

Samuel Izsak

Samuel Izsak

Kolozsvár

Romania

Interviewer: Attila Gido

Date of interview: September-October 2003

Samuel Izsak is a good-looking, old-school retired historian of medicine. You can find in him the sharp view of the intellectual and the striving to understand the reasons and meaning of everything that goes on around him. The life story he lived and relates mainly focuses on him. He is reluctant to talk about his family, friends or acquaintances because he thinks it is immoral, an interference with personal matters. His day-to-day life still consists of research and writing. He is not involved in the life of the Jewish community of Kolozsvár. Neither him, nor his wife are members of the community, but they always emphasize they are Jewish. There are very few things in their downtown apartment that suggest it's not inhabited by Christians. The simple furnishing denotes an intellectual family, interested in spiritual values rather than in material ones. The books and the desk in the study room, the paintings of the sculptor and painter Endre Szobotka on the walls and the piano are predominant in creating the atmosphere of the apartment.



[My family background](#)

[Growing up](#)

[My school years](#)

[Our religious life](#)

[My high-school years](#)

[My university years](#)

[During the war](#)

[Post-war](#)

[Married life](#)

[Glossary](#)

My family background

My paternal grandparents were farmers in Mezőszabad, a village near Marosvásárhely, twelve kilometers from there. My paternal grandfather was also called Samuel Izsak. I don't know exactly when he was born, but according to the family tree he died in 1914. I was born the next year, in 1915, and they named me after him. He was the judge – now we call it mayor – of Mezőszabad for a year, sometime at the end of the 19th century. It happened because the former judge had to be replaced at the elections, and my grandfather held this office until the next elections. He managed

the village brilliantly, and while he was in this position he kept order there. There was no fighting between the young boys. The villagers always talked about him with great respect and appreciated him because he always supported them. A beautiful relationship developed between my grandfather and the villagers of Mezőszabad, who, by the way, were all Romanians. Mezőszabad is a Romanian village. I think his family was the only Jewish one there. I don't know whether he was a member of any organization or party. I don't even know whether he had any particular political beliefs.

The maiden name of my paternal grandmother was Regina Simon, and after her husband died she was known as Mrs. Samuel Izsak. She was born around 1864, but I don't know where. My paternal grandparents' mother tongue was Hungarian, and they dressed entirely according to the Central-European fashion of the time. They were beautiful and healthy people. My grandfather had a small beard when he was young. I have a picture of them taken sometime at the end of the 19th century, where you can see they were dressing in pure European style. They lived a civilized life and were in trim. At the beginning of the 20th century they moved to Marosvásárhely. They lived for a while in a rented apartment, then they bought a two-storied house not far from the city center, on Kisfaludi Street. The Izsak family lived on the lower floor. I don't know who lived upstairs. The house was very modernly furnished, following the fashion back then. As far as I remember, there were at least four rooms and the offices. I don't remember whether we had tap water, but I know my grandparents had a Szekler maidservant.

They were religious and surely they observed the holidays. My grandmother was going to the synagogue regularly. I think she was Orthodox. But slowly my aunts, uncles and my father all became Neologs ¹, laicized and less observant. They never converted to be Neologs, but if they had the opportunity, they went to the Neolog synagogue. In Marosvásárhely this wasn't possible, of course, because there only was an Orthodox and a Status Quo synagogue, but not everybody remained in Marosvásárhely. They spread all over Transylvania. I don't remember whether my father went to the Orthodox synagogue in Marosvásárhely, but when our family moved to Nagyvárad, where Neologs were predominant, my parents went to the Neolog synagogue. As for me, I went there less often. Then we moved to Temesvár, where they also went to the Neolog synagogue.

As a child I often visited my grandmother, aunts and uncles in Marosvásárhely. I used to be invited to my paternal grandmother's for lunch each Saturday. I had to wait for her in front of the synagogue, because she used to go there every Saturday. I wasn't compelled to go inside, so I waited for her outside. When she came out of the synagogue, we used to go home together. On the way she always asked me, 'Why do you love visiting me? Do you come because you love me?'. I answered that I liked going there because the meal was great. Of course she felt offended, but what else can one expect a child to say?

I had several aunts and uncles. My father's sisters were Sari, Terez and Antonia. Aunt Sari Izsak, born in 1887, was a playwright. Several of her pieces were performed in Marosvásárhely. I don't remember any titles, nor the drama company that performed them. I do remember though one play being performed in the auditorium of the community center. My whole family attended it. I was still a child. I only recall that the piece received a burst of applause and my aunt had to take a curtain-call and she was given a basket of flowers. The public expressed its respect that way. Sari never got married. By the way, all my aunts were unmarried and perished in Auschwitz in 1944. I

don't know the professions of my father's other sisters, but they made beautiful needlework and Gobelin tapestries to order. There was a needlework factory on the main square that even exported goods, and they all worked there. I don't remember the name of that company. Terez Izsak was born in 1896. I don't know anything about her, only that she died in Auschwitz. Antonia Izsak was the youngest of my father's brothers and sisters, she was born in 1904. She died in Auschwitz as well.

My father was the oldest son; the others were Jozsef, Jenő, Béla and Gyula, my uncles. Jozsef Izsak was working as a clerk at the kerosene factory. He was an extremely cultivated person, with an exceptional gift for languages. He could speak and write in eight to ten languages. He knew oriental languages: Persian, Turkish and Ivrit. He also knew Romanian, Italian, German and French. He had a very large library. Every time I visited him he gave me some books. He was single, and, as far as I know, he was deported from Kistarcsa [today Hungary] for political reasons. I have no idea exactly what these reasons were. He perished in Auschwitz in 1944.

Jenő Izsak lived in Kolozsvár, and he worked as a functionary. He had some commercial agency. His wife was Anna Janosi, who I think was Reformed. Their daughter Eva told me once that Anna converted to Judaism after she married my uncle, but I don't know that for sure. They weren't wealthy, but well-situated. Uncle Jenő, just like Uncle Jozsef, loved to read. He had a small private library, which mostly consisted of modern literature. While I was a medicine student they used to invite me over for lunch each Sunday. There was a Hungarian boy, a relative – who was, by the way, one of my colleagues– and they agreed he could come on Sundays, so I went there on Sundays, too.

Their daughter, Eva, finished the medical school in Marosvásárhely, and later, in the 1930s, she married a Jewish doctor called Herczeg here, in Romania, and emigrated to Israel. Eva still lives there, in Rishon Le Zion. She was an exceptional doctor, she learned the profession at Marosvásárhely Medical University. She is now retired, but I don't know how old she is. During the times of calamity Aunt Anna was hiding Uncle Jenő from the authorities. I don't know how she did it, but she succeeded. It had to be difficult, though. Uncle Jenő escaped deportation and died here in Kolozsvár. I don't recall the exact year of his death.

