

Gotterer Borbala Piroska

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Brasov

Romania

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Interviewer: Paul Tinichigiu



Mrs. Gotterer is an 84 years old tiny woman, with mauve dyed hair and blue eyes, which have a sparkle of kindness and heart warmth the concentration camps she had been in couldn't erase. She accepted the interview despite her precarious health, as she suffers with her heart and her legs, because it is very important for her to make the horrors the Jews in the 20th century had to suffer known to the world. She lives together with her husband, Sanyi, in an old house in the center of Brasov, where she has rented a room with a kitchen and a bathroom. The room is loaded with massive furniture and documents, files, papers that talk about the Jews in Sfantu Gheorghe who have been killed in the Holocaust. Mrs. Gotterer speaks Romanian very well, with an unexpected rich vocabulary, and she finds a good word in both Romanian and Hungarian for those who cross her threshold.

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My family background

I never knew my paternal grandparents, but I know they lived in Hungary, in Debrecen, and that their name was Lowi; I take pride in remembering this because it is the proof that we descend from the tribe of the Levites. I know that grandfather had a grocery store and a pub, and that my grandmother was a housewife. There wasn't much else they could do at that time, back then in the 1800s. I don't know whether they were very religious Jews or not, my father never talked to me about that. My grandparents surely lived in Tiszadob as well, because that's where my father, Solomon Lowi, was born, but I don't know where his siblings were born. However, I don't know when my grandparents moved to Debrecen.

My father, Solomon Lowi, had two brothers, Ignac and Armin. Ignac, my father's younger brother, went to high school in Vienna; he was a grain dealer, and he was a very well off man. He lived in Kalocsa, a city in Hungary, and he was married to Ella, who was a housewife; he had three children, Agneta, born in 1923, Edit, born in 1920 and who died in 2000, and Tibor. Ignac was very religious,

he regularly went to the temple in Budapest, where he was specially invited. He died in 1984 and his wife in 1981. Armin, born in 1870, was a timber trader and he lived in Debrecen; I don't know where he got the wood from, he was buying it and selling it. He too was married, but I don't remember his wife's name; he had however four children, Rozalia, who died in 1986, Maria, who lived and died in Debrecen, Julia, who died in a concentration camp, and Iosif, who ran to Spain and from there to USA. He has children there, but I don't know more. One of his children, Gyuri is his name, works at an astrology institute somewhere, I don't know where. Armin lived until World War I, and he died of natural death, from sickness, in 1918. My father also had a sister, Charlotte, who was married to Sandor Markbreit. Charlotte lived in Karczag. They had a son, Geza, who was married to a woman called Maria.

My father was born in Tiszadob [in Hungary], a village that belonged to Debrecen, in Hungary, in 1880. That's where he went to elementary school, and then he went to the normal high school in Vienna. He didn't study further, back then there was no need for that. As a young man, he learnt how to work with timber from his brother, Armin, because his elder brother had a forest and was involved in timber trade. My father's job was to go in the forests a lot, he was a forestry engineer. After he graduated from high school, he met my mother there, in Debrecen. Armin, his brother, had been in my mother's parents' house, and he met my mother, Eszter Hidveger. And he told his brother, after he graduated from high school: 'Look, I know a girl; maybe you should meet her too'. And then he took him there and my father was introduced to my mother.

My maternal grandparents, Rozalia and Miklos Hidvegy lived in Debrecen as well. I know grandmother originally came from Sighetul Marmatiei, and grandfather from Hidveg. My grandmother lived with my grandfather in Hidveg until my mother, Eszter Lowi, turned six years old; after that, they moved to Debrecen. I know they were tenants on the big estate near Debrecen. The estate belonged to a Hungarian count named Carol Zoltan. This count Carol had an estate of 10,000 hectares, from which my grandfather had 2,000. There were other tenants on that estate as well. My grandfather administered the estate, and my grandmother was a housewife. I once heard my mother say that grandmother studied something at a convent school, but I don't know more than that, and I know that grandfather had studied at cheder. Grandparents spoke Hungarian between themselves, but they must have known German as well, because they lived in Austro-Hungary. All their records were written in German. They didn't wear traditional Jewish clothes: grandmother didn't wear a wig, she dressed in a modern way, quite in the German fashion of the time – maybe more fashionably than an elderly lady should have dressed. My grandparents changed their name from Hidvegy to Hidveger at some time, because of the Austro-Hungarian's oppression over Jews, but I don't know when; however, their children were already born, so of course all the family changed their names.

My mother had three brothers: Ludovic Hidveger, born in Debrecen, who was a MAV [Magyar Allami Vasutak – Hungarian National Railways], engineer, and I know he obtained this position after an examination: he was 'karamas', chamberlain [kamaras in Hungarian], and people addressed him with 'Your excellency'. [Note: The chamberlain is an officer who manages the household of a king or nobleman, or the treasurer of a municipal corporation. After 1526 the function of the chamberlain became formal, they contributed only to ceremonial events.] Emperor Franz Iosef [1](#) himself remarked him and gave him a distinction. Ludovic was married to Stefania, who was very rich, and they lived in Miskolc. He died in 1940 and she died in 1962. They had two children, Eva,

born in 1921, who is still alive and lives in Budapest, and Stefan, born in 1919, who was taken to forced labor by the Hungarian army and died somewhere around the Don in 1944. Ioan, another of my mother's brothers, was born in 1894; he was a soldier, and he died on the front in 1914, in Doberdo, in Italy. And Anton, the third brother, was an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army [in Kuk] [2](#) and I know he had children, but I don't remember whom he was married to.

