Vasile Grunea

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Kolozsvar
Romania
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Vasile Grunea is a short, stocky and very friendly elderly man. His bedroom is also his living room; it is a spacious room, on one side of which there is a huge desk facing the door, as if expecting some clients. The bookshelves are full of books. He has some old books published before World War II, it is a real gold-mine, this bookshelf. He likes watching TV, with the volume turned up a bit, though. He reads newspapers regularly and is up-to-date on current events. He still leads an active life, he walks around and does a little traveling, and even travels as far as Jerusalem on his own.

My family background

The family of my father’s maternal grandmother came to Transylvania from Portugal. My great-grandfather, Mordechai Weintraub, came from Russia to Retteg, called Reteag in Romanian, which is a village near Marosvasarhely in Transylvania. My father’s maternal grandfather had five children and for some time he directed a traditional higher school, a yeshivah, I think, in Retteg. It was customary that the person who set up the yeshivah taught in it as well; my great-grandfather must have been a rabbi there. He died of some infectious disease at the age of 49, but I don’t know in what year.

The family of my father’s paternal grandparents, the Grubers, came from Silesia. My father’s paternal grandfather was called Haim; he settled in Bethlen, Transylvania, around 1825 and died in tragic circumstances, killed by a bull. Around 700 Jewish families lived in Bethlen until the deportations, it was a small Jewish town. My paternal grandfather was called Jozsef Gruber and he was born in 1852. My father had a joke about this. He said that his father was called Jozsef [Joseph] and Jesus’ father was also called Joseph, his father was from Bethlen and that of Jesus from

Bethlehem and he was called Immanuel just like Jesus, so he was identical with Jesus in this respect. My father and his brothers and sisters were already born in Bethlen. Grandfather Gruber had a rabbinical training and it was said that he was competent in the Talmud but he wasn't a rabbi. He was a farmer and he also worked as a merchant; he had a food store for a long time, which he ran himself. He sold everything from sugar to kerosene in this store – as was customary in all village stores – until the store unfortunately burnt down. After that he was mainly involved in buying up apples and eggs; he had a cart and he went around the villages and collected eggs and apples, put them into boxes and sent them abroad. My grandfather had a beard and wore tzitzit. If I remember well, he usually wore black clothes and a white shirt. His coat was almost a span [about 20 cm] longer than jackets today, it reached down above his knees – they called it Franz Joseph coat at the time. It was a strange coat. [Editor's note: At the time it was considered very elegant in bourgeois circles.] He was a religious man, who put on tallit and tefillin; however, he didn't go to the synagogue but prayed at home.

My grandmother on my father's side was Rozsa Weintraub, or Reizele, she was born in 1866. I don't know much about her, I didn't know her personally, but only from my father's stories; he told me that she had a most beautiful voice, and sang most beautifully, and he was surprised that she knew many songs about longing to return to the Holy Land in Yiddish. I think she must have learnt them from her grandparents. They usually sang on Friday night and on Saturday and they must have sung these songs then. After Saturday lunch the family in Bethlen didn't leave the table but stayed to talk and sing. My grandmother was religious; she wore a kerchief and lit candles on Sabbath. There's a traditional short prayer that she recited as she was holding her hands cupped around the candles – this was a traditional gesture; she recited this prayer over the Sabbath candles, the 'ner shel Shabbat', blessing them with this prayer. My grandfather probably went to the synagogue with his sons on Friday night, then he went home and recited a benediction, a prayer [kiddush] over the wine. After that the whole family performed the ritual of washing hands and the head of the family recited a prayer, the 'hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz' [who brings forth bread from the earth] over the challah. On Sabbath they usually put two loaves of white challah on the table in memory of the time when they [the Jewish people] were on Sinai and had to collect manna for two days on Friday. Then the head of the family broke off a piece of challah for everybody around the table and gave everyone a piece after dipping it into salt – this custom was observed in the family. They prayed in Hebrew but with a Yiddish pronunciation. Seder night was a big event. According to my father's recollections Pesach had a very romantic atmosphere. The whole family got together when they were children: his father, mother and even the closest relatives were there on seder night.

The house in Bethlen where my paternal grandparents lived must have been quite a big house, five or six rooms, but they lived rather crammed because they had six sons and four daughters. The boys usually slept two in one bed, but they all left their parental home one after the other. The house also had a big garden with vegetables and big fruit trees. In the fall they usually made jam in huge quantities for the winter. Like poor people in general, they also made plum jam because they didn't need to add sugar to that and this way they could save the sugar. Instead of putting bacon on the bread, they spread plum jam thickly on it. As I learnt from Aunt Margit, my father's younger sister's recollections, my grandmother loved flowers very much and she had a most beautiful flower garden. I think that they always had one or two servants around the house because they had many children. General laundry was a reoccurring event every month, and it wasn't an easy

job to do a general laundry for twelve people. During this time the whole household was upside down, and they hired some women to help with the laundry. My father was fluent in Romanian, so I think that apart from having had many Romanian friends as a child, he must have had some Romanian employees as well.

My grandmother didn't really help my grandfather in his business, as there were ten children to look after. My father told me that before the high holidays and Pesach two apprentices brought back the shoes that the village cobbler had repaired and they brought the shoes hanging on a bar. Ten children needed ten pairs of shoes and the younger ones rarely got new things. They usually wore the outgrown and mended clothes and shoes of the older children; the older siblings had better luck.

My father's younger sister Margit recorded her recollections on tape. She was one of the ten siblings and she described in detail what clothes her mother had bought her and her older sister Sari before holidays, balls or graduation from school. It was quite an event when they were given new clothes, although Jewish families, and my father's family likewise, always bought new clothes for the children for the high holidays and Pesach if they could afford it. It was part of the tradition to renew themselves for the holidays not only spiritually but a little in their appearance as well. They bought clothes rather than toys – at least my father and my aunt never mentioned any toys in their recollections.

My grandparents in Bethlen were quite well off for some time, but when the store burnt down at the end of the 1880s, their financial situation became worse and worse. They moved to Kolozsvar and rented a smaller store, and they were a little better off financially. Grandfather was turned out of the store after 1918 and a Romanian took over the store. Later part of their apartment was confiscated, so their material situation was gradually getting worse again. I think that it must have been their material circumstances that made them all decide to go abroad. After 1918 the siblings, both the boys and the girls, even though most of them had graduated from a gymnasium or lyceum, started to learn a trade to make sure that they would be able to find a job when they went to America.

My grandfather and my grandmother emigrated to America around 1926. I think that my grandmother lived two more years in America, and died young of kidney disease there. Later she was reburied in Haifa in Israel. I knew my grandfather around 1938 when he returned to Transylvania. And my guess is that at one point he wanted to stay and live with his son who was a doctor in Kolozsvar but, thank God, his son persuaded him to return to America. My grandfather died in New York in 1952 and was later reburied in Haifa.

Hanika Gruber, born in 1889, was my father's oldest sibling. Her husband was a Jew; unfortunately he died of some disease in 1916, after he returned from the front, and Hanika was left behind with three children. Her son died of Spanish flue in 1918 and she had two daughters left. They were a religious family. All her siblings remembered Hanika as their second mother because the difference of age between them and Hanika was so big. She lived in Szaszregen and later emigrated to America with her daughters. As far as I know, she was the first to go and the other siblings followed in turn. Hanika worked mostly in the summer, she was a chief cook in various seasonal guesthouses in smaller towns and she maintained her daughters this way. Both of them graduated from university later. She took my aunt Margit and her daughters – who also emigrated to America

– and they did the cleaning in the guesthouses where she worked.

Adolf Gruber, born in 1891,was a thin tall man. He led a bohemian life, he was an excellent storyteller and he had a great sense of humor. I know from Aunt Margit's recollections that he wrote a fantastic storybook entitled The Rabbit Swam the Sea – he wrote it at the end of the 1920s. He was very good at dealing with children and he simply loved to play. I have a leather purse from him, which he made himself. He was extremely good with his hands, and he could make wonderful things from leather. I think that he was an excellent judge of character, who could win everybody over to his side. He worked as a clerk in New York, but I don't know exactly what he did. He came back from America around 1930 and lived here in Kolozsvar for some time. I remember him from the time after his return from America. I was around five to seven years old and he and my father bought an electric train set for me. I remember that he and my father played with the trains much more than I. Adolf had a son, Joel, a lawyer, who was a pilot in World War II and died very young. Adolf died around 1945.

Marton Gruber was a year younger than my father. He was a baker. He was a lower officer in World War I and it was told in the family that he was responsible for protecting the hall where the first Zionist, that is, Jewish national, meeting took place in 1918 in Kolozsvar. They rented the hall of the Urania Movie Theater – it was at the beginning of Horea Road [in the center of town] – for the meeting. The meeting caused a stir, Uj Kelet, one of the most serious Zionist national newspapers published in Hungarian in Romania, was founded after this meeting; at first it was a weekly but later it became a daily. It had correspondents in bigger towns, and it even had permanent correspondents in Bucharest. Zionism led to the creation of the newspaper Uj Kelet and Uj Kelet created Zionism in Transylvania. Marton emigrated to America with his wife; the other siblings had not been married before they left. My guess is that when one sibling settled there, he arranged a visa for the next one so that he could also enter America. That's why they didn't emigrate together but one after the other. I think Marton made aliyah in 1968, he left New York for Nahariya, a town not far from Haifa, where he lived as a pensioner; he died there and is buried there, too. His wife was a Buchwald girl and a very religious woman. Marton's wife was probably the most religious member of our entire family. I don't know how religious she was in her spirit, but she certainly observed all the outward forms of religiosity. They didn't have any children.

The next sibling, born in 1894, was Sarolta Gruber, who was called Fried after her husband. Her husband was a Jew, but I don't know what he did for a living. Sarolta was a housewife and she also helped in her brother Samu's confectionery. Sari also emigrated to New York and also died in Israel. They left America for Haifa around the 1970s.

Hershi Gruber, born in 1895, was my father's closest brother. He finished secondary school before World War I, was drafted into the army – I think he was second lieutenant – and disappeared in a battle in Galicia in World War I. He was at the same front as my father, who was a sanitary officer in an artillery unit, while Hershi was in the infantry. The two brothers met before a battle and Hershi disappeared after the battle. We don't know anything about him ever since, he was not declared dead but was reported missing. I was named Zvi after him because Zvi is Hersh in Yiddish, so my name commemorates his name.

Samu Gruber, born in 1897, was a confectioner. His wife was Jewish, and as far as I know, they had two daughters. There was a fire in a summer cottage somewhere near New York and one of his

daughters died there tragically, the poor thing. Samu died in the 1960s.

Margit attended the Tarbut 1, the Jewish lyceum in Kolozsvar. The school had separate boys' and girls' classes. Margit graduated in 1926, I think, which was the last year before the school was banned. A rabbi or religion teacher taught religion in the school. But they also paid special attention to classical Hebrew and the presentation of prominent figures of Jewish culture. On Sabbath the students usually went to the Neolog 2 synagogue on Horea Road. The school was next to the Jewish hospital, on Iasilor Street, where the editorial office of the journal Korunk is now. The classrooms were on the first floor where the office of Korunk is located today. The gym was on the ground floor, right next to the entrance. It's still there but it's neglected, I think it's not used for anything.

In other respects, the school had the same curriculum as all the other schools, with one big difference, namely that the teachers lectured at a very high level. The majority of the teachers had been educated in Hungary or Austria. The director of the school, Mark Antal 3, was originally from Hungary. He was school inspector during the Hungarian Soviet Republic 4 and he had to leave Hungary because of this and he got to Kolozsvar in the 1920s as someone who escaped from the Horthy 5 regime. He had two sons. One of them was an economist and poet; he died in forced labor in 1943. Before that he spent many years in jail in Pest [Budapest] because he was convicted as a communist. His brother, Istvan Antal, was a world famous pianist. My aunt Margit remembered Mark Antal warmly and mentioned that he always gave nice long lectures on French, German and Norwegian literature. He also held lectures on the theory of relativity; Einstein's theory was novel at the time, and these lectures were attended not only by students of the lyceum but also by many people from town because Antal's lectures were of very high standards and he was a very pleasant lecturer. As most of the classes were held in Hungarian, although there were also Romanian language classes, the authorities didn't want to license the school any more and, as far as I know, it was closed in 1927. Mark Antal continued to live here in Kolozsvar and gave lectures and earned a living mainly from giving private lessons and from making major calculations, for example calculating pensions, for banks and insurance companies. He was well known in educational circles in Hungary, and it was because of him that the Jewish lyceum was given the permission to reopen in 1940 [and operate until 1944].

After graduating from the Tarbut, Margit learnt sewing in Kolozsvar. She left for America with her parents at the end of the 1920s. They went via Hamburg but she got inflammation of the eye when they arrived in Hamburg and couldn't continue her trip. She stayed there for some time and followed her parents to America only later. There she worked with her older sister Hanika in a guesthouse for a while and later she worked in her own trade as a dressmaker. She was quite a skilled dressmaker, and she worked her way up and made first-class dresses in the end. She was a doctor's assistant for a while in her brother's consulting-room. Margit died in Haifa in 2001.

Valter, who was called Valvi in the family, graduated from the Medical University in Kolozsvar in 1921. He was a specialist in internal medicine, as well as a radiologist, and he had an x-ray machine. For some time he worked in the Matyas Matyas sanatorium. [Matyas Matyas was the founder and head surgeon of the sanatorium.] He brought radium from Belgium, and was the first to carry out a radium treatment in Kolozsvar. He had a doctor's office on Szechenyi Square – he was a renowned doctor. The Leb brothers had a big food store in the same building below his office. He had many patients coming from villages. On Fridays, which was market day [the weekly

big market was held then], when the villagers came into town, they queued up on the staircase to get into his consulting room. He performed many medical analyses, for example, the measuring of gastric acid. His first wife Szeren, who was a Jew, helped him a lot.