As far as I know Béla Izsak was a farmer. I think he owned a vineyard. He had a Jewish wife and family and lived in Marosvásárhely. Béla died long before the deportation of some disease, but I don't know the exact cause of his death. His wife Eszter was born in 1898. They had two children, István Izsak and Kati Izsak. Eszter and her daughter Kati were deported to Auschwitz. Eszter perished there, but Kati survived, and shortly after she returned home she emigrated to Israel. During the Holocaust István was taken to forced labor. After the times of calamity, he got married in Marosvásárhely. He worked as a journalist and publicist right up to his death.

Gyula Izsak was born in 1899. He had no family. He was an employee and moved away from Vasárhely [short for Marosvásárhely] very early on and worked for different Transylvanian companies. He was a brilliant expert in the woodwork yards. As far as I remember he worked at a woodwork yard in Făcsard. In 1940, when Northern Transylvania was separated from Southern Transylvania [at the beginning of the Hungarian era] [2](#), he left his job and returned to Northern Transylvania, to Marosvásárhely. He was deported in 1944 and died in Auschwitz.

My father, Izsak Izsak, was born in Mezőszabad in 1885. I don't think there was a school there, so I presume he either finished his elementary education with a private teacher or in Marosvásárhely. He didn't go to cheder, nor to talmud torah. He finished his higher education in Brassó. He studied at the higher commercial school in Brassó and graduated from there. I still have his graduation diploma. He graduated in June 1901. I think his teachers were unfair to him; we have to keep in mind that my father was Jewish: He had grades of 'A' for seven out of twelve disciplines, but they only declared him a 'B', and not an 'A' student. He had an 'A' in Romanian. My father's mother tongue was, of course, Hungarian, but he already learned Romanian when he was a child. He also spoke good German, and understood some, but couldn't speak it, Italian and French. His parents sent him to Brassó to learn German.

After he graduated from the higher commercial school, he became a bank clerk at the Ludas branch of the Agrar Bank from Marosvásárhely. He was already married by then. He was called in from Sepsiszentgyörgy to Marosvásárhely, to the headquarters of the bank, and he became one of the chief clerks, one of the managers of the bank. My father was never a wealthy man. He wasn't a business man, never had any inclinations for commerce, but his income was enough to support us.

As to my maternal grandparents I only knew my grandfather, Rudolf Legmann. He was born around 1856. I only vaguely remember my grandmother, Rozalia Legmann [nee König], born in 1878, because she died when I was only ten. My grandfather was a farmer in a Romanian village near Kolozsvár called Drag. Drag is about 40 kilometers to the northeast of Kolozsvár. He farmed both his own and rented lands. Apart from the family, there were, of course, wage laborers working on the land. They were locals. My grandfather was on very good terms with the Romanian Orthodox [Greek Catholic] priest of the village and the villagers, as well, who never forgot my grandfather's humane attitude: in World War I many of the male villagers had been taken to war, and my grandfather supported their widows, giving them wheat and corn flour.

I have no idea how religious my grandparents were. I presume they observed the traditions and the traditional holidays, and I think when they had to recite the Kaddish for their deceased parents, they went to the synagogue, but I have no precise information on this. My mother never told me anything about these matters. Their mother tongue was Hungarian.

When I was a child my parents took me to my grandparents' on several occasions. They had a nice farm-house with a large yard, stables and a garden. They lived a very civilized life. Behind the house there was this beautiful garden, with an old row of currants all along it and an alley between. In the back of the garden there was an old walnut tree, with a stone table underneath. I was in the room where my mother spent her girlhood. From there one had a beautiful view of the garden. Underneath her window there was a splendid flower-bed. My mother loved flowers.

I have a very nice childhood anecdote related to Drag. A buffalo calf was lingering in the yard at my grandfather's – they had buffaloes, cows and horses – and I thought it was child's play [to handle animals]. I went to it, but I incensed it and I got very scared. I ran away and hid in the poultry-house. I got very dirty in there. When my parents found me, they took my clothes off and bathed me – in a tub, of course – and dressed me in clean clothes. I also remember a family lunch there. There were some relatives, my parents and us, kids. We had to sit at a different table, a lower one, for children. We had the same meal as the grown-ups. They drank wine, while we had raspberry-juice with soda.

My grandmother Rozalia died in 1925. If I remember correctly, she had breast cancer. She was 47. After this my grandfather sold everything he had and moved to Kolozsvár. I remember he built a simple, one-storied house and lived there. Back then the street was called Kun Street. Today one of the pediatric clinics is on that street. This street leads to Kismező cemetery. Behind it there was a garden, and the house is still there. I don't know who lives in it now. My grandfather died in 1938 here, in Kolozsvár. At that time I was a medicine student, and I attended the funeral with my parents. He was buried according to the Jewish tradition in the Orthodox cemetery of Kolozsvár. My grandfather Legmann had three children: my mother Rachel, Miksa and Iren.

Uncle Miksa Legmann lived in Kolozsvár and died of a disease before the deportation started. I don't know how old he was. I think his wife, Eszter, was deported, but I don't know for sure. They had two children, József and Pál. I know Pál and his wife survived the deportation. They had a son, Gyuri, who was born in Auschwitz. He was one of the seven children who were born in Auschwitz, towards the end of the deportation. I don't know any details of his life. Aunt Iren Legmann was married for a while. Her husband was called Deutsch, but I don't know what his occupation was. They divorced in the interwar period, and Iren lived in Bucharest for a while. Then she emigrated to Israel, where she died. She had no children.

My mother, Rachel Legmann, was born in Drag in 1884. I don't know what education she had, nor which elementary school she went to. She attended middle school [3](#) in Budapest. She lived at her uncle's. My mother lived a very rich cultural life there. She used to go to the theater, read periodicals and literature. After she returned to Drag, she subscribed to several periodicals she had liked in Pest: the Magyar Lányok [Hungarian Girls] and the outstanding literature journal founded by poet József Kiss [4](#), the Het [the Week]. My mother liked folk art very much, and she passed on this spirit to me.

My parents met in Marosvásárhely. There was a family in Marosvásárhely called König, Gyula König and his wife, Berta, my mother's relatives. Gyula König had a younger sister, Roza König. They were probably the ones who brought to my mother's attention that there was a young man, my father, who could start a family. He had a good job and was financially stable. They somehow arranged for them to meet, and from then on everything probably took its own course. Auntie Berta had five daughters. One of them, my aunt Illo [Ilona] married a Romanian pharmacist from Marosvásárhely. Her daughter grew up as a Romanian. My uncles kept in touch with her even when her family moved to Temesvár in the 1930s. Gyula König died long before the deportation, in the 1930s. His wife Berta and their four daughters were deported to Auschwitz, and they all died there.