One of my mother's fourth sisters was Gizella Meizels, who was a housewife and was married to a rich merchant, Ludovic; they had two daughters: one was Clara, married to a Hungarian officer, Boki Miklos. They both died in 1944: the Russians executed him when Budapest was liberated, because he was a 'salasist' [partisan of Szalasi] [3](#). I know he loved her very much, and even if he was a Nazi, and he divorced her because she was Jewish, he fought hard to protect her from the war, and he even arranged that she wouldn't be taken to the ghetto in Budapest. She died during the battles for the liberation of Budapest, before he did. The second daughter was Lili, who was a journalist. Charlotte Poncz, my mother's second sister, was born in 1891 and was married to Francisc Poncz. They lived right across the street from the Hungarian parliament, near Gellert, and they had a candy shop on Rakoczi ut [street], which prospered. They were religious people, I know that Francisc wore tallit katan all the time. Charlotte died in 1968. My mother's third sister was Juliana, a housewife, married to Sigismund Laszlo; he was the general manager of the harvesting vehicles division at MAV. Juliana had two children, Ioan, who died in Germany, and Tamas, who lives in Haifa, and has two daughters, Vera and Gabriela. Then there was Margareta, married to Alexandru Solomon, who was the administrator of an estate in Hungary, of course, but I don't know where. They had four children, three boys and a girl: Ladislau, born in 1910, who was a colonel in the Hungarian army. Ladislau has two sons, and I know one of them is named Alexandru. Ladislau died in 1993. Then there was Mihai, born in 1912, and who died in 1942, a soldier in the Hungarian army; Paul, born in 1924, who was married to Clara, and who had two daughters, Agi and Baba. He was a clerk in the ministry of agriculture in Budapest, and he died in 1988. Margareta's daughter was called Baba, born in 1921, a teacher in Nyiregyhaza, who was very beautiful. She was gassed in 1944 with her one-year-old child.

Before the war [World War I] grandmother and grandfather lived in Debrecen, and they were considered very wealthy people. And indeed they were. Mother told me their house had many rooms, and that there were many servants, because there were many children; and they had tap water in the house at that time. Not to mention that they had electricity as well. The house had antique, expensive and stylish furniture. Heating was made with wood, in terracotta stoves. The garden was for flowers, maybe for greens as well, I don't know that. Their financial situation was very good, my mother told me sometimes that the girls would have their dresses made at fashion houses, and that all of them were very elegantly dressed. My mother had a governess when she was young, and she also had a chambermaid. And there was a cook in the house as well. She told me that the governesses came and went, because of the boys. But she said that they were generally not very young women, and that they were all very trustworthy people; they were Hungarians and Germans. I know grandparents had a social life, they had friends and they visited them.

Mother also said that they had two spirits plants, which were their property, it was grandfather's own investment. They had a manor on the estate, with a garden, but I can't say what the estate was like. They lived there during summers, but in winters they lived in the city, on Hatvani Street.

Mother also told me that every year they raised 200 pigs in the forest (there was a forest as well), because pigs needed to feed on plants from the forest, with acorns. They sold the pigs, and they kept the money. There were workers working on the estate, many of them, my mother told me, and they sometimes had to cook for them. My grandfather had an administrator there who was in charge of the estate, and some sort of a manager for the animals. They also practiced agriculture on the estate, they grew wheat; there, where the estate was, is the best plain in Hungary. Grandfather had rented that terrain, and therefore he could do anything on it, for as long as he paid the rent. All the profit from the pigs, the wheat fields and the spirits plants was his.

There was a big Jewish community in Debrecen, people were religious there. They used to go to church on Saturdays and on other holidays. I know that the children, I can't say all, but many, went to cheder. All my uncles could read in Hebrew, they learnt that from cheder. My grandparents from Debrecen were religious, they observed the traditions, but averagely, not to an extreme. The holidays were observed, and they ate kosher food; grandmother observed the traditions in her house as she wanted, she was very religious, and they went to the synagogue.

The good situation in Debrecen was lost because of uncle Anton. Uncle Anton was loafer. Because of him the estate was lost, it went up in smoke. He subscribed a note of hand to somebody, a friend. He was an officer, and he got drunk like officers do, who knows what they did. Nobody knows. But some day they just showed up with that note to my grandfather. It had an extraordinary value, and all he could do was to sell all he had and pay. My grandfather was too generous, he didn't have to do that because Anton wasn't worth it. It would have served him right to be thrown in jail. My poor grandfather, honest as he was, paid with everything he had for his madness. He should have let Anton be taken where he deserved. My mother told me that much, that grandfather fell ill because of Anton, because he lost everything he ever had and that he became indifferent to all around him; he wasn't exactly ill, but he was melancholic, nothing interested him and he died early, in 1923, in Budapest.