Valter had leftist convictions, and he was arrested and spent some time in prison in Temesvar, convicted of illegal communist activities. He wasn't a party member but he was involved, he made propaganda against fascism. Uncle Valter was the last to emigrate to America in 1938. When somebody in the family got the visa, they said, as I remember hearing it, that they got the 'efidevit' [affidavit]. Maybe I don't pronounce it correctly but that's how it was pronounced in the family. After struggling for a year to have his medical diploma accepted, Valter opened a private doctor's office in New York, while working as a doctor in a hospital at the same time. He became quite a well-known doctor there as well. After Valter arrived in America, his sister Margit took an express course to train as an assistant and worked for him, as Valter had quite a well-going doctor's office. He offered consultation in internal medicine, he did x-ray and had a laboratory there, too, and he needed a permanent staff for all this.

He divorced his wife late in life and in a very nasty way; my uncle was left with nothing more than the clothes he was wearing after an entire life spent at work because the wife gets everything according to the American laws. If I remember correctly, Valter remained in America until after the end of the Six-Day-War [6] in Israel, that is, until about 1969, and then he emigrated to Israel with his second wife, Magda Sporn, who was my mother's sister and my aunt. Magda had been in the south of France during World War II. Valter knew her from childhood, as she was my mother's younger sister. He went on a visit to Paris, they met there and decided to get married. Then my uncle left America and my aunt left France, and they went to live in Haifa. Valter bought a apartment there and lived there as a pensioner. My aunt still lives in Haifa and she is over 90. Valter had three children from his first marriage: Lia, Frank and Eva. Magda and Valter didn't have any children together. Valter wasn't religious at all.

My father's youngest sibling was Magda. I don't know much about her. She was a housewife and she emigrated to New York. She had a son called Laurens, who was a physicist and a university professor. Poor Magda died quite young of progressive paralysis in America.

In my father's family, my father and his younger brother Valter were the first who didn't only go to a traditional school, but were also sent to a secular secondary school in Szamosujvar by their mother, despite the disapproval of the village. My father arrived in Szamosujvar around 1904. They lived there rather poorly, they 'ate days', as it was called in those days. This meant that better-off people offered lunch to a poorer student during the week or the student tutored pupils who weren't doing so well at school and was given board and lodging for this. My father told me that he was sharing lodging with a Romanian boy in Szamosujvar at some point, and they regularly accompanied each other before school, one day he accompanied the boy to the Romanian church and the next day the boy accompanied him to the synagogue. My father graduated in 1912, his younger brother in 1918.

After graduation my father went to Kolozsvar but stayed here only for a short time. Just before World War I he was accepted to the Medical Faculty, even though he was a Jew, and he finished two years. He should have become a military doctor in the KuK, the Kaiserlich und Koniglich, army [7], that is, the Austro-Hungarian army, but World War I broke out in the meantime. He went to the

front as a voluntary sanitary officer and spent almost four years there, from 1914 to 1918. He came home in 1918 and got involved in politics and promoted Zionism. I think that he received his first impulse at the front, mainly from a colleague of his, who had studied in Vienna. There was a doctor called Ritter there, who was one of the heralds of Zionism and my father came into contact with the Zionist movement through him. One of my father's brothers-in-law, Simon, my mother's older brother, was also a committed Zionist and his younger brother, Marton, was also a Zionist.

He enrolled at the Faculty of Law in 1919 and attended it as a 'field-goer' [commuter], which means that he didn't go to classes every day. They were called field-goers, that is, people who 'went to the field' [went to work] during their studies. He graduated from law but he didn't pursue a career in law. In 1922-23 my father went to Brasso, where the Albina Bank opened a branch office; he was offered a job there and worked there as a bank-clerk. At that time it was quite a high position, he had the right to sign papers on behalf of the director. The director-general was Brediceanu, who was a full-time composer. He took a leading role in the reannexation of Transylvania to Romania in 1920 [following the Trianon Peace Treaty] 8 and he was made director-general in return. Later he was a broker at the stock exchange and a lottery ticket agent until these were banned and became a petty clerk.

My father was among those who introduced Zionism to Brasso with Ritter. They remained friends for life, all the more so, since both of them settled in Brasso. There was an organization called Barisia, which was mainly an organization for students and Zionist intellectuals. Members of the Barisia imitated a little the German Burschenschaften [fraternity], they laid quite an emphasis on sports: they went in for sports, they did fencing. At the beginning it was an important thing for them to show that the Jews didn't just think and philosophize but could also stand up for their Jewishness with a sword or boxing if the need arises. It is no accident that Zionist organizations launched a strong sports movement, the Haggibbor movement, after 1918; it had a football team, as well as an excellent water polo team, they were national champions in table tennis and tennis. My father did gymnastics until his old age but didn't go in for competitions; when he got up in the morning, he did push-ups. In Barisia he was mainly involved in educating the youth, he held theoretical lectures for them, usually in Hungarian. He mostly told them stories of Jews who stood up for their Jewishness, from the rise of David to the arts of Solomon.

I think that my father knew my mother's older brother Simon from the Zionist organization in Kolozsvar and my parents met through him. I know that Lea, whom everybody called Lotte, was about a year and a half older than my mother. My father told me that at first my mother's family, especially my grandmother, wanted him to marry Lotte, as it was the custom to marry off the oldest daughter of a family first. But my father didn't really like her, he liked my mother, so he married her. It wasn't the parents who agreed on this but my father and mother.

My maternal grandmother, Sara Paneth, came from a rabbinic family. Her grandfather, Yecheskel Paneth, was the chief rabbi of Transylvania and lived in Gyulafehervar. Rabbi Paneth had six children. There were many rabbis in Des and around who came from the Paneth family, it was a big rabbinic dynasty. The synagogue in Des was also built by a rabbi Paneth, and he gave most of the money to purchase the plot for the synagogue out of his own pocket. My grandmother came from the family of the third son of the chief rabbi. Hermann Paneth, my grandmother's older brother, graduated from the Rabbinical Seminary in Frankfurt in Germany, but he didn't work as a rabbi; he was involved in agriculture and Zionism instead.

My grandmother on my mother's side was very religious. She lived with us in Brasso for more than a year, and I had to accompany her to the synagogue every Saturday. She was so strictly religious that she didn't carry anything, not even her prayer book, so I accompanied her to the entrance of the women's gallery in the synagogue, gave her the prayer book and waited for her at the end of the service. My poor grandmother never learnt that after I went with her to the synagogue, I played football – there was a small plot not far from the synagogue – while she was inside, praying. I remember some strange things: when she cut her nails, for example, she collected the cuts, took two small pieces of wood and burnt them.

I don't know how my grandparents met, I only know that at some point they lived in Gerend; grandmother came from Retteg but married and lived in Gerend. My maternal grandfather was called Lajos Sporn, his Jewish name was Leb. He was the manager of a big estate and a distillery in Gerend. Before World War I, when things weren't going that well there, he went to Noszoly and rented the rather big estate of a landowner called Szasz. He worked in agriculture and livestock breeding. He bred cows and piglets and then sold them. It might seem strange that a Jew bred piglets but Noszoly was close to Szamosujvar and there were many Armenian merchants there, and he sold the piglets to them. He also grew wheat. At the end of July, beginning of August during the threshing season, the threshing machine worked for a week without stopping, they were threshing the grains.

My grandmother Sara was a housewife, they had eight children, but only six of them survived to adulthood. They were Simon, Piroska, Marci, Lea, my mother Erzsebet, Helen, and Magda. Two of them died during the Spanish flue when they were only a few months old. Most of the children were born in Gerend, I think only Magda and Helen were born in Noszoly. My mother was born in Gerend, and Uncle Simon and Uncle Marci were also born in Gerend.

My grandmother was very religious; I'm sure that her wedding was conducted by a rabbi. She led a kosher household, but she couldn't have done otherwise, as she came from the rabbinic family of the Paneths. Her family could probably afford to hire private teachers to teach her because she could read Hebrew fluently, and she was fluent in German and read a lot of German literature. Before she got married she lived in Retteg, which is near Szaszregen, and there were Germans [Saxons] there. I think that only the boys went to cheder. At that time girls were taught by private teachers. My grandmother read Hebrew fluently. She wore a wig, prayed and went to the synagogue every Sabbath and on high holidays. My grandparents spoke Yiddish beside Hungarian, although this perhaps was more so in the case of my grandparents on my father's side. My grandfather and grandmother spoke Yiddish at home but their children's mother tongue was already Hungarian.

During World War I the boys were drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. After 1918 a law on the expropriation of property was passed and big estates were expropriated. The state took them over and divided them into 2-3-acre plots and gave them to peasants who had participated in the war and to poorer peasants. So, my grandfather could only rent a smaller estate and the whole family moved to Kolozsvar. From then on my grandfather was chiefly engaged in lumbering in the Beszterce-Naszod region. He was an expert, he went through a forest and could tell almost exactly how much wood could be lumbered from that forest.

They lived in their own house – which was a four-room house I think – somewhere near Szechenyi Square in Kolozsvar. At that time Szechenyi Square and the streets around it were mostly inhabited by Jews. Sadly, my grandfather died in 1927; he is buried here in Kolozsvar in the old Jewish cemetery on Tordai Road. The girls learned the trade of corset making and it became a family obsession, all of them had corset salons. Corsets were in fashion then, I think, and there weren't many salons, and corsets weren't made in the factory. They called the corsets Mieder using the German expression. The corset in one piece, where the bra, the suspender and the corset were sewn together was called the Princesse; this was very difficult to put on but ladies were willing to torture themselves and wore them. Magda and Lotti, the two youngest sisters, became clerks.

The girls went to a regular state school in Gerend and in Kolozsvar as well. My mother's two brothers, Simon and Marci, went to commercial secondary school. The girls went to the Marianum, which was one of the most well-known Catholic secondary schools for girls in Transylvania at the time. It was located on what is Horea Road today, in the building that houses the Faculty of Philology of Babes-Bolyai University. So, they all went to secular schools, but the girls surely learnt Hebrew from my grandmother and the boys had gone to cheder as well. When they were living in the village, they probably hired a younger bocher as a private teacher. The girls could read the prayer book in Hebrew fluently, too; they didn't speak Hebrew, of course, but they could read it well.

My uncle Simon Sporn was at least ten years older than my mother. He always called the younger ones, Magda and Helen, 'the pups'. He graduated from commercial secondary school and then from the Commercial and Agricultural Academy here in Kolozsvar. He was a clerk of a high level. In World War I he served as first lieutenant in the KuK regiment. He participated in World War I and came into contact with Zionism as a soldier. There were other Jewish officers in the army, mostly from the Austrian half of the Monarchy, who had come into contact with Zionism earlier. Simon participated in the first big Zionist meeting in 1918, in which my father, charged with propaganda, and my other uncle Marci, charged with defense, also participated. This was the rebirth of the Jewry. Simon's future wife also came from the rabbinic family of the Paneths, she was called Ilus Paneth. Around 1922 Ilus' father, Herman Paneth, took his whole family, bought some animals and a prefabricated house and emigrated to Israel. Ilus and Simon also went with them. Herman took the prefabricated walls made in the factory in a train, then in the boat; he engaged some men, of course, to help him with the transportation. He arrived in Israel and was among the first people to found Givat Adah. This was a moshav, private property because they bought the land for it. [The moshav is a village community, in which, as opposed to the kibbutz, people own their homes and own land and can make decisions about their land independently, but at the same time, members of the moshav run the farm together and mutually help each other.]

They weren't very fortunate with the land. Coming from Transylvania, they thought that black soil was good soil, whereas in Israel red soil is usually the good soil. Black soil is usually marshland, and malaria was widespread in the region. At first they had a very hard time: the moshav wasn't going well, partly because they didn't know the climate, and partly because malaria was spreading so fast that they used to put salt on one side of the salt-cellar and quinine on the other, and they put quinine in food to avoid the shivers. Moreover the animals they took with them to Israel couldn't adapt well to the climate unfortunately and they soon died.

Simon had two children, Yitzchak and Juda [Yehuda], both born in Israel. They were sabras, that is, natives who were already born in Israel. Simon's wife came home with one of the children in the 1930s and stayed in Noszoly for a while. It wasn't easy to pay for a boat ticket, so only one of the children, who was ill, came. They were told in Israel that if they wanted to keep the child alive, they should take him to a different climate for some time. I think they spent about a year and a half here. We realized that water must have been a big problem in Israel because when the child saw a can of water, he put his arms around it and started shouting, 'All this water is mine!'. Later they returned to Israel and they were there during World War II, and both children served in the Jewish army after the war. The older one, poor Juda, died tragically on a lorry in the 1970s: they were taking boxes full of oranges, the rope broke during the loading, a box fell on him and he died. His younger brother, Yitzchak, is a farmer; he lives in Givat Adah and has three children.

Piroska Sporn was two years older than my mother. She married a Sporn but they were not related. Her husband was called Asher Seilig Sporn. He worked as a clerk in the Dermata factory and died quite young, in the 1930s. [Editor's note: The Dermata leather and shoe factory, owned by Dr. Mozes Farkas and Jozsef Farkas, was one of the most famous leather businesses of Kolozsvar, it was the predecessor of today's Clujana shoe factory.] Piroska's husband is buried here in Kolozsvar, in the old Jewish cemetery, which was the cemetery of the Orthodox Jewish community at the time. Piroska graduated from secondary school and also worked as a corset-maker. The Sporn girls learnt the trade of corset-making after finishing school but they didn't have a store in Kolozsvar. As far as I know, they worked in Aunt Piroska's apartment, since her husband died so young, they had their corset salon in one of the rooms. She had a daughter called Shulamit and two adopted sons from her husband's first marriage; she had to support them as well, so that's why she started making corsets. I think she left for Israel in 1935 or 1936. There she ran a corset salon in Haifa with her sister Lea, who had emigrated earlier. The salon was called Gracia. As far as I know, there's a diner in its place today but the name Gracia can still be seen on the façade, it hasn't been taken down. Poor Piroska died in 1948 or 1949.

