

# Tili Solomon

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Iasi

Romania

Interviewer: Francisca Solomon

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Mrs. Tili Solomon is a 74-year-old woman who takes care of her appearance and is very sociable. She used to live in Iasi in a three-room apartment, located in the vicinity of the railroad station. After the death of her husband in 2004, she chose the aliyah and joined her daughter's family in Beer-Sheva, Israel. At the time of this interview she was embarrassed and, at the same time, upset because her apartment wasn't in perfect order anymore: there were boxes everywhere, as she was preparing to sell the place and move to Israel for good. What one could still notice was the comprehensive bookshelf in the living room, with many titles. She was also preoccupied with finishing the work on her husband's tomb in time. Yet her face radiated with joy because she was soon to be reunited with her children and settle in Israel, thus fulfilling her lifelong dream.

I don't really know any details about my great-grandparents because they died long before I was born. Instead, I have quite a few childhood memories involving my grandparents: both maternal and paternal ones. They were all born before 1900, around 1870-1875. My father was born in 1900, so his parents must have been born in the 1870s. I don't know how many generations of ancestors had lived in Iasi before them. But I know that my grandparents were born in Iasi and died here. They were all buried in the Pacurari Cemetery [Editor's note: Pacurari is the Jewish cemetery in Iasi.].

My maternal grandfather, Volf Shaim, was a bricklayer. I don't think he had any siblings, at least, I can't remember any; we were little children back then. Here's a detail that I recalled yesterday. After World War I, immediately after 1918, he left for America on his own, planning to work as a bricklayer: people probably thought that America was the land of milk and honey. So he left his wife and six or seven children at home and went straight there. Of course, he came back after a short while. I think the reason why he went alone was that he wanted to see for himself what the situation was like: whether he could take his children there and somehow earn his living. I don't know how long it took him to figure out there was no future for him there and return to his children. His absence may have had an influence on his wife, who died right away. As for him, he remarried.

His second wife was called Clara, who I actually met. She lived with him for many years, including the war period: World War II. She didn't have children of her own and raised his very nicely and made sure they all married well. They applied for emigration with their children. But it was a time when most applications were rejected. Because they were pretty old, they got the approval but their children didn't. In 1950 or 1951 they emigrated [see Mass emigration from Romania after World War II] [1](#) to Israel. My grandfather, who had worked as a bricklayer in Romania once, believed that he could do this in Israel too and be somebody, despite his age. Since his children were denied the right to emigrate, my grandfather and his wife were all alone and signed up for an old age home. When they left for the station, they rode in a carriage and Clara had a bouquet in

her hand. And all the daughters, sons-in-law and their children accompanied them in other carriages, as if it were a wedding procession. We kept in touch with them by mail. Back then we didn't have a telephone.

My maternal grandmother, Sifra Shaim, was a housewife. In those days, it was unusual for women to have jobs. They lived in Iasi on Aron Voda Street, in a large house with an entrance lobby, bedroom, elegant dining room, bathroom, another room, kitchen, large basement filled with goodies, and a summer kitchen. They later bought a gas stove. I never saw a gas stove in my parents' home, but the old folks bought themselves one right after 1944: my grandfather just brought it home one day. The house had a nice courtyard with a lot of ivy on the side; it was paved, and had a table with two benches on one side and also on the opposite. I remember that my grandfather's second wife, Clara, who was, in fact, our grandmother too, used to go to the synagogue on Sabbath and holidays, observed the kashrut, kept separate dishes for milk and meat products, and sometimes went with her daughters to the mikveh.

My mother, Clara Herscu [nee Shaim], Jewish name Haia Hinda, was born in Iasi, in the house on Aron Voda Street, around 1902. She had three younger sisters. The first one who was born after her was Toni Smilovici [nee Shaim], of course, the last name is her husband's; she was born in 1904, was a housewife and died in 1974 in Iasi. Her husband's name was Leon; he was born in 1901 in Iasi, and was a tailor. They had a son, Nelu, who was born in 1929 and died in 1994. Nelu was an economist. Paulina Scheinfeld [nee Shaim], my mother's second sister, was born in 1907 in Iasi. She was a housewife. Her husband's name was Strul; he was a hakham and did ritual slaughters, especially with poultry. They had a son, Avram, born in Iasi in 1932, who currently lives in Germany, and is a light industry engineer. He's married and has a son who's a surgeon. Paulina died in 1993 in Rehovot, Israel. Ceanca Siriteanu [nee Shaim], my mother's third sister, was born in 1920. Her husband's name was Sergiu and he was an accountant. They had a daughter, Sorana, who was born in 1944 in Iasi and currently lives in Israel. She's a chemical engineer. Ceanca left for Israel and was buried in Rehovot too. She died in 1997.

My mother was a housewife. She was a very beautiful woman. Someone once told me, many years after, 'I liked to passing by your window only to see your mother.' Her hair was always done and she was always fixed up. She wouldn't leave the house unless she looked perfect; she'd say, 'How can I go out if my hair isn't combed and done?' A truly beautiful woman: I say it with no hesitation. And so were her sisters. They were all beautiful and elegant girls.

My paternal grandmother, Debora Herscu, was a woman with little education. We, the children, all lived helter-skelter, so to speak, on Socola Street. The old man, Moisa Herscu, adored us. He was a grain merchant; he traded grain and there was even a time when he owned a grain store. I mean, it wasn't a grocery, he sold food and forage. This was around 1925, after he completed his military service. He also had the nickname of Moisa Stramola because he always wore a kopola [kippah]. I remember my father and grandfather once worked for an employer who did business with walnuts. He bought them from peasants, his employees cracked them and dried the kernels, and he then exported them to I don't know where. It was a seasonal job, in fall usually. The employer's name was Herman Schneer. He died during the pogrom [in Iasi] [2](#) with one of his sons, and one of his sons-in-law. In our house, Schneer was thought to be a very clever man. He used to pay his employees on Saturday evenings. On one of those evenings my grandfather wasn't satisfied with what he got and refused the money, claiming he deserved more. The employer told him, 'Let me

tell you something. You may not be satisfied, but take the money first, then negotiate.' These words were remembered in my family for a long time.

My father had a brother whose name was Pincu [Avram]. He was a grain merchant too. My grandparents' house on Socola Street was rather modest. They used firewood for heating in winter. The stoves were ordinary, not made of terracotta, and there were no gas stoves back then. All they had was the so-called Primus stove. Later, some lamps were introduced, but they were worse than the Primus because they smoked heavily. During the war [World War II] we all gathered there; each family occupied a room. It was very difficult, but we did it to be together.

I only know that both my grandfathers wore kippahs, but I don't recall them having beards; they were religious, but not extremely devout. This was also true for the grandmothers: they didn't wear wigs and only put on a kerchief when going to the synagogue or cemetery. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents used to go to the synagogue on Friday evenings and especially on Saturdays, and they observed the kashrut. I remember that on holidays, especially on Purim, the whole family and some friends would gather at my maternal grandparents' place on Aron Voda Street. They had a rather good material situation and could afford to serve abundant meals, with cookies, chocolate cakes, traditional hamantashen: small cakes whose shape was reminiscent of Haman's hat. All the guests chatted, ate and had fun. My mother sometimes went to the mikveh, but we used to go to our maternal grandparents' because they had a bathroom; back then, few people had the chance to take a bath at home. They also went to Zisu Herman's, a communal bath. When my paternal grandfather died, the women sat shivah, i.e. they sat on the floor for seven days in his memory. My family used to say that his former employer, Herman Schneer, for whom my grandfather had worked in the walnut business, had personally come to express his sympathy, and this was a great honor for us.