Growing up

My parents got married in 1907 in Marosvásárhely. They never told me anything about the ceremony. My oldest sister, Hajnal Izsák, was born in Sepsiszentgyörgy in 1908. They moved to Marosvásárhely probably the same year, or early in 1909. Hajnal finished the Jewish elementary school and another four years in the Reformed middle school in Marosvásárhely. My oldest brother, Ferenc Izsák, was born in 1909. He finished the Reformed high-school in Marosvásárhely. My second oldest brother, László Izsák followed in 1911. He studied at the Romanian high-school in Marosvásárhely. In the interwar period he was a contributor to the Korunk [5](#) in Kolozsvár. Balint was his pen-name. My third brother, Ivan Izsák, was born in 1912, and I came next, in 1915. The youngest of us, Ibolya Izsák, was born four years later, in 1919. She emigrated to Israel after World

War II, and then moved to her sister in Canada.

The majority of the inhabitants of Vasarhely were Hungarians. The center was dominated by Hungarians and Jews. I was born right in the center of town [that is, Samuel's family lived downtown]. I don't remember the name of the street we lived on, but there was a Greek Catholic church there. Behind it there was a line of houses, and among these houses there was one called Tovisi house. The houses were usually named after their owners or other inhabitants. I was born in this Tovisi house and, as far as I remember, we lived there for a while. I recall that there were lots of rats in the basement and on the ground-floor. My older brothers and sisters used to break glasses and put the splinters in the basement so the rats would hurt themselves and die.

In the neighboring house there was the doctor's office of Dr. Miklos Blatt, a famous ophthalmologist of Jewish origin. While I was still in elementary school, there was an epidemic of contagious ophthalmitis. So our parents, of course, took us to him. He was an outstanding ophthalmologist. Later, after the war, he became a university professor in Temesvar and then he emigrated to Germany. He worked as visiting professor in Frankfurt am Main. Miklos Blatt was also an excellent writer, he published scientific monographs and essays.

My parents sent me to the Jewish elementary school in Marosvasarhely. The school was on Iskola [School] Street, and the synagogue was also on that street. On our way home, we usually crossed the former Meszaros Koz [Butcher's Alley] in Marosvasarhely. The Meszaros Koz was a special place in Vasarhely. This was a street, which only had stores on one side of the street, and on the other side there were only fire-walls. There were pork-butchers aligned next to each other. The entrances were covered with wooden doors painted in green. There were several butcheries there, but later all of them were closed down. Housewives used to do their shopping there. One could buy there not only meat, but also fish. Jews were allowed to eat fish. All these stores were owned by Hungarians. One day at the entrance of one of these butcheries a two-meter long cat-fish hung on a hook. The fish was then sold piece by piece. We were quite impressed by this monster. These were cat-fish from the Maros river. I don't know whether there are any cat-fish left in the Maros today.

I recall one more thing: after we left the Meszaros Koz, we had to go on Hunyadi Street past the castle. The castle was painted in ochre, so we called it the Ochre Castle. I also remember that after we passed the castle, the foundation of the latter Romanian Orthodox church was being dug on the main square, and they found the wooden pipes of the former Zenelo Kut [Musical Well] of Marosvasarhely. The pipes were joint under cut logs. They dug them out and probably took them to the museum. Where the Orthodox church is today there used to be the Musical Well built by Bodor. [Peter Bodor (1788-1849): a Szekler handyman, who built this well in 1816. He built a musical structure in the cupola of the well, which played music every six hours, so loud it could also be heard in the neighboring villages.]

I remember one anti-Semitic incident that happened to me in Vasarhely. We were coming home from school via the Meszaros Koz. Everyone who was familiar with Vasarhely knew that the Jewish pupils were coming home from Iskola [School] Street via the Meszaros Koz because the Jewish elementary school was on Iskola Street, not far from the synagogue. When we arrived at the square - we were three or four - some csiszliks surrounded us. People called apprentices csiszliks. They were shoe-maker apprentices, they carried boots over their shoulders. They surrounded us

and began shouting, 'Hep, hep, hep'. [Samuel said they only shouted this way when they wanted to make fun of Jews.] Otherwise they didn't hurt us, just surrounded us and made fun of us. We didn't run away, we continued to walk quietly.

My school years

I had a classmate at elementary school in Marosvasarhely, and I remember him because I used to visit him. His name was Karcsi Paneth. One time I went to their house. His mother opened the door, and I asked, 'Is Karcsi at home? I have come to visit him.' She said, 'Karcsi is not here, but if you want to find him go to the main square and walk around the stores. He is probably standing in front of a shop-window because he loves looking at shops-windows.' So I went there and found him, and we continued the walk together. This I remember.

I also remember that on the main square there was an alley that lead to the Reformed high-school [present-day Bolyai Farkas high-school]. This alley doesn't exist anymore. At the weekly market the women who made fries used to stand at the main market side of this alley. They made roast sausages, Torda roast etc., and they also gave you delicious bread and cucumbers along with them. I was once at that market with my mother and I asked her to buy me some roast sausages. She did, and I got a slice of very delicious home-made bread and a cucumber, too. I don't know whether the cucumber was leavened or watered. Obviously, the sausage wasn't kosher, but my mother didn't tell me I wasn't allowed to eat it, she bought it for me without more ado. From this point of view, my parents disobeyed the religious laws.

Our family doctor in Marosvasarhely was a doctor of Jewish origin, Bela Schmidt. For a while we lived in the house opposite his. If I'm not mistaken, that was on Petofi Street facing the Rakoczi-stairs. We lived in the first house on that street. We moved there from Tovisi house. This house wasn't ours, we only rented it. Across the street there was Bela Schmidt's villa, a beautiful English-style house. He built it. On the ground floor there was the passage to the basement. The doctor had a carriage, a buggy, and, in the back, the stable – so he went by carriage to the patients who called him. He even had a driver. Once, when we already lived on Kemeny Zsigmond Street, I went down into the basement. I found a piece of soda by the undergarment washer. I thought it was a piece of kandli sugar. Back then there was a type of sugar called kandli. I started to eat from this piece of soda and it began burning my mouth. Fortunately I spit it out and didn't swallow it. I came out of the basement on all fours, breathing, spitting and trying to cool my mouth. Then my mother asked me what had happened. I told her that I had been in the basement and eaten something that looked like a candy. She knew right away what had happened, called a carriage and took me to Dr. Schmidt. He told me that if I had swallowed the soda, it would have caused my food-pipe to block, which would have been difficult to treat, and painful, too, because it would have been hard for me to eat. He prepared me some flour pap which I had to drink. He told me to keep it in my mouth, but I could also swallow it because it was made from flour. He saved me with that mixture.