The Jewish name of the next sibling, Marci Sporn, was Moshe. I think he was born in 1900. He was younger than my mother. He also graduated from commercial secondary school. He was drafted in the last or penultimate year of World War I and became a lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian army. He demobilized after the war and stayed in the parental house in Noszoly and rented an estate there. His wife was Jewish, she was called Eli and I think she came from Somkut. They didn't have any children. He was religious in the sense that they lit candles on Friday night, he didn't work on Saturday, they always had challah and performed Havdalah at the end of Sabbath. Unfortunately they were deported from Noszoly in 1944. My aunt died in the concentration camp in Auschwitz, while Marci, who worked at a station near the camp died during a bomb attack – as we learnt from others later. So, they didn't come back. Marci's wife had a sister, who lived in Szamosujvar; her husband had an oil-press; they also died during deportation. Her younger sister was the only one from the family who survived the war, she lived in Bucharest during the war and her husband was called David. They emigrated to Israel after the war and have already died. Their son, Laszlo David, was a university professor in the Technion [Institute of Technology] in Haifa.

Lea Sporn was born in Gerend, she was a spinster and also emigrated to Israel. When she arrived in Israel, she had no other possibilities, and also joined in the corset salon. She managed to save some money from this, took out a loan and bought a plot of land with a three-bedroom single-story

house and a very nice garden on it, next to the Technion in Haifa. This happened before the war and she had to pay the installments during the war, but money lost its value then, so in the end she got the place quite cheap. At that time this district was on the outskirts of the city, the hyenas came in among the houses; today it's one of the most elegant districts of Haifa. Lea worked in one salon with her sisters in Haifa, and each one of them had their own tasks. She was mainly involved in the commercial side of the business, she dealt with taxes. She was quite old when she died around 1975. I remember that their salon was quite close to the Arab quarter and they had quite a lot of Arab clients. The store was open when Palestine was still under the British Mandate, so the 'more important' English ladies used to go to their salon and order their corsets from them.

Helen Sporn worked as a clerk in Kolozsvar. My grandmother lived together with Helen and Magda until she left for America, they maintained her. Helen was two years younger than my mother, she married Janos Antal, the son of Mark Antal, the director of the Tarbut, who was an economist and poet. He was a member of the illegal Communist Party in Hungary and they went to live in Pest. They lived in Pest and in France for some time, then at the end of the 1930s, her husband was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison. After his term in jail was over, he was taken to forced labor in Ukraine and he died there of typhus, if I remember well. Mrs. Janos Antal was in hiding in Pest during the Holocaust and survived. She had a cousin on her mother's side called Magdel, who had a rubber and corset factory and my aunt worked there as a clerk. After World War II my aunt worked as a secretary at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for many years, and she also did some research on the history of literature. She died in Pest in 1971.

The youngest sibling was Magda Sporn, her nickname was Nanny. She was a clerk in Kolozsvar. She married Bela Simon, a graphic artist, whose family was from Kolozsvar. Bela had a sister as well. All three of them, his father, mother and sister, were killed in Auschwitz. Magda left from France with her first husband around 1938. During World War II she looked after orphans in Antibes, in the south of France, where she worked as a teacher in an orphanage. In France her husband was drafted at the beginning of the war and he was taken prisoner. I think he managed to hide the fact that at he was Jewish, and he survived captivity. After the war they returned to Paris and divorced, and Magda married my father's younger brother Valter Gruber, with whom she went to New York and later, in 1969, to Israel. She lives in Haifa today. She is my last living relative from both my father's and my mother's family. Magda has a daughter called Adu, who is a university professor in Canada; she teaches sociology, I think.

My grandmother Sara lived with her daughters, sometimes with Magda, sometimes with Helen in Kolozsvar and sometimes with us in Brasso; she left for Israel in 1936. Lea was the first to leave, Piroska followed her with her daughter, and my grandmother left after them. I think that they emigrated because of economic reasons. My grandmother was very religious, but she didn't force her religiosity on anyone else. She came to us and noticed that we didn't have a separate salt-cellar for meat and diary dishes. When you have a meat dish, you have to put one salt-cellar on the table and when you have diary dishes you have to use another one. For example, if one had potato soup with milk, one had to put salt in it from the salt-cellar for diary dishes. We didn't have a separate salt-cellar for this in Brasso. My mother told me later that my grandmother had noticed this but she didn't want to insult my mother, so she sent the servant to buy one and told her: 'Go tell the mistress that you broke the salt-cellar and have to go and buy a new one'. And she didn't say to my mother, 'How come, my daughter, that you don't have a salt-cellar for diary dishes!?' My

mother told me another story: my grandmother was sitting in the garden in Haifa – there was a nice flower garden in front of the house, I saw it later, too – and a missionary came into the yard. She welcomed him, offered him coffee or tea and said, ‘I respect your religion, I ask you to respect mine, too; we can talk about anything you want, but let’s not talk about religion. Everybody should stay with the religion they were born with.’

Growing up

My mother, Erzsebet Sporn, finished the Marianum secondary school in Kolozsvar, married my father at the age of 22 in 1924 and they settled in Brasso. They were married by a rabbi but I am not sure whether it was in Kolozsvar or Brasso. I know that they were on good terms with the Neolog rabbi, Deutsch, in Brasso but we were Orthodox and our rabbi was called Sperber. My older sister was born in 1925, one year after they got married, and I was born in 1926. My mother was a housewife for some time. In the summer they swapped the children, as they said jokingly, and either I and my sister came to Kolozsvar and spent the summer with Aunt Piroska, or her daughter came to us to Brasso for the summer. Or my uncle Valter’s three children stayed with us in Brasso in the summer. I remember a humorous incident. In the 1930s we already had a bathroom in Brasso. Old apartments had usually been built without a bathroom but later part of the apartment was converted into a bathroom. It was easier for my mother to wash me in the bathtub rather than in the washbasin; she put me in the tub, put soap all over me, opened the shower to wash the soap off and said, ‘There you go, you are finished, son’. When I arrived in Kolozsvar my aunt told me in the morning to go and wash myself. And I told her, ‘Aunt Piroska, I don’t usually wash myself.’ Then she realized that I really didn’t wash myself because I took a shower in the bathtub every morning.

At the beginning, in the 1930s, we rented an apartment near the railway station. From there we moved to Hosszu Street, into a quite big single-story house, where we had three rooms, I think. The house also had a garden. Then we moved into the center of town, to one of the main streets of Brasso. It was an old house, built in typical Saxon style – it was a long house, which extended far back from the street and its entrance opened onto the street. A law was passed in the 1930s and my father’s business wasn’t going that well after that. So my mother opened a corset salon on the ground floor because my father’s salary was no longer enough to ensure a comfortable life. We always lived on a middle-class level. They didn’t pursue this corset making because they liked it or because they were so eager to work, but because it was necessary to support the family.

The corset salon opened onto the street. The entrance to the house was next to it and on the other side of the entrance there was a tailor’s shop, the workshop of a Hungarian tailor called Szabo. The forefront of the corset salon was the shop itself with a counter, where the materials were kept and where the products were sold. They were usually three, my mother, one worker skilled in corset making and one apprentice. They were all Jewish and I know that they were always relatives, for example, the daughters of our second cousin. The girls usually stayed one or two years until they learnt the trade. There was a long porch with paneling on the first floor, and the entrance to our apartment was there. We had a hall, a kitchen, a bathroom, a toilet, a bedroom for my parents, a big dining room, two more bedrooms and a balcony. There was a girl called Szeren Sporn – she wasn’t a relative – who worked in my mother’s workshop for several years and she lived with us in a separate room for quite a while, until she got married.

A couple called Hanko lived in a one-bedroom apartment on that floor for quite a long time. The husband was a lawyer but he didn't take an oath on the Romanian State in 1918 and he couldn't work as a lawyer any more, so they were very badly off. [Editor's note: After 1918 state officials and civil servants had to take an oath on the Romanian State, many people refused to do so and lost their jobs as a consequence.] We gave them soup for years and they lived on that. I remember little details, for example that the lady, who came from some noble family, cared much about her looks and spread egg white on her face to avoid wrinkles, and I saw Auntie Hanko with egg white on her face on some mornings.

We always had a Hungarian servant, we even had two for a while, but we usually had one. We had a kosher household in the sense that the servant took the farm stuff [the poultry] to the yard of the synagogue once a week and had it killed there. The shochet worked in the yard of the Orthodox synagogue. The Neologs had their own shochet but it wasn't kosher enough for the Orthodox, so they had their own shochet. There were two butchers, one was called Zelig, we bought beef at the kosher butcher shop from him, but we also ate a piece of ham or Bologna sausage on a piece of paper at home. We didn't buy pork to roast, but we ate ham or salami on a piece of paper.

We had a traditional Transylvanian Jewish cuisine at home. Meat soup has quite an important place in Jewish cuisine, although not only Jews make it. We always had meat soup, usually made from beef or poultry. I remember that I was especially fond of semolina dumplings, which were usually cooked in meat soup. We were very fond of beetroot soup as well, which was sour beetroot soup with bits of warm potato in it. Beef was cooked – and as beef is rather stringy, it had to be cooked for a very long time to become tender – and then it was roasted. Roast beef was a favorite dish among Jews, whereas Christians didn't really prepare this dish. I could talk about many dishes, but I want to describe only two specifically Jewish dishes.

The first was Zwiebel und Eier, egg with onion, which was usually served as a starter. Hard-boiled eggs and some onions are grated together with a little beef or poultry liver and all this is mixed with a little goose fat – Jews were very fond of cooking with goose fat. The whole thing became a yellowish-brownish paste, which was eaten as a starter. The second typical dish was the cholent, which could be made in different ways. We made it in the Transylvanian way, so we obviously put some beans, as well as some poultry – usually goose – in it, and cooked it thoroughly with various spices.

There was a Jewish baker called Malek, if I remember correctly, we took the cholent to him in a pot around noon on Friday and he put it in the oven for a few hours after he had baked the bread. This gave the cholent an especially nice flavor. We went to get it before Sabbath arrived, that is, on Friday, because generally the baker didn't work on Saturday, the shop was closed. As long as we had servants, it was their job to go and pick it up, and when we didn't have one any more, my sister, I or my mother went to pick it up. We had these very sweet special cakes made with honey and walnut especially at Purim, which I've only eaten at home – my mother made them, but I don't know what they were called. All better-off Jewish families made hamantashen, this triangular millet pastry with jam called Haman's ears. My grandmother always made so-called sour-cream scones, small sweet scones – I don't know if this is a specifically Jewish sweet – which I liked very much.

Another thing I remember is that in the fall or at the beginning of the winter, we bought a lot of geese, baked the meat, melted the fatty skin and put it into enameled pots. I remember that we

always had two or three such pots with goose fat in them in our larder. Part of the meat, especially the breast and the legs were separated from the bones, seasoned with pepper, salt and paprika, fastened onto two sticks and smoked. This was smoked goose, the Jewish salami, which we ate during the winter. And we also made 'Jewish bacon'– the fatty part of the goose or duck was cut off, marinated with some garlic and paprika and then chilled. In the winter we put it under the snow in the yard for a few hours and it became so chilled that it was as hard as pork bacon. In many families they killed ducks, not only geese.

I remember another specifically Jewish dish that Jews liked to eat very much – this is roasted liver. If someone managed to buy a good goose with a liver weighing at least half a kilo, the word spread from mouth to mouth. We usually bought poultry from the villagers. They came into Brasso – the weekly market was usually on Friday – and we bought the poultry on the weekly market. If we knew the villager, he brought the poultry home. But we usually bought food, and not only the poultry but vegetables and other products as well, on the market on Friday. When we had to buy heavier stuff, my mother took the servant with her. I didn't like to go to the market and even today I don't like it. I do it if I have to and I also did it back then to help her but I don't like to bargain and cannot really do it well. I always paid the first price the villager told me and they kept telling me: 'You buy the most expensive food'.

Brasso is a potato-producing region and we ate quite a lot of potatoes. I remember that at the beginning of the fall farmers, usually Hungarians or Saxons, went around the houses and brought two to three kilos of potatoes in several little sacks and we could choose which type we wanted. And we told them, 'Bring 50 kilos of red potatoes, 30 kilos of white potatoes' – there was the so-called roll potato, which was very tasty fried in oil. They settled the day and the farmer appeared on that day and brought the potatoes on a cart, because back then one bought potato for the whole year, not just half a kilo, like today. We always had a cellar to our apartments and we kept the potatoes in the cellar.

We always needed a good cellar because gas was installed in Brasso only towards the end of World War II and people heated their houses with wood, and they needed to keep the wood somewhere. This was a financial problem, on the one hand, and it involved some work, on the other, because we had to go to the wood warehouse before the winter – there were large wood warehouses at the time. We bought wood by the meter and chopped it with a wood-chopping machine; those who had money paid a man to chop the wood and told him that he should chop bigger pieces for the tile stove and smaller pieces for the kitchen stove. We always did this at the beginning of the year. Until I was older, we always had someone to chop the wood, usually with a wood-chopping machine. From about the 1940s on, when I was already 14 or 15, I chopped the wood, because I knew already that Mother needed so many smaller pieces of wood and so many bigger pieces. They chopped the wood in the yard and took it into the cellar and then up into the apartment. The portions were set, one basket of wood for the tile stove and two baskets for the kitchen stove.