My father had two brothers and a sister. Avram Herscu was born after my father, in 1903 in Iasi. In the beginning he worked as a grain merchant, just like my father. I was very fond of him. He was a great adventurer. During the war he served in the Red Army. Then he came back to Romania, stayed for a short while and left for Israel via Hungary, Austria and Germany. He stayed for a while in Germany, got to Israel, then returned to Germany, where he got married. His wife's name was Toni. He owned a restaurant there. Eventually he went to Israel again and died there in 1981 or 1982. The next brother was Ilie Herscu, born in 1906, a grain merchant too; he married a woman named Reghina who was from Campulung la Tisa [Northwestern Bukovina] [3](#) and spoke German fluently. I can tell you that she, her sister and mother stayed in Campulung and were deported to Transnistria [4](#); her mother died there and her sister returned. My father's sister was called Nety Herscu. She was born in 1912, was a housewife and married a man named Iosif; he had some roots from Bukovina too, but his family had moved here when he was a child. I'm not sure whether he spoke German like my aunt. He was a watchmaker. They had a daughter, Dori, who's currently living in Israel.

My father, Burah Herscu, was born in May 1900, in the house on Socola Street in Iasi. He was a grain merchant: he traded grain and there was even a time when he owned a small store where he sold hay, oat, grains, rye, bran, salt lumps, animal supplies, i.e. for cattle.

My parents got married in 1927 in the beautiful temple in Unirii Square. Since they lived in different neighborhoods, my mother in the Targu Cucu area and my father on Socola Street, they must have

met through a common circle of friends; young people who went together to various shows and films. On Friday and Saturday evenings, they organized parties with dancing and snacks, at their places. This is how they met; they liked each other and got married. The wedding party took place in a very fancy hall where such events were organized. I think its name was 'Sport si muzica' [Sports and Music]. Many Jews used to go there, maybe Christians too, but it was very expensive and Jews usually had a better material situation. My mother used to tell us that balls were organized in this hall on Saturdays; young men and women would meet there to dance and snacks were served. In 1928 my sister, Silvi, was born. My mother was a very pedantic woman and dressed us in beautiful and neat clothes, but nothing fancy. My mother didn't have a job. In that period women didn't work. I had a rather hard time living with my parents.

My father was very talkative and read a lot. He enjoyed reading Sholem Aleichem's [5](#) books. I remember how he used to sit in bed in winter and read; at a certain point, he would start laughing and we didn't know why: he had come across something funny. So he would read us a fragment from Sholem Aleichem's book to amuse us. We didn't have an actual bookshelf, but he borrowed many books and newspapers. My mother read too. My father particularly liked the Jewish authors, he was happy whenever he came across someone like Aleichem. There was a bookstore on I. C. Bratianu Street, and they also lent books. My sister borrowed from there too. My parents probably borrowed from family and friends as well.

I was very fond of my father. My sister was my mother's favorite and I was my father's. I used to go with him to the marketplace and enjoyed accompanying him to the synagogue on Friday evenings. There were a few other children there, little girls and boys, and he often took me with him. My father was a big fan of amusement in general: he took me to the cinema and theater. I also went to several performances at the Jewish Theater [in Iasi]. Here's a little detail: it's nothing, but I'll say it, since we're telling stories now. It was my birthday and I woke up next to a huge bouquet of lilacs. My father had brought them for me because it was the lilac season. I think this happened right before the war, and I was probably very young. But, as you can see, I can remember this. I can still visualize the scene of me waking up with a huge lilac bouquet in my bed. It's amazing how such small things can touch your heart.

My father did his military service around 1925. He was assigned to the firemen. He had many stories from his army days. I remember my family used to say that if my father woke up at the sound of a fire engine's siren, he would jump through the window in his underwear or his pajamas and run after them to see where the fire was and give a hand.

I was born in Iasi in May 1931. My sister, Silvi, is two years and a few months older than me. She currently lives in Israel. I remember my sister had a friend, Coca Pomeranz, who had two brothers: Dedi and Sandu. I was the youngest and always insisted on going with her to her friends, but they would often leave me at home. They would send me inside to ask for my parents' permission, or so they claimed. I would ask for some sort of guarantee, to make sure they wouldn't leave in the meantime. To make fun of me, because I was so naive, they would give me a hairpin or button, something unimportant. This way they could leave without me, and it would make me upset and I would cry.

I've just remembered a game they used to play. I was desperate because I had no idea how it worked. They took two small pieces of paper and stuck them on their forefingers. And this is what

they sang, 'Two swallows are picking up woodchips; one of them is Lina, the other is Paulina; when Lina flies, Paulina flies too; when Lina comes back, Paulina comes back too...' The paper stayed stuck on the forefinger and they changed it using the middle finger. And when they got to the part where Paulina and Lina come back, they brought those fingers back. I was little and couldn't understand how this flying away and coming back worked. So I kept nagging my parents to tell me how that was possible. This is a story I remember many times and laugh on my own every time I do.

We were a Jewish family, but weren't very religious. We observed all the holidays though. When a holiday, like Purim, was near, my father would try to tell us something about its traditions. On New Year's Eve, Rosh Hashanah, he told us why the Jews had started counting the years long before Christ was born, and many other things. They wanted us to know the basics about the holidays.

The eight days of Passover were observed rather strictly. We ate latkes; they were made of matzah flour to which they added an egg, salt and pepper, and they were roasted in oil. We occasionally ate potato salad with eggs. There was no question about having bread at home in that period. Wheat flour and rice were forbidden. On the seder evening my father went to the synagogue. We had to wait for him to come back before we could eat. My sister and I were already half asleep by then. My father read the Haggadah and my sister or I asked the mah nishtanah. During the war we baked a sort of unleavened bread: simple or with eggs. It was round and I can still see it before my eyes. We kept it in a special cupboard which was cleaned before Passover. The hakham would slaughter poultry, but this didn't only happen on Passover, poultry was always slaughtered by the hakham, to observe the ritual.

Purim was a happy holiday; every year we went to our maternal grandparents' where there was a large meal. Both my grandmother and mother made cakes, especially hamantashen. We dressed up and visited our relatives. The streets were full of fiddlers, usually Gypsies, who made a buck thanks to Purim. Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and other high holidays were very pleasant times. I remember that, on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we used to go near a stream and shake our pockets. This custom was called 'ba da tashlehs' [Yiddish for 'at the pockets']. The entire Socola neighborhood used to go shake their pockets by the Bahlui River, which ran nearby. This meant that you shook off your sins and entered the New Year a renewed person. Others went to Zisu Herman's bath to shake their pockets. My parents went to the synagogue and took us with them; we would find a place to play there. I remember the children dug a hole in the ground and, as it was chestnut season, we played with chestnuts by that hole. These are my childhood memories which I cherish so much.

On the eve of Yom Kippur there was the 'shlogn kapores.' For this custom, they had to use a cock for a boy and hen for a girl. The chicken had to be donated to the poor afterwards. We usually went to our grandparents' as they were the ones who performed the ritual. A prayer was said and the chicken was swung around the child's head. This was supposed to erase the child's sins. Other times this was done with money which was later donated. On Yom Kippur there was a big fast. Everyone fasted; we, the children, fasted less strictly, for only half a day. But when we grew older, we began to fast the entire day. In the evening we would all sit at the table and, in the end, it became a pleasant holiday, because we all sat together and ate the traditional soup.



On Sukkot, those who could afford it built a sukkah. I can't remember having one at our place when I was a child. I think the men in the family went to the synagogue, where a sukkah was erected. I think people used corn stalks to make the walls of the sukkah, which was a sort of hut where you were supposed to stay. I saw it at our neighbors' houses and in the courtyards of the synagogues. Others improvised a table inside and sat at it.