I knew grandmother better, because she lived with grandfather in my aunt's Charlotte house in Budapest. I went there on vacations, I spent my holidays there with them for a while. I know the house where my grandparents lived in Budapest, that's where I knew my grandmother after the war [World War I]. It was a very spacious house, very modern and very beautiful. There were four rooms and there was a room for the servant. They had a servant and she had her own room. There was a hallway and to the left and to the right were two rooms, plus the bathroom. It was a big deal to have a bathroom with faience at that time. The house was luxurious and they had employees. I don't know many things about grandmother from my mother.

My mother was born in 1885 in Tiszalok, this is a little village near Debrecen as well. My mother went to school, I think she graduated from a high school for girls in Debrecen. But she did tell me one thing, that she would have liked to become a teacher, and there were possibilities, but her parents didn't want her to. And my mother could read Hebrew, even though she didn't go to cheder; I don't know who taught her, but she could read it well. She also spoke French, she was a well-read woman. And the governess also taught her some things, like German, a language she also spoke. My mother knew a great deal about Franz Iosef's empire, about World War I, how and why did that war start, how the Austro-Hungarian Empire was organized here. My mother knew these things, she told me about them. My mother read a lot. She was a well-read woman, she read a lot, a lot of literature, at the manor in Debrecen there had been a library as well.

My parents' marriage wasn't arranged like it was in those times, it was a love marriage; my father was a very handsome man. They got married in Debrecen, in the synagogue. I don't know if they had chuppah, but they must have done as it is written in the law. At first they lived in Debrecen, but I don't know for how long. From Debrecen they went to Karczag, but I don't know what they did there, and from Karczag they moved back to Debrecen again. My mother might have gone to Karczag only to give birth: my elder brother, Emil, was born in Karczag. I don't know anything about my parents living there. For as long as they were in Debrecen, my parents lived with my maternal grandparents.

I don't know when exactly, after 1910, my parents moved to Romania, to Kajanto, near Cluj-Napoca [a 12 km distance]. [Editor's note: Transylvania and the territory Mrs. Gotterer refers to in 1910 belong to Austria-Hungary, only later in 1920 became part of Romania.] There was a brick and terracotta tiles factory, which was built by Armin, my father's brother, who was an expert in construction materials and in timber: Armin handed over the factory, which sold terracotta stoves, to my father. The factory was on my father's name; Armin remained in Debrecen. Of course the factory had workers employed. In Kajanto there is the biggest brick factory. In Cluj, at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, my father's name, Solomon Lowi, is written in the books as the owner of the factory. My parents didn't live in the city of Cluj, but in Kajanto, which was close; but they had a coach with horses, and somebody to drive it, and they went in the city very often. My sister, Livia, was born in Cluj in 1912. My mother didn't tell me what the house in Kajanto was like, but she would have liked to stay there, in Cluj. They lived in Kajanto until the war [World War I].

My father was drafted for military service and then he was a soldier. He was drafted in the Austro-Hungarian army in 1914, as soon as the war started, and my mother stayed behind with three children in Kajanto. I am not sure what the events were back then, but I think my father returned during the war, closed down the factory because it was in ruin and he couldn't recover any losses, and then he went to Covasna and became the director of the Groedl factory. When my parents moved to Covasna, my maternal grandparents came to live with them there. My brother Francisc was born in Covasna in 1914, while my parents were in Covasna. Then my father was drafted in the army again and my mother was left alone with the children again, she only had her parents with her. And what was she to do, she had no relatives near by, there was no one. So she took refuge in Hungary, to her sister, Margareta, whose husband was an administrator on an estate, there was food, a good material situation, and she stayed there with the children for as long as World War I lasted. My grandparents went to their daughter Charlotte in Budapest. After the war, my mother was the first to come back to Covasna with her three children. My father returned some time after her, because I remember my mother used to tell me about a period when she was alone with the children in Covasna and they suffered from a terrible hunger, and lived from the mercy of others. My father had been taken prisoner at the end of the war, at Skopje and two other places, but I don't know which they were.

Growing up

I was born in Covasna in 1920, my brother Otto in 1923 and Edit in 1926, in Covasna as well. Covasna has been a spa resort for as long as I know it; there was electricity and running water everywhere. The water was very good, you could take mineral water directly from the fountain. There used to be a carbonic acid factory, acid which was put in the mineral water and the sodas. It doesn't exist anymore, but it did, I remember that. I lived there until I was 20 years old.

There was a Jewish community in Covasna and there were Jews in the town, but they weren't as they should be, they weren't decent Jews. They were the kind of Jews people hate us for, with no character, I have to say that. I don't know where they came from. They weren't straight, honest. Those who were well off didn't want to hear about other Jews. When there was a collection for a poor woman or a sick man, they never contributed with anything, they were mean people, I have to say that. I can't say I felt anti-Semitism in Covasna because I lived among Jews, although we didn't get along well with Jews either. My mother was a very honest and well brought up woman. I don't want to say more, but there were some among them who were dishonest and my mother didn't want to be associated with them. My father had colleagues in the office where he worked. And one of his colleagues, who later became director, was dishonest and stole as much as he could.