Our religious life

We observed the traditional holidays. My mother covered her head with a kerchief on Friday night. The lighting of candles on Friday night was a tradition. They brought in the two candlesticks, my mother lit the candles and then benched, that is, she recited a blessing over the Sabbath candles. [Editor's note: The grace after meal is called benching, so Laszlo doesn't remember correctly the

name for the blessing.] My father recited a blessing over the wine and the challah, which wasn't called barkhes in our family, but kajlics [a variant of the Hungarian word for challah, which is kalacs]. My father and I didn't go to the synagogue every Saturday. When I went to a non-Jewish school, we also had classes on Saturday and my father usually worked on Saturday, too. But we observed the traditional Friday rituals on Sabbath and we had better food on Saturday, we had cholent and the so-called salz fish. This is boiled salty fish in aspic, which we called zultz in Yiddish. Another Jewish specialty is gefilte fish, which translates as stuffed fish, but which is in fact more like ground fish; it has a sweetish flavor because it's served with a sweet sauce. My mother did salz fish usually, which has become a great delicacy for me. We usually had cholent for Saturday lunch. As we weren't that strictly religious, my mother warmed it, I think, but I am not a 100 % sure. The Havdalah prayer, the prayer marking the end of the Sabbath, was said over a wide braided candle made from a white and a blue candle, and they poured a little bit of strong brandy on a tray and lit it, but I cannot really tell you why – it was a tradition. This was what took us back into the weekdays. I saw this done for the first time in my life at my uncle's place in Noszoly in the 1930s, my father didn't do it at home. I wasn't really interested in these things, I just liked the purple flames because my eyes were drawn to them. But they never explained why they did it or what exactly was happening.

At Pesach we held two seder nights – they were exactly the same, apart from the fact that the second seder was called seder sheni [second in Hebrew] and we didn't have roast meat on that night. We had two seder nights because they said that since the Jews had been dispersed from Israel, they didn't know exactly when Pesach should be held, so they held it twice rather than not to hold it at all by mistake. We had special Pesach dishes, which we brought down from the attic. We didn't have any bread, only matzah for eight days. I don't think that collecting the breadcrumbs in the house was such an important ritual for my father or my mother, it was just part of the tradition. Just before Pesach arrived, we collected two last morsels and burnt them in the stove. (We heated the apartment with wood until 1943, as gas was installed in Brasso then. I'm also a gas fitter, among other things.) My mother learnt how to make charot [charoset] – this mixture of apples and walnuts, which symbolizes the material from which the Jews made bricks in Egypt [the mortar they used in the constructions] – from her mother, just as her mother had learnt it from her mother, so it was passed on from mother to daughter. She also knew how the tip of the wing of the poultry had to be roasted a little more than usual to symbolize the offering of the sacrifice in ancient times. [Editor's note: In fact it is not the roasting itself but the piece of meat with a bone in it that symbolizes the festive sacrifice performed in the Temple. The piece of meat – usually a chicken leg or chicken neck – is straight, which symbolizes the fact that God liberated the people of Israel with 'his hands stretched out'.]

In my father's family it must have been my grandfather who led the seder night; in our family it was my father. It is always the youngest member of the family who asks the so-called four questions [the ma nishtanah], which go like this, 'Why is this night different from all other nights?'. As I was the youngest, it was always my job to ask the four questions. I learnt the ma nishtanah from my father. I think that he read them out to me several times and I memorized them. I had three tasks to perform: first, I had to participate; second, I had to ask the four questions; and third, I had to steal the afikoman and then give it back. Of course, the afikoman was placed on the table for me to hide. [Editor's note: It is usually the adults, who hide the afikoman, but in Laszlo's family it was the opposite, because the child had to hide it.] Because the seder ritual couldn't be

concluded without the afikoman, the person who hid it came and there was some kind of a bidding, I said that I would give back the afikoman if they gave this or that in return. I usually hid the afikoman behind the back of the chair or went out of the room and hid it among the books. I usually asked for some toy – a toy car – or a book for it, and when I was older, I asked for a watch or something like that. Seder was very intimate, as the entire family got together at these times. My father put on his kitel, in which he got married. Another Pesach custom was that the seder leader sat in an armchair or on a bigger and more comfortable chair, and a cushion was put on the chair, which symbolized that he was the master, and he was free to do whatever he wanted – this was a symbol of comfort and freedom. On seder night a basin was brought so that he wouldn't have to get up and go out every time he had to perform the ritual of hand washing; the basin was placed on a chair together with a pitcher, from which he could pour water to wash his hands. Everything was done according to the rules.

Before the 1940s when we were going to the synagogue on seder night, we noticed Jewish soldiers in uniform. Jewish soldiers could still join the Romanian army, but they were only given two or three days off and they couldn't go home. So they came to the synagogue in their army uniform and stood there during the service. When they left the synagogue, they were usually invited by families to join them for the seder night, so none of the soldiers was left there without being invited to a Jewish family. When the seder night was over, they stayed there until the morning. I don't remember any soldier in particular but I do remember that quite a lot of people came to us later, during World War II, when they were passing through Brasso on their way to forced labor. My parents gave them food and clothes.

We went to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. My mother and my father fasted on Yom Kippur – I was only a child then. On Sukkot we didn't have a sukkah at home, I don't remember my father building one. We went to the synagogue and prayed with the etrog and the lulav, these branches braided together, which one has to hold during the prayer, but we didn't have a sukkah. I knew what a sukkah was because when I worked as an electrician and gas fitter, I often installed electricity in sukkot. The owner of the company – an electric and radio mechanic company – where I was an electrician apprentice was a religious Jew named Stern and he always erected a sukkah on his balcony.

During Chanukkah we lit one candle more every night. We had a chanukkiyah and we lit that. We usually invited some children over and five-six of us sat down to play with the dreidel; I still have the spinning top that we used. There are four letters on the spinning top, which has to be spinned. I cannot remember which letter represented 'get', 'give', and 'you don't get anything'. [Editor's note: The four letters on the spinning top are 'nun', 'gimel' 'hey' and 'shin', which stand for the sentence 'Nes gadol haya sham', that is, 'A great miracle took place there'. The 'nun' stands for 'you don't get anything', 'gimel' stands for 'get all', 'hey' stands for 'get half' and 'shin' stands for 'give'.] We played for small candy, they were the stake. Adults didn't really play this game.

On Purim there was usually a concert in the Redut, which was originally a big concert and dance hall. They usually organized a fancy-dress ball for children there; I remember that I was once dressed as a boot-maker. The adults had a Purim ball in the evening but I have never been on their ball, so I don't know whether they also dressed in fancy dress or not, but I remember that the children did. It didn't matter here who was Orthodox and who was Neolog. The difference was more apparent in the synagogue because the Orthodox were more traditionalists. The poorer stratum

was Orthodox and the wealthier stratum attended the Neolog synagogue. The Neolog synagogue was one of the few synagogues which had an organ and in the interwar period the Jewish choir was led by a non-Jewish musician for quite a long time. The Jewish elementary school and the rabbi's apartment were built next to the Neolog synagogue. When the legionaries 9 occupied the temple in 1940 or 1941, they wrecked it and even stole the organ pipes. They turned the Jewish school into a dormitory for legionary students and evicted Armin Deutsch, the Neolog rabbi. (His two sons had emigrated to Palestine before World War II. One of them became a well-known biologist in Israel and all I know about his other son is that he served in the Jewish brigade of the British Army in 1943-44. He visited his father after 1944.)

My father had a tallit and phylacteries. I didn't really see him pray at home but he prayed in tallit and phylacteries in the synagogue on Sabbath. He was very well acquainted with the Jewish traditions: he had spent six or seven years in cheder, he knew all the prayers by heart and sang very nicely. He usually recited the prayers with a melody and I still remember for example what melody he used on the two seder nights. I didn't have to study these melodies, I had imbibed them from infancy. I heard them every year and learnt them forever. I still remember, although I must have been only 12 at the time when I was at my uncle Marci in Noszoly, what song he sang about the end of Sabbath on Saturday night. I listened to it and I somehow absorbed it. I spent about a month in Noszoly during the summer vacation. There's a lake between Cege and Noszoly, the Lake of Cege, where carps come from today, because there is a fish farm there. It was very nice because we went to the lake on foot or on a horse-drawn cart – they lived some 4 km from the lake. I went to Noszoly with my sister and I usually took along a friend or two from Brasso to make my uncle happy. He didn't have any children and he loved children – and, I'm not being ironic – he really liked to have the noise of children in the house.

We usually went from Brasso to Kolozsvar and then on to Noszoly; my parents put me and my sister in charge of someone who took us to Kolozsvar. Until 1938, as long as Uncle Valter lived here, we spent a week or two with him and until my aunt Piroska left for Israel, we spent one or two weeks at her place. Then my uncle or my aunt took us to Szamosujvar by train. When we were older, my uncle took us to the station but he didn't take the train with us. It wasn't a problem: we got in the train and got off in Szamosujvar. The father of my aunt Margit's first husband had a workshop, which was incorrectly called a soda water factory. In reality it wasn't a factory but two machines for filling bottles with a worker who filled the bottles with soda water. Sometimes we stayed there and waited to be picked up, at other times the horse-drawn cart was already there when we got there. Later we took a bus to Noszoly, which was 24 kilometers from Szamosujvar. Our last trip to Kolozsvar together was in the summer of 1940, just before Transylvania was handed over to Hungary [this was the so-called Hungarian era] 10. It was announced on the radio and it was an open secret that the Hungarians would occupy the territory. That's when we went to Noszoly for the last time, and that was our last meeting with Uncle Marci Sporn and Elli. I still remember that we returned home from Kolozsvar under horrible conditions. The trains were terribly packed because they were the last ones to go from Northern Transylvania to Southern Transylvania before the Hungarians occupied Kolozsvar. We got into the compartment and then we couldn't go out until we got to Brasso, it was simply impossible to walk down the corridor. The only other train I remember packed like this was when I was going home from the lyceum in Bucharest to Brasso in 1944 and 1945.

In Hungary there was official anti-Semitism [that is, there were anti-Jewish laws in Hungary] 11, which went back to a longer time than in Romania, but my parents didn't think that the Hungarian situation was any better. Older Jews, people a generation older than my father, were reminiscent, of course, of the good old Franz Joseph times, saying that 'things were better under Franz Joseph', because Franz Joseph was a good emperor from a Jewish point of view. One part of our larger family was in America and the other in Israel, the only closer relatives who were left in Noszoly were my uncle and my aunt. We talked it over in the family whether it wouldn't be better if I and my sister came to live in Kolozsvar, as there was a Jewish lyceum here and we could attend it, but we didn't actually agree on doing it. Later on, towards the end of the war Jewish refugees started to arrive in Southern Transylvania from Northern Transylvania, who told us about the deportations, so we didn't really feel like going to Hungary any more.

My school years

My sister is called Judit Gruber and she is one year older than I. Looking back now, I can see that she could always think more maturely than I, although there's only a very small age difference between us. She helped me a lot in my studies both in elementary and secondary school. When she was in first grade, I was still in kindergarten, and when I went to first grade, she was already in second grade. But when I went to first grade, I could read and write well already, because I learnt it from her and my mother also taught me a little. This both had advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage was that I was extremely undisciplined because I was bored. When the teacher started teaching the alphabet to the others and told them to draw a line, I was obviously bored. I tried to talk with my neighbor and I remember that the teacher put me in a separate bench alone for a while so that I wouldn't have anyone to talk to.

I didn't go to cheder. There was a four-grade Jewish elementary school in Brasso, where the language of teaching was Romanian, but there were Hebrew classes, which were held by the director of the school, Kain, for a while. Religion classes were mainly held by rabbi Deutsch and in the framework of these classes he usually gave us lectures on Jewish history, Jewish self-esteem, arts, and Jewish writers. What's more, he also organized a youth service for the pupils of the school on Sabbath. The Jewish elementary school – which was officially called Scoala Primara Izraelita Brasov [Israelite Elementary School of Brasso], I think, and had only 4 grades – was located in the same street as the Saxon elementary school, we were separated by an alley-way only; we had blue caps and the Saxons had red caps. I went to this elementary school from 1933 to 1937. It happened very often that when we or they left school, we ran into each other and they picked a quarrel with us and we had fights. We must have been more vehement because we beat them up from time to time and then the director of the Saxon school came to complain to the director of our school. We got to know about these visits because the director used to call us and tell us not to fight with them again. So, there were such conflicts between us.

I was circumcised and I had my bar mitzvah as well. I went to preparatory classes to a bocher who studied in yeshivah – rabbis didn't deal with such trifles at the time. There was no yeshivah in Brasso, but there were always yeshivah bocherim who came to teach before finishing the yeshivah. The bocher taught me two basic things: one was the prayer that one has to recite before putting on the phylacteries and the prayer shawl. A boy puts on the phylacteries and tallit for the first time in

his life on his bar mitzvah and from then on he's supposed to put them on every single morning. The other thing he taught me was the pericope [weekly Torah portion], which falls on the Saturday when the bar mitzvah is held. One learns it basically by heart to be able to recite is smoothly in the synagogue. After the ceremony a tikkun, or celebration, is organized at home or in the entrance-hall of the synagogue. I had my bar mitzvah in November; at that time only the small hall behind the main hall of the synagogue was heated in the winter and I recited what I had to at the table there. Then we invited home my best Jewish friends and they brought presents, a fountain-pen, a propelling pencil, and mostly books, just like on a birthday. And there were cakes, of course. My sister didn't have a bat mitzvah, in the Galut in Brasso it wasn't a custom to hold a bat mitzvah.

There were Zionist organizations where the youth got together, the activities usually took place on Saturday afternoon. People from about the age of 14 were accepted into the organization, and there were lectures, dances and songs taught in each youth organization. There were several Zionist organizations of different streams – bourgeois, socialist –, and one could choose which stream to join. My father joined socialist Zionism, the Barisia organization, which included mostly students and Jewish intellectuals. There was a restaurant called Kahana and they usually gathered in the room of the restaurant on Saturday afternoon – I don't know whether they got the room for free or they rented it. There was a smaller old house behind the Neolog synagogue, which had several rooms and at one time the Zionist organizations had three or four rooms there. I belonged to the Hashomer Hatzair 12 socialist-Zionist organization.

My father had quite a big library for his time. He had books by Hungarian authors from Petofi 13 through Ady 14 to Kosztolanyi 15 and Babits 16, as well as German, English, Western authors fashionable at the time. He had fewer religious books. He had many Jewish history books, for example the History of the Jews by Dubnov. We had Graetz's work in 4 volumes, which was the most comprehensive work on the history of the Jews at the time. And we had other history books, not only Jewish ones. There weren't any books that we weren't allowed to read. There were only books that we read but didn't really understand.