My favorite holiday was Channukah. We would light candles: first my father, then my sister and I. They say only boys should do it, but there were only girls in the house. During the eight days of Channukah we made red beat borscht at least once; it had varnishkes, a sort of bow-tie pasta made of potatoes. Our maternal grandparents always gave us money, not gifts. They called it Channukah gelt. When we got a bit older, my sister and I tried to avoid going to our grandparents' on the very days of Channukah because we were ashamed to receive money. I had two cousins, one of them was older than me, and the other younger, who weren't embarrassed at all and had no problem with going to pick up their share. If we went the following week, the two of them laughed at us, 'Who didn't go on Channukah doesn't get the Channukah gelt!' Eventually, our grandparents gave us the money: it didn't matter that we hadn't visited them when we were supposed to. Of course, it was a small incentive for us, but it was something to remember over the years. Our parents sometimes gave us Channukah gelt too.

Most of the city's population was Jewish. There were a few neighborhoods inhabited exclusively by Jews. On Sarariei Street, Christians were predominant, but certain quarters had only Jews. Very few of us were devout: a few women wore wigs and few men wore caftans and payes. But my family, like most of the Jewish population, observed the Mosaic religion to a great extent. As far as I remember, Iasi had many synagogues and prayer houses. Counting from Podul Ros to the Marzescu School, no, I don't even go as far as the Marzescu School, to Tesatura [factory], there were at least ten synagogues, well, prayer houses, where my parents used to go. There were four of them only in a small corner. Further away, after Targul Cucului [Editor's note: quarter of Iasi, where the Jewish population was predominant until World War II], there were others: two or three on Halei Street, and just as many on Independentei Boulevard, which was called I. C. Bratianu back then. The one at Kantarski survived for a long time. Not to mention the Cahane synagogue on Stefan cel Mare Boulevard: this was only demolished in the communist period, in the process of urban systematization [see Systematic demolitions] [6](#). Today there are only two synagogues left in Iasi, both of them Orthodox [7](#). One of them is the Great Synagogue in Targul Cucului, where a service is held only on Saturdays. I think there is also a Friday evening service in the other synagogue, on Palat Street, where the few Jews from Podul Ros gather.

Before and during the war the city had a number of paved streets and it had streetcars between Socola and Copou, and between Nicolina and Pacurari. There weren't many cars, but there were a lot of carriages. We had neighbors who owned a few horses and carriages; they hired cabmen who drove the carriages and made money for them. In the evening they retired and others replaced them. A cousin of mine, Nelu, particularly enjoyed coming to Socola Street. They lived downtown, six or seven streetcar stops away. He remembered that, when they had to leave, my father went to where the carriages were on duty in the evening, and asked whether there was anyone going downtown to give them a ride from Socola Street to Alecsandri Street, where they lived. These last years, my cousin remembered this and told me: 'I really liked to come by your place!' 'Why is that, Nelu?' 'Uncle Buca [Mrs. Solomon's father] used to go next door to Iancu Fonea's and ask whether

there was a carriage going downtown to take us home.' This was a great pleasure for him.

Our neighbors were Jewish. There weren't more than four or five Christian families in the entire neighborhood, from Podul Ros, Bahlui River, to the Marzescu School. It would have been inconceivable otherwise. Ninety-five percent of the inhabitants on Socola Street were Jews. The entire neighborhood was like that. Further away, towards Targul Cucului, on Aron Voda Street, where my maternal grandparents lived, it was the same thing. In fact, these were the two neighborhoods inhabited only by Jews.

As I lived on Socola Street, I went to a Romanian school, the Marzescu School; I studied there for two years, until 1940. Then several Jewish schools were founded because all the Jewish children were kicked out from the public schools [as a result of the anti-Jewish laws in Romania] [8](#). So, whether we wanted it or not, we had to go on. I attended the third and fourth grades at the Stern School on Palat Street. There was a shortage of teachers. For instance, one of my teachers in the third elementary grade was a chemist, Miss Blumenfeld. I started the fifth grade at the ORT [9](#) school on Sfantul Lazar Street. Half of the day was for learning a trade and the other half was theory. All the teachers were Jewish. There I learnt a little Hebrew and a little Yiddish, both speaking and writing, but it didn't really stick with me.

Yiddish and Hebrew were taught in those schools regularly. The ORT school had a tailoring and an underwear workshop. I was with the latter. I wasn't an outstanding student and couldn't say whether there were teachers that I preferred and teachers that I disliked. I remember I once wrote a composition with my sister's help when I was in elementary school. We were supposed to describe a cat or something like that; and I slipped a certain word. Anyway, that particular word got me a ten or a 'very good': I think this is what they used. Still, it wasn't my own doing, but my sister's. Another time, in an anatomy class, we were told to draw a heart and describe it. I got a ten or a 'very good' again because I really liked that subject. [Editor's note: In the Romanian grading system, the maximum grade is 10 and the minimum passing grade is 5.]

I studied Hebrew at the ORT school. In that period my father was no longer with us, having been sent to forced labor, and my mother was sick. Taking care of two children on her own wasn't easy; she didn't supervise me enough, so I got a failing final grade in Hebrew. I was supposed to get a prize for handiwork: they gave separate prizes for each subject. Because of my failing grade in Hebrew, when they called out the prizes, they said, 'Herscu Tili, prize for handiwork', but, in fact, they didn't give me anything: neither the diploma, nor that little piece of fabric which was given to us in recognition of our merit. I cried all the way from school to our house. My eyes were swollen. 'What happened?' they asked me at home. 'My friend Molca got a prize for handiwork and I didn't!' My problem wasn't that I hadn't got the prize, but that she had gotten it and I hadn't. I had to take private lessons. There was this young lady who taught Hebrew, a very nice young woman who did pro bono work for our school. I think she emigrated to Israel right after the war. She worked without compensation to help the Jewish community. My mother went to see her with tears in her eyes; she told her about my situation and that I wanted to continue my education. The lady recommended to us a girl who was two or three years older than me and I took some lessons with her that summer. I was able to pass my exam and enter the next grade. However, the fact that I didn't get that prize is something I'll always remember.

I started a very close friendship with a girl who was my age, Malvina Fischel. She had a little brother two or three years younger than her; his name was Michel. His Jewish name was Mehola. I became very attached to them. I went to their place more often than they came to mine. Throughout the war period I kept going there. We were in the same class at the Stern school, and then in the fifth grade at the ORT school. I also went to the sixth grade and maybe started the seventh, but she stopped after the fifth. Her mother was very ill and I think her father prevented her from going to school so that she could help her mother at home. Her father was a carpenter and made custom-made furniture. He had a workshop. I went there a few times with Malvina and her little brother; I think that was the first time I ever saw a carpentry workshop. Right after the war they moved to Bucharest and our friendship ended. Today I'm over 70 years old, I'm an *ole-hadas* [emigrant] to Israel and would be very happy to find her and meet with these people who were my childhood friends, again. The Fischels were very devout. On Saturdays, they didn't light a fire or warm up the food; I don't know, but they had a way of keeping it warm. They were very devout indeed.

