, and in the meantime he also did his military service. When he was in the army – around 1934 – he was a private first class in the gendarmerie. He was drafted, he served his due time, I don't know exactly where, but in any case it was somewhere in Oltenia. Back then the military service lasted – I couldn't tell you for sure – about two or three years.

I didn't know my grandparents on my mother's side, we lost all trace of them [in Transnistria] when I was very little. My grandfather's name was Leibovici and my grandmother's name was Brana Lupascu. My reckoning was that they weren't officially married – which is to say they were only married religiously – since there was no name recorded where the father's name should be on my mother's birth certificate, and my grandmother was recorded as Lupascu, her maiden name. My grandmother was 38 when my mother was born in 1908 – which means she was born in 1870. My grandparents were living in Sarbi when my mother was born, a village near Saveni [41 km north-east of Botosani]. Afterwards, they lived in Hanesti, a neighboring village, located at about 10 km from Saveni [Hanesti is located 13 km south-east of Saveni]. It was a small village, with a large pond, and my maternal grandfather was a watchman there.

The grandparents on my mother's side had seven children – in those days people had more children than they do now – and my grandfather supported the family with what he earned as watchman of the pond. Every week, the pond owner would give him a few kilograms of fish, flour, and sugar. That's how it was in those days: part of the pay due to those who performed certain tasks was paid in goods. That's how he managed to raise seven children.

Some of the children learned trades. My mother and one of her sisters, Ruhla, learned tailoring. They didn't get much schooling, they finished four grades. Only the youngest of them, Zlota, finished as much as seven elementary grades – when my grandfather's obligations for the older children started to dwindle, as they had married.

My mother had an older sister, her name was Sura Bercovici, she lived in Stefanesti – a locality near Botosani [55 km east of Botosani]. Her husband was a cereal tradesman in Stefanesti. They, too, left during those years when everybody was leaving for Israel – in the 1950s – they lived in Petach Tiqva. They had two daughters, Liuca and Ethel. Ethel was married, yet had no children. Liuca was married, too, but she soon divorced her husband. Ethel passed away, while my niece Liuca is still alive; she has two daughters.

My mother had a brother, Sulim Leibovici, who, too, was older than her. He was married; his wife's name was Saly. They lived in Stefanesti, where my uncle was a cereal tradesman. They had no children, my uncle died young of an incurable illness here in Romania, in Dorohoi, just after the war. His wife died during the deportation to Transnistria.

Ruhla Roizen, one of my mother's younger sisters, lived in Saveni with her husband, Sloim Roizen, and they left for Israel from there. They had no children and are no longer alive today.

The last-born, Zlota Vizitiu, married after World War II and lived with her husband in Dorohoi; they had a son, Delu, who now lives in Israel. My aunt's husband was a shop assistant in a shop in the city, he died in Dorohoi around 1960; she immigrated to Israel afterwards together with her son - he was little then - where she died of a heart attack around 1985.

There were five brothers and sisters, including my mother. There were other siblings, but infant mortality was higher back then, and some of them died. All that is left of the family now is only cousins, children of theirs - about seven of them [including those on the father's side and those on the mother's side]; some of them are younger than me, others are older.

My mother, Leia, finished four grades and was apprenticed to a dressmaker, she learned tailoring and it became her trade.

My parents met as was the custom in those days - through matchmaking. The parents of a boy would start looking for a young woman for their son, while the parents of a girl would start looking for a young man for their daughter. 'Look, there is this young girl in Hanesti, she is hardworking, a dressmaker by trade, she has a steady job.' The young man's parents: 'He has a job, too; he learned the trade of a shop assistant.' And one thing led to another... Well, that's how they met.

This village - Hanesti - is located 10 km from Saveni and back then, if you wanted to go to the city, let us say, you hired a cart, or two, or three, and the young girls and men in Hanesti would all go to Saveni - here they met young girls and men from Saveni. They met at a certain place for tea and, by starting relationships of this kind, willingly or unwillingly, they would get to know each other. So my parents met, they were probably pleased with each other - for they must have been, since they gave birth to us - and they got married.

They married in 1937, my father was 27 and my mother was 29. In those days, young people coming from well-to-do families could enjoy their youth, could live their youth. These other ones [from poorer families], as soon as they were old enough to be able to work, entered apprenticeships for various trades. And when they finished their apprenticeship and were their own masters, only then would they marry. A dowry was out of the question in these simpler families, as they had no means to amass various sums of money, objects, properties or what not, to give their children. And you had to make your own money to start a life. In those days, when you started a family, you needed a place to stay, a bed, a table, this and that, and you needed some money, in order to look after yourself, buy clothes, buy your own bedclothes. In the same manner, my father saved money so he could manage these things. Neither my father, nor my mother received any dowry. My mother saved money and bought a sewing machine. My father saved some money so he could buy some merchandise, and that's how they started their life together.

They moved to the countryside, to Hanesti, my mother's native village, and my father opened a small food shop in Hanesti using the money he saved from the salary he received [at the manufacture where he was apprenticed] and the experience he gathered while working there. They rented a house close to the village center. That's where the shop was, too, and they sold food products. Actually, these shops resembled general stores: there were food products, a few kilograms of nails and a bucket, and anything else you could sell to country folk. You see, there weren't many shops back then. And my mother worked as a dressmaker for the villagers. And just when they started to make ends meet the war was upon them...

Growing up

In the meantime, I was born in 1937, my brother in 1939, and my sister in 1941. My brother's name was Avram Rotaru. He is no longer alive. He died in 1985 and is buried here in Botosani in the Jewish cemetery. His wife's name is Hermina, I forget her maiden name. She is Jewish. They got married in 1970 or around that time, seeing that their oldest daughter is 35 and she came into the world one or two years after they got married. They had three daughters: Rica - the eldest -, Monica - the second born - and Bianca - the youngest.

Rica is still in Romania, she lives in Bucharest, is married and teaches computer science at the Lauder High School. The Lauder School was founded - as far as I know - by the Embassy of Israel and with the support of the Jewish community. It is a school for children entering 1st grade and up to higher grades, high school included. It is a private school, attended in general by the children of accredited staff in Romania - ambassadors, embassy personnel - and other children of various nationalities. Classes are taught in Romanian, but there are also foreign languages classes such as English, French, what do I know... This school is attended both by Jews and Christians - and other nationalities. [The Lauder-Reut School: private Jewish school in Bucharest, founded in 1997, in the building of the former Jewish school for boys 'Iacob and Carolina Loebel.' It has over 260 pupils, from kindergarten up to secondary school. It is an elite school, acknowledged for its educational performances as well as for promoting a tolerant, multicultural environment. The school is under the patronage of the international Ronald S. Lauder Foundation based in New York, USA, and Budapest, Hungary.]