We had our own books, of course; we grew up on the fairy tales of world literature, on the Grimm brothers. We knew and we were crying over the Paul Street Boys [by Ferenc Molnar] and we were in utter despair. We had bookshelves all along the wall under our widows in our last apartment. Our parents didn't recommend us books, I could just go and take any book off the shelf. It happened only during the winter when it was cold that my father would tell me, 'As you said that you were bored, you either go out and play or sit down and read'.

My parents also read and my father was very fond of reading dailies. They subscribed to both Hungarian and Romanian newspapers. Among the Jewish newspapers, we got the Uj Kelet, to which we subscribed, although it was published in Kolozsvar. Once a month we got the Mult es Jovo [Past and Future], the chief editor of which was Patai. There was a very good cigar store next to the lottery ticket office, where my father bought the so-called democratic journals every day. I remember that the Brassoi Lapok was a Hungarian daily of very high standard in my childhood; among newspapers appearing in Bucharest, my father always bought and read the political dailies Adevarul [Truth] and the Dimineata [Morning]. And we also got the Korunk 17, which was regarded as a progressive leftist paper at the time and was published here in Kolozsvar. I also remember seeing the Pasztortuz from time to time but we mainly got the Korunk. The Pasztortuz was also published in Kolozsvar but it was a more bourgeois Hungarian literary paper. I was brought up on

these newspapers.

Korona on Kapu Street was the most famous restaurant and hotel. I remember that before the war my father and mother dressed up elegantly usually on Saturday night and went to the Korona to have dinner and dance. I'm sure they had friends there. Even though they had kosher food at home, they would go out in the evening from time to time to have mixed grill and a glass of beer, in the Gambrinus restaurant, for example. Our Orthodox rabbi, Sperber, knew about all this but closed his eyes for a while, but he was a rather vehement rabbi and spoke out against them from time to time in the synagogue on Saturday, but of course, he didn't go as far as to mention names. But I think that it made no impression on my parents.

My parents didn't lead a very active social life. The two women's society, the Orthodox and the Neolog, often organized tea parties in the afternoon. My mother went to both because she had friends in both places. The ladies would gather and sit around the rummy tables and play rummy, drink a cup of coffee or tea, have some cakes and tell each other the gossip around town. My mother had Jewish friends mostly. After the war they no longer cared for rummy. There was also a social thing, they organized a soup kitchen for poor children usually in the wintertime. All poorer children who went there received food for free. It was organized the following way: every day different women brought food and also participated in preparing the meal. They volunteered to bring flour, meat and vegetables, and cooked the meal there. The Jewish community rented a bigger room, not far from the Orthodox synagogue, and they had the kitchen there. The kitchen had a cook and waitresses. My mother also participated in running the soup kitchen.

Usually there was a mikveh in every Jewish community with many people. Women were supposed to go to the mikveh at least once a month to be purified. But even if they didn't go every month or every week, the rabbi wouldn't marry them under a chuppah if they hadn't been to the mikveh just before the wedding. According to tradition the Jews erect four wooden posts with a canvas, a kind of canopy above it, next to the synagogue, and not inside it, and the wedding takes place under this canopy. As far as I know, the Neologs conduct the wedding under the canopy but inside the synagogue, while the Orthodox conduct the wedding outside the synagogue. I don't remember my parents attending the mikveh. We always had apartments with a bathroom, so we didn't need it for cleanliness and they weren't so religious as to go just because of the tradition. But my sister did go to the mikveh before she got married.

I would say that I was born at the same time as the radio and the telephone. Maybe telephones appeared earlier. I think that a year or two after my birth we already had a radio, which could pick up Pest, for example, whereas the long wave station of Botfalu didn't even exist yet in Brasso. We were among the first people in Brasso at the end of the 1920s that had a radio. At the beginning one had to crank the telephone, a woman picked up at the other end, you told her what number you wanted and she connected you. The radio was a novelty to the operators as well and they asked my father from time to time to put the receiver close to the radio so that they could listen to it, too. If I remember well, the first model was a mark called Nora, which was a tall circular model. Unfortunately we had to hand it in in 1942 when Jews were no longer allowed to own a radio, even though this radio remained with us only as an antique and we already had another big radio, a Standard. When the war started, the authorities forbade the Jews to have radios to make sure that they wouldn't make propaganda. We took one of the radios, the Nora, to the police station, but we knew that one had to plug something into a specific place in order to make the radio work. They

came to us saying that we gave them a bad radio because it didn't work. Then I went back and plug this thing in so that it would work. My father didn't want to hand in the Standard, as well, so he arranged with a Saxon bank clerk to take and hide it. The situation changed and since most of the Saxons supported Hitler during World War II, the Romanian authorities confiscated their radios after 1944. Then it was my turn to go to this Saxon in a carriage and took his two radios to hide.

There were very few cars in Brasso before World War II, and apart from some doctors, factory directors and bank managers nobody had a car. All the cars were driven by chauffeurs. The owner of the car didn't drive; he had a chauffeur for this. The father of one of my friends, Andris Weiss, was a wood merchant and had a car. And Stein, who was the representative of the textile factory of Arad in Transylvania, also had a car. There was this American mark called Buick and the Steins had a black Buick. He had a chauffeur of Italian origin, Angelo – Italian construction workers used to come to work here and some stayed for good, just like he must have done. Stein loved children and he often put the car at the disposal of his son and his friends, so on Sundays we would often go on hiking trips around Brasso – to Predeal, Sinaia, the Valley of Prahova – from morning till night. During the war the authorities confiscated not only the radios but also the cars and even bicycles of the Jews. I know that they took two bicycles from us.

After finishing the Jewish elementary school in 1937, I enrolled into the Dr Ion Mesota Lyceum. I had finished the 3rd grade there and the 1940/41 school year was about to start and I was going to start the 4th grade, when the Antonescu 18 regime passed the numerus nullus 19 for Jews and I couldn't continue studying in a Romanian school. My sister went to the Principesa Elena and she was going to start the 4th grade there. Both these lyceums were Romanian. A few months after I had been expelled, the Scoala de Meserii Evreasca a Comunitatii Evreiesti de Rit Occidental din Brasov [the Jewish Trade School of the Brasso Jewish Community of Occidental Rite] was founded. The 'Rit Occidental' [Occidental Rite] meant that it was Neolog. So, it was the trade school of the Neolog community offering the locksmith and locksmith-fitter trades to boys and tailoring and sewing to girls, and this school operated until August 1944. But it was a four-grade school only, we couldn't study for eight grades there, so we studied at home.

I finished one year in this school, I learnt the locksmith-fitter trade. It was a four-grade school and I stayed on for another year and a half and worked as an assistant to the master craftsman. Then I went to work at a gas-fitting company and worked as a gas-fitter for some time. There are still many houses, or more precisely, stoves in Brasso into which I fitted the gas burner. Gas was being installed in Brasso at that time and it was quite a popular trade and one could earn quite a good salary. We, Jews, couldn't earn as much as the others because we weren't allowed to work legally, but we could still make quite a good living, since everybody wanted to have gas installed as soon as possible, and the owners of apartments where we installed gas often courted us, so we were given a fine meal for tea and a tie or some other present when we finished the work. Among my friends, three of us worked as gas-fitters, two of them became doctors later and I became a journalist.

Parents usually hired private English and French teachers for their children. We had a madame Madleine, for example, during the war, who taught us French. We also had a teacher of Russian nationality, who taught us English at home; he was called Karabansky and I think he had been an officer in the tsarist army and military attaché in England for some time. He was a 'gibsomaniac', when he started to drink, we couldn't communicate with him for a week or two because he was

blind-drunk. I also had another teacher, a very tall thin lady, she was called Tolstoy and she was a member of Tolstoy, the writer's family. She taught me French and German. Jewish graduates of secondary school, who were good at arithmetic and grammar but couldn't go to university, also gave private lessons. But we had to take an exam every year. A law was passed at that time, according to which the examination period was open and one could even pass all the exams for four grades in one year. There were exams each month. I finished the 4th grade as a private student in Brasso.

During the war

During World War II voluntary defense organizations sprang up, partly organized and partly unorganized, especially after the incident when some young Hitlerjugend 20 boys stabbed two or three young Jewish boys in the back with a dagger on Var Street and they died, so a form of defense was created against such incidents. During the Jewish holidays guards were standing around the synagogue to make sure that elderly people and children weren't attacked.

There was a poorer Jewish stratum, mostly coming from Maramaros, the so-called shnorrers [Yiddish for beggar], who had an elegant way of begging. They played a very important role in Jewish society because few people had a telephone or radio at the time and these shnorrers went from village to village, from house to house and brought news from other places. When they went to a town, they went to the Jewish community and were told there who they could go to, who would give them something. Families gave them a place to sleep, gave them food for a day or two and wealthier people also gave them some money. They came to us, too, as to all petty bourgeois Jewish families – the stratum that I belonged to, too. Sometimes one or two came a year and they stayed with us for a day or two, but they didn't come very often. Then, during World War II, relatives came to stay with us – I don't remember their names – and this is when I got to know about them. They were drafted into Moldova or wherever they were to go to forced labor and they went via Brasso. On their way, one or two of them dropped in and stayed with us for one or two days. I remember that my father always gave them some boots and clothing to help them.

According to the anti-Jewish laws in Romania 22, Jews were only allowed to go to the market around noon, that is, at the time when the market-women had already sold the goods. Or, for example, when bread was rationed, Jews didn't get a ration card for bread. So, if you needed bread, you had to buy it from the baker or, to get it cheaper, you would do what we did: my mother kneaded dough once a week and we took it in a bowl to Var Street; there was a Hungarian baker there whose family name was Denes and he baked it for us. A point of interest was that when the bread was baked, he would strike off its thick crust and then we could take the bread home. At the same time, Jews weren't entitled to get sugar and flour, which were also rationed, so we had to buy these during the war. Rationed food could be bought cheaper with a ration card, which ensured that one had the minimum amount of bread and sugar, oil and flour every day. And Jews didn't get these. People were usually given the ration cards at their workplaces or at the town hall and they knew, of course, that Jews weren't entitled to get them. There was quite a vigorous black market during the war; everything was sold at a black market price, that is, at a much higher price.

My father was sorely tried by this mentally because he was a very conscientious person and always stressed that Jews as a people weren't inferior in any respect to any other people. But he could more or less ensure a financial stability for the family. He worked as a broker at the stock exchange

at that time and he also ran a lottery business. In the 1940s, Jews usually had strohmans – which literally means straw man – to work with. Strohmans were [non-Jews], and the business was under their name but in reality it still remained one's [the Jew's] own business. He lent his name to the business and one had to pay him a certain amount of money for it. That's how my family could ensure a living at that time.

After 1940, when the legionaries came into power in Romania, a legionary woman came into my mother's workshop one day and behaved as if she was the owner. She expropriated my mother's workshop and wanted to have everything. She took hold of the two Singer sewing machines in the workshop, the materials that were there – linen and rubber for the corsets – and simply occupied the shop. After the clash between Antonescu and the legionaries, in which Antonescu suppressed the legionaries' coup, the woman walked out of the shop. But it would have been useless to open the shop, because she took the sewing machines, the materials, the counter, she took everything and left the shop completely empty. We committed only one stupid mistake, namely that we didn't claim these things back from this woman after the war when it was possible. But we were so happy at the time to have survived the war that my mother said, ‘She can go to hell, let her run away!'.

We moved into a smaller two-bedroom apartment, which we rented. My parents lived in one room and my sister and I in the other; we had a bathroom, a hall and a kitchen. We struggled through the war in that apartment. During the war, Jews weren't allowed to hire servants. For a few months in the last year of the war we had a Jewish servant from Maramarossziget, if I remember well. Before the war, our servants were usually Hungarian girls from the villages around Brasso, but later the law forbade us Jews to have servants and house them in our apartment, as was the custom then. The place where the servant lived couldn't be called a room, a small part of the kitchen, where a bed and a small table could fit in, was divided off and she slept there.

During the war my father was drafted into forced labor and he worked for the railways, sometimes in Brasso and sometimes in Predeal. There was external forced labor outside the town of Iasi, Bessarabia 23, and there was internal forced labor [in the town or in its vicinity]. The authorities didn't profit much from Jewish labor because the Jews, especially those who were in internal and not external forced labor, didn't kill themselves over work. I also worked, for example, at the end of 1943 and in 1944. We stayed in town, we slept at home but we didn't get any food, money, clothes, boots or anything, and were forced to carry out whatever tasks we were given from six in the morning until six in the evening. There was a time when one could buy his way out of forced labor. My father managed to do this and he didn't work in forced labor for long. After 1944, he kept on working in the lottery office but later lottery was banned and he became a petty clerk at the municipal people's council.

I also worked for the railways and did street sweeping too, and with three friends – Weintraub, Dan and Eropataki – I deserted from forced labor in June 1944. We went to Bucharest determined to head further on to Israel. As far as I know, we were supposed to leave on board of the ship called Mefkure, but at that time there were quite a lot of Jews in Bucharest who had escaped from Hungary. It was to be feared that Hungarian citizens would be arrested, so we were told that we couldn't leave for the time being but should wait for another ship, as they had to secure places on the ship for the Hungarian Jews. [Editor's note: the Mefkure was sunk in August 1944.] We were waiting for another ship but 23rd August 1944 24 came and none of us went to Israel after that. All of us thought back then that communism would solve the Jewish question as well, and things would

be fine, and everybody would kiss everybody else on the forehead on an international basis and everybody would be happy, and it wouldn't matter any more who was Hungarian and who was Jewish. We thought, as we were told, that communism would bring paradise to earth for the working class. People believed it but gradually they all became disillusioned – some sooner, some later. Later on some went to Israel, others to Western countries to find a better living. I stayed for family and other reasons.