Here's a memory from the war days, in the 1940s. There were private grocery stores on our street. The closest one was about one hundred steps away from our house. One day, I think it was Friday, my father sent me to buy some pies. I remember they were puffy and dipped in sugar a bit and well baked: I can still see them today, so many years later. So I probably went to buy them for breakfast. At that moment I think the air raid sirens went off. When that happened they kicked us out of the grocery store; they wanted to close the door and couldn't have foreigners on the premises. So I had to run all the way from the store to our house, lest the bombing caught me on the street. I entered through the courtyard; my mother and sister were already in the trenches, while my father was waiting for me, because he knew I was away. The house had a porch with two small cupboards. They sort of replaced the refrigerator: in summer food was kept there, because it was cooler. My father and I sat on the floor between those two cupboards and heard the sound of the air raid. The first thing one could hear was the sound of the planes which flew over the city. We stayed there for a while. Then we heard the sirens again: they probably knew when the planes withdrew. And we came out. When we came out, my mother looked very worried, 'Oh my God! Where have you been? Relax, it's over now.'

Right after the war broke out, the Russians occupied Bessarabia in June 1940 [see Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union] [10](#). My father decided that we should move there. It was a sort of frenzy resembling the one about the aliyah, in the 1950s. Jews would pack two or three suitcases, and rush to the station to catch the train for Bessarabia. They thought it was better for us to stay there under the Russian occupation than here, in Romania, where the persecutions against Jews had begun. We took the train. I think it was my first train ride and I thought traveling in cattle cars was normal. There was total chaos: we were very crowded and surrounded by luggage, baskets, suitcases, bundles and the like. When the train got to the border we were told the border had been closed and that we couldn't cross it anymore. We waited in the field. My father and some younger men went to inquire about our situation. It started raining heavily. We had no food, because we had probably taken very few things with us. My poor mother held my sister and me in her arms, while my father and some other people were trying to get the trains moving again, so that we could at least get back home.



It was night when we got to Iasi. Where to go? It was a long way to our street and we were probably afraid too. Aron Voda Street, where my grandparents lived, was equally far. The relative who lived closest to the station was my mother's sister, Toni Smilovici, on Alecsandri Street. But she lived opposite the prefecture. Don't ask me how my father managed to get a carriage. One of our suitcases was stolen in the process. My father gave the cabman the address and we were taken there. When our relatives saw us they went, 'Oh dear, weren't you afraid to come here at night? Look, the prefecture is right there.' We slept over. In the morning they took us to my maternal grandparents' place. I don't remember how exactly we got there. We were afraid to go back to our place. The policemen who watched the street knew that the 'jidans' [offensive word for Jew in Romanian] had gone to Bessarabia [11](#). Still, five or six days later, we regained our house and the neighborhood policemen kept yelling at us, 'So, you wanted to go to the Bolsheviks?' This is pretty much what the situation looked like back then. This attempted departure affected my father so much, that he never wanted to leave again.

A neighbor of ours from Socola Street, also a Jew, of course, had a radio set. After the war began, in 1940, one or two of the neighborhood people, my father included, would risk going to that man's place to listen to the news in the evening. But it didn't take long till the radio sets were confiscated: maybe a few months later, I can't remember exactly.

Before the Legionaries [12](#) there were the Cuzists [13](#), for a shorter period. But it was during that very period that my father was hospitalized for an operation. My mother, who had two little children to take care of, had a hard time. She had to divide her time between going to the hospital and looking after us at home. At that time, the Cuzists saw my mother and, probably knowing she was Jewish, told her something that made her come home very upset.

It was difficult for us during the war, as my father was sent to forced labor camps. He had an extremely hard time: he kept going to places where the work was the most difficult. There was a place on Socola Street, about three streetcar stops away, on the outskirts of the city; they called it the 'Engineers Corps.' He had to walk to get there because we couldn't afford the streetcar tickets. The work there was the most difficult and only the Jews were assigned to it. Of course, they did it under military supervision. He came back home every night, but he was always full of scratches and dried blood. He was in a pitiful state. I don't know what exactly he did there, but I suppose he had to work with steel wire. It was a convict's work. One of us had to wash and disinfect him every night. I think this is why he died so young: he hadn't even turned 60.

In the meantime, my mother got very ill because she had two children to look after and my father was always away. She could hardly support our home. Her sisters rushed to help and her father brought her physicians. She underwent treatment and began to recover. Seeing what was going on at home, my father fled from the 'Engineers Corps' and became a deserter. This happened in 1940 or 1941. He was found, tried and sentenced to one month of imprisonment for being a deserter from labor. When he was released we had a big meal at our place, with potato dumplings. My mother also made a sort of cake like they used to back then: a few layers, milk cream and something to give it color. I distinctly remember the night he came back as it was very late, 11 or 12pm, and we were already asleep.

In 1941 there was the pogrom. Anti-Semitism burst out in Iasi. All the Jewish men on Socola, Nicolina and Crucii Streets were seized and taken to the bank of the Bahlui River, where machine

guns had been installed, ready to shoot them. Only one neighbor got away. I think he had a mistress who lived opposite his house, a German woman who simply kept him at her place and refused to hand him over, although she already lived with a man. I later found out that this man was assigned to Tesatura [Editor's note: weaving mill in Iasi, founded before the war. In the communist period it became a state-owned textile enterprise.]; he was actually a German spy who had been sent to Romania. All the Jewish men were lined up on the river bank, ready to be executed. There was this police sergeant, Manuta; he had been a neighborhood policeman and knew all the Jews. He wasn't really an anti-Semite. He treated the neighborhood Jews decently. He often took bribes in order to let the merchants practice their trade in peace, but didn't ask for much; it was a way of making an extra buck.

It was Sunday. In that period he was the prefect's chauffeur. He drove downtown, he must have lived in Podul Ros, and saw what was happening on the river bank; he saw them [Jews] lying on the ground awaiting the execution. He probably went back and told the prefect about it. I don't know what really happened, but the fact is that they were all released instead of being shot. My father was among them. We didn't even know what was going on in the city. [Editor's note: Mrs. Solomon can't tell precisely how the release order was issued, but she thinks it was a less official action; she suspects Manuta of having persuaded the prefect.] After the war, somewhere between 1948 and 1950, Manuta was tried in Bucharest for things he had done during the war. I don't know what else he had done, but as you know, many people who only did their job during the Antonescian period [14](#) were prosecuted after the communists came to power. Manuta came to my father and maybe to some other neighbors too, and asked him to appear as a witness in his trial and testify about what had happened to the Jews on Socola Street who were close to getting shot by the Bahlui River. My father went to Bucharest and testified two times. As far as I remember, thanks to the people's testimonies, the man was acquitted.

I think my husband Aurel told me that he had been at the prefecture 'that Sunday.' Jews were being shot there. Aurel and some others were forced to wash the pavement with a hose. There were so many bodies in the courtyard that Sunday that the water flowed to the gutters on the street mixed with blood. On Monday morning two of my uncles who lived there went to their workplaces together. One of them was a watchmaker and had a workshop on Stefan Cel Mare Boulevard. When he got there and saw what was going on in the street, instead of opening the store he entered the courtyard, where some horrified relatives of his asked him, 'How did you get here? There's big trouble in Iasi.' The other one went further away. He was a clerk and worked for another Jew named Kratenstein who owned a small factory. He was supposed to get to I. C. Bratianu Street. Nobody knows whether he made it or not. But his wife and my cousin, who are now in Israel, claim that he was murdered on the street that Monday morning; he didn't get to the train. On Monday, 30th June 1941, the Jews who survived the pogrom of the previous day were forced to board cattle cars and were taken to Ialomită. Most of the bodies were unloaded and buried in mass graves in Podul Iloaiei and Targu Frumos. Few of them managed to stay alive: this is why they called them the death trains. My poor uncle never came back. My cousin asked me to light two candles for him; she is sure he ended up in the mass grave.