My brother's other two daughters live in Israel, work in the field of computer science, are married and they both have a child. My brother's wife lives in Israel, too, she remarried a Christian, her name is Hermina Hariga now.

My sister, Haia, was born in 1941 in Hanesti, and she died that very same year of starvation during the deportation to Transnistria.

My parents' wedding was held in January 1937, and in October - exactly nine months later - I was born, Saul Rotariu. [Editor's note: Mr. Rotariu's name was misspelt from Rotaru in his birth registry and he continued to use it with an "i" in it. That is why his name is slightly different than his other family members'.]

My mother used to bake kneaded bread - coilici - for Saturday. [Coilici is a variant for challah, similar to the word "kajlics" used by some Hungarian speaking Jews in Romania. Both words have their origin in the Hungarian word "kalacs."] She used white flour and eggs. Usually, they made meat dishes for Saturday. Throughout the remaining days of the week, we ate like everybody else, but we had meat dishes on Saturday.

On Sabbath eve my mother would light the candles - she would light a candle for every dead person she prayed for. Usually, she lit two candles for her parents, a candle for a sister who died in Transnistria, and she lit a few more candles, I forget exactly how many. [Editor's note: The custom is to light two candles on Sabbath.] She would cover her head and recite the prayer for lighting the candles. After that, my father would return from the synagogue and we would sit at the table. Which is to say we welcomed Sabbath - Sabbath is welcomed in the Jewish religion as a queen. My father would bless the bread, the wine, the food; after we ate, he would say a prayer in which we

thanked God for giving us the chance to welcome Sabbath and rejoice in it.

On Saturday, my father would wake up early in the morning, put on his good clothes and take his siddur and tallit and he would go to the synagogue. Sometimes we went, too. Everybody wore their good clothes and we would return from the synagogue around noon, we would eat and then go visit our relatives or friends. Nobody did any work. In later years, our parents would light a fire, but in the beginning they didn't. We had someone who lit the fire for us, we had Christian neighbors who knew it was a holiday, and they would come over: 'Do you need the fire lit?' And we called them and they would light the fire for us.

On Passover my mother prepared the dishes: she took them out of the cupboards where we kept the special dishes for Passover and she cleaned them. She had separate dishes for Pesach, all families had them. And before Passover all the things that contained leaven would be gathered and burned. Usually, my father would do this. He would put a piece of leftover bread or pasta, well, whatever else there was, inside a bowl, place a piece of paper on top and set it on fire. But it was mostly symbolic; it would burn for a short time, then be extinguished and then be thrown away. The significance of this was that you were cleansed of food that had leaven.

As for the large amounts of flour that people had in their homes – nowadays they no longer do, but in those days people kept large quantities of flour in their homes – the sacks were tied tightly, sealed and placed somewhere out of reach: in a larder, in a depot, in a lumber room. In any case, it was laid down you shouldn't have any bread – you wouldn't buy it, you wouldn't bake it. It wasn't so when I was little, but I heard it told by others: in order to have nothing to do with this [things with leaven], you would draw a contract whereby you sold it to someone and that someone accepts to give it back to you when you gave them the money back, but neither the sale, nor the purchase would take place [actually]. These customs didn't exist anymore when I was born.

Passover lasted eight days. During the first days my father attended the service at the synagogue. During the first two days seder was celebrated. [Editor's note: The Passover seder is a Jewish ritual feast held on the first and second nights of Passover (which begins on the 15th day of Nisan). In Israel, the seder is held only on the first night. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder] In the old days it wasn't held at the synagogue [at the community canteen], it was celebrated at home. But there were two seder evenings. Now they hold the seder evening at the synagogue as very few people are able to or know how to celebrate it at home, which is to say they can't read Hebrew, there aren't enough persons to perform it. The families aren't that numerous, and to start performing an entire ceremony for a person or two...

The meals were mostly made of chicken, soups in general. That's what Jews ate the most: chicken soup, fried chicken. They made sweets using unleavened bread and unleavened bread flour. They ate a lot of potatoes, cooked in all sorts of ways, for the sake of diversity. The same goes for eggs. When you sat down at the Passover table, eggs had a place of honor together with a piece of meat, vegetables, each representing certain traditions.

My father organized that special ceremony for Passover at home. It was like a theater play, a certain ritual, everybody tried, tasted each dish on the table, filled a cup of wine, raised their cup whenever the ritual specified it – they read the Haggadah, as they call it in Hebrew, the Passover story, the religious one: 'Why is Passover celebrated? What happened in those days?' It was my youngest brother who asked the four questions [the mah nishtanah]. And this dinner lasted long

into the night, for they read something from the book, tasted the food, then they read some more. We were little back then, it was like a theater play for us, like a theatrical performance.

They filled a glass for the prophet, they opened the door – it was the father who opened it – when they reached the respective chapter. Everybody – all religions – are waiting for the Messiah. They waited, it was as if He came, tasted it, liked it, and left. [Editor's note: In fact, they waited for the return of Prophet Elijah to drink a glass of wine with those who lived in the house. He will return on the day of the final judgment to announce the coming of the Messiah.]

They hid a slice of matzah [the afikoman] and the tradition was that whoever found it received a present from father. And my father hid it somewhere where you could find it, of course, so as not to interrupt the ceremony because we couldn't find it. We found it and started negotiating. My father said to us: 'Give me back the slice, why did you steal it from me?' 'I will, but will you give me 5 lei?' 'What do you mean 5 lei? I can buy three loaves of bread for 5 lei!' 'There, give me 3 lei and ...' Money, it was money he usually gave us.

The first time he performed the seder ceremony after we returned from there [from Transnistria] I was of school age, I must have been six. When we were little we didn't realize he was performing this ceremony. And he hid the slice of matzah, we forgot all about it, you see, he had told us beforehand how it was going to be, he had told us to simply find it, that he would see, he would give us a present, something, he would give us some money. But we forgot. We found it [the afikoman] and we secretly went into another room while father didn't notice, as we did everything in secrecy, and ate the slice of matzah. We weren't really hungry, but there wasn't so much matzah as nowadays, and father would buy only a few slices, as was the custom. We didn't have much money, for it was just after the war, there was widespread poverty. It wasn't like today, when you go and buy a whole box, or two, or three. And when we returned [from the other room], Gather said: 'Well, let us see the afikoman' – that's what it's called. And we looked at one another, we exchanged some glances... 'Come on, let us see it, that is the rule, you must show it! We will give you something for it.' 'Well, we ate it!' There was no question of reward anymore, we had taken it ourselves.