Our religious life

We weren't too religious. My parents had a civilized, Central European outlook, they dressed and behaved accordingly. The Jewish characteristics appeared only in our private life, on holidays. Apart from that we led a normal civil life and my mother had an ordinary household. She didn't care about a kosher kitchen. We had a washwoman and a maidservant, too. I think they were Szeklers. The maidservants came with us when we moved to Temesvar; they remained our

employees.

My parents were widely-read people, who liked literature, theater, and music. We had a piano at home, my sister used to play it. My father bought the progressive Romanian daily newspapers, Adevarul [The Truth] and Dimineata [The Morning]. Those were the leftist newspapers in the interwar period. My father regularly read Pesti Hirlap. We had a subscription to Mult es Jovo [Past and Future, monthly literature and culture magazine]. We read German journals as well, like Die Dame [The Lady] and Die Woche [The Week]. My parents subscribed for us to Elek Benedek's [6](#) magazine, Cimbor. We read tales from it. My mother bought for us, juveniles, Elek Benedek's Tales, Hungarian Tales And Myths and Csili Csali Csalavari Csalaver. That's how they instilled into us the feeling for literature, culture and arts. We had a maidservant for some time – she was Saxon or Szekler – who tried to teach us German, but we didn't learn anything. My mother and my father saw this was useless because we were attended to quite well at school, and in their free time they could do it. So they let off the maidservant.

We didn't read religious literature. However, we had prayer books and I think since we had them, my parents used them on holidays. We even had the Haggadah, which one uses to read from on Pesach. Since I was the youngest boy in the family, I read the parts from the Haggadah on Pesach, and my father used to answer while sitting at the head of the table. I asked, 'Why is this night different from others – mah nishtanah ha-layla haze mikol ha-leylot?' My father answered that we had been slaves and left Egypt, and on this night we celebrate this event. This is an important day, because it celebrates the liberation from slavery. My father used to read the ten plagues that hit the Egyptians before they agreed to let the Jews leave. While he was reading the plagues, we dipped our finger in the glass of wine that we held in our hand and dripped the wine on the floor. This was the tradition.

I remember when I was a child we had separate utensils for Pesach. They were festive plates. They were more colorful than the regular ones. On Pesach the table was set. It was a regular seder night. The word itself means set table. [Editor's note: seder means order and it refers to the fact that the seder night ceremony has a very strict order that has to be followed.] The seder nights are conducted by the head of the family according to well-defined rules. My father used to sit at the head of the table, and we, children, were sitting around the table. We consumed the meals recalling the period of slavery. I don't know the exact names of these meals, but I remember there were some bitter roots symbolizing the bitterness of life. There also was some walnut cream between two matzot representing the mortar. There were boiled eggs, too, but I don't remember what that represented. [Editor's note: The boiled egg reminds of the sacrifice that was offered in the Temple.] This part of the night ended, of course, with wine. The holidays always had this pleasant atmosphere.

On Yom Kippur my parents used to go to the synagogue, and not because they were that religious, but in memory of their parents. On the afternoon of Yom Kippur one recited the Kaddish, and they did it, too, in memory of their parents. They used to fast on that day, but we, children, didn't observe this law. Children under 13 are not obligated to fast, but after that, after one became a grown-up, one had to, at least on paper. But we, children, never bothered with the religious laws, even after the age of 13, and on fasting day we went out to eat something with our friends. Religiousness wasn't strict in my family, so my parents never gave us any scolding.

I don't know exactly what kind of friends my parents had in Vasarhely. My mother visited Auntie Berta Konig quite often. I don't know anything else about their friends. Among my friends there were Christians, too, of course. We used to go on trips together to the Somos Hill near Vasarhely. We were going by ourselves, without our parents. We brought with us matches, empty cans, green onions, eggs and most certainly some cold cuts. We used to make a small fire near the forest, careful not to set anything on fire, and we had real fun. We made this trip several times. There were occasions when we even spent the whole summer holiday together. I remember we, the whole family, went on vacation to Szovata once. [Szovata is 67 kilometers from Marosvasarhely.] I don't remember any other summer holidays. There had to be more, but I don't recall any.

My father was offered a better job. The Timisiana Bank had a branch in Nagyvarad, they knew my father and appreciated his work. They offered him a better salary than he had in Marosvasarhely. My father accepted it, of course, and so in 1926 we moved to Varad [short for Nagyvarad]. In Nagyvarad I finished the 4th grade of the Jewish elementary school in the same year.

Varad had a very active cultural life. There were quite often morning shows for children in the cinemas, mainly screening comedies. There I got to know Chaplin, Harold Loyd, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Zigotto. One of the best cinemas in town was on the first floor of the famous Sas mansion. The cinema was owned by a very well-situated Jewish family, who also owned the mansion. Inside the Sas mansion there was a commercial hall and a hotel, as well.

During our time in Nagyvarad my brother Ivan turned 13. His bar mitzvah took place in the Cion [Zion] synagogue, which was a really beautiful synagogue. Lipot Kecskemeti was the rabbi then. After my brother's bar mitzvah we had a formal dinner at home, and we invited rabbi Kecskemeti, too. I remember my parents seated him at the head of the table. Lipot Kecskemeti was originally from a very famous family of rabbis, and as far as I know his father was also a rabbi in Varad. His father was well known for his marvelous preaching in Hungarian, which even Endre Ady [7](#) attended in order to learn the beauty of the Hungarian language. The Kecskemeti family was very committed to the Hungarian nation.

In the fall of 1926 we moved to Temesvar. The owner of our flat was a Christian. At the same time I entered the Jewish high-school in Temesvar. Following its establishment in 1919, it operated for a while as a Hungarian school. The public education law then transformed it into a Romanian school. Until I entered high-school I only read literature in Hungarian. There I respected the high-school curriculum and read in foreign languages, as well. There were many Romanian books we had to read. Every year the required reading got more and more demanding, and we complied with the requirements. I was a young high-school boy when my father bought me Karoly Lyka's History of Art. This is a very famous book. My father himself was an outstanding art historian. This book woke my interest in art history and art, and was the foundation for the art history knowledge I acquired during my later years in Italy.

My high-school years

I loved the atmosphere in the Jewish high-school. Every school has its pros and cons. This is true for any school, not only for the confessional ones. Not every teacher was a good pedagogue, not everyone could keep his temper under control. But the school as a whole was a very civilized, forward school. There were some outstanding teachers, who excelled not only as high-school teachers, but also as scientists.