I also remember a schoolmate from the Marzescu school, a boy; whenever he walked on Socola Street, he would call me, 'Jidauca, jidauca!' [Offensive word for female Jew in Romanian.] When I spotted him from a distance, I hid inside the house or the courtyard so that he wouldn't see me and

have his way with me.

It was still during the war, but the front had moved towards the Russians. One night the planes came. I think they were English, the Russians' allies; or that's what they told us. The sirens went off. Because it was night, they used some sort of lamps, so that they could see every house in the neighborhood. One of our neighbors had Romanian or German soldiers quartered with him. The attackers saw the soldiers and fired with the machine gun or dropped a bomb; they may have hit the soldiers, but they also hit that family of seven: husband, wife, two children, husband's brother, an old woman, and another brother who was a bachelor. There are seven tombs at the cemetery: the Aba Pesah family. The following morning all these bodies were loaded in a cart and you could see their shoes and feet stacked one over the other; seven dead people.

In 1942 or 1943 they made us wear the yellow star [15](#); it was a little piece of black cloth as wide as the opening of a glass, with a yellow star with six corners on it. It was attached with a safety pin. One day they simply told us that, as of the following day, we couldn't leave our houses without wearing that star. I remember that a neighbor of ours, an old man with a beard, went to the toilet one Friday and forgot to wear his yellow star. They beat and insulted him in a terrible way because of that. The yellow star wasn't worn by Jews countrywide. After I went to Israel I found out that there were cities where they didn't wear it. My brother-in-law used to live in Braila and told me that they didn't have to wear the yellow star there.

We could only go shopping after 10am. Purchase gas, for instance. We could only queue for gas after 10am, while the rest of the population could buy gas throughout the entire day. This was the same for bread too.

From 1943 until the spring of 1944 my father was sent for forced labor to Ghidighici [today Moldova], in Bessarabia. Then, in spring 1944, at the time of Passover, the Russians broke through the frontline and began to advance towards Iasi. My father was sent straight to Harsova, in Constanta County, to the other end of the country. He probably dug trenches. He once managed to come home from Harsova and stay for five days. They only allowed him to do that because they thought his child had died. I was that child. [Editor's note: The Herscu family managed to obtain a false death certificate for Tili Herscu in order to get the father home to the so-called funeral of his daughter.] He was escorted by an armed Romanian soldier. He had been given five days and had to return on Saturday. He reported to the [Military] Circle, to a man named Cotaie, and was given his return pass. My father then told the soldier escorting him, 'You know what? Let's pretend we got to the station too late and missed the train and let's postpone the pass for 24 hours. Since I'm here, I'd like to spend the Saturday with my wife and children.'

On Saturday they went to the Circle to pick up the pass for that day, which was the last day of his leave of absence; they intended to leave the following day, on Sunday. If someone asked them why, they would simply say that they had missed the Saturday train. So they didn't even go to the station on Saturday, only to the Circle. Instead of going to the train, they came home. This happened on Saturday at noon. On Sunday the frontline gave in and the Russians entered Iasi. Had he left on Saturday, this event would have caught him on his way back to Harsova and who knows how long it would have taken him to find a train to get back home. This was the only time he got lucky during the war: he happened to get his five-day leave of absence at the right time. Because of the Russians' arrival, he was able to stay in Iasi with his family.

Here's another story from the war days. It was a Friday morning. We didn't have tap water, so I had to carry two buckets of water because it was bath time for us children. I was always the one who carried the water. I used to have a neighbor who claimed her arms had stretched because she had carried too many buckets of water. I think I can say the same now. This happened in 1944, when the frontline was very close: it had reached Stanca Roznovanu located 10-15 kilometers from the city. So I went to another courtyard to get water. I was returning with the buckets full. Because the frontline had gotten so close, there was no time to sound the alarm when there was an air raid. We just heard planes and falling bombs. Our very neighborhood was hit that day. I was carrying the buckets, my mother was standing at the door waiting for me to return, and the few people who were in the street were trying to take cover. My mother waved at me urging me to abandon the buckets and come home running, as we didn't have time to get shelter. But I just couldn't make myself leave those buckets, for which I had worked so hard. Eventually, I carried them all the way home, but we didn't make it to the shelter.

I didn't have any brothers. I only have a sister who currently lives in Israel and is two years and a few months older than me. She was born in Iasi too. She finished the first four elementary grades in a Romanian school: the Marzescu school. Then she went for two years to the Commerce High School, until the war began and we were kicked out from the public schools. She didn't continue her education. After the war she was an activist in a Zionist youth organization, Hashomer Hatzair [16](#) [Mrs. Solomon was active in Hanoar Hatzioni [17](#), a branch of the Zionist organization for children and teenagers.]. This is how she met her husband. They met in 1947 or 1948 at the 'ahsara' [Editor's note: Hebrew for preparation for emigration to Israel under the guidance and with the financial help of the Zionist associations]. These Zionist organizations were dissolved in 1948 or 1949. Her boyfriend went home to Braila, where he founded an agricultural snif [Editor's note: Hebrew for branch; used here in the sense of agricultural settlement], which didn't work out. Because they weren't getting the results they expected, they moved to Piatra Neamt or Targu Neamt. The boys got jobs and provided the money, while the girls stayed at home and cooked, cleaned, did the laundry, and ironed. It wasn't enough, but they still got help from certain organizations like the Joint [18](#) who must have sent them many aids. My sister invited her boyfriend to Iasi; then he invited her to Braila, his native town. While she was there, they had a quick civil marriage. So she was still Miss Herscu when she left and returned as Mrs. Gottesman.

After a short while they had an actual wedding. Two or three years later, in the 1950s, my sister gave birth in Braila. In that period people had started to apply for emigration to Israel. My sister did that too, but, as she had had a second child in the meantime, she got a negative answer. Her father-in-law left, while she stayed in Braila with her two children and only one salary [her husband's]: a very difficult situation. They had to wait for two years before their application was approved. Living in Israel wasn't easy in the beginning. They only had one room; it was winter and raining, and the water infiltrated inside, so they had to place pots and basins here and there to collect the drops. Their little boy was about eight years old by then and the girl was still little. When they were preparing to leave and were packing the things in Braila, the boy asked, 'Mother, why are we leaving?' She replied, 'You'll see, Marius. It will be better for us there.' When the kid saw the pots and the rain drops falling inside the house and how they stayed there, he said, 'Mother, remember how you told me it would be better for us? What's so good about this?' She said, 'Patience, the good will come.' Today my sister has five grandsons. Her two children have very good material situations. The boy worked for many years in Africa, in Johannesburg.

I remember summer 1948 or 1949, when I went to a moshav in Vatra Dornei. I was still a member of the Hanoar Hatzioni. It was pretty nice. There were girls and boys, we had a campfire every evening and made a mamaliga as big as a cart's wheel. Everyone grabbed a piece of mamaliga and had a ladleful of milk and that was our dinner. Some recited poems, others sang something; it was nice. We went to the Hanoar about two times a week, and also on Friday and Saturday evenings. They usually organized something every day: singing, games, etc. We were divided into several groups and each group had a menahel [director, manager] who spoke about certain issues in Israel. When the State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948, the Zionist organizations were still legal in Romania and their representatives organized rallies of celebration. Girls in white blouses and navy-blue skirts and boys in white shirts and navy-blue pants marched on the streets.

After the war we didn't get involved in politics. We sort of supported communism though. Because anti-Semitism had given us such a hard time during the war, many Jews began to support Communism. Maybe some of them did it for material profit too. But neither my husband nor I were party members. And we also had relatives abroad. If you were an ordinary party member, having relatives abroad wasn't a big problem. Usually, only people in higher offices had this sort of problem.