The owner of the timber factory where my father worked was an Austrian baronet, Groedl, who was a Jew as well. Actually they were a family of baronets, they were a few brothers, and they owned the forests and the factories in Comandau and Covasna. And this baronet had a big factory there and many employees. At Comandau, the merchandise was brought from the forest and it was processed, timber was made from the cut trees. The factory in Covasna was for storage and selling of the merchandise, it was like a shipping station: the timber came as merchandise and from the sale point it was sent to different countries. It was a big factory, the biggest timber factory in all [today's] Covasna county. My father only worked there, at the factory in Covasna. There weren't typical occupations for Jews in town. All Jews worked in the factory, almost all of the employees were Jews.

We didn't have a household with animals or with a garden there, the majority of the goods we needed we bought from the market. Covasna was a spa resort, tourists were coming from all over and as a consequence the market was very expensive. Sometimes my father or someone else from the family – my elder sister Livia when she grew up – came to Brasov and went shopping for the necessary things here because they were cheaper. It was customary to do the shopping in Brasov. From what I remember, my sister went to the market and helped my mother with the household, and then me, when I grew up. We had a servant, a girl, back then one couldn't raise children without help. My poor mother, she couldn't cope with everything alone.

My mother was a well-read, cultured woman, she read books regularly. There weren't many women as cultured as my mother, because my grandmother had been like that as well. My father read books as well. My father really enjoyed reading at home. He was the one who usually bought books. He always bought books for us, for example by Emile Zola, or 'Egy magyar nabob', 'A koszivu ember fia', by Mor Jokai, or books by Kalman Mikszat. [Note: Mor Jokai (1825–1904) and Kalman Mikszath (1847–1910) Hungarian writers, the former is a representative of romanticism, the latter of realism in the Hungarian literature.] 'This is for your age and this for your age...', we always received books for reading, not for studying.

In their everyday life my parents wore clothes that were modern at the time, but they observed the tradition at home and they went to the synagogue as well, when they were in a city that had a synagogue, like Budapest or Debrecen. My father knew some Hebrew I think, but my mother didn't, she could only read. She learnt to read the prayers, but I think my father went to cheder as a child and he could understand it as well. They weren't involved in the Jewish community in Covasna. My mother observed the tradition at home, although my father worked on Saturdays: she lit a candle on Sabbath, she recited the prayer. There was no work done on Saturdays, or on Sundays as a

matter of fact: not even the servant was allowed to work. My mother didn't cook kosher food, but every time she got to Brasov, she bought kosher food from there. There was no synagogue in Covasna where we could go on Sabbath. So on the high holidays all the Jews in Covasna gathered in a room of the factory my father worked for, which was some sort of a club for them; and I know a Jew from Debrecen came, who knew the prayers and who led the ceremonies. He had no function in the community there, and unfortunately I don't remember his name anymore. All our family fasted on Yom Kippur and we children fasted as well when we turned 10 years old. I know mother cooked humentaschen on Purim, but dressing up wasn't popular in Covasna. We always celebrated Christmas as well. We received presents, we had a Christmas tree and under the tree we always had books, many books. We, the children, my brothers and my sisters, received many books, each of us for our level.

We didn't have any contact with my father's brothers or with his sister, there was the border. [Note: Piroska refers to the situation of the Transylvanian territory after the decision of the Trianon treaty] [4](#). My father wrote to Armin, for as long as he lived, and to Ignac and to his sister Charlotte. I wrote letters to my cousin, Ignac's eldest daughter, Edit, who was my age. They couldn't meet because there was the border and it was very difficult. My brother Francisc studied one year of school living in Debrecen, some time in the 1920s. Although there was the border, Armin took out a passport for him and took him to learn Hebrew a little and so he studied one year of school there, in Debrecen. After that Armin died and we lost contact with his family.

My mother looked after me when I was little, there was no kindergarten where we lived. We lived near the train station and the kindergarten was 2 km away and I couldn't go there. We lived near the train station because my father worked at the shipping of the merchandise at the Groedl factory. When I was 4 years old I ran away from home: I was bored, and I knew there was a village near the town and I wanted to get there. I liked to walk when I was little. So I started walking on that 2 km country road that went to the village, but I didn't know why I was going there. And a Romanian peasant came with his cart from the opposite direction, and he saw that I was walking alone, that nobody accompanied me. I was walking and singing and I was doing just fine. It was spring, almost summer...then the peasant stopped the cart and asked me where I was going. But I couldn't say where I was going, I just mimed that I was walking. Why was I walking? But I couldn't say anything to him in Romanian, because he was Romanian. What is your name? Yes, I could tell him my name. My parents didn't find me immediately because the peasant didn't know where to look for my parents, because I only told him my name, but nothing more. The peasant announced the militia that he had found a child. And then the peasant took me home with him, and the militia looked for me. That's how they found me and took me home. And then mother said that that couldn't go on like that. Actually that's why I went to school when I was 5 years old, even if school started when you were 7, so that I wouldn't desert!