We didn't sing at the end of the evening, father sang and intoned – it is intoned using a certain song. We didn't recite, because we were little, and afterwards, as we grew up, we didn't attach that much significance to it. My father observed all the rules, we read a book, we did this and that in the meantime. Until his death, Father always observed seder on Passover. But in those years when it was performed at the canteen, he attended it at the canteen. They started performing it at the canteen around 1970. In the old days they didn't have these activities with canteen service. Afterwards, there was a canteen here in Botosani where 50-100 persons ate [lunch] every day.

Then there is the strictly religious holiday of commemorating the dead, Yom Kippur. Before Yom Kippur, everybody had to sacrifice a fowl. That was the custom in these parts. People would buy a fowl – roosters for men and chickens, hens for women – and in the morning [before Yom Kippur] they would say a short prayer and swing the fowl above the head three times, then again three times, as it was prescribed there... Each member of the family said their prayer individually, depending on their possibilities. Father, for instance – because he was working – came home, said the prayer, then returned to work. Mother said it together with us. She read it first, then my brother, then me.

The fowl were afterwards sacrificed by the hakham, in a ritual. Usually, it was us, the children, who went [with the birds to the hakham]. Mother put them in a basket and gave it to us; we took them there and brought them back. These fowl were sacrificed and then prepared [for the meal marking the end of the fast]. But there were other dishes as well. If the family was more numerous, one used other kinds of meat as well, prepared other products. However, sacrificing the animal was obligatory. When my parents were alive, I did this together with them. Now I no longer perform this sacrifice.

Everybody fasted on Yom Kippur. Only those suffering from severe illnesses didn't fast. We, the children, fasted as well, we didn't even drink water. Boy, were we hungry... it was as if we hadn't eaten for a month. Before the fast started, you weren't allowed to eat too late in the evening, only until the rise of the first star. After the rise of the first star it was night already and it was the night before the fast, the eve of Yom Kippur, and you weren't allowed to eat anymore.

Our parents fasted, too, went to the synagogue, both my father and my mother, they stayed there the whole day. We went there as well but we - as we were children - went there, stayed for a short while, then went outside. And we kept returning to see if the prayer was over, for we were hungry. We kept saying: 'When will it end? When will it end?' And we only talked about food. At least my brother and I didn't eat [secretly]. We had a lot of respect for our father. We did our share of mischief, as children will do, but if he told us something in earnest, we obeyed him.

Of course, at the end of this day [the Yom Kippur day], they served a special meal in the evening. Usually they had coffee before the meal, they had an alcoholic drink, which was not a custom in our house. For instance, as long as my father lived, I saw no alcoholic drink in our house. There was none. But then [in the evening after the end of the fast] there was. The parents drank a few tens of grams - 20-50 grams - of an alcoholic drink; we, the children, didn't. They ate a few light appetizers, had a break of half an hour, an hour and then everybody sat down to eat. The meal was a specially prepared dish, and it marked the end of the fast.

On Sukkot - ever since I was old enough to remember - my father built the sukkah for a year or two, when I was young. Our rented house in Saveni had a small courtyard, and that's where he built a sort of a reed tent: he made some sort of shelving from wooden planks and he covered it with reed. We didn't have too many decorations, for it was after the war and one couldn't find certain fruits - there weren't any exotic fruits - people used apples, walnuts, I don't know what else there was. And we ate our meals there for a few days - both in the evening and at lunch. Before we ate, Father said a prayer and a few intonations. We, the children, rejoiced, it was play for us.

Chanukkah was a merry holiday, too. For the children, Chanukkah was a more important holiday because of the custom of giving presents and money, generally speaking, Chanukkah gelt. And we awaited Chanukkah and made plans about the gifts we would receive. For we received gifts not only from our parents, but also from our relatives and acquaintances who were more like family friends. And it was a cheerful holiday.

We had a chanukkiyah - which I use as a decoration nowadays - and our parents lit the proper candles each night. My father would light them. If there was a window where the chanukkiyah could be placed, he would place it on the windowsill, if not, we kept it on the table. But normally, according to tradition, it is placed in the window, in order for the light to be seen from outside. When I was little, my childhood was a bit more ascetic since, after the war, we didn't have too

many toys. On Chanukkah I used to play with a spinning top every year. It was different when we were little, nowadays they make spinning tops in industrial quantities.

Then we celebrated Purim. During the day the men attended the religious service at the synagogue, they read the story of Esther – Megillat Ester is the name of this story. [Editor’s note: Megillat Ester literally means ‘The Book of Esther.’] And on Purim we had that thing for making noise – in Yiddish they called it a greggar – made out of wood. We didn’t have one at home, usually there was one at the synagogue. It was used for making noise on reading Haman’s name in the synagogue. They use it in football stadiums as well. You spin it, it has a certain type of spring that touches against a mechanism and makes a racket and imitates noises.

People baked many cakes and families would bring one another cakes. [Mr. Rotariu is referring to shelakhmones food gifts for friends.] We gave our neighbors cakes, received cakes in return from them, from our relatives. And in the evening, every household made merry: there was wine, there was food on the table...

They still had this custom when I was little: during my childhood in Saveni, they organized meals, they had children wear masks, they created teams that performed little plays about Esther, the whole story. And they would go to people’s houses, like they do on New Year’s Eve. I used to go, too. Sometimes we went in groups, sometimes alone, depending on how you paired up.

If a few children managed to form a group they organized a sort of a small play. We dressed for several parts: Esther was played by a man in a white dress, wearing a mask, many bracelets and all sorts of adornments; Haman was played by someone wearing a uniform, something, whatever one could manage to find – a military coat and peaked cap, anything. We played all kinds of parts, every year a different one. Some went all by themselves – I went alone, too, sometimes. You wore the oddest clothes you could find at home, and you went to people’s houses, sang something, recited something – a poem, let us say, intoned a few lyrics about it [the story of Esther]. Usually you went to classmates’ houses, afterwards you had some fun with your classmates, were offered a treat...