In 1946 there was inflation [see Financial reforms in post-war Romania] [19](#). Before that there was a drought which lasted for one or two years or maybe more, and we had a food shortage. One kilogram of wheat flour cost millions. It was a very hard time. I, for instance, worked as a tailor for an employer; we settled for a certain sum but, by the end of the week, when payday came, the money couldn't buy me anything anymore. Inflation was booming. Money wasn't worth anything. You couldn't buy anything. Then they made the stabilization. A decree announced that people could exchange a fixed amount of money. No matter how much money you had, the State only exchanged a minimum amount. This happened in 1946 or 1947. I think the monetary reform was in 1951. Things were totally different then. My father worked for a food store. The evening news announced there would be a change with the money. My father didn't know anything. A neighbor came and told him, 'Look, Mr. Herscu, they just said on the radio that they are changing the money; something is about to happen tomorrow and I have some money. Couldn't you help me? Sell me some merchandise and I'll return it later.' My father told him, 'All right, but it's closing time now. Come here tomorrow and we'll do it.' The following morning he found a financial inspector at the door of the store; he inventoried the merchandise and any scheme became impossible. This is how I went through the stabilization process and monetary reform.

I met my husband in a common circle of friends. We sort of liked each other from the beginning. We dated for a while and, at a certain point, he proposed. We had a small engagement ceremony at home, only with the family. Almost one year later we got married: in 1957. We had a religious ceremony before the rabbi; I would have never considered marrying someone who wasn't Jewish. We had a beautiful wedding with guests: my sister, brother-in-law from Braila and his parents, my husband's relatives from Bucharest, a sister of my mother-in-law, and a brother of my father-in-law. We had a civil ceremony several months before the actual wedding. Today the custom is to have them both on the same day or one day apart. We got married on Purim, on a Sunday; we agreed with our parents and in-laws to have the wedding on Purim. The religious ceremony took place at the Cahane synagogue, and the meal for the family was organized in a synagogue in our neighborhood. The only shortcoming was the cold: it was winter and, although we installed a stove,



we couldn't heat the large synagogue well enough. But I couldn't say that the wedding was a failure. After we got married we used to meet up with some friends every week, usually on Saturdays, and go to the cinema, theater, pool, or Ciric Forest for a picnic. It was nothing fancy, but we enjoyed spending time with them.

Three years later, in 1960, I gave birth to a little girl, Beatrice. May God help her! She's a grown-up woman now and has a boy who's almost 14. My husband was very happy when he learnt we had a girl. After I had the baby, he told me something very interesting. When I was pregnant he dreamt of a park with many children in it; a little girl came towards him, so he considered this a sign that I would give birth to a girl. But he didn't tell me about it at the time. After the baby was born he told me the story, 'You know, it would have been a surprise for me if you had given birth to a boy, because, you see, I had this dream...' We often make connections between dreams and reality and really pay attention to the dreams.

My husband, Aurel Solomon, was born on 4th August 1929 in Iasi. He was an electrician. When he was a teenager his father sent him to be the apprentice of a neighbor who was a sort of mechanic. But he always came home dirty and his father didn't like it, so, after a while, he sent him to the streetcar company. This was in 1950 or so; he worked for about two years there. They called it training at the workplace, because he hadn't gone to a vocational school. Then he was drafted into the army, where he spent three years and three months. It was bad luck. When the normal three-year period was over, instead of discharging him, they called him up for an extra three months. He had many stories to tell from his army days. He was very picky with food; there were many things which he had never tasted and didn't plan to taste either. While he was in the army his parents were forced to send him parcels so that he wouldn't starve. When he returned, the streetcar company hired him again and he worked there until his retirement. His work record counts 40 years spent in the same place.

After the war I let my parents know that I wasn't planning to continue my education. I wanted to get a job. There were two sisters in our neighborhood, young girls, who worked as tailors. My father knew their father very well. They were Jewish, of course. So he talked to him, 'Look, David, why don't you ask your girls if they need an apprentice?' One or two days later the reply came, 'Sure, tell your girl to come; my girls do want a new apprentice.' I went to their place, met them and stayed there. It wasn't easy at first because I adapt myself to change very slowly. I cried a lot in the beginning. But, eventually, I didn't want to leave anymore. I worked there from 1944 until 1950: six years. In 1950 the employer told us she didn't need the girls, working at her place, anymore; she had a boyfriend and they wanted the house all to themselves. So I went to a famous tailor on Nicolina Street, Madame Ilie: this is how they called her. I worked there for only a few weeks, but I couldn't say why I didn't like it.

It was the time when people were preparing to go [In the 1950s there was the first large wave of emigrations to Israel.]. Those who had filed their applications couldn't know for sure whether it would take a week or a month to get an answer, so they started ordering clothes. But they didn't just want a dress; they kept coming with a lot of fabric. So I thought that instead of working for Madame Ilie, I could stay at home and work there. The problem was that I didn't have a sewing machine back then. But we had a neighbor who told me, 'That's not a problem; whenever you need to, you can come to my place and use my sewing machine.' It was something temporary, of course. So I stayed at home and worked from 1950 until around 1954, when working at home became



more and more difficult: there were inspections and I was starting to be afraid of getting caught. Times had become more difficult. I got a job at Tesatura, at the section for recycling waste [remnants of fabric less than one meter long], where I learnt to make shirts, women's blouses, and underwear. I worked there for about three and a half years.

In the meantime I got married. Then my section was closed and they wanted me to do something completely different. I didn't like that, so I resigned. I worked for two years or so for a tailor on Stefan Cel Mare Boulevard. He was the neighbor of one of my uncles and had a workshop where they made shirts. After 1960 there came a time when all the small craftsmen had to join the cooperative associations. Of course, he was forced to join as a foreman with his sewing machine and all. He asked me whether I wanted to work for the cooperative too. What was I supposed to do? I had a small child and a mother whom I was supposed to support. So I joined the cooperative. However, because I had a small child, they let me work at home. When my kid grew up a little and my mother got used to her, I told them, 'I want to come to work every day and make as much money as everybody else.' I think I started going to the cooperative on a daily basis in 1962 or 1963. My co-workers were very good people. In the beginning, there were several Jewish girls and the foremen were all Jewish. As time went by, some retired and some left for Israel, so I ended up being the only Jew. I couldn't say I didn't feel all right though. However, I was happy to retire in 1986. Times were getting difficult again. When winter came serious power savings were made.

I remember one of my co-workers was a lady named Bela Davidovici; she was Jewish and a party member. She organized this ritual: every morning at 10am, when people had breakfast or a snack, a young girl would read the editorial from a local newspaper or a party organ, be it 'Scanteia' [The Spark], or 'Flacara Iasului' [The Flame of Iasi]. There was a time when someone from a gym took us outside to exercise for five minutes; he had us carry weights. But this didn't last for long. We went there to earn money, not to exercise. When the communist holidays came they made us go to parades: on 1st May, 23rd August [1944] [20](#). We had to be there because otherwise we could have been in trouble. For instance, if you missed a parade, the head of personnel had you stand in front of the entire staff the following day and asked, 'And why didn't you come to the parade?' Then there was the patriotic labor. In fall they sent us to harvest corn.

In the communist period I went on vacation from time to time. I once went to the mountains, to Predeal, on a 'Mother and child' ticket. These tickets were sold through the cooperative and they were only for the mother and child. The husband could come too, but had to pay the full price. The ticket had a big discount: it included accommodation, and transportation at a very small price. We took the train from Iasi to Mangalia. There were many such programs: individual or family tickets were sold by the trade unions or the cooperatives. I also went to the seaside on my own, but I had to save a lot of money to afford that. I only went abroad twice, and both times to Israel, where I visited my sister. I first went in 1973 or 1974, and then I went with my husband in 1987 or so. I can't say we had difficulties in getting the necessary papers. And plane tickets weren't as expensive as they are now. I kept in touch with my relatives by mail. After I had a phone installed, I called them.