I would like to mention Dr. Viktor Deznai at this point, who taught us French. He was an excellent teacher of French and French culture and literature. He said, 'Close your books because you'll only need them for the high-school graduation, but now I will talk about French literature and culture.' He was very helpful and showed us the cultural perspective of things. Otherwise, by profession he was an urbanist. He published some articles in Temesvar, but more were published by the Sorbonne in Paris. In other words, he was a well known urbanist expert and scientist in Europe. I hold him in my memory with great respect because I learnt a lot from him. I used to go to his place, and I even drew city-planning maps from time to time, following his directions. I borrowed some books from him, so he played an important role in the development of my cultural life and culture. We also liked our hygiene teacher very much, a very likeable, very skilled doctor. He taught us, youngsters, many things, including the intimate matters of life.

I loved natural history, but I had no feeling for mathematics. Mathematics and geometry were my weak side. I also liked history a lot, and my interest for it is still alive. As for foreign languages, besides French we learned German and Ivrit. The school quite often took us to the museum of Temesvar, which had a department of paintings that I liked very much. I remember we had to write essays about these visits, and one time my essay was the best in class. The poor students of the Jewish high-school were supported by a foundation that I managed around 1935.

Besides school we had to go to the synagogue, the Neolog one. They called the roll and threatened us saying they would give lower grades in school to those who didn't go. We didn't like to be forced to go to the synagogue. That's a fact. We had a really warm-hearted Hebrew teacher, whom we called Uncle Vajda - I don't remember his first name. We liked him because he was a very kind, warm-hearted person. He knew how to handle children; he had children, too. In the upper grades a talmudist called Lipot Fleisher taught us Hebrew grammar. We had already learned to read in Hebrew in the lower grades. We learned to read and write Hebrew including punctuation. We had Bible reading in Hebrew, which was biblical Hebrew. We didn't talk about Zionism or emigration at school. There were Zionist teachers at school, but none of them taught my class.

When I turned 13 I should have had my bar mitzvah but I wasn't in the mood. The man who prepared me for it at home was quite primitive, some kind of vestry-keeper, who couldn't answer my questions. I told my father that the man who was preparing me answered to my easiest questions with, 'That's right, that's how it should be known, that's how it should be said.' So I turned 13 and we just had a festive lunch at home. I got new clothes and a pair of shoes. For the same afternoon I invited my classmates and they came. We celebrated my bar mitzvah in our own way, and my parents didn't mind. They weren't rigid in matters related to religion. It didn't affect our Jewish conscience. The fact that my brothers and sisters and me went to Jewish elementary school and Jewish high-school partly made us realize our Jewry.

In Temesvar we used to go to the theater and cinema. We went to see both Hungarian and Romanian performances. In the 1930s a Jewish acting company gave a guest performance in Temesvar. On that occasion a famous singer, Sidi Thal, made her appearance. [Editor's note: Between the wars the Jewish singer Sidi Thal, along with the Yiddish acting company from Csernovic, toured Transylvania several times.] During the performance members of the Iron Guard [8](#) detonated a bomb, killing and injuring people. [Editor's note: This incident happened in 1935, according to the Uj Kelet [New East] Jewish journal from Kolozsvar.] I wasn't there, I just heard about it. My father-in-law to be was there, but he didn't get injured.

Among the Jewish youth there were conservatives, progressives, leftist and Zionists, as well. My circle of friends was very diverse, its members had different beliefs. I wasn't part of any movement, but I sympathized with Hashomer Hatzair [9](#), a left-wing organization. I attended its events, lectures and dance parties, but I didn't become a member. There was a Jewish sports club in Temesvar, Kadima, frequented by pupils and university students as well as by young workers. I participated at the New Year celebrations of Kadima, where the cream of the Jewish youth of Temesvar used to gather. During the summer, the club also organized many group trips. We went on trips almost every weekend. We usually toured the neighboring places on foot.

My university years

I didn't manage to graduate from high-school on my first try. I graduated in the fall of 1936. I had to enter exams of Latin, Romanian language and literature, natural science and French, I think. I had decided long before that I would become a doctor. My father could afford to send me for studies abroad. It was quite hard to enter Romanian universities because of the numerus clausus [10](#), so, to avoid failure, which would have lead to losing a year, in 1936 we commonly decided that I should go to study in Italy, to the famous University of Bologna. Two of my childhood friends were already there, they went to Bologna before I did. I joined them, I continued my studies and my friendly ties. Many Transylvanians, both Romanians and Hungarians, studied there.

In Bologna every university year was opened by a festivity. This celebration took place in the main hall, the Aula Magna of the university, in the presence of the students and the professors. The professors, deans and vice-deans sat at one end of the hall. They were all dressed in robes, wearing golden necklaces and holding the university diploma in their hands. On the left there were the heralds in medieval clothes, and in the loft the trumpeters and horn-players, also dressed in medieval clothes. There were four horn-players, and the university flag was on their horns. The doors of the Aula Magna opened and in came the rector. He wore an ermine cloak. Then the heralds came in carrying the symbols of the university: the big medieval seal of the university on a velvet pad. After they came in, everyone sat down. The rector went to the pulpit in the center of the hall and made a short speech, declaring the year open. Of course this had a big impact on us, it was an unforgettable moment.

I know there was the Transylvanian Jewish Student Aid in Kolozsvár, which had a cafeteria for and supported Jewish students studying abroad. In Bologna I only used my parents' funds; I didn't receive any help from this organization. From a material point of view there were advantages of studying in Italy and I never suffered from any discrimination because of being a Jew.

I only finished two years of my studies in Italy, from 1936 to 1938. Then I returned to Kolozsvár to continue my studies. My father asked me to come home. He thought that due to the situation in Europe, the imminence of war, it was better to keep the family together. My years as a student in Kolozsvár weren't easy. When the sympathy towards the Iron Guard began to grow, it also had an impact on the universities. The Jews were beaten constantly. The Jewish students were beaten up, while the girls were handled with 'politeness': they only got a slap on the back.

I remember one time we had to leave the lecture room via a dark corridor. Lined up along both walls there were some Romanian students who slapped the Jewish students from one side to the other, including me. This was in 1939 or 1940. I managed to study in Kolozsvár only for a short period. After the Second Vienna Decision [11](#), when Northern-Transylvania was annexed to Hungary,

the anti-Jewish laws became effective, which restricted access of Jews to university. Due to the numerous clauses in Hungary [12](#) I had to discontinue my medical studies. Anyway, my family lived in Temesvar, which remained in Romania after the Vienna Decision, so I had to leave Kolozsvár and return home.