We received a pack of sweets and money – but we cared to receive mostly money, for sweets we had at home as well. We wanted money, which we used afterwards in order to buy a football, and what not... what you could buy in those days. Christians wore costumes, too, and called on Jewish homes. Everybody knew they were Christian, but they called on Jewish houses, they were enjoying themselves. Those who could play instruments brought them along and played Jewish songs, usually on a concertina – an accordion – and a violin.

I attended cheder in Saveni. Usually children attended cheder after they were four. I also attended it while going to regular school. I attended the cheder when I was three or four, and they taught us to read, translate from the Torah.

I had my bar mitzvah in Saveni. It was for my 13th birthday. Before the event, I learned the prayers to be recited during the ceremony. There was a teacher who taught children to read siddurim, and he prepared us for it. Each according to their possibilities. It depended on the training the child had received. I had attended cheder, so when I had my bar mitzvah it was easier, I could already read. He only taught us strictly the ceremony proceedings, so that we knew what to do. He also taught us the speech we had to give. You had to give the speech in Hebrew, but you could deliver it in

Romanian as well if you didn't want to do it in Ivrit. And you had to say a few words: you thanked your parents for raising you until then, you thanked the teacher for teaching you, you promised that, by becoming a man, you would strive to behave like a man, you said what conclusions about life you had reached from what you had learned – for those who attended – at cheder.

In those days when I had my bar mitzvah they didn't have large festivities as they sometimes do nowadays. At the synagogue people were offered sweets, a glass of wine. Now they have a sort of a name day anniversary, sometimes there are parties. And I received a tallit, siddur and tefillin – to wear on the head and on the arm – and for a while I put them on and took them off [the tefillin] each morning – they are to be worn only in the morning. I did this for two to three years, until school started in earnest, the higher grades, after which I gradually stopped wearing them. By now, with modernism came new interests, new ideas.

During the war

My sister was born about the time when the whole issue of the war emerged [World War II]. I was four, my brother was two. At the beginning of 1941 my father – together with the rest of the Jewish men in the village – was called up, drafted and taken to a forced labor camp. He was summoned to the military headquarters in Saveni, as men are called up for military service, with a suit of clothes, and was taken to Transnistria, which was occupied by Romanian troops at that time. And he was taken to build strategic roads in that area. He wasn't wearing a military outfit, meaning he hadn't been called up to do his military service – that is called a military call-up – he was taken as a civilian. He had already done his military service.

My mother was left behind in the village, with three children to raise. Naturally, she left that village and returned to Saveni. She lived with my father's parents in Saveni, while my mother's parents returned to Saveni, too, and my father's parents lived together with my mother's parents in my father's parents' house in Saveni. And actually that was in early 1941, around January-February.

In November, both my father's and my mother's parents received a written order to be somewhere in the city of Saveni in 24 hours with what hand luggage they could carry. And what could my mother carry? She had a two-year-old baby, I was four, and a baby girl only a few months old. So my mother carried the baby girl in her arms, while my father's and mother's parents were holding my hand. And what could my grandparents carry back then? They certainly weren't young anymore – if my father was 27, my grandparents were around 50-55 years old. [The grandparents on the father's side were 58 and 59, respectively, while the grandparents on the mother's side were 71.]

They told us they were taking us somewhere where they could put us together as we couldn't live in those areas anymore, since there were too many Jews there, the village was no place for Jews to be living in. Well now, they didn't offer too many explanations, for they had called the army to handle this. And they took us by cart to the nearest train station. These carts had been rented by the local Town Hall. Whether my parents paid for them or not, I couldn't tell. When we arrived at the first train station – there is a train station some 10 km away from Saveni, it is called Ungureni – they put us aboard freight cars and took us to Transnistria. They took us by train to Moghilev [3](#). Everybody ate whatever food they managed to grab when they left their homes – for they had told people to take food to last them three days. We weren't given any food whatsoever on the train. It just kept moving on – it stopped, then started moving again, depending on how they needed to

switch tracks.

There they left us in a neighborhood that had been bombed during the fighting. And there was a sort of a large storage facility there, a large warehouse, a cereal warehouse as they used in those days. People were taken to different places. We ended up in this large warehouse, where there were many of the people living in Saveni and the neighboring villages, who had been previously taken to Saveni – for there were Jewish people living in all the neighboring villages. I was just a child, I couldn't put forward an estimate about how many persons were in this warehouse, but I do know there were many families from Saveni, from where we had left.

My mother had a younger sister, Ruhla, and she would leave us in her care whenever she went to get some food, do some work. And I only accepted to be held by this aunt of mine. She had business of her own to take care of – she too had to get something, I forget what – and she left us alone there, she asked other people to see to it that we didn't go outside – because she was afraid someone would take us away, kill us. And I would scream until she returned: 'Aunt Ruhala! Aunt Ruhala!' As soon as she returned, I would jump in her arms and she couldn't do anything anymore, while I was gripping her and dangling in her arms. It was probably because of the whole situation, too: I was scared, apprehensive. I remember that afterwards, when we returned, I would come across people here, in Botosani, where I went to high school, and hear them in the street: 'Aunt Ruhala!' 'But Sir, I do not know you!' 'Well, I know you. Weren't you the one standing there yelling <<Aunt Ruhala!>> and didn't let us sleep?' Of course, I did not know these people anymore, but they were grown-ups then [when we were in Transnistria]. That's why I know that very many people were there.

Well, there was straw there, and they told the people: 'Gather straw, everybody, here in the corner, make yourselves a place to sleep on, cover it with whatever you have can – a blanket, a bed-sheet – and that will be your spot. You are only allowed to go out only up that point' – they told us up to what point we were allowed to go out in the confines of that neighborhood. So, we settled there. We stayed there the whole time [until we returned home].

They didn't give us food. Some people who had no children or obligations had brought along more things: clothing, bed-sheets, this and that. Others had wedding rings, some rings, some jewelry. They traded with the peasants: for a wedding ring, they received in exchange a few kilograms of flour, potatoes. And so, little by little, people – including our family, both my mother and grandparents – gave everything they had on them. They kept only the suit of clothes they were wearing, which they couldn't part with. And thus they would buy an extra half a kilogram of flour. Some people were even scavenging the trash, where the inhabitants of Moghilev dumped their trash, in search of potato scraps and other kinds of leftovers.

My mother had a hard time in this respect, because she had a little baby she had to breast-feed. She couldn't produce any milk, she needed to eat more nutritious food in order to have milk. She couldn't even work because she had a little baby. Some people used to go and do some work for the peasants living around Moghilev, they helped them herd sheep and cattle, animals in general.

