

Letti Leibovici After The Deportation In Vatra Dornei



This is me, Letti Leibovici, on the right, with a childhood friend, Eti Vitof, and her brother, Benu Vitof. Eti Vitof was as old as me, we went to kindergarten together, and were also classmates in school, and we got along very well. But she left to Israel with her parents, brother, and another sister, I believe. This photograph was taken in Vatra Dornei when I was 16, after returning from the deportation. My father and I lived at a relative's in Vatra Dornei for more than a month after World War II as well. The photograph might have been taken by a photographer.

[During the Holocaust] I was hospitalized in Moghilev, the doctor there was from Vatra Dornei, he admitted me into the hospital for treatment, for that infection. And father stayed in Moghilev, so that he could visit me. Meanwhile, they caught my father in Moghilev and took him to a labor camp. And, starting from that day, I had no news of my father anymore.

It was the end of 1943 by then. I stayed in the hospital for approximately 2 months, and in January 1944 I left the hospital and was transferred to the orphanage. And I was all by myself there. I was 10 and a half when they deported us from Vatra Dornei. By January 1944 I was already 13. The Federation in Bucharest sent the orphanage and the hospital some food and clothing, and we seemed to fare a little better. There were some teachers who came to the orphanage to teach lessons every now and then, give us some activities, some handiwork. It was more humane. And lists were drawn up, for a delegation from Romania representing the Federation of Jewish Communities was coming there to take the children aged 1-15. A list was drawn up with the

children who were eligible, I enlisted as well. And the question was: 'Where should I ask to be sent?' Someone asked to go to Bacau, someone else to Roman, others to Falticeni, Bucharest, Timisoara. 'Should I go to Vatra Dornei?' Nobody had returned home at that time. We, the children, were the first to return home. 'What will I do there, at only 13 years of age, all by myself?' So I asked to be sent to Botosani, and I enlisted to be sent to Botosani. I didn't know their address [of my grandparents and uncles from Botosani], only their names. The delegation came indeed, they brought clothes for the children, they dressed us and boarded the children on a special transport train. This was happening in March 1944. So I stayed in the orphanage until March 1944.

That's how I arrived in Botosani. I arrived at the Botosani train station. Many, many, many people. Some came out of curiosity, knowing that children were coming, others came to see if any of the children from their families had returned. I inquired about the Davidsohns. I saw a lady and a gentleman: 'The Davidsohns.' 'No, we don't know them.' The city was big, approximately 25,000 Jews lived there. None of those that I asked could help me. Evening was drawing near, and I could see that I was making no headway. Then a young man came and told me: 'Where are you from?' I told him. 'Did you just come with...' 'Yes.' He asked me how old I was. He said: 'Look, would you like to go with me? There is a family who have a daughter your age, and they would be happy to take you to live with them.' It was a family with a very good financial situation. Seeing that I had no family, no anything, I said: 'Alright. I will go.' And I went. This young man was a neighbor of that family, and he was the son of a rabbi who also lived there. And he took me to that family, the Fichmans. I spoke Romanian very poorly, for we spoke German at home. Ever since I was born I had been speaking German. Even at kindergarten, and then at school. And you had to tell the story to everyone. People didn't know the exact details. They knew about Transnistria, they knew about the Gulag, but they didn't know everything.