After August 1944, the communist youth began to get seriously organized. It's not true that Jews brought communism to Romania. Considering that out of 700,000 Jews 200,000 died and 400,000 fled communism and left the country, that's simply not the case. But this was the only party that ensured theoretically the equality of all the national minorities on the one hand, and its fight against Hitlerism meant survival for the Jews on the other hand, so that's why it had many Jewish members at the beginning. I joined the Party, its League of Communist Youth, very young, back in 1945, so I'm a good old soldier in this respect. I had two good Jewish friends, Izso Smit and Feri Ganz – they were a little older than I – who played quite a prominent role in 1944-1945, since they had already participated in the illegal League of Communist Youth, and I joined the Party under their influence. I don't know anything concrete about their illegal communist activities, all I know is that they were tried and were in prison during World War II.

Post-war

In 1945 I enrolled into the Jewish lyceum called Cultura in Bucharest – this school was the equivalent of the Tarbut in Kolozsvar. It was a very famous school, where famous Jewish teachers, who had been expelled from university education in 1940, taught. Among the teachers was Graur, who became one of the most famous linguistics professors in Romania, Professor Bick, teacher of Romanian language, Sufrin, the history teacher, and Mihail Sebastian, who was one of the best dramatists of the interwar period, whose memoirs, which appeared three years ago [in 2000], kicked up dust.

The classes were numbered, there was Cultura A and Cultura B, but there was no difference between them, they simply had to have this because the school was so big. Cultura A had classes from 1st to 8th grade, just as Cultura B, they just didn't have enough rooms and the teaching was done in two buildings. According to the educational law of the time, which was called Voitec Law 25 , after the Minister of Education at the time, there were permanent open private examinations, so one could finish several grades in one year and one could take an exam every month. I finished four grades in 1945. We took many exams but we had been studying the material for years as private pupils and we just did revisions for a month before the exams. That's how I managed to graduate from four classes in one year, so to speak; however, the exam didn't take place in the Jewish school but there was a graduation committee. As far as I remember, I took the exam in the Spiru Haret Lyceum, where the president of the committee was university professor of philosophy and poet Alexandru Clausian. We all passed the graduation exam although not with very high grades.

My sister took the private exams in a lyceum for girls in Bucharest. The Cultura had a lyceum for girls and she went there. She met my brother-in-law, Pali Grunberger, in the train; he was from Szeben and he was a radiologist and going from Brasso to Bucharest to take an exam, and my sister was also going to Bucharest. The Medical Faculty moved from Kolozsvar to Szeben during the

war and my brother-in-law finished the first year there in 1945. The Faculty moved back from Szeben to Kolozsvar in 1945 but because of lack of wood or for some other reason, teaching only started in the spring of 1946. Having graduated, my sister took an entrance exam in Kolozsvar in 1946. She was going to university when my parents put down their name on the list of people waiting for permission to emigrate to Israel.

My sister got married quite soon, already in 1948; they were married by Rabbi Dr Deutsch in the Neolog synagogue in Brasso. They moved in with Pali and went to university together. They also put their name on the list for emigration to Israel in 1949 and my sister's husband's parents also put down their name on that list. By the way, Pali Grunberger's father was one of the leaders of the Romanian Zionist organization. My parents left but unfortunately my sister and my brother-in-law were kept here for another 15 years without any explanation. They filed 25 memorandums until they were finally allowed to go to Israel.

After finishing Medical Faculty, my sister worked as a pediatrician and my brother-in-law as a radiologist in Maramarossziget. They have a son, Dan, who was born here in Romania and was about 7 years old when they left for Israel in 1966. Their daughter Yael was already born there, she is a sabra. Today Dan is an officer in the Israeli army, his wife is called Judit Roved, she is a professor of Arab language and literature, and they have three sons. Jael graduated in biology but works in a bank, her husband is also a biologist and they have two sons. My sister and her husband went to Tel Aviv first, and then they moved to Tiberias, where my brother-in-law was a chief radiologist in a hospital and my sister was a pediatrician in a policlinic. Later they moved to Jerusalem, where my brother-in-law was head of various doctor's offices. Sadly, my brother-in-law died two years ago in 2001. We talk on the phone with my sister from time to time, and we also correspond.

My father was fluent in Hebrew [Ivrit] and Yiddish; he corresponded with my grandfather in Yiddish, for example. As soon as it became possible to emigrate after the war, my father and mother emigrated to Israel in 1950. My father was 58 years old then. When my father made aliyah, he was already fluent in Hebrew [Ivrit], so he didn't need to take ulpan classes. He adored Hebrew [Ivrit], and he constantly perfected himself. When he arrived there, he bought a tape recorder from his first economies and he recorded everybody who spoke a nice Hebrew and he listened to their pronunciation on tape. His dictionary was always at hand. Sometimes he was listening to something on the radio and if he didn't understand a word, he would jump up and look it up in the dictionary. For a long time he worked as a clerk at a big construction company, the Solel Boneh in Haifa. My mother also liked it in Israel. When my parents, my sister and her family and other friends put down their names on the list for emigration, I didn't. I was the black sheep of the family; I stayed here for family and other reasons.

I graduated from secondary school in 1945, and went to the Medical Faculty in Marosvasarhely in 1946 and 1947, but I didn't like it there, so I transferred to the Faculty of History in Kolozsvar. I started journalism in 1948 and I've been doing it ever since.

Married life

I met my wife, Erzsebet Galfi, in 1949. There was a club called ARLUS at 1 Egyetem Street, where the editorial office of the newspapers Tribuna and Steaua and the headquarters of the Writers' Association are located today. It was quite a well heated place, at a time when places weren't well

heated in Kolozsvar. It was the club of the Asociatia Romana de Legaturile cu Uniunea Sovietica, that is, the Soviet-Romanian Friendship Association. As it was well heated, secondary school students who lived in badly heated dormitories or rented rooms usually spent their afternoons there. There was a very good library and a rather cheap buffet there, and one could also play chess and do what-not there. I used to go there, just like my future wife, and we met there. She was in the last year of the Unitarian Lyceum for Girls and she was a very pretty girl. I soon married her; we got married in August 1949. We went to the people's council with two witnesses – one was her classmate and the other her husband, a teacher – and after the wedding we invited them to have a beer and a Wiener Schnitzel in a restaurant, and that was it. My mother wasn't very pleased with my marrying a non-Jew. Although she had nothing against her as a person, only against the fact that she wasn't Jewish. My father kind of resigned to it, although he wasn't very happy either. But my mother said it openly, ‘Don't do this, my son!' Just like young people in general, I didn't listen to mother and did what I thought was right. Erzsebet enrolled into Bolyai University majoring in Romanian literature and language. She was still a student, in the 2nd or 3rd year, when our son, Vasile Gheorghe Grunea, was born in 1951.

I was still a student when I started writing articles on the subject of youth for the local paper of Brasso, the Drum Nou [New Way]. In Kolozsvar I met a quite well-known poet, Toma Gheorghe Maiorescu, who was also Jewish. He came to Kolozsvar from Resita – now he lives in Bucharest – and wrote several books. He worked for the Lupta Ardealului [Fight of Transylvania], a communist daily, which was at first the paper of the Kolozs county branch of the Party and later became the local daily. There was no other Romanian daily at the time. Maiorescu recommended me and the editor-in-chief invited me to work for them. I started writing for them and I was invited to join the editorial staff in 1948 and worked there until 1952. I directed the cultural part of the paper, that is, the publishing of book reviews, theatrical reviews and literature. But it was a daily, the main task of which was the propagation of the political line of the Party. I was still a university student at that time. I was sent to a higher school of journalism in Bucharest at the end of 1949 and in 1950. The school lasted for about three quarters of a year; it was an express school, where we had ten hours of lectures and seminars a day. After the school I went back to the Lupta Ardealului and worked there as the editorial secretary-general.

My name change coincided with journalism. At the beginning Vasile Grunea was a journalistic pseudonym, and later it became my official name as well, but I cannot say that I was forced to do so by anybody because it simply wouldn't be true. I had used the name Laszlo Gruber until then and I was even called Ocsi [Laddie] in my childhood. Those who know me from that time call me Ocsi even today. I have no idea why I chose the name Grunea and not another name.

Regional papers were also created in 1952: the county was divided into rayons [districts], so for example Des rayon and Torda rayon belonged to Kolozsvar but villages were also annexed administratively to Kolozsvar. Viata Noua [New Life] was started at that time in Topanfalva. They called me in 1952 and said to me: ‘A newspaper must be founded in Topanfalva and we thought of you, we appoint you editor-in-chief.' It was quite difficult because my son was only a few months old in 1952 and my wife was still a student, so I had to leave the family behind in Kolozsvar and move to Topanfalva. The only one good thing about it was that the newspaper was printed in Kolozsvar, so I was in Kolozsvar every week from Saturday morning to Monday noon. Monday noon I took the so-called mocanita narrow-gage railway back all the way from Torda up to Topanfalva.

[Editor's note: mocanita is a joking nickname for the narrow-gage railway in the Romanian vernacular.] It took me a few hours. I lived like this, commuting for a year. During these years I didn't experience any anti-Semitism directed against me in particular, I wasn't discriminated because I was Jewish. I actually remarked jokingly that they couldn't have found a ‘better Romanian' than me to be appointed to a pure Romanian region because Topanfalva is the region of Avram Iancu and Horea, Closca and Crisan, where apart from the neighboring mining region, Abrud, there were hardly any Hungarians. [Editor's note: Avram Iancu (1824-1872) was a leading figure of the Romanian revolution of 1848; Horea, Closca and Crisan were leaders of the Romanian peasant revolt of 1874.]

I moved back because they called me again and said that we would organize a radio studio in Kolozsvar. A man called Ludovic Ratiu came from Bucharest at the end of 1952 and worked in Kolozsvar for some time until he organized the radio, which started broadcasting on 15th March 1953. I was deputy editor-in-chief until 1959. As deputy editor-in-chief my task was as a member of the management, to listen to or read all materials before they were broadcast – live or from tape. The most important criterion was quality and the authenticity of news, which corresponded, of course, to the political line of the time. The news was written in Hungarian or Romanian and I had to listen to them; besides I also made many programs myself. I made countless interviews with famous intellectuals, there are still many, many tapes in the golden tape repository of the radio studio in Kolozsvar, and there are also many tapes there that were broadcast with my signature on them. I made interviews with many personalities at that time, for example with writers Istvan Asztalos and Istvan Nagy, poet Aladar Laszloffy, actors Gyorgy Kovacs and Mihaly Fekete among the Hungarians, and writers Agarbiceanu, Emil Isac and Aurel Rau among the Romanians. It didn't matter if we made an interview with a Romanian or a Hungarian personality. And of course when new people joined the editorial team, we had to help them. At that time they usually looked for worker-cadres, so they went to factories and chose some people there, brought them to the editorial office and it turned out after two, three or four months that one was suitable and the other four went back to their former workplace.

There was only one editorial team at the time: the head of the cultural editorial team was a Hungarian, Ferenc Kovacs, but there were Romanians in the team as well. The head of another editorial team, for example the agricultural editorial team was Barna, a Romanian, but there were Hungarians working there, too. So there was one editorial team but there were two separate broadcasts: there was a separate Hungarian broadcast and a separate Romanian broadcast. It didn't go like this that a news item was broadcast in Romanian and then in Hungarian but there was a separate Romanian broadcast and a separate Hungarian broadcast [where the same news item was broadcast in both languages].

There was no anti-Semitism directed against me at the radio either. Of course, one could hear whispers about why two Jews were the heads of the radio, because Lajos Racz was also Jewish. Lajos Racz Romanianized his name to Ludovic Ratiu, he had been an illegal communist. He was a doctor by profession but he had always worked in politics, he was a party activist here in Kolozsvar after 1944. At first he was working in the radio studio of Bucharest, but then in 1952 he was appointed editor-in-chief in Kolozsvar and was the director of the radio in Kolozsvar. Later he was transferred to the central radio in Bucharest. One could hear such voices but no one came up to me to say, ‘You stinking Jew, how come that you are the deputy editor-in-chief of the radio?', but we

were working in an atmosphere where some people were wondering why this or that person was in a certain position. Or there were some colleagues who made statistics of how many people were Romanian, Jewish and Hungarian in the staff and how many of them were in the management. So there were such manifestations in the background, but no one complained openly, you couldn't say things openly, like today. So, I can't say that there was no anti-Semitism, but communist ethics and morality rejected this in theory. And there was a law on national minorities, which condemned any manifestation of chauvinism, xenophobia and nationalism and imprisoned people for it; this law is still in force but no one keeps it any more.

In 1956 the atmosphere was quite tense at the radio because of the events in Hungary [1956] 26. It was quite difficult to make programs in Hungarian because Bucharest, that is, the center, kept asking us for materials condemning the counterrevolution. And there were few Hungarians, of course, who condemned the counterrevolution. So, it was a rather difficult situation, and on top of it, there was a strong wave of arrests; young Hungarian educational cadres from Bolyai University and secondary school students were mostly arrested, so the atmosphere was dense. It was difficult to get materials as well, and, although there's nothing to be proud of now, we still tried to minimize the amount of these materials. As people could get the broadcasts of the radio of Kolozsvar in Hungary as well, the programs had to be in line with Hungarian politics, so we broadcast materials that called upon people to stay and materials in which people who had went from Romania or Hungary to other countries, especially to capitalist countries, in the interwar period, described how hard it was to live abroad and how foreign countries didn't receive well the Hungarians. So, the atmosphere was like this a bit. No one from the radio was arrested, only one person, Zoltan Keresztes – who died since then – was advised to leave because of some statements that he had made in the radio.

The Tribuna, just as the Korunk, was started again thanks to the atmosphere that developed in 1956. There was only one Romanian literary monthly, the Steaua, at that time in Kolozsvar, so they decided that a weekly was needed, and the Tribuna was founded. At the same time the Korunk, originally founded by Gabor Gaal was started again. It was published anew from 1957 and the two papers worked in this spirit.

I was expelled from the Party in 1959 for the simple reason that I had been a member of a socialist-Zionist organization, the Hashomer Hatzair, between 1942 and 1945. They knew this because I put it down in all my CVs, I wasn't ashamed of it and I didn't hide it. And a resolution was passed, which stated that no one who had been a member of any other party could be a member of the Communist Party.