And this little sister of ours died at some point. She starved to death. My mother had no milk to breast-feed her anymore. I have a macabre memory of my sister's death. There was a place where the dead were buried, a common burial ground. There was always activity there, since they always carried away those who were found dead in the morning. A few persons would come, place the

dead on a stretcher and carry them away.

I remember my mother tormented herself with the thought of placing my little sister there on the pile for them to carry her away on that stretcher. And I remember there was something in the shape of a wooden box, my sister being such a little girl – she was nine months old – I know that my mother put her in that small wooden box and covered her with a piece of cloth. That’s what I remembered as a child, when I had no knowledge of coffins, I was innocent in all things. At least my mother had the notion of placing her in a coffin, not just simply have her taken away and thrown on the pile. This is the memory I have of it. At the age when you have your first memories, the earliest impressions on your memory, these things out of the ordinary remain with you... it’s not as if they happen every day as regular play.

There were no funerals performed, ten men would gather together – as is our custom – and perform a Jewish religious ceremony, which is very short, it lasts five minutes: they say a prayer in the memory of the deceased. And afterwards it was taken to a common burial ground, somewhere. I didn’t go to the common burial ground, as my mother didn’t let me. She went there with the dead baby, and we stayed with Aunt Ruhla, my mother’s sister. Whenever my mother had things to take care of, our mother’s sister looked after us.

We, the older ones – my brother and I – were fortunate to have one of our mother’s brothers, Sulim, who wasn’t drafted for work, he was rather old. He had worked there in a mobile kitchen for Romanian soldiers. He did chores such as disposing of the slops and the like. And we were able to subsist with whatever he could bring us from there, scraps and leftovers. It goes without saying that hygiene was completely out of the question. There was no water, neither running water, nor a fountain – fountains had been destroyed during the bombing. There was the river Bug, and people brought water from there, a bucket or two, to wash with. It was a long distance away, but they brought water. Well, diseases broke out because of the squalor and starvation: typhus, the like. Those who were older and weaker fell ill. My father’s parents and my mother’s parents fell ill and shortly afterwards – deprived of any medical assistance – they died. Only my mother was left and us, two children. Well, this lasted until 1943.

In the meantime, my father had reached the area we were in. The building site he was working on had moved across the river Bug. The river Bug separated the site where they were building the roads from Moghilev, where their families were, the women, the elderly, the children. And usually they gathered on the riverbanks on Sunday, when they weren’t working. The men would come looking for their families. The river Bug is rather large, but if they yelled loud enough and waved their arms, they could recognize one another. And that’s how my father managed to spot my mother. Well then, that’s when my mother learned that my father was alive and that he was in that area, and my father learned that she and we were alive. And from his food ration, from what he received – they gave them a food ration at work – he would send us a little, too: a loaf of bread, a few lumps of sugar. He would send us something every now and then, through soldiers who were more charitable, or even through people living there traveling on various business; they would take a few parcels and drop them off [on the opposite riverbank for those who were waiting for them].

This was the ordeal in those days. Around these parts, here [in the area of Botosani], they cleared the entire area, there was nothing left, not a single trace of any Jew living in these rural areas. They wanted to clear the area here in order to have a buffer zone between the Russians and Romania. In

the final days, help began to arrive from the country. The Jewish Community in Bucharest had organized a system for help and support; they collected what they could from Jews living in Bucharest and the southern regions where the deportations had not been that massive. And they would send us help: some food, what they could manage to find, some money was given to people. And that's how we managed to survive until we left that place.

We left once more aboard a freight car, with no toilet, no anything – as these trains are. We arrived at the train station in Dorohoi. I remember it was here that I had the finest cup of tea in the whole world and I have never had one like it to this day, in the Dorohoi train station – for it was there that we were welcomed by the Jewish Community of Dorohoi. There were still Jews living in Dorohoi – it was a town larger than Saveni – and there was a mobile kitchen there where they prepared sweetened hot tea. Sweets were a rarity in those days, and I remember that when they gave us a cup of that tea it was as if seeing a miracle, especially for us, children, that's how it was. In December 1943 we arrived at the Dorohoi train station and they left us there. And the family settled in Dorohoi: my mother, her three sisters and her brother.

We went through some very hard times after we arrived in Dorohoi; my father still hadn't returned from the concentration camp, he was still working in Transnistria. They allotted us a house belonging to a citizen who had left when the Germans started retreating. Some of the inhabitants had left the city, probably those who feared communism, I presume, or some thing or other. It was in one of these houses that they put us. Well, we had better accommodation here. It was a house in which there were still beds and the things the owner couldn't sell or take with him. But the problem was that nobody would give you any food. And we were many: my mother and us, her two remaining children, together with her three sisters and her brother. In the end, the solution was that we, the children, were sent to an orphanage in Dorohoi, destined especially for the children who returned without their parents – whose parents had died in Transnistria. We stayed in that orphanage for a year.

My mother started sewing odds and ends. Those were very hard times – as is to be expected after a war – and nobody had any money back then, nobody sewed clothes for themselves anymore. Who could think about making clothes for themselves in those days? Well, little by little, that's how we managed to get by.

Then my father returned home. It was about March 1944, for some time passed between the closing of the construction site and their arrival back home. Certain areas were already occupied by the Russians, so they stayed in train stations, cities, I don't know where. They brought him to Dorohoi as well, and he found out that we were there, because people asked around, the odd postcard would reach them; it was known that the Jews from Saveni had been brought to Dorohoi.

The houses of our grandparents in Saveni had been destroyed, and our parents' house in Hanesti wasn't their private property. Besides, they could find no work in the village during those days after the war, so we stayed in Dorohoi. They rented a house somewhere and we moved there: our mother, our father and the two of us.

My father started working together with three brothers-in-law – with the husbands of my mother's sisters, that is. They formed a team and they chopped wood for the winter for the households in the town of Dorohoi. And we got by like this until my father managed to gather some money and, as he was born and raised in this area where people had horses and carts, he bought two young

horses, two rather young colts – they were cheap back then because people had no use for them – and he started carting goods for a living. He transported all sorts of goods, he transported grains to the mill – as they did in those days; they used to grind this and that at the mill – somebody would move... and that's how we stayed in Dorohoi until 1945.

After the war

I started attending elementary school in Dorohoi, I entered the 1st grade in 1944. Afterwards, we returned to Saveni in 1946. We still had no house there – the grandparents' house was destroyed, there was only an empty plot of land. My father rented a room somewhere that you entered and exited through the window. Someone else lived there, a single, elderly lady. It was one of those houses that have two entrances, one in the front and one in the back, and the rooms are placed like in a train carriage, without separate entrances.