It wasn't a Jewish school, it was a state school, which taught in Hungarian. The Groedl factory asked for a school to be set up there so that the children wouldn't have to go a 2 km distance to the village. There weren't means of transportation back then, there were no buses. And then the factory managed to have this school set up, for the children whose parents worked there, at the factory. And I repeated primary school for three times, from the first grade. Everything I heard for three years, I learnt, and when the teacher would ask a child something and he wouldn't know the answer, I would raise my hand and say what he had to say, and I was only 5 years old at the time. I

learnt very well in the first grade. I liked everything in primary school. And I learnt everything without knowing to read, only by listening. Sometimes, when I was a little girl, I learnt home out loud, and my mother heard me and told me a few times: 'this isn't so. It wasn't like that.' And I noticed several times that things weren't exactly how they were described in books. But I don't remember examples, it was too long ago. I remember military parades in Romania on May 10th [5](#). The biggest holiday was the king's day, the proclamation of kingdom. I learnt patriotic songs back then, but I don't know them anymore. As a pupil, I paraded, I even had an artistic program: each pupil who could do something was in the program: I did ballet dancing and I sang.

My brothers went to school to Micu high school in Sfantu Gheorghe, where they stayed at the boarding school. My sister Livia also went to high school before me, she did three years of high school. There was only a primary school in Covasna, so I had to go to another town, to Targu Secuiesc, for high school, the middle school. I didn't go to Sfantu Gheorghe because the boarding school in Targu Secuiesc was better, and my parents wanted me to eat as well as I could, because I was very thin. It was mostly my mother who insisted on me going there, she was afraid that I would starve. I was 10 years old when I went to high school – it was one year earlier than usual – and I didn't know a word in Romanian. And the high school was a very good school and had a very good boarding school: it didn't have a name, it was known as the high school for girls, and it was bilingual, students studied in Romanian and Hungarian. And then Emil came every day to Targu Secuiesc with the train to learn with me the lessons in Romanian, because I couldn't learn anything as I didn't understand anything in Romanian. He wasn't employed yet at the time, because he wanted to take the entrance examination for university in Bucharest, so he learnt at home for a year, he thought he would get in. After that, Emil couldn't study at the university, because racism had already begun, and *numerus clausus* [6](#) had already been enforced. I learnt Romanian from him until Christmas, I already had good grades in three months. I was a very good student, exceptional, I was the second in my class and I always received prizes. I didn't have to learn anything, I paid attention during classes and I could do my homework without anything else, that was enough for me to be able to do my homework. I didn't study in my spare time because I knew by heart anything I heard in the classroom, I didn't need to reread it: I read the lesson again for those who sat next to me, not for myself. I learnt very easily, I was very good at learning. We received prizes at the end of the school year.

In middle school I enjoyed geography, French, I was the best in all the school at French. And I also liked mathematics. Of all the teachers I liked the French teacher. I liked the way she talked and she behaved nicely. And I enjoyed speaking a language that others didn't know and that I liked very much. I had another very good teacher, who taught us physics only for a while, Mrs. Gabi; she also taught us mathematics and chemistry. I was the best in physics, I liked it very much. It is a wonder that I am not good at electricity nowadays, I only know few things. I had the key for the drawer where there were some physics objects, for the laboratory. Mrs. Gabi was so fond of me, she never had children. And sometimes, on Sundays, she would take me home with her in the afternoon, for a meal. She cooked a better and more filling meal, and she always said: 'Come on, I'll take you home from the boarding school!' she talked to me about many things, and I learnt a lot from her, about life, about how I should behave. And I was on a trip once – every year we went on a trip with the school – and I lay in the sun for too long; I was a bit delicate, sensitive, and I suffered a bit with my heart because of a diphtheria which affected my heart, I wasn't even allowed to do gymnastics. And on that trip I fell ill and she took me back to the boarding school in a separate car, she took

care of me. Before I left school she asked me what I wanted to study further. And we decided together that I would study at the commercial high school next. And then she told me to be careful what I studied, mathematics, algebra and the foreign languages.

I never had problems with my colleagues: I was a very good student, the second from my class, and everyone tried to take after me, they asked me how you do this or that, so everyone tried to make friends with me. My colleagues were Hungarian, only I and other three girls in our class were Jewish. The schoolmistress assigned me to tutor a girl who couldn't hear well. And I tutored her and the girl passed the grade, because at Christmas she had failed the exams and it was then that the schoolmistress noticed that something was wrong. But I didn't receive as much as an apple as a gift from her, and her parents were rich people in the village, they had an estate.

Before World War II, I visited my high school colleagues. I had a very good colleague, a Hungarian from Ojdula, near Targu Secuiesc. Her father was a landlord, they were rich, very rich people, and they had a daughter, Olga, and I made friends with her: we stayed at the boarding school together and we made friends and she called me to spend the holiday with them. And I went to them and she came to my house. To this day, if we hear that one of us is in Ojdula, we send word.

I studied piano in school with a teacher, she had students who wanted to learn. I still remember a few things, but I didn't learn properly. I did study, but I didn't like the teacher and I gave up learning to play the piano. I didn't have other private lessons, I liked to act instead. I acted with my colleagues in my spare time. And I celebrated my birthday several times, I set up some play, I sang, I danced...I learnt to play something at the piano and invited the schoolmistress and the other teacher I liked, to come as there was a performance in that after noon. And they came, the schoolmistress brought her husband along, Mr. Ionel, who sometimes sent me to buy cigarettes, and they came. Back then I had pocket money and I bought some cake for each guest. I was 13-14 years old at the time.