Until 1960 I lived on Socola Street with my parents. Then the systematization began and our house was demolished to make room for apartment houses. My father died on 5th or 6th April 1960, a few months before the house was demolished. But by then, we already knew we had to move out. My father died of a heart condition. We got a new place on Cuza Voda Street. I was pregnant already.

We got two rooms, a kitchen, and bathroom in a basement. We were actually three people, not four, because one could hardly notice that I was pregnant. We had tap water, plumbing, water closet, but there were many downsides too. For instance, whenever it rained heavily, the apartment got flooded. At that time most of the Jews got new apartments either in the basement or on the last floor, so there was a sort of discrimination. I lived there for 24 years. In 1984, when the date for my daughter's wedding had already been settled, my husband received a three-room apartment on Garii Street. After they got married my daughter and her husband lived with us until my son-in-law received a studio apartment. My mother died in January 1986. She lived with us until she passed away. After the Romanian Revolution of 1989 [21](#), a law was passed in 1990 or 1991, allowing the tenants to buy the apartments in which they were living. With tremendous efforts we managed to buy this apartment. This year I sold it in order to leave for Israel to be with my daughter.

My daughter is a chemical engineer. She went to college in Iasi. She has been living with my son-in-law and grandson in Beer Sheva, Israel, for nine years. She works for a large pharmaceutical factory. She's a very sociable person and likes to have many friends. She always had a very nice circle of friends when she lived in Iasi. They were girls and boys who threw parties, anniversaries, and hung out together. Most of her friends were Jewish, but they gradually left. In time, she made new friends at her workplace. They were Christians, but were very good kids; they were special, educated, and never showed the slightest sign of anti-Semitism. The Jewish Community used to have a youth choir composed mainly of students. The choirmaster was Izu Gott. Many friendships began through this choir. They sometimes went to the seaside [the Black Sea], in Eforie Nord, and the choir members got a place at 'Mira' Villa.

When my children got married, the [Jewish] Community offered them a ten day stay at this villa. This was their honeymoon. My daughter had to do her internship in Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej [the name of the town of Onesti during the communist period]. She spent three years there. It was very difficult at first. Her husband worked in Iasi, so she came home pretty often. This way, I didn't miss her too much. When she returned to Iasi she was unemployed for a long time. Then the Revolution came. This made them go to Israel. They now have their own house and everything they need, but they have to work very hard. I encouraged them to choose the aliyah. I was very happy when they decided to. I told them that, even if they had a hard time in the beginning, things would gradually improve. They come to Romania pretty often. They still have relatives here and hope they will be able to maintain the ties with them. They miss their country sometimes.

I remember how the Revolution [of December 1989] started. It was Friday, at about 1pm. My husband had already retired. I looked outside from the balcony and saw a kind of fuss that seemed to foretell something. A cousin of mine had already told us that on Thursday there had been open fire on the revolutionaries in Timisoara. But we didn't imagine things could get so serious. We turned on the radio and heard something rather confusing. Then we turned on the television and saw what was going on in the country; we began to follow the unfolding events. We didn't know what would follow. We thought things could get messy for us, considering that we were Jewish and all that chaos. But things were quiet in Iasi compared to the other cities.

I can't say that the change of the regime had any influence on how we asserted our Jewish identity. We observed the same traditions in the communist period and after. I went with my family to the synagogue and cemetery before the holidays and told my daughter what had happened to us

during the war. We didn't build the obstacles on our own, it was the communists: we just kept on observing our Judaic traditions. For instance, in the communist period, I always celebrated Pesach: I cleaned the house, prepared the special dishes, had the hakham slaughter the poultry and went to seder evenings organized by the Community. We didn't wear the tallit in the street, but people did come to seder. Matzah was distributed through the Community: it was brought from Israel. And we had a waiting list for beef. When a beast was slaughtered in a kosher way we bought meat from the Community. At that time our chief rabbi was Moses Rosen [22](#), a very clever man who knew how to negotiate with the authorities on our behalf: that's why we didn't feel any restrictions.

When my father-in-law died in the 1980s my husband was still working, but he went to the synagogue every day for a whole year, in the mornings and evenings, to recite the Kaddish. He did that for his mother too. Once a year we organized a Yahrzeit, the commemoration of a departed member of the family. I would prepare a pound cake and bottle of wine and took them to the synagogue. We used to go to the cemetery before the holidays, especially before the high holidays. This is how we understood to observe the tradition and pay respect to the dead.

Before my husband died, we received a very substantial and timely help from the Federation [of the Jewish Communities in Romania] for one year. We got food and money for the heating in winter. When my husband's condition worsened, they sent us a woman once a week to help us around the house. I also received a compensation for the suffering endured during the Holocaust: there was a certain amount from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, from the Claims Conference.

I really wanted to emigrate, but my husband never agreed. We went to Israel as tourists; he liked it, but didn't want to stay. He wasn't a sociable man at all and maybe this is why he didn't want to leave for good. Yet, a few years ago, we had made up our minds and were determined to leave. We prepared a lot of papers and were planning to go to the Sohnut [23](#) to apply for emigration. But my husband got sick and never recovered. He died last year. And now I'll go to my children in Israel on my own.

Glossary:

## **[1](#) Mass emigration from Romania after World War II**

After World War II the number of Jewish people emigrating from Romania to Israel was much higher than in earlier periods. This was urged not only by the establishment in 1948 of Israel, and thus by the embodiment of an own state, but also by the general disillusionment caused by the attitude of the receiving country and nation during World War II. Between 1919 and 1948 a number of 41,000 Jews from Romania left for Israel, while between May 1948 (the establishment of Israel) and 1995 this number increased to 272,300. The emigration flow was significantly influenced after 1948 by the current attitude of the communist regime towards the aliyah issue, and by its diplomatic relations with Israel. The main emigration flows were between 1948-1951 (116,500 persons), 1958-1966 (106,200 persons) and 1969-1974 (17,800 persons).

## **[2](#) Pogrom in Iasi and the Death Train**

during the pogrom in Iasi (29th- 30th June 1941) an estimated 4,000-8,000 people were killed on the grounds that Jews kept hidden weapons and had fired at Romanian and German soldiers.

Thousands of people were boarded into two freight trains 100-150 people were crowded in each one of the sealed carriages. For several days, they were transported towards Podul Iloaiei and Calarasi and 65% of them died from asphyxiation and dehydration.

### **3 Bukovina**

Historical region, located East of the Carpathian Mountain range, bordering with Transylvania, Galicia and Moldova. In 1775 it became a Habsburg territory as a consequence of the Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty (1774) between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Austria-Hungary Bukovina was annexed to Romania (1920). In 1939 a non-aggression pact was signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact), which also meant dividing Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of interest. Taking advantage of the pact, the Soviet Union claimed in an ultimatum from 1940 some of the Romanian territories. Romania was forced to renounce Bessarabia and Northern-Bukovina, including Czernowitz (Cernauti, Chernovtsy). Bukovina was characterized by ethnic and religious pluralism; the ethnic communities included Germans, Poles, Jews, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Romanians, the most dominant religious persuasions were Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. In 1930 some 93,000 Jews lived in Bukovina, which was 10,9% of the entire population.