We were given the room in the back, the last one, which had no separate door, and we had to walk across her room to enter ours. From the room in the back you entered the one in the middle, the middle room opened onto a hallway leading into the courtyard on one side and into the street on the other. And we had no choice but to walk across that lady's room if we wanted to go out either through the front or through the back.

We, the children, ran about the place all day long: out of the house – into the house, outside the house. You can't keep children inside the house all day long; we went out from time to time. And this was a very, very old lady. In the end, the problem was solved by building two or three steps in front of the window, and that's how we went out of the room: through the window. We lived there for a while.

My father started performing my grandfather's trade: that of a blacksmith. He became partner with someone – a Christian – living there, in the city, as well, who had the necessary tools, for you need tools for it, and they worked together as blacksmiths in Saveni. And that's how life went on. I kept going to school, then my brother started going to school as well. After a while that man closed his business, left Saveni altogether, he took his tools, took everything and left. And my father stopped practicing this trade, too, because he needed to acquire tools, which was difficult, as he had no money. And even though he had only finished four grades, he had a very beautiful handwriting from the time he had worked as a shop assistant and he had to calculate, measure, write prices. So he was hired as a town hall clerk in Saveni. After working as a clerk for a facility for agricultural mechanization, he became an accountant – for he also learned accountancy in the meantime.

It was around 1950-1951 – we were living in Saveni then – that my parents wanted to immigrate to Israel, but in the end they gave up this undertaking because my father's relatives – he had three sisters – didn't want to leave anymore, they hadn't made up their mind. And then my father said: 'If my sisters aren't leaving, neither am I.' And it was decided. Later on, they left and stayed here. They each left one by one, but we didn't leave after all.

In the meantime we had moved to a new house, also rented from someone. Back then, buying a house was out of the question as it was impossible for certain social categories. We belonged to one of these categories. Even if my father was apprenticed to a trader, he had no calling for making money. He needed to turn an honest penny so that he could feed his wife and children; my mother didn't work, she couldn't find a job, that is – she used to sew for various people, mending

this and that. We had no garden, as we lived right in the so-called urbanized area of the town, where there were no gardens. We had a small courtyard in the back of the house where there was a toilet and a small lumber-room and a clothes line for leaving some laundry out to dry.

We lived in Saveni until 1961 and afterwards we all moved here, to Botosani. During our stay in Botosani, my father was employed by the community as administrator of the ritual restaurant [the Jewish Community canteen in Botosani] for a few years, until his death. He died of a heart attack in 1975. My mother lived with me as well, she died in 1999, she was 90 years old.

My modernist, present-day story has nothing special about it. I attended the first grade in Dorohoi and the following seven grades in Saveni – from the 2nd to the 7th grade. After that [after the fall of 1951] I came to Botosani, sat for a matriculation exam for the Commercial High School – back then it was called Middle School for Statistics – and graduated from the Commercial High School. It was like this: 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th grade. There were four years of studies. During my studies in Botosani I lived in the hostel for pupils, and so did my brother. He graduated from the same school as I did. I graduated from high school in 1955. After graduation, I worked for two years as an accountant in Saveni, from 1955 to 1957, at an agricultural machine and tractor station. My father worked there as an accountant as well and, since he worked there, I ended up working there as well. Two years later I was drafted into the army.

I did my military service in many places, among them Craiova, where I also had my photograph taken. My military service lasted two years, from 1957 to 1959. At first I was a private, but in the meantime I attended a school for sergeants and thus I became a corporal – corporals belong to the sergeants' corps.

After completing my military service I attended university. I went to college in Iasi, under the optional attendance system, for four years. I worked for and studied at the Faculty of Accounting simultaneously. I worked in Saveni and then moved to Botosani in 1961. I've been working here ever since.

I am an economist by trade; I worked as an economist in various industrial units. I worked for a commercial unit for selling food products, after which I was head accountant for an industrial unit for collecting raw material for the light industry. I worked there until 1998, and from 1998 I worked for the Public Finances Division, I was a specialty inspector until 1999. I retired in 1999 and I am now a young pensioner aged 69.

I married in the meantime. I met my wife-to-be at the workplace. I married late in life, in keeping with the family tradition. I married in 1972, I was 35 by then, after a long, long friendship with my wife. My wife, Aurelia, is a Christian and her family frowned upon this friendship. And, in order not to upset her parents – she is a very kind-hearted woman, she is warm-hearted, she wouldn't hurt a fly – she kept saying: 'Never mind, there's no need to rush. Never mind, we don't need a piece of paper, no one is going to ask us for an account number.' We were more modern by then, we weren't particularly anxious to get married, things like those. It is more difficult with elderly people – her parents were older: one has certain notions and ideas which aren't that easy to discard from one's subconscious. And we said: 'Come, let's wait some more, let's not do this just yet.' We didn't live together, but I used to go over to their place, she would come to ours, it was a known fact...

Eventually, we decided to get married. We saw the years pass by, and our friendship had strengthened too much. We were only married at the registrar's office, and we threw a party at home for family and friends. And the bride spent around three to four days preparing this party. There were almost 30 people present: relatives, my brother, my wife's brother, friends, colleagues. And many children would gather: my brother had three children, my wife's brother had two, there were friends who also had children. We had a neighbor here, a woman who had a little boy – and almost all of them were of the same age. We had no children of our own.

We both observe our individual traditions. My wife is a religious woman, she is an Orthodox Christian, but not the practicing kind. She observes the due holidays, she doesn't work on the days marked as holidays in the Christian calendar, she goes to church to attend the prayer for her dead parents, she welcomes the priest to bless our house on New Year's Eve. [Editor's note: In the Orthodox Christian religion it is customary for priests to visit the houses of the faithful and bless the homes with holy water each year in the days after the Epiphany holiday – 6th January.]

My wife also observes the holiday of Yom Kippur – when people fast – she fasts together with me, so as not to stir my appetite. I would tell her: 'Listen, you go ahead and eat. Alright, you don't want to eat, but have a cup of tea, nibble some sweets, anything, until I am done fasting.' For I go to the synagogue in the morning and return late from the holiday celebration, at around six or seven in the evening. She says: 'No, how come? Can't I fast for a whole day? God will be happy, my God as well, for it is with Him in mind that I fast, God is One and the Same.' And we have no issues regarding this.