I didn't spend a lot of time in Covasna during high school, I was there only during the vacations, on holidays and during summers; I didn't come home every weekend. I stayed at home during vacations, I didn't go anywhere. There was a big swimming pool in town, built by the owners of the carbonic acid factory, where I went and sunbathed, but not alone, I usually went with my father. My father usually went to take warm baths. The swimming pool still exists in Covasna today. I didn't have many other interests outside the school. At home I had to learn to cook mostly, but I didn't like it. I liked to clean the house, that's what I did when I came home, to Covasna, I cleaned and my sister cooked, that's how we divided the chores to help our mother. I wasn't allowed to work out, but for all that, I had skates and I went to the skating ring and I had a racket and I played tennis, but not so often. My mother took care that I didn't overdo it.

Heaven forbid, I wasn't involved in any sort of politics. However, my father was a member of the liberal party back then. He was in the liberal party, I remember that he voted when people had to vote. This was before World War II, between the two World Wars. My brother also liked politics. I remember mother cooked at home – when we got a bit older she didn't keep a servant anymore, for a few years we did what she had to do – and then my elder brother, Emil, came home on vacation from the upper grades in high school, the sixth, the seventh and the eighth, he went in the kitchen, brought the newspaper, he had several newspapers, and he read from it out loud for mother. He read ‚Brassoi Lapok‘ [Papers of Brasov, Hungarian daily issued in Brasov] or ‚Uj Kelet‘ [7](#),

which was the Jewish newspaper. My mother liked politics and my brother enjoyed reading terribly. I sometimes heard him read about Iuliu Maniu [Editor's note: Maniu Iuliu (1873–1953) was a Romanian politician who served three terms as a Prime Minister, being a member of the National Peasants' Party.] and about Nicolae Iorga [Editor's note: Iorga Nicolae (1871–1940) was a historian, university professor, literary critic, memorialist, playwright, poet, and Romanian politician. He served as a member of parliament, as President of the post-World War I National Assembly, as minister, and (1931–32) as Prime Minister. He was co-founder (in 1910) the Democratic Nationalist Party and was ultimately assassinated by fascist legionnaire commandos.], about them, about what they did in the parliament. I only remembered the names. After he graduated from high school, my brother Emil got a job in Cluj; he also worked at a timber factory that belonged to Groedl, at the lumber station. My brothers learnt this forestry trade from my father. Each of them moved to the place where they worked, they learnt the job as they went along, but I don't know where the rest of them worked, it was too long ago.

I remember some events before the war. My best friend was a German girl, Clara Uhl. She was about my age and we lived close to each other. And her father, a German, Mr. Uhl, Austin Uhl, was my father's best friend. He wasn't from Brasov, but from the actual Germany, from Bayern. And I remember, he was a very honest man. And since my father couldn't make friends with his Jewish colleagues at work because they were dishonest he felt more close to him because he was honest. He was a German, but an honest one. My parents were good friends with all our Hungarian and German neighbors. My father was like that, he was an honest man. And I'm not saying that there weren't honest Jews as well, but there, in his office, there weren't any. In 1942 a delegation came at his office, and usually if there were delegations from abroad my father attended them, because he spoke German perfectly, he had gone to high school in Vienna. And then again a group of three men came but my father told us at home that he didn't know why they came because they weren't talking about commerce; instead, they wanted to see everything there was, everything that belonged to the factory and the garden. They wanted to go to the forest, to see the factory. They had come all the way from Germany, but back then Nazism was already in power in Germany, and Hitler already ruled. They wanted to see the estate, the fortunes, probably to get their hands on them. Although my father had been fired in 1940, and the liquidation of his position lasted until 1941, he remained in good relations with the management of the factory, and that is why they asked him to attend that delegation.

One of these three men was young and he made friends with my friend Clara, who worked as a typist for a lawyer. She and I were best friends, we spent the whole day together when I had time to go out for a walk. And then Christmas came. And this young man came and said that that we should spend Christmas together, since he couldn't go home, to Germany. He told me that I can bring along a boy if I wanted, or he could invite one of his German friends from the delegation. I didn't say anything, at that time, I already knew what was going on in Poland in Germany. Poland was already invaded, Czechoslovakia was invaded. We knew that. I had another very good Jewish friend, Meihoser, and her brother was a photographer (they didn't come home from the concentration camps after the war). And she knew many things as well, she secretly listened to the radio at her brother's and they told me many times about what was going on in Poland and Czechoslovakia. I understood what they said. And I thought about it, but still I couldn't believe such things. I didn't believe that there were such camps, I didn't believe it. I didn't give Clara an answer about that Christmas party, and I said I had to talk to my parents. I said to my father: 'Daddy, what

do you say? They invited me...what do you think?' And my daddy said: 'Under no circumstances will you go. Under none'. He said: 'What will we tell them? We will tell them the truth.' He was that honest. I take after him. So I told this man that my father didn't approve, and that I wouldn't cross his will. And then this young man came in our house personally to persuade my father. He said that I could bring along whomever I wanted and that the party would be held in Clara's parents' house, so nothing bad would happen. We wouldn't go anywhere else. And Clari's father was a guarantee for anything, he was an honest man. And my father said, I will never forget: 'Sir, if you were in my situation, would you let your girl, in this times, go to such a party?' And he looked at father and said: 'Sir, you are right.' He was a German and he couldn't say or do anything else. My father didn't insult him with anything, but he spoke the truth. And that's how it turned out. I didn't go. They had the party over at Clara's parents, but they didn't invite anybody else. There were Romanian, Hungarian women in Covasna, all nationalities, but no one went to that Christmas party.

