

Leizer Finchelstein With Friends



This is me, Leizer Finchelstein, before the war with 2 friends of mine, Jews like myself. I think I was about 15. The photograph was taken in 1937. I'm the one on the right, the one in the middle is Iancu, and the one on the left is Meier. We probably had our photograph taken one time when we went for a stroll, I forget what the occasion was.

My friends lived in the same neighborhood as myself, we were all apprentices. I went out with them on Saturdays either for a walk or to the cinema. Later, as we grew up, girls started to accompany us during our strolls through the city. We strolled down Lapusneanu St. We spent our childhood in the neighborhood where we lived. We were all like the newly hatched chickens of a hen. Especially since there was some anti-Jewish hatred in the air, and we avoided leaving our neighborhood and being in the center of their attention. In fact, the first time that I traveled outside of Iasi was on the death train during the pogrom of June 1941.

My parents sometimes went out to the public park, you brought food from home, and you only ordered something to drink there. When we grew up a little and if we managed to have some 2-3 lei [Romanian currency], we, the children, would go to the cinema to watch movies with Laurel and Hardy, Tom Mix, or Pat and Patachon. And that was all the entertainment we had. Back then, movies at the cinema ran without intermission. Sometimes, if we had any money left, we bought a bag of sunflower or pumpkin kernels and watched 2 movies in a row.

I will never forget the words of our teacher after we graduated the 4 primary grades. He told us at the graduation celebration: 'Well, children, mind that you don't forget how to read. During these 4 years I have strived to teach you how to read, write, and the 4 essential rules of arithmetic: subtraction, multiplication, addition, and division.' He thus guided and advised us to read whatever we could get our hands on. He knew from personal experience that most children entered apprenticeships into various trades after the 4 primary grades and didn't have time to read anymore. However, very many adventure installments were published in those days, and we, the children, were eager to read them. I recall an interesting children's magazine, it was called "The Doxa Submarine." This submarine sailed across the world, even all the way to Africa, where it found tribes of cannibals. One of these little stories told how these cannibals caught white people

and tied them to a post, leaving them in the heat of the sun. In this way, you didn't forget how to read. Because the work system before the war, especially in our Jewish neighborhoods, didn't allow you to allot too much time to reading.