When there are celebrations open to the public she comes and attends the service at the synagogue as well, she is an official member of the community, she is registered there. The same goes for me, I accompany her when she goes to church, at a funeral service, at the Resurrection ceremony, at such events. I accompany her so that she doesn't go alone, there is no harm in it, neither for me, nor for her.

I also observe the Christian Easter and Christmas holidays. On Christmas, my brother and his family would call on us, spend time with us, eat with us. And the little nieces – they sang beautifully – performed a sort of a program. We placed presents, boxes for them under the Christmas tree and they kept peeking at the presents under the Christmas tree, they didn't know for whom the parcels were, they didn't know which was whose, who would receive it. And after that we gave them presents – well, they are grown-ups now.

I observe Passover probably better than a 100 percent Jewish family. We have separate dishes, my wife sees to it that they are separated from the rest and uses them only for Passover. As you know, that is the rule on that occasion [on Pesach]: one isn't allowed to use dishes that were used during the year. There were times when people didn't have two to three sets of dishes as we do nowadays – some for daily use, some for certain occasions, some for festive meals, as the case may be – they had a single set of dishes. Well, back then the custom was to boil these dishes in a solution made from boiled water and ashes. They cleaned them and they used them. That's what my mother did, too, when we were little. She didn't do this all the time, in the latter period, when the standard of living improved a little, she had separate dishes for Passover, pots, plates, everything you need. So does my wife: we have some beautiful French glass dishes and she keeps those for Passover, she doesn't touch them during the year. She has some dishes which she uses for cooking, cutlery,

everything – on Passover everything is replaced.

My wife prepares traditional Jewish dishes, they are very tasty; she is a very good cook. Usually, the traditional Jewish dish for Passover is chicken soup with potato dishes, all sorts of potato dishes. For instance: you mix mashed potatoes with raw eggs, fried onion, spices and you make some small breads; or you take boiled potatoes and pass them through the mincing machine: you mash the potatoes into a paste, mix them with eggs, pepper or other spices to suit your taste, place them on a rather large square tray – naturally, you oil the tray beforehand, using grease, oil – put it in the oven, bake it and slice it in squares. It tastes exquisitely.

For the matzah, the unleavened bread for Passover, there is also flour. When they sell matzah, they also sell flour. The matzah is dough that has no ingredients in it, for it is made from plain quality flour and water, which is then passed through a machine that gives it this indented shape, and is then baked in a special oven used on Passover. And after this is done, it is then ground into powder at home using a coffee grinder – until it has the consistency of flour. Well, you can make very tasty dishes from this, sweet or spicy, you mix it with eggs, sugar, you can make all sorts of very tasty sweets from it.

After my father died, mother stayed with us until her death. And my wife learned these things from my mother. Also, she knew some of them from before, for she also attended the Commercial High School here in Botosani and she had many Jewish classmates there. Here in Botosani, the majority of the population in the city itself was actually Jewish. There were very many Jews in the schools as well, almost half the children were from Jewish families in these schools. And my wife visited the homes of her classmates and friends. They invited her for Passover, she invited them – her Jewish classmates – on Christmas, New Year's Eve; she invited them to her home, to the table, to eat whatever they were having. Well, she knew by now what it was all about. Not to mention the fact that my mother lived with us.

I attend the service at the synagogue every Saturday. Now that I am retired, I go more often than I used to when I was working – I didn't even have the time then. During communism, you could practice your religion without restraints. It was only that you had to be at work, even if it was a holiday. But in certain cases, whenever possible, if they were willing to give you one or two days off, you took a leave for one or two days. It also depended on where you worked. If you worked in a highly politicized institution, you couldn't tell them: 'Give me a day off, I have business to attend to at the synagogue' – for such was politics, it was atheistic. But, in general, you could observe the holidays if you wanted. You took a leave of absence and you had a week or two for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Furthermore, you could go to the synagogue, nobody asked anything about that. If you held a high-ranking position in the political hierarchy, well then, that was a different matter: you had agreed to get involved in that, you had to take it [the consequences].

I wasn't a member of the Communist Party. I was a pioneer [4](#) from 1949 – when these organizations for children were founded. And back then not all the children were accepted to join the pioneer organizations, only those who did well in school were accepted, and it was quite something in those days to be accepted as pioneer. If you weren't a pioneer, it meant you played truant or that you were stupid. I was a pioneer until high school.

When you entered high school, you were automatically accepted within the ranks of U.C.Y. [the Union of Communist Youth]. Everybody was a member, all youngsters in high school were

members of U.C.Y. One couldn't say: 'I don't want to be a member of U.C.Y.' I was a member until I turned 28 and couldn't be a member anymore. The activity of U.C.Y. wasn't political, as was the case with the Party. Perhaps those at a higher level were involved in political activities, but this wasn't the case for us, at school level. We would meet, organize a trip. For instance, as a U.C.Y. member, I went on a trip to East Germany organized by the U.C.Y.; I couldn't have gone on this trip, if I hadn't been a member of the U.C.Y. After I started working I was still a member of the U.C.Y, and soon afterwards I reached the maximum age for membership...

After that, I didn't want to join the Party. I had no problems at work because of this decision. Actually, I did have some problems, but I was a good professional. Back then, centralization was the name of the day, ministries, this and that, and I was asked repeatedly: 'Say, what is the matter with you, we were told to let you know you will be out of your job, if you don't join the Party.' Whenever the issue came up, I would say: 'I won't become a member of the Party. It is for two reasons that I won't join the Party: first of all, I don't need to be a member of the Party in my line of work, for it isn't a job that involves dealing with people; second of all - I told them - I don't want to become a member of the Party and be criticized by the watchman or the janitor for not performing this or that activity with the base unit.' For this is how it was: any drunk would stand up during the sitting and you had to answer him why this and not that, things like these. And I said: 'That's why I don't want to join the Party. If you fire me from this position, I will find another job as head accountant or economist somewhere else.' And I stuck to this until they got tired of me and said: 'Leave this one be, he's slow-witted, he isn't right in the head!' And so I didn't join...