The first time I came across anti-Semitism was when I wasn't allowed to go to school. When I was 17 years old, in 1937, numerus clausus was enforced. I would have liked to go, but I saw it was impossible. My parents, what were they to do... it bothered them, of course. I wanted to go to Timisoara, at the convent school, the French Institute, but one couldn't go there either. So I went home and in 1940 I got a job there, in Covasna. I started working something at the forest ward, but I had only worked for two months I think, when the Vienna dictate came and northern Transylvania was given to the Hungarians and those offices were closed down. My parents also felt anti-Semitism, in 1940. People were laid off at the factory where my father worked. The Hungarian authorities forced it, they were Hitler's allies and they pushed for these dismissals; and my father was laid off from the factory where he had a good job and a nice salary; I got fired too, my brothers as well, and Emil and Francisc were drafted in the army.

During the war

From 1940 to 1944, when we were taken away, we did something, which was my initiative: the idea would have been good, but we didn't succeed. In 1941 we, the girls, me and my sister, went to visit my maternal grandmother, to get to know our Jewish relatives from Hungary, from Budapest, where grandmother was, and that took about a year. Then I thought that my parents were from Hungary and I thought it might happen to us, that we would be told at some time that we weren't allowed to stay here. And I made up this plan in 1942, to go and hide, to move to Budapest, we had all our relatives there, there were my father's siblings, my mother's siblings, and we wouldn't have been so alone. I thought we might hide better there, we wouldn't have been so conspicuous. We were too visible in Covasna, and at that time Jews had to hide. So then we moved to Budapest. My father's brother, Ignac, also had a house in Budapest, but it wasn't empty, but he had a good friend who had a very beautiful house, which was temporarily uninhabited and he didn't want to rent it or give it to anyone who wasn't a Jew. So they settled that we would go in that house and live there. We went, it was a very beautiful house with a garden, in the center of the city. It was located where the embassies were. It was close to some movie studios, it was a nice place. The rent wasn't a problem, we paid what we could and wanted. And because it was very beautiful, we accepted. And in the spring of 1942 we received the approval and moved to Budapest. The war events had taken a different turn back then in 1942, at Stalingrad [9](#). The Russians defeated the Germans and the German defensive and the Russian offensive began. So the political life changed, but we didn't feel that change because the hortists [those who made common cause with Horthy's regime] [10](#), the

Hungarian authority remained Germany's allies.

We stayed in Budapest for half a year, we stayed until fall, but we couldn't get an approval to stay in the city of Budapest, and without that one wasn't allowed to stay there. I don't know how the police tracked us down that we were Jews and that we stayed in Budapest without the necessary approvals. The problem wasn't that we came from another country, but from another city. At first we were taken to jail. We stayed there for about three weeks, not in the actual jail, but we were forced to stay where all those without their papers in order had to crowd in. It was a separate room for the Jewish prisoners and another for those who were thieves or who know what else. And there was a poor girl, who had run from Czechoslovakia, who was also in hiding. But they had found her, and I don't know how, through some miracle, she had been kept there for over a year, and she was praying to God to keep her there, where we were too, in 'tombhaz', even in that jail [Editor's note: the actual meaning of the word in Hungarian is block], only not to be taken to Auschwitz. That's where I first heard about Auschwitz. And she knew many things. Her parents, her family were executed there, and she was left all alone. I heard those things from her. But, to tell you the truth, I couldn't believe that such things could happen to us as well. I thought they happened to her, in Czechoslovakia.

Ignac had an acquaintance, a good friend of a counselor who was an important person there, at the Ministry of Justice, and that person could solve what was almost impossible, he arranged that we wouldn't be sent to Auschwitz after three weeks. The rest of the people there, the other Jews who were found without approval to stay in Budapest were sent immediately, in 1942, to Auschwitz. But rumor had it, that Hungarians didn't actually want to send Jews to Auschwitz, they wanted them to stay. They enforced all sorts of punishments in return: they confiscated firms, houses, radios, but they didn't want to let the people be deported. [Note: Piroska refers here to the anti-Jewish laws in Hungary.] [11](#) And we stayed there for three weeks, Horthy still ruled and he didn't allow us to be deported and then my uncle arranged with this counselor that we would be sent back to Covasna.

From 1942 to 1944 we stayed in Covasna. It was a so-called house arrest, that's what we had, forced residence, until the police deported us. It was the same house where we had stayed before. We couldn't go anywhere: we could go out of the house, but not out of the town. We were good friends with Ovidiu, the prefect there. And when we were sent home from Budapest, his first question was: Did they hurt us there? That man was a real human being, and very kind. And nothing bad happened to us in Covasna, we just had house arrest and that was all. But my brothers, Emil and Francisc, who had been drafted in the army before we left for Budapest, were brought back to Covasna and then again they were taken in the army. They weren't soldiers, they were in the fatigue parties, at forced labor for Jews. That was in 1942.