That's when I started working for the Tribuna, at first as a proof-reader, and later as an editorial secretary, and of course, I published poems, translations, reports on theater and fine arts, and interviews. [Editor's note: At that time all papers were communist.] As I learnt afterwards I had been quite popular and the paper was rather well liked. Unfortunately, there was a period when the paper was published under very difficult circumstances; it wasn't published at all for several months in the 1990s. I left the paper in 1990. It has continued since then, but there was a period when they simply didn't have any money and couldn't print it. The editors looked for jobs and worked for this paper for free, but there wasn't any money to publish it. The situation has been back to normal for about three quarters of a year, since 2002, although it isn't published weekly any more, but twice a month.

I started publishing in the Realitatea Evreasca [Jewish Reality] in the 1960s; it was called Revista Cultului Mosaic [Journal of Mosaic Faith] at the time and it was founded in the 1950s under Moses Rosen 27. Heim Rimer, who was the editor-in-chief at that time, asked me to write for the paper. I published two longer essays on the history of Hasidism 28, as well as an interview with Marcel Iancu, the world famous painter, who came from Romania originally, and I published all this under my Hebrew name Zvi ben Emanuel.

My mother came to visit for the first time in 1969. We hadn't seen each other for 19 years. My mother stayed with us for a month in Kolozsvar and she developed a very good relationship with my wife. Then we went to Brasso for a week because we had two cousins on my mother's side and their children who still lived there, and we stayed with them. And of course my mother went to see the houses we had lived in before. I went to Israel for the first time in 1970 and I saw my father for the first time since he had emigrated. All in all I went to see them at least ten times, I think, and I usually stayed for a month or two. My wife has never been because the ‘custom' back then was that one member of the family always had to stay behind to guarantee [that the family would not emigrate, since a family wouldn't stay abroad without one of its members.] They always invited her, too, but she said, ‘You should go to see your parents, it's more important for you.' They didn't invite us to stay for good, they only mentioned it when I was there and they were very diplomatic even then. It was especially during my first two visits that my mother tried to show me the whole country, so that I could see what was there with my own eyes, she didn't try to convince me, but she wanted to show me the reality. And she told me frankly that my wife, being a teacher of Romanian language and literature and having no other profession, would experience great difficulties in Israel in economic terms, but only in such terms.

The early Ceausescu 29 era was more open in some ways, they adopted in a way the Chinese saying that ‘all flowers should be allowed to blossom'. They allowed the names of such people to appear in the press as Blaga or Arghezi, which had been forbidden before. [Editor's note: Lucian Blaga (1895-1961): Romanian poet and philosopher; Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967): Romanian writer.] The names of progressive but not communist art critics from the interwar period, such as Comarnescu, just as that of Moisil, the still world-famous mathematician, appeared often in the press. Interwar writers, for example the Titans of the late 1930s, could be published more often, although the main line was still socialist realist literature, they propagated this and obviously reviewed such works. But as I said the good thing about it was that there was more openness in literature, as well as in the fine arts, and many things which hadn't been allowed in the fine arts before were allowed then.

We started to study again the abstract literature and abstract art, the avant-gardism of the interwar period, because it was obvious that Romanians, such as Marcel Iancu or Ilaria Voronca, played an important role both in the French and the Swiss avant-garde. The one question that was a taboo throughout the Ceausescu era was religion, because it was a big problem for both Ceausescu and the ‘lady' [his wife, Elena Ceausescu]. So, fine arts, for example, couldn't deal with religious themes, nor could we publish anything on religion in the paper. They went so far that there were some words, for example ‘Sir' or ‘Madam', which could only be used in a pejorative sense. Besides, there were long lists, of course, with the names of those who couldn't publish, or whose writings, if they were already dead, couldn't be published in the paper. As to foreign writers and especially Romanian writers living in emigration, there was a time when their works were

translated into Romanian and we could talk about them. But then if they happened to make a statement about the Romanian communist regime that wasn't positive enough, their names were put down on the list again and we couldn't publish them.

There was an old man, I. D. Musat – this was his penname, I think his original name was Dimoftache – who was a social democrat in his youth. He wrote historical novels as an elderly man and, as far as I know, he was prefect of Torda for some time right after 23rd August 1944. The Kolozsvar branch of the Writers' Association had a local party branch and all the communists from the editorial staff of all the literary papers, the Steaua, Tribuna, Utunk, Korunk, Dolgozo No and Napsugar, belonged there. The Party organized monthly meetings of the local party branch, which were attended by many people. They always discussed different issues, but at the end of each meeting they talked about problems, which weren't on the agenda. And what happened? They couldn't make this Musat keep quiet, he always told the meeting – and this is why there were so many people there, they came to listen to him – what news he had heard the previous month about Romania on Radio Free Europe 30 and he also asked questions like this: ‘If they say this or that, what is the truth then?' This was a funny thing at these meetings. Nothing happened to him, they didn't touch him, I think, because he was a former social democrat and prefect, so he was quite a well-known figure of the Social Democratic Party and the Romanian communists were trying to build links with foreign social democrats and they were afraid, I think, that Musat was known abroad. Or maybe they didn't take him seriously. He spoke at these meetings for a long time during the 1970s and then he didn't come any more; maybe he died, I don't know.

The control became tighter in the 1980s. When the boss [Ceausescu] or the lady boss [his wife] had their name day or birthday, for example, we were told how many photos and articles had to be published about them and in what spirit they should be written. And what was especially hard in the later years of the regime was that they weren't satisfied with the fact that we published the poems of unknown authors, but they insisted on having the best writers writing poems about them and singing their praises. At first they were satisfied with anybody but then they started demanding why this or that one wasn't writing about them. Some people refused saying that they were ill, or they hadn't been writing for years, or regretfully they couldn't write, or weren't worthy of writing such poems because there was something in their past, or whatever excuse they could find. It's easy to condemn better-known people today for writing such hosannas…, the youth today doesn't understand it, but I must add that there was enormous pressure on us at the time.

I didn't write such poems. I wasn't so bad that I would have had to write [hosannas] if I wanted my other poems published; and I wasn't in such a high position [or so well-known] either that they would have demanded why I didn't write any. And since I was involved with the editing of the paper itself, I didn't have to write such poems. Looking back, there were many editors who didn't agree with what was happening during the Ceausescu era – it doesn't make them heroes today, though. But this doesn't mean that they would have dared to publish their opinion.

From the 1980s on anti-Hungarianism and anti-Semitism became in fact more pronounced; for example, Hungarians and Jews who were in higher positions in different workplaces were laid off and Romanians gradually got into leading positions. This couldn't really be done in literary circles, there were always Hungarians beside the Romanians in the management of newspapers. It can be a long discussion to what extent writers and intellectuals of Jewish origin contributed to interwar and postwar Hungarian literature. There were Jews, for example, in the management of Utunk and

Korunk, Erno Gall 31 and Pal Soni at Korunk and Laci Foldes at Utunk. We don't think of them today as Jews any more: although they were Jewish by origin, they declared themselves Hungarian authors, who belonged to Hungarian culture. We must distinguish these people from the Hungarians and Jews who played a leading role in the party leadership, since they played this leading role as communists and not as Hungarians or Jews. I don't know Karoly Kiraly personally, but he was first secretary of the Party in Udvarhely and then he was transferred to Bucharest, so there were always some Hungarians in the leadership of the Party in the communist era. One cannot say that Laszlo Luka, for example, would have stood up more for the Hungarians just because he was a Hungarian from Szeklerland. Luka was the first mayor of Kishinev after 1940 when Bessarabia was handed over to the Russians. There was a Hungarian mayor in Kishinev! Although this whole Luka question is seen differently today. He was appointed there by the Communist Party as he had been an illegal communist. And later, in 1948, he was treated very badly and chased out by Gheorghiu Dej 32, who declared him a class enemy and said that he had been the servant of English-American imperialism back in the 1930s already.

The so-called Laszlo Luka – Ana Pauker – Teohari Georgescu group [Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group] 33 is basically unknown to young people today. In 1948-1950 Ana Pauker was Foreign Minister, Teohari Georgescu was Minister of Internal Affairs and Luka was Minister of Finance. They were expelled from the Party in 1952 as so-called right-wing and left-wing deviationists (‘deviatori de dreapta si stanga' – this was a special communist term), and each one was taken all over the country to tell everywhere what a bad lot they were and what harm they intended to do to the Party. It was a trumped-up affair, like the Rajk trial 34, in which Rajk was also charged with and made to confess of being the servant of English-American imperialism. Most communist trials in the country were show trials. Lucretiu Patrascanu 35 was Minister of Justice for a while [from 1945 until his arrest in 1948] but as Gheorghiu Dej considered him a rival, he convicted him on trumped-up charges, had him tried and then Patrascanu was hit on the head with a log and died. [Editor's note: It's only bluff that he was hit on the head with a log. In reality he was imprisoned from 1948 to 1954 and after the conviction of the Luka-Pauker-Georgescu group and Stalin's death, he was sentenced to death in a show trial and executed in 1954. The affair was brought to light only after Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's death in 1968 when Ceausescu started building up his position of power. The partial rehabilitation of Patrascanu served only to remove Ceausescu's rivals.]

I retired in 1990. The Fundatia Culturala Romana [Foundation for Romanian Culture], whose goal was to report on Romanian cultural life to foreign countries, was set up in Bucharest at that time and a Centru de Studii Transilvane, a research center, was founded here in Kolozsvar to study and popularize the history of Transylvania. To that end, they publish the Transylvanian Review in English and French four times a year. They also publish books. They invited me to work for them, and I worked as a technical advisor for a few years and participated in the editing of several books for them. From time to time some articles are published on the earlier and recent history of the Jews of Kolozsvar in the Realitate and I'm the coordinator of this and, if need arises, I bring things under control. I held quite a few lectures on Judaistics to Jews and Jewish youth, organized and advertised by the Jewish community. I participated in several national interethnic lectures and interethnic lectures organized abroad.

I will never denounce what I've done in life, what I've written and signed. I've always believed in what I wrote and I've never written falsehoods. There was only one thing, namely, that I stated half-truths, which unfortunately is the same as lies. What I mean is that I always wrote about the full half of the glass and never about its empty half. But, as I said, I assume full responsibility for what I did, and I did it of my own accord, no one forced me to do it and I never did any harm to anybody. I never denied that I was a Jew and I didn't change my name for this reason, but this is a very complicated issue. I put down in all my CVs that I had been a member of a Zionist organization, and I obviously couldn't have been a member there as a faithful Christian but only as a Jew.

One doesn't agree with everything of course, especially if he is an intellectual. And 1989 was obviously a relief, the time had finally come when you didn't have to live in duplicity any longer, saying one thing to your wife at home with the door locked [and something else at your workplace]. And saying nothing to the kid, lest he would blurt out something and both he and you would get into trouble because of this. Obviously, I felt a big relief that the time had finally come when you could be whatever you wanted to be and express things the way you wanted to express them. What had a very bad effect on me, however, was that I had hoped, like everybody else, that the change of regime in 1989 [following the Romanian Revolution of 1989] 36 would bring a radical and rapid turn in a positive direction, and unfortunately it brought negative developments in many respects. Nationalism, open anti-Semitism and xenophobia, and anti-Hungarianism especially, became much more emphasized. It was like a boiler that had been suppressed politically and then suddenly exploded after 1989, and this brought a great disillusionment to us.

I would have never believed that so many people who had lived side by side with you for so many years behaved differently and never told you ‘stinking Jew' in the face only because they were afraid or they didn't have the opportunity to do so. After 1989, it turned out from one day to the next that they weren't your friends but your enemies. One could hardly believe his ears when he heard what one or another person said, or some people even wrote, in which they showed themselves as ‘Hungarian-eaters' or ‘Jew-eaters', it was hard to believe that it still existed after 50 years of brainwashing. It shows that instincts are unfortunately stronger than common sense.

Since 1990, there have been articles in dailies in Kolozsvar, which I opposed in writing but I don't want to name the daily because I quite like the boy who wrote it and he is a rather good music critic. I answered him in a big article with the Latin saying, ‘Let the shoemaker stick to his last', because he defended Antonescu and doubted a little that the Holocaust had actually happened. I answered him, of course, in an article in which I dealt not so much with what he said but I proved with documents that he was wrong. There was another paper, where another article along the same lines was published; the editor-in-chief of this journal was actually a democrat and a very decent man, who had been in prison for some 10 years under the communists, and it wasn't him who wrote the article, but it was still published in his paper. I am not the kind of person who says that it's raining when someone actually spits him in the eyes. [Editor's note: Laszlo refers to the fact that he did not let such affairs pass uncommented.]

So, I dare to stand up for my truth with arguments, and it is important to debate because if you don't debate, some people may think that they are right. Although I have a feeling that it's like talking to a brick wall because those who don't believe that it [the Holocaust] happened, will continue to question it. Soon, we can talk about anti-Semitism without Jews in Romania. Because

how many Jews are there here? There are about 10,000 Jews left and what does it matter, a 10,000 Jews? The former Prime Minister, Petre Roman's father was a Jew, and what's more, his grandfather was a rabbi, but he considers himself a Christian, all the more so as his mother wasn't Jewish. But some people still bring this up, asking how a Jew could have become Prime Minister. So, there is intolerance here; when we start a discussion, it always comes up that one is a Jew or a Hungarian. The other big issue now is gypsies, that this or that person is a gypsy.

My wife knew that I was a Jew, she was a Unitarian, but both of us kept our own religion. We never discussed it with my wife that I should maybe become a Unitarian or she should convert. Although I have a feeling that if I had wanted her to convert to Judaism, she would have done it for me. But we never discussed this. Of course, we have had many, many Jewish friends and they all know that she is Hungarian and their attitude to her has been very good and her attitude to them likewise. We talk both in Hungarian and in Romanian in the family. We talked in Romanian for quite a long time because my wife was a Romanian teacher, she taught Romanian in three secondary schools and a lyceum here in Kolozsvar. She wasn't religious either, so my son wasn't raised in any religious tradition. My son knew, even before 1989, that his father was Jewish and his grandmother and grandfather were Jewish, and he has visited them in Israel, too. He knows the broad outlines of the history of the Jewry, but he doesn't know Jewish religious traditions. He only knows cholent, for example, from the canteen of the Jewish community.