Before the Revolution [5](#) I traveled to East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia. But it was only for short trips, for two days, during the holidays. I traveled to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and East Germany using my private automobile. In any case, I liked these countries. You should know, I went to Bulgaria, where, they used to say, lived 'Bulgarians with a thick back of the neck' - that was the saying. They were seen as more backward than us. I was already working when I went there, around 1968-1969, I went to the seaside - we used to go to the seaside [the Black Sea] every year in that period - and we also drove to Bulgaria where we stayed two or three days. And we found that the resorts were more modern than Eforie, Mangalia, or Mamaia [all resorts in Romania]. Even in those days their beaches were already compartmented, had deck chairs, beautiful kiosks, were painted in various colors. It was as it is here nowadays. In those days, over here there were sorry-looking stands, two or three planks of wood and a few grilled minced meat rolls and beer - what they usually served.

Not to mention that the degree of civilization in Czechoslovakia was something else... I was there around 1968-1969, around that period. I traveled to Poland, too, also by car. But in Czechoslovakia and East Germany - words are not enough! East Germany was civilized, beautiful, clean. When I saw that in these small towns there is no mud on the street... It had rained for two or three days when I was there, and when I saw that there was no mud... If here, in Botosani, I have some business to take care of and drive there by car when it rains, and if I just washed it the previous day, when I return I have to wash it again. I was very surprised to see that I had driven for two or three days and my car was still clean. Needless to say: the people there were cleaner, too - even in those days.

Nowadays - after the Revolution - I have only been to Israel lately, together with my wife. I went there a few times. I have relatives there - almost all my relatives live in Israel. At present, I only

have cousins and female cousins from my father's and mother's brothers and sisters. The first time I traveled there was around 1980. My relatives sent me an official invite [6](#), I went to the proper authorities, they investigated my case, saw that I posed no risk, I knew no state secrets – for this is how it was: if you worked in a field dealing with matters of state security, you would have a very hard time obtaining permission to visit foreign countries.

I returned with a good impression every time I traveled there. I went there before and after the Revolution and I enjoyed my stay there. But we couldn't make up our mind to make aliyah. Since my wife's mother lived in Romania, too – for her father had died previously and only her mother was still alive – and she lived with her mother, looked after her and had very many relatives here... They were seven siblings and all of them live here, in Romania. So she couldn't make up her mind. I would have been in favor of leaving, but there was also the matter of my age, the question was finally addressed when I could no longer go there and start all over again. For it's true, life is more civilized over there and – how shall I say it – more plentiful, but it takes time to get there [at that level]. You must start at the bottom, do certain things until you manage to save some money, know a few people, find a place to work. And we had reached a certain age when we couldn't decide in favor of this anymore.

But I went there, I've been there a few times, even my wife was there two or three times. After my retirement, I went there and stayed for three months together with my wife. From Haifa, in the north, we traveled as far as Tel Aviv, Petach Tikva, a few rural settlements. I have relatives throughout the country. We didn't go there during the summer season, we went there during winter, in November. We didn't travel during the summer because we like to visit, travel, move about and it goes without saying that during the hot season you must stay indoors with the air-conditioning turned on, you can't walk in the street, ride the bus, travel by train or even on the highway. Every time we went there, it was in October, November, December. The climate is milder during this time of the year, as it is in Romania in August and September.

I am retired now, and I have no occupations related to my former profession. I read, walk, go on trips throughout the country sometimes and take part in the Community's activities [the Jewish Community in Botosani]: I go to the synagogue on a regular basis when they recite prayers, on Friday, Saturday and all religious holidays. And I am mending my health, which was rather shaken up during my lifetime...

Two or three years ago we still used to go in the mountains, on trips, we used to go to the seaside [the Black Sea], but now we can't go to the seaside anymore. Now, since I started undergoing some treatment and, in addition, must avoid all physical effort, we go to spas, where we have to undergo treatment. In the past years we went two or three times to Baltatesti [41 km north of Piatra Neamt], in Neamt County, they have good facilities there for the treatment of rheumatism, using water and medicinal mud baths, medicinal mud sessions, infrared rays and electric treatment. For instance, this year we went to Covasna, we underwent some cardiac and rheumatic treatment, and after that we went to Balvanyos [21 km north-west of Targu Secuiesc], we spent a day or two at Lacul Rosu [23 km north-east of Gheorgheni], we went to Baile Tusnad [32 km south of Miercurea Ciuc], but we stayed there for only one day, we stayed in Borsec a few days, and the summer was nearly over.

In addition to this, we take strolls on foot every day outside of town, we walk to the Eminescu lake, we walk across the field, a few kilometers across the fields, from morning until evening, and we try to preserve our physical condition. We try not to age so quickly, so that only the identity card, when you look at it, might give away the fact that time has, in fact, passed.

Glossary

1 Transnistria

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

2 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).

3 Mohilev-Podolsk

A town in Ukraine (Mohyliv-Podilsky), located on the Dniester river. It is one of the major crossing points from Bessarabia (today the Moldovan Republic) to the Ukraine. After Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the allied German and Romanian armies occupied Bessarabia and Bukovina, previously Soviet territories. In August 1941 the Romanians began to send Jewish deportees over the Dniester river to Transnistria, which was then under German occupation. More than 50,000 Jews marched through the town, approximately 15,000 were able to stay there. The others were deported to camps established in many towns of Transnistria.

4 All-Union pioneer organization

A communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscoouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

5 Romanian Revolution of 1989

In December 1989, a revolt in Romania deposed the communist dictator Ceausescu. Anti-government violence started in Timisoara and spread to other cities. When army units joined the uprising, Ceausescu fled, but he was captured and executed on 25th December along with his wife. A provisional government was established, with Ion Iliescu, a former Communist Party official, as president. In the elections of May 1990 Iliescu won the presidency and his party, the Democratic National Salvation Front, obtained an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

6 Travel into and out of Romania (Romanian citizens abroad, and foreigners into Romania)

The regulations made it extremely difficult for Romanian citizens to travel into non-socialist countries. One could apply for a passport every second year; however, the police could refuse its issue without offering any explanation. One had to attach to the application for a passport a certificate from work, school or university proving the proper behavior of the applicant, and an invitation letter from a relative or an acquaintance had to be enclosed too. If a whole family solicited for passports, the authorities usually refused to issue a passport for one member of the family, thus forcing the traveler to return. The law controlled very severely the travel of foreigners into Romania. No matter if they were tourists or visited their family, foreign citizens had to report when entering the country the number of days they intended to stay, and had to exchange a certain amount of money defined by the law for every day they intended to spend in Romania. Furthermore a foreign citizen could stay only in a hotel. Any individual Romanian citizen could get a significant fine if it turned out that they secured accommodation for a foreigner. The only exception were first degree relatives, but they also had to be reported to the police, indicating the number of days they would spend at the person accommodating them.