I had found a job in the meantime, at a lawyer, on the black market, who hired me as a secretary and typist, and who gave me a salary better than the one the county chief had, it was such a salary he gave me between 1942 and 1944. He knew that we were in an extraordinarily difficult situation and he had a lot of money, he collected a lot of money, and he trusted me and let me and not some other employee - because he had two more employees - handle the pay office; he trusted me and wanted to help me. He sometimes paid a fine for me, every month, to his friend, the county chief, so that I could remain in his service, because I was a Jew. He was an extraordinarily kind man. After the war ended, he went to Sweden.

We had just one nuisance in Covasna. We stayed in the house together with a kindergarten teacher, and she was a big Hitlerite, an elderly woman. There were two apartments, they lived in one apartment and we lived in the other. But she was so ill willed, she caused quite a row, said that we didn't leave her alone there...and she went and complained until she had us kicked out of the house. But my father had a friend, a lawyer, whose mother had a big house, and he said: 'move to my mother's and live there in peace'. So we moved there.

Before we were deported from Covasna, my friend Clara wanted to go to a woman who predicted the future. This happened a month before the deportation (we left in May 1944), in April she said, 'let's go to that woman to see our future'. 'No, I don't want to know the future', I said. It was like I felt the future wouldn't be good, although I didn't think it would turn out like that, the thought of me being deported never crossed my mind. But still we went to that woman, I don't think she was a gypsy, she was a Hungarian, and she told some things to Clara and then she said: 'let me guess for the young lady as well' (that was me), 'no, I don't need that' - I didn't really want her to read in my palm - 'it's alright', she said, 'don't pay me, but let me see all the same', the woman wanted to foretell the future. She had some bean pods and she read in them, and she grew all sad and said: 'I won't say a lot'. She said: 'you are a large family', and she had never met me before, 'you are a large family, eight people', she guessed from the beginning that we were eight people, and that wasn't something to be known easily, because my brothers were never home, they had been in the army for a long time, 'eight people, but you will all be in 16 places', that's what she said, I will never forget that. It meant that we would be scattered and that we wouldn't know about each other and I didn't forget that in the concentration camp or anywhere else: it happened exactly like that woman said it would.

One night a friend of my little brother Otto came with a cart. I don't know his friend's name, I think he was a boy from the Furtuna family, but I am not sure. My brother had many friends, I don't know who was which and what their names were. It was in the spring of 1944, in May, on May 3rd, in the evening. This friend of my brother's came during the night, it was after 10, and showed us a paper which summoned him to the city hall: he had to be at 5 o'clock at the city hall with the horses because he had to take part in the transportation of Jews. And he came to tell us that if we wanted to, he would take us over the border, he knew the roads very well, and he would take us to Romania. He asked us if we had anybody in Romania to go to, if not, he would take us to his relatives. He was an extremely good man. Can you imagine that he risked his life with this, but my father said: 'I don't want to risk your life because you are a young and decent man and heaven forbid something should happen to you, and I don't want to risk my family's life either, because if we are caught there, we will be executed on the spot.' Whoever was caught at the border was shot. We didn't go and we lost the opportunity and it was a wrong choice to make, because it would have been better for us to go: we could have gone to Romania, there were Jewish institutions there and maybe they would have helped us. We had relatives in Timisoara, but they too had been evicted from their home by the legionaries [13](#). So we stayed home.

In the morning, on May 4th 1944, the military police came and took us out of the house. They were Hungarian soldiers who were conscripted at the time. And one of them was a boy who knew me very well from the office where I had worked. The militiaman behaved, he told us to carry along all the food we could because they wouldn't feed us, and that he couldn't say more except the fact that we were taken to the ghetto and that we wouldn't receive any food there, and that we could

starve if we didn't bring any with us. When they came to take us out of the house, Mr. Uhl, who lived next door, came and went to the militia man and shook him and said: 'I am a German and you want to take these people away in the name of all Germans? But as a German I say that they are the best and the most honest people and that you can't take them away.' That he said, I remember, in the last moments when we were forced to get on the train. And the militiaman said this: 'I am a militiaman. I receive orders only from my superiors and I can't do anything else because I received this order.' Mr. Uhl had courage, no one else had courage. He was brave enough to come there and shake that militiaman to leave us alone. He was a very kind and honest man. But all others helped us as well, they put in the cart everything we had in the pantry, all the food, flour and lard and everything we had, and a counterpane and a pillow and everything we could carry and they transferred us to Sfantu Gheorghe. We were all gathered there in the farming school, together with those from Sfantu Gheorghe. This farming school was still in construction, it wasn't ready, it had no windows, it had no doors, it had no stairs, we had to go up to the first floor on a board, which was very difficult for my mother and other elderly persons. It was miserable. And we slept on the ground, one next to the other, packed like sardines, without water, without food. We had food, thanks to that soldier who took everything from the pantry and put it in the cart; my poor younger brother, Otto, and my father carried everything along so that we wouldn't be left without food, they wanted to carry the food as long as they could. There was nothing, no sanitation, what can I say, filth. We stayed there like that for a week. There were Jews from all Haromszek (Trei Scaune) county, as it was called back then, the present Covasna county, even from other places. We stayed there for a week until they gathered the Jews from all over the county and then we were transferred to Reghin.

I know we were about 1000 people, that's what I found out when I came back and worked for the community in Sfantu Gheorghe. And we stayed at Reghin, there was no roof over our heads, nothing, it was in the open air, and when the rain started we stayed in mud, there