My son graduated from a Romanian secondary school and joined the army because he failed at his first entrance exam to university. Then he took an exam to enter the Faculty of Law. While he was studying at the Faculty of Law, he worked as a technician and later as an editor at the Radio of Kolozsvar, and then he graduated from university. His wife is a Romanian from the vicinity of Des, she's a biologist. My son lived in Des for some time; he worked as a legal adviser there, and then he started working as a judge, first in Csikszereda and now in Kolozsvar, and he is the president of the court in Szamosujvar. He has two children. His son, Dan Emanuel Grunea, graduated from the Faculty of Law of Babes-Bolyai University this year, in 2003. His daughter, Maria Emanuela Grunea, graduated from high school this year. My son considers himself more Romanian than Hungarian. As his father is Jewish and his mother is Hungarian, he cannot deny his origins, but he is more part of Romanian society. He isn't circumcised.

At home we didn't observe traditional Jewish holidays, we didn't light candles on Sabbath. I didn't make a Pesach night [seder] ceremony for my wife and son, although I would have been able to do it. At Pesach I brought home matzah from the Jewish community for my wife and the kid, though. The kid knew what matzah was, but we also had Easter eggs at Easter because it was a tradition for my wife. We had a Christmas tree, that is, there was a duplicity concerning this at the time, because there was no Christmas tree under the communists, but they allowed the so-called Winter-tree and there was the so-called Father Christmas. And 90 % of the people decorated the Winter-tree before Christmas but drew the curtains tight so that it couldn't be seen from outside and they opened the curtains on 30th December, before the New Year's Eve of the Peoples' Republic, to pretend that they decorated the Winter-tree just before New Year's Eve.

The Jewish community invited me around 1969-1970, when Miklos Kertesz was the president. He was a lawyer originally. Otto Rapaport worked as a director at the Hungarian theater and he organized the cultural life of the community and he asked me to help. Later, at the end of the 1970s, he emigrated to Israel and was the editor-in-chief of the Hungarian newspaper, the Uj Kelet,

there for a long time. Nowadays, I give lectures about Jewish history and culture, work as a coordinator at the Romanian Jewish journal, which appears every month – I work mainly on the articles devoted to the Jewish history of Kolozsvar – and I'm a member of the leadership of the community, which means that they invite me to a meeting from time to time and ask me to give my opinion on various matters.

As to the definition of my Jewishness, it's like the saying in Yiddish: 'Shver zu zayn a yid', it's hard to be a Jew. So, it's a pleasure to be the son of a nation, which has a long and great history and at the same time it's a big burden because if you take it upon yourself to bear this history, you have to behave in a way that no one can say anything bad about you as a Jew – that's how I see it. If someone comes up to you and says that you should throw down your cigarette in the street, you mustn't do that, lest they would say that this Jew is dirty. It's not always a great pleasure. Another problem is that you who have a family tree that goes back to several hundred years and proves that you are at home here have to prove day after day that you belong to this land. It's a strange thing that it's you who have to prove after several hundred years that you are not a stranger here. That you have the same rights and obligations as all other people here.

Glossary

1 Tarbut Jewish Lyceum
Jewish high school founded in Kolozsvar/Cluj in 1920 and operating until 1927. The school was reopened in 1940. The staff consisted of Jewish teachers and professors who had lost their jobs in 1940 as a result of the anti-Jewish laws. Students of the school recalled that for some time in the beginning the teachers held university style lectures instead of regular secondary school classes. They did not have regular tests to give them grades as was common in ordinary high schools; and they addressed the students with the formal you as was customary at university. Many teachers and students of the school perished in Auschwitz during the Holocaust. The Jewish lyceum was closed in 1948 as a result of the nationalization of denominational schools.

2 Neolog Jewry
Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

3 Mark, Antal (1880-1942)
Mathematics teacher and director of the Tarbut Jewish Lyceum, a Jewish high school for boys and girls in Kolozsvar/Cluj, from 1920 and 1927. In 1940 he convinced the Hungarian Minister of Education to approve the reopening of the Jewish Lyceum, and he was its director until his death.

4 Hungarian Soviet Republic
The first, short-lived, proletarian dictatorship in Hungary. On 21st March 1919 the Workers' Council

of Budapest took over power from the bourgeois democratic government and declared the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The temporary constitution declared that the Republic was the state of the workers and peasants and aimed at putting an end to their exploitation and establishing a socialist economic and social system. The communist government nationalized industrial and commercial enterprises, and socialized housing, transport, banking, medicine, cultural institutions, and large landholdings. On an effort to secure its rule the government used arbitrary violence. Almost 600 executions were ordered by revolutionary tribunals and the government also resorted to violence to expropriate grain from peasants. This violence and the regime's moves against the clergy also shocked many Hungarians. The Republic was defeated by the entry of Romanian troops, that occupied and looted Budapest, and the Soviet Republic on 1st August 1919.

5 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)

Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary. In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon peace treaty - on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI – which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy. When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce. The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

6 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

7 KuK (Kaiserlich und Koeniglich) army

The name ‘Imperial and Royal’ was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated from the dual political system. Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name ‘Imperial and Royal’.

8 Trianon Peace Treaty

Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on 4th June 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries

concerned. The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary). The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia). Hungary lost 67.3% of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4% of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian regimes.

9 Legionary

Member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions. The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland) that represented the movement in parliamentary elections. The followers of the Legionary Movement were recruited from young intellectuals, students, Orthodox clericals, peasants. The movement was banned by King Carol II in 1938.

10 Hungarian era (1940-1944)

The expression Hungarian era refers to the period between 30 August 1940 - 15 October 1944 in Transylvania. As a result of the Trianon peace treaties in 1920 the eastern part of Hungary (Maramures, Partium, Banat, Transylvania) was annexed to Romania. Two million inhabitants of Hungarian nationality came under Romanian rule. In the summer of 1940, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, the Romanian government agreed to return Northern Transylvania, where the majority of the Hungarians lived, to Hungary. The anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1938 and 1939 in Hungary were also applied in Northern Transylvania. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19th March 1944, Jews from Northern Transylvania were deported to and killed in concentration camps along with Jews from all over Hungary except for Budapest. Northern Transylvania belonged to Hungary until the fall of 1944, when the Soviet troops entered and introduced a regime of military administration that sustained local autonomy. The military administration ended on 9th March 1945 when the Romanian administration was reintroduced in all the Western territories lost in 1940 - as a reward for the fact that Romania formed the first communist-led government in the region.

11 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary

Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and

journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

12 Hashomer Hatzair

'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

13 Petofi, Sandor (1823-1949)

Outstanding Hungarian poet who expressed the sentiments and way of thinking of the folk in his poetry. He was contributor and editor of various publications in Pest. Petofi organized and led a circle of young radical intellectuals and writers and participated in the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence as a leading revolutionary. His poem, the National Song, became the anthem of the Revolution. He joined the Hungarian army as captain in the fall of 1848 and he went to fight in Transylvania at the beginning of 1849. During his time in the army in Transylvania he wrote military reports and inspiring and glorifying poems. He disappeared in 1849.

14 Ady, Endre (1877-1919)

One of the most important Hungarian poets, who played a key role in renewing 20th century Hungarian poetry. He was a leading poet of the Nyugat [West], the most important Hungarian literary and critical journal in the first half of the 20th century. In his poems and articles he urged the transformation of feudal Hungary into a modern bourgeois democracy, a revolution of the peasants and an end to unlawfulness and deprivation. Having realized that the bourgeoisie was weak and unprepared for such changes, he later turned toward the proletariat. An intense struggle arose around his poetry between the conservative feudal camp and the followers of social and literary reforms.

15 Kosztolanyi, Dezso (1885-1936)

Poet, prose writer, literary translator, journalist; an illustrious member of the first generation of Nyugat [the West], the most important Hungarian literary and critical journal in the first half of the 20th century. His oeuvre offers one of the most outstanding artistic expressions of bourgeois mentality and way of life. He published numerous books of verse, anthologies of short stories and novels, and he wrote editorials, feuilletons, literary and theater critiques in various dailies and journals. He also worked for progressive bourgeois, social democratic and Catholic papers. He was

fluent in several foreign languages including Italian, French, German, English and Spanish. He translated the works of many Western European writers and modern poets into Hungarian.

16 Babits, Mihaly (1883-1941)

Poet, writer, literary translator, essayist. He was a leading figure of Hungarian bourgeois literature in the interwar period and an outstanding member of the first generation of Nyugat [the West], the most important Hungarian literary and critical journal in the first half of the 20th century. He was attracted to the revolutionary movements of 1918-1919. He taught literature at university during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic. After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, he was removed from university and deprived of his professorial pension. He became the leader of the camp of humanist bourgeois writers who distanced themselves from official academic literature but did not participate in the struggles of leftist writers.

17 Korunk

The most important Hungarian periodical published in Transylvania under the communist regime. It was founded in 1926, initially with a progressive-liberal profile. At the beginning of the 1930s it turned into a Marxist direction and was soon embraced by a group of young leftist Hungarian intellectuals from Transylvania. The periodical stopped appearing in 1940, when Northern Transylvania was annexed to Hungary following the Second Vienna Decision in 1940. Hungarian authorities banned it, just like all other leftist papers. Korunk was published again in 1957, a year after the anti-Soviet Revolution of 1956 in Hungary. The Romanian communist establishment regarded it as a gesture of appeasement for the Hungarian minority in Transylvania.

18 Antonescu, Ion (1882-1946)

Political and military leader of the Romanian state, president of the Ministers' Council from 1940 to 1944. In 1940 he formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders. From 1941 he introduced a dictatorial regime that continued to pursue the depreciation of the Romanian political system started by King Carol II. His strong anti-Semitic beliefs led to the persecution, deportation and killing of many Jews in Romania. He was arrested on 23rd August 1944 and sent into prison in the USSR until he was put on trial in the election year of 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and shot in the same year.

19 Numerus nullus in Hungary

With the series of ’numerus nullus’ regulations Jews were excluded from practically all trade, economic and intellectual professions during World War II.

20 Hitlerjugend

The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth organization. From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties. After reaching the age

of 18, young people either joined the army or went to work.

21 Struma ship

In December 1941 the ship took on board some 750 Jews – which was more than seven times its normal passengers' capacity – to take them to Haifa, then Palestine. As none of the passengers had British permits to enter the country, the ship stopped in Istanbul, Turkey, in order for them to get immigration certificates to Palestine but the Turkish authorities did not allow the passengers to disembark. They were given food and medicine by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish community of Istanbul. As the vessel was not seaworthy, it could not leave either. However, in February 1942 the Turks towed the Struma to the Black Sea without water, food or fuel on board. The ship sank the same night and there was only one survivor. In 1978, a Soviet naval history disclosed that a Soviet submarine had sunk the Struma.

22 Anti-Jewish laws in Romania

The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime. According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery. More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish property, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city, were confiscated by the state, as part of the ‘Romanisation campaign’. Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc. Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

23 Bessarabia

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

24 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.

25 Voitec-law

named after communist minister of education Stefan Voitec, and adopted in 1946. According to this law all those (regardless of their nationality) who had to interrupt their studies during World War II could take exams and apply for high-school or university following an accelerated procedure.

26 1956

It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest during which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

27 Rosen, Moses (1912-1994)

Chief Rabbi of Romania and the president of the Association of Jewish Religious Communities during communism.

28 Hasidism (Hasidic)

Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

29 Ceausescu, Nicolae (1918-1989)

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

30 Radio Free Europe

The radio station was set up by the National Committee for a Free Europe, an American organization, funded by Congress through the CIA, in 1950 with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features from Munich to countries behind the Iron Curtain. The programs were produced by Central and Eastern European émigré editors, journalists and moderators. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in communist countries behind the Iron Curtain and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of Central and Eastern Europe.

31 Gall, Erno (1917-2000)

Writer and philosopher. He was professor of philosophy at the Bolyai University (later Babes-Bolyai University) of Cluj from 1949 and its rector from 1952 to 1956. Between 1957 and 1989 he was editor of Korunk, the most important Hungarian periodical published in Transylvania under the communist regime. Gall's interest in the issues of nationalism, national identity, minorities, ethnicity and the intellectual elites of ethnic minorities led to several studies of great interest.

32 Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe (1901-1965)

Leader of the Romanian Communist Party between 1952 and 1965. Originally an electrician and railway worker, he was imprisoned in 1933 and became the underground leader of all imprisoned communists. He was prime minister between 1952-55 and first secretary of the Communist Party between 1945-1953 and from 1955 until his death. In his later years, he led a policy that drifted away from the directive in Moscow, keeping the Stalinist system untouched by the Krushchevian reforms.

33 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.

34 Rajk trial

Laszlo Rajk, Hungarian communist politician, Minister of Interior (1946-48) and Foreign Minister (1948-49), was arrested on false charges in 1949 in the purges initiated by Stalin's anti-Tito campaign. He was accused of crime against the state and treason (of having been a secret agent in the 1930s), sentenced to death and executed. His show trial was given much publicity throughout

the soviet block. In March 1956 he was officially rehabilitated.

35 Patrascanu, Lucretiu (1900-1954)

Veteran communist and appreciated intellectual, who successfully conducted an underground communist activity before the Communist Party came to power in Romania in 1944. Following this he was in charge of the Ministry of Justice. He was arrested in 1948 and tried in 1954. He was allegedly accused by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the leader of the Romanian Communist Party, of helping Antonescu in his war against the USSR and of being a spy for the British secret service. In fact, he was the only rival from an intellectual background Dej had. His patriotism, which he openly expressed, was interpreted by the communists as chauvinism.

36 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.