### **4 Transnistria**

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

### **5 Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich (1859-1916))**

Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poem in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. In his writings he described the life of Jews in Russia, creating a gallery of bright characters. His creative work is an alloy of humor and lyricism, accurate psychological and details of everyday life. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted to raise the despised Yiddish literature from its mean status and at the same time to fight authors of trash literature, who dragged Yiddish literature to the lowest popular level. The first volume was a turning point in the history of modern Yiddish literature. Sholem Aleichem

died in New York in 1916. His popularity increased beyond the Yiddish-speaking public after his death. Some of his writings have been translated into most European languages and his plays and dramatic versions of his stories have been performed in many countries. The dramatic version of Tevye the Dairyman became an international hit as a musical (Fiddler on the Roof) in the 1960s.

## **6 Systematic demolitions**

The passing of the Law for the Systematization of Towns and Villages in 1974 incited a large-scale demolition of Romanian towns and villages. The great earthquake of 4th March 1977 damaged many buildings and was seen as a justification for the demolition of many monuments. By the end of 1989, the time of the fall of the Ceausescu regime, at least 29 towns had been completely restructured, 37 were in the process of being restructured, and the rural systematization had claimed its first toll: some demolished villages north of Bucharest. Between 1977 and 1989, Bucharest was at the mercy of the dictator, whose mere gestures were interpreted as direct orders and could lead to the immediate disappearance of certain houses or certain areas. Old houses and quarters, the so-called imperialist-capitalist architecture, had to vanish in order to make room for the great urban achievements of Socialism as it competed with the USSR and North Korea.

## **7 Orthodox communities**

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868- 1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities were registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country, in 1896. In 1930 30,4 % of Hungarian Jews belonged to 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 %).

## **8 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.

## **9 ORT**

(abbreviation for Rus. Obshchestvo Rasprostraneniya Truda sredi Yevreyev , originally meaning "Society for Manual [and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]," and later-from 1921-"Society for Spreading [Artisan and Agricultural] Work [among Jews]") It was founded in 1880 in St. Petersburg (Russia) and originally designed to help Russian Jews. One of the problems which ORT tackled was to help the working Jewish youth and craftsmen to integrate into the industrialization. This especially had an impact on the Eastern European countries after World War I. ORT expanded during World War II, when it became a world organization with branches in France, Germany, England, America and elsewhere, in addition to former Russian territories like Poland, Lithuania and Bessarabia. There was also an ORT network in Romania. With the aim to provide "help through work", ORT operated employment bureaus, organizes trade schools, provided tools, machinery and materials, set up special courses for apprentices, and maintained farm schools as well as cooperative agricultural colonies and workshops.

## **10 Annexation of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union**

At the end of June 1940 the Soviet Union demanded Romania to withdraw its troops from Bessarabia and to abandon the territory. Romania withdrew its troops and administration in the same month and between 28th June and 3rd July, the Soviets occupied the region. At the same time Romania was obliged to give up Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern-Dobrudja to Bulgaria. These territorial losses influenced Romanian politics during World War II to a great extent.

## **11 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.

## **12 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.

### **13 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. Cuza founded the National Christian Defense League, the LANC (Liga Apararii National Crestine), in 1923. The paramilitary troops of the league, called lancierii, wore blue uniforms. The organization published a newspaper entitled Apararea Nationala. In 1935 the LANC merged with the National Agrarian Party, and turned into the National Christian Party, which had a pronounced anti-Semitic program.

### **14 Antonescian period (September 1940- August 1944)**

The Romanian King Carol II appointed Ion Antonescu (chief of the general staff of the Romanian Army, Minister of War between 1937 and 1938) prime minister with full power under the pressure of the Germans after the Second Vienna Dictate. At first Antonescu formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders, but after their attempted coup (in January 1941) he introduced a military dictatorship. He joined the Triple Alliance, and helped Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union. In order to gain new territories (Transylvania, Bessarabia), he increased to the utmost the Romanian war- efforts and retook Bessarabia through a lot of sacrifices in 1941-1942. At the same time the notorious Romanian anti-Semitic pogroms are linked to his name and so are the deportations - this topic has been a taboo in Romanian historiography up to now. Antonescu was arrested on the orders of the king on 23rd August 1944 (when Romania capitulated) and sent to prison in the USSR where he remained until 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and was shot in the same year.

### **15 Yellow star in Romania**

On 8th July 1941, Hitler decided that all Jews from the age of 6 from the Eastern territories had to wear the Star of David, made of yellow cloth and sewed onto the left side of their clothes. The Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced this 'law' on 10th September 1941. Strangely enough, Marshal Antonescu made a decision on that very day ordering Jews not to wear the yellow star. Because of these contradicting orders, this 'law' was only implemented in a few counties in Bukovina and Bessarabia, and Jews there were forced to wear the yellow star.

### **16 Hashomer Hatzair**

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, started up in Poland in 1912, and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to emigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to emigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups had been established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps.

## **17 Hanoar Hatzioni in Romania**

The Hanoar Hatzioni movement started in Transylvania as a result of the secession of the Hashomer organization in 1929. They tried to define themselves as a centrist Zionist youth organization, without any political convictions. Their first emigration action was organized in 1934. Five years later (1939) they founded in Palestine their first independent colony called Kfar Glickson. The Hanoar Hatzioni organizations of Transylvania and of the old Regat (Muntania and Moldova) formed a common leadership in 1932 in Bucharest called Histadrut Olamith Hanoar Hatzioni. In 1934 the Transylvanian organization consisted of 26 local groups.

## **18 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during WWI. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

## **19 Financial reforms in post-war Romania**

Post-war Romania had two major financial reforms (in 1947 and 1952). The one of 1947 was necessary because of the grave post-war inflation, the biggest banknote was the 5 million lei by then. The new 1 lei used to be the equivalent of 20,000 old ones. Most affected by the stabilization were the peasants, because they mostly kept their money in reserve and at the same time the amount of exchangeable money was maximized. Due to this reform the government brought the inflation under control and the economy revigorated. This emission still had the name of King Michael on it, but from 1948 on his name was gradually replaced by the country's name (the People's Republic of Romania). Starting in 1966 all the coins wore the Socialist Republic of Romania sigla. The second financial reform (1952) was realized by a centralized, socialist economy. Its main aim was to strengthen the national coin and to withdraw the money surplus.

## **20 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.

## **21 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.

## **22 Rosen, Moses (1912-1994)**

Chief Rabbi of Romania and president of the Association of Jewish Religious Communities during communism. A controversial figure of the postwar Romanian Jewish public life. On the one hand he was criticized because of his connections with several leaders of the Romanian communist regime, on the other hand even his critics recognized his great efforts in the interest of Romanian Jews. He was elected chief rabbi of Romania in 1948 and fulfilled this function till his death in 1994. During this period he organized the religious and cultural education of Jewish youth and facilitated the emigration to Israel by using his influence. His efforts made possible the launch of the only Romanian Jewish newspaper, Revista Cultului Mozaic (Realitatea Evreiască after 1995) in 1956. As the leader of Romanian Israelites he was a permanent member of the Romanian Parliament from 1957-1989. He was member of the Executive Board of the Jewish World Congress. His works on Judaist issues were published in Romanian, Hebrew and English.

## **23 Sochnut (Jewish Agency)**

International NGO founded in 1929 with the aim of assisting and encouraging Jews throughout the world with the development and settlement of Israel. It played the main role in the relations between Palestine, then under British Mandate, the world Jewry and the Mandatory and other powers. In May 1948 the Sochnut relinquished many of its functions to the newly established government of Israel, but continued to be responsible for immigration, settlement, youth work, and other activities financed by voluntary Jewish contributions from abroad. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Sochnut has facilitated the aliyah and absorption in Israel for over one million new immigrants.