After the Second Vienna Decision we felt powerless. My family wasn't directly affected by the turn of events because we lived in Temesvar, but they affected our relatives from Marosvásárhely and Kolozsvár. We knew what had happened to the Jewry from Hungary in the interwar period, so we weren't particularly happy about the Vienna Decision.

During the war

As for the deportations from Hungary, many people are mistaken if they think the deportations only began in 1944. The fact is that there had been deportations even before 1944. For example, such a deportation took place in the early 1940s, even before the German occupation. They gathered the Jews who took refuge in Hungary from the neighboring countries and whose citizenship was unclear, and deported them to Galicia, which was already controlled by the Germans. Some 10-12,000 Jews were executed in Galicia. [Editor's note: Samuel refers to the massacre of Kamenetz-Podolsk, where in 1941 some 16-18,000 Hungarian Jews were slaughtered by SS troops and the Ukrainian auxiliary forces. The role of the Hungarian troops has not been established yet.]

In Romania very severe anti-Jewish measures were established in 1940 [see anti-Jewish laws in Romania] [13](#). We had to hand in our radio, they confiscated cars and bicycles and expropriated Jewish houses. In 1940 my father died. My brothers were already self-supporting and they supported my mother from then on. After the war our apartment in Temesvar was annexed to the building of the national sick-relief fund. My mother was evicted and the authorities gave her a room and access to a kitchen. She died there, the poor thing. She was seriously ill and died of cancer in 1957. My parents were buried according to the Jewish tradition in Temesvar. The Kaddish was recited, but no Yahrzeit was drawn up for them. I only had my grandmother's Yahrzeit, which I sent to the Memorial Museum of the Hungarian Speaking Jewry in Safed, Israel.

Jews were taken to forced labor not only in Hungary, but also in Romania. I was taken away in August 1941. These labor camps were spread all over the country. First they took us to Banat region, where we did some construction work, then they moved us to the valley of the Olt river. But the longest I stayed in a camp in South-Moldova, not far from Focsani. Most of the Jews from Temesvar and Arad were taken there for forced labor. For a while I worked there as an ambulance man. I had a corps-man bag I brought with me from Temesvar, with medications and bandages. The elderly needed treatment most frequently. I gave them shots, and even provided first-aid for the Romanian soldiers who got injured. Furthermore, their commander, a captain, got an eye infection because of the dirt and the poor hygiene we were exposed to there. I treated and cured him with my knowledge as a 2nd-year medical student and the books I had on me. I had course books on surgery and contagious diseases. I even cured cases of furuncle or abscess. I cut the abscess, cleaned and disinfected it following the instructions. I was able to help only in the cases that needed surgery because I had no knowledge of internal medicine. We hadn't covered that subject at university yet. In the places I was working there were fairly decent conditions, but this wasn't true for every camp. I know from my brother's complaints and stories how horrible the situation of the forced laborers in Pankota was. [Pankota is 40 kilometers northeast of Arad.]

We worked under military supervision. We listened to the radio, and the officers of the nearby military units were all pro-French, pro-West. Some of them even came to us and informed us on the situation on the front. In the last weeks an officer came and told us that the retreating Germans were closing in. He judged correctly when he thought they would execute us if they found us, the forced laborers. He said, 'I'll give you some carriages which will take you to the city, to Braila. It's safer there than in the countryside.' There was no need for that because on 23rd August 1944 [14](#) the army moved over to the allied side, and we retreated with the troops towards Braila. I'm not sure whether we first went to Focsani and then to Braila, but I do remember we saw stampeding Germans on the way, who threw away their guns and ran away from the Russians. In Braila the local Jewish community helped us out for the time we stayed there, until the traffic for trains opened.

From Braila I went to my relatives to Bucharest. I looked them up, took a bath at their place, cleaned myself, and they gave me some clothes. The Jewish community of Bucharest also helped us out with some money. I didn't go to the canteen because I ate at my relatives. I waited until it was officially announced that the railroad had been repaired and it was possible to go to Temesvar. I went home in the fall of 1944, and there everybody was unhurt: my sisters, brothers and my mother. After the war they all carried on with their lives separately, and I think I'm not entitled to speak about them.

Post-war

In the fall of 1944 I re-entered the medical school in Kolozsvar, which in the meantime had been relocated to Szeben because it had to when Northern-Transylvania was annexed to Hungary in 1940. I finished one year in Szeben, and after the university moved back to Kolozsvar in 1945, I continued my studies there. I had to readjust to the academic life and I also had to learn the Romanian technical language because I had learned the basics in Italian. I had to attend courses, practice and laboratory. The aesthetics professor at the university of Kolozsvar was professor Rusu. His lectures on music were brilliant, and students from every faculty came to his lectures. He was a highly cultured man. He used to present a piece of work with a tape-recorder, and at the next lecture we listened to the same composition without him explaining. It went on like this for the entire academic year. His lectures were frequented by many Jewish students, at least those from the medical faculty.

We went to symphonic concerts quite frequently. Other ways of entertainment were the cinema and the theater. During fall and spring we used to tour the forests surrounding Kolozsvar quite often. After World War II there was a very serious Jewish student organization in Kolozsvar which had a canteen. It was called the Mark Antal [15](#) Student Aid. We had lunch and supper there. It was quite a big help, because there was a famine after the war. It was very difficult to get food. This organization was managed by a board of several students. I don't remember their names. But I do recall one of them, Dr. Antal, because he became a doctor. Some new members of the board were elected periodically, for instance I was a member of it from 1945 to 1948. I was also a member of the communist student organization. I joined the Party in 1945. As people from many other nationalities, I hoped there would be no more anti-Semitism or ethnic discrimination, and tolerance would prevail.

There were some ideological issues I couldn't agree with from a scientific point of view. The leftists always emphasized the universal importance of historical materialism [16](#), that attaining historical materialism would be of great help in the field of historical research. I soon realized that this had no substance, because after World War II, but even after World War I, almost every great medical finding or discovery took place in the West, and not in Russia.

In Szeben I got acquainted with Professor Valeriu Lucian Bologa, a brilliant scientist of European mentality. I liked his lectures on the history of medicine. Although we were compelled to attend all the lectures, I loved this one because I liked history. I developed a closer relationship with the professor, and after I finished my studies in Szeben he asked me whether I would like to work in Kolozsvár at the history of medicine chair. I told him I didn't really know anything about the history of medicine. We learned very little about it. He said, 'You know what? I will give you some studies on the history of medicine, you read them and then you decide whether you would like to do it or not.' A month later, after I had read those studies, I went to him and told him I liked the history of medicine, and I would gladly work at the chair. 'But there could be a problem', I told him. 'What's that?', he asked. 'Professor, Sir, I'm a Jew. This could hinder me in the future.' He said, 'Well, son, I don't care what you are, the most important thing is for you to love what you do and be fair and honest.' So from 1945 right until the death of the professor, that is until my retirement in 1981, I worked at the history of medicine chair in Kolozsvár. I'm the apprentice and successor of Professor Valeriu Lucian Bologa, I took over the professor's lectures at the university as an officially appointed professor of history of medicine .

I abandoned my career as medical practitioner and dedicated myself to the history of medicine. I hadn't given up practice entirely, but I restricted it to my family. I studied the history of medicine in both Transylvania and the Regat. I wrote and published several books in Romanian, in which I presented the history of medicine and its greatest personalities in the Hungarian community of Transylvania. I published them in Romanian because I wanted to familiarize the Romanian public with this slice of culture of the Hungarians from Transylvania. My first step, in which my mentor, Professor Valeriu Lucian Bologa, was of great help, was to get acquainted one step at a time with the subject, the Romanian and Transylvanian, respectively the European medical traditions and their historical development. I had to get familiar with the medical procedures and the domestic medicine, as well. In time I managed to get into the scientific work of the different authors on the history of medicine in Romania. I paid special attention to the impact of European medicine on Transylvania and Romania. It was a necessary thing to do, and after I did it I was able to organize my thoughts, my sources grew in number and I began writing down what I had learnt. I began working at the chair in 1945, but my first book only came out in 1954. By then I knew and processed many works, and those were the basis for my book, a collection published in 1954 by the Romanian Academy.

As my knowledge developed, I advanced within the university from trainee to lecturer, and then to the assistant professor position. When my professor couldn't be present for various reasons, say when he was away or ill, I was holding the lectures and seminars. A long year had to pass until I acquired enough knowledge to publish, along with and assisted by my professor, more comprehensive, synthetic works. In 1955 we published our work on the history of domestic medicine, for which in 1957 both Professor Bologa and myself received a National Award.

Besides the history of medicine I also studied the history of pharmacy. I have an accomplishment in this field I have to mention. In the 1950s, that is, after the nationalization [17](#) of the drug stores, I created a Museum for History of Pharmacy in the Hintz drug store here in Kolozsvár. Of course, I used to its full value the famous history of pharmacy collection by Gyula Orient from Kolozsvár. To these I added the values in the field of history of pharmacy I gathered from the nationalized drug stores. There were beautiful pharmaceutical equipment, paintings, and a beautiful baroque-style office desk. I see this museum as the greatest achievement in my life because I enriched the cultural life of Kolozsvár.

After my professor retired in 1962, I took over the lectures. For Professor Bologna, his office at the chair was kept for him right until his death, and he was always there, working. It was very important for me to provide him a place where he could work in peace. It never crossed my mind to move into his office; the more so since I had my own office.

In 1979 I wrote a study on the history of pharmacy of four hundred pages. This was a universal history of pharmacy, with special focus on the development of the domestic, that is the Romanian pharmacy. No other such study has been published since. There are some very valuable works related to the history of the domestic Romanian medicine and pharmacy, but that book remains the only one related to the universal history of pharmacy ever written in Romanian.

Married life

I married Sari Ungar in 1945. She was born into a Jewish intellectual family in 1916. She spent her childhood in Szilagysomlyó and Nagyvárad. She was working as a clerk. We got acquainted and married in Temesvár. We only had a civil marriage. We were very poor and didn't organize a party after the wedding. There was just a family dinner at which only my wife's family and my mother took part.

We moved to Kolozsvár because I was a student then and I had to continue my studies. We both had been supported by the Mark Antal Student Organization and dormitory. We stayed on the edge of the city in a basement apartment, in very humble conditions. Then, at the end of the 1940s, we moved to Jokai Street [a street that looks onto the main square], into our current home. When we moved here, however, only one of the four rooms was ours, three other families lived in the rest of the apartment. There were quite a few discrepancies related to using the bathroom and the kitchen. We lived in these conditions for five to six years. After our children were born, we requested the housing board to allocate the whole apartment to us. It wasn't easy, we could only gradually take over the rooms, and after many fights.

My son György Izsák was born in 1950, and two years later our second son, András Izsák followed. They grew up here, went to elementary school and high-school from here. They finished high-school in Romanian. Their mother tongue is, of course, Hungarian; they read books in Hungarian. We never kept secret from them their origin, and educated them in the Jewish spirit. They both graduated from the medical university in Kolozsvár. György graduated from the dentistry faculty, while András graduated from the general practitioner faculty. András graduated in 1978.

When they were in the 4th year, they both got passports and emigrated to Western Europe. I had a cousin doctor in Paris and he supported them. From France they moved to Italy, where I also had some former colleagues who helped them, thus they got acquainted with the Western European

culture. They both got married there and emigrated to Israel: Gyuri in 1980 and Andras in 1981. They weren't Zionists, we didn't raise them to be. We rather wanted Diaspora, but they wanted to be free. They wanted to travel and enjoy their work. Now they both live with their families in Haifa. We speak on the phone every week.

In 1959 I participated at an international conference on the history of pharmacy in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. Among the participants were some Dalmatian Jewish pharmacists from Yugoslavia. I visited a Jewish street in Dubrovnik. There was a nice baroque-style synagogue there that I also visited. I talked to a man from the community, a guard or something, and he showed us around. He was of Spanish origin, his name was Toletó. His family came from Toledo. The guard opened for us the Torah chest and showed us an old, a several hundred year old Torah. His family's name was engraved on the holder. They had brought it with them from Spain. By the way, I visited Toledo, as well. I visited the beautiful synagogues of Toledo in 1980. I had the opportunity to give lectures at many international conferences on the history of medicine and the history of pharmacy. I took my wife along to several of these conferences in the Czech Republic, France and Germany. Our visits to Western Europe were not always related with conferences. We've been to Israel five times, and we've visited our sons.

During the communist era it was very hard to obtain Samizdat literature [18](#), but I listened to the radio all the time. I listened to the English and Israeli radio stations. We took no part in the events of 1989 [see Romanian Revolution of 1989] [19](#), nor in the demonstrations.

My sentiment about my Jewry remained unchanged even after the Revolution. I didn't think it was important to be a member of the community, and neither did my wife. But that doesn't mean we broke our ties with the Jewish community. On the contrary: amongst other things, when I found out the community wanted to set up a library, I donated many valuable books to them. Recently, the president of the Jewish community, Gabor Goldner, asked me to write a history on the former Jewish hospital of Kolozsvár, which I did and handed over to him. I wrote it in Hungarian, but now it will be translated into Romanian and probably into English, as well, as part of a publication that will be published by the community. Occasionally we got some matzah from the community, and after I finished my work they even honored me with a bottle of Israeli brandy. In other words, the ties are still there.

In the case of the Jewish community of Kolozsvár we cannot speak of a true rebirth. The community has several hundred members. I don't know exactly how many, but I suspect there are around 300. There is no rabbi, just some chazzan who is familiar with the ceremonies and the prayer order. There is a prayer house and a synagogue on Horea Street that leads to the railway station. That's the memorial synagogue for the deported. It was renovated after the war and a memorial tablet was placed on it. We don't go to the synagogue, not even on high holidays, as before 1989. We don't celebrate the holidays at home, either. At most I take a book on Jewish history and read the part referring to a specific holiday.

I keep in touch with the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, which has its headquarters in Rotterdam or somewhere there. I correspond with them. I sent them my personal data, although I wasn't deported, but I was in forced labor camps. We communicate in Romanian. I had to fill in long lists for their records. This has been going on for years now, but with no results; they didn't tell me whether I'm entitled or not to any compensation.

I've been retired since 1981, but I continue my scientific work. I'm the member, or honorary member, of several scientific societies: the Romanian Society for the History of Medicine, the International Society for the History of Medicine, the International Academy for the History of Pharmacy, the Italian Society for the History of Medicine and the Hungarian Society for the History of Medicine. In my free time I like reading literature and works on the history of medicine. I really enjoy music and the musical culture.

I have both Hungarian and Jewish friends, but most of them are Hungarians. Almost all my doctor friends are dead. I have some elderly friends who are sustained by the community. In exchange they transferred by deed their homes to the community. The feeling of loneliness bears upon us. We live a lonely life, although our sons call us on the phone every week from Israel and visit us at least once a year.

Glossary

1 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.

2 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.

3 Middle school

This type of school was attended by pupils between the ages of 10 and 14 (which corresponds in age to the lower secondary school). As opposed to secondary school, here the emphasis was on modern and practical subjects. Thus, beside the regular classes, such as literature, maths, natural sciences, history, etc., modern languages (mostly German, but to a lesser extent also French and English), accounting and economics were taught. While secondary school prepared children to

enter university, middle school provided its graduates with the type of knowledge, which helped them find a job in offices, banks, etc as clerks, accountants, secretaries, or to manage their own business or shop.

4 Kiss, Jozsef (1843-1921)

One of the most important Hungarian Jewish poets. He was the first professed Jew who became famous as a Hungarian poet. His early poems followed the tradition of 19th-century Hungarian verse, although their heroes were assimilating Jews rather than Hungarian nobles and peasants. He broke new grounds with poems about social change, moral degeneration, and the breakdown of traditional Jewish family life. In other poems he described the cruelty of economic life in the city. He was attracted by revolutionary ideas but he envisioned the revolution in the distant future and was shocked when the Hungarian Soviet Republic was established in Hungary in 1918. He did not support it any longer. Anti-Semitism is a recurring motif in his poems. In 1890, with the backing of some friends, he launched a successful literary journal called A Het [the Week], and as its editor he gained a reputation as a leading figure in Hungarian literature.

5 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.

6 Benedek, Elek (1859-1929)

writer and journalist. Benedek was the founder and editor of many children's and youth magazines of high standard and literary value; one of them was Cimborá. He is recognized for his folk tale collections, children's books, children's verses, youth novels and dramas.

7 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.

8 Iron Guard

Extreme right wing political organization in Romania between 1930 and 1941, led by C. Z. Codreanu. The Iron Guard propagated nationalist, Christian-mystical and anti-Semitic views. It was banned for its terrorist activities (e.g. the murder of Romanian Prime Minister I. Gh. Duca) in 1933. In 1935 it was re-established as a party named Totul pentru Tara, 'Everything for the Fatherland', but it was banned again in 1938. It was part of the government in the first period of the Antonescu regime, but it was then banned and dissolved as a result of the unsuccessful coup d'état of January 1941. Its leaders escaped abroad to the Third Reich.

9 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.

10 Numerus clausus in Romania

In 1934 a law was passed, according to which 80 % of the employees in any firm had to be Romanians by ethnic origin. This established a numerus clausus in private firms, although it did not only concerned Jews but also Hungarians and other Romanian citizens of non-Romanian ethnic origin. In 1935 the Christian Lawyers' Association was founded with the aim of revoking the licenses of Jewish lawyers who were already members of the bar and did not accept new registrations. The creation of this association gave an impetus to anti-Semitic professional associations all over Romania. At universities the academic authorities supported the numerus clausus program, introducing entrance examinations, and by 1935/36 this led to a considerable decrease in the number of Jewish students. The leading Romanian banks began to reject requests for credits from Jewish banks and industrial and commercial firms, and Jewish enterprises were burdened with heavy taxes. Many Jewish merchants and industrialists had to sell their firms at a loss when they became unprofitable under these oppressive measures.

11 Vienna Decision

As a result of the Trianon peace treaty 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.

12 Numerus clausus in Hungary

The general meaning of the term is restriction of admission to secondary school or university for economic and/or political reasons. The Numerus Clausus Act passed in Hungary in 1920 was the first anti-Jewish law in Europe. It regulated the admission of students to higher educational institutions by stating that aside from the applicants' national loyalty and moral reliability, their origin had to be taken into account as well. The number of students of the various ethnic and national minorities had to correspond to their proportion in the population of Hungary. After the introduction of this act the number of students of Jewish origin at Hungarian universities declined

dramatically.

13 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.

14 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.

15 Mark, Antal (1880-1942)

Mathematics teacher and director of the Tarbut Jewish Lyceum, a Jewish high school for boys and girls in Kolozsvár/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.

16 Historical materialism

Part of the Marxist philosophy, the theoretical basis for the activities of the working-class and the communist party, elaborated by Marx and Engels, and further developed by Lenin. The origin of the materialist interpretation of the society is the interest of the working-class, based on the philosophical-economic analysis of the production of material objects (the large-scale machine industry). According to the historical materialism the basis of the society consists of the relations of production, on which the structures of politics and conscience are built. Liquidation of the capitalist private property and the establishment of the collective property is realized by the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is a transition towards creating the classless society, the communism.

17 Nationalization in Romania

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

18 Samizdat literature

The secret publication and distribution of government-banned literature in the former Soviet block. Typically, it was typewritten on thin paper (to facilitate the creation of as many carbon copies as possible) and circulated by hand, initially to a group of trusted friends, who then made further typewritten copies and distributed them clandestinely. Material circulated in this way included fiction, poetry, memoirs, historical works, political treatises, petitions, religious tracts, and journals. The penalty for those accused of being involved in samizdat activities varied according to the political climate, from harassment to detention or severe terms of imprisonment. Geza Szocs and Sandor Toth can be mentioned as Hungarian samizdat writers in Romania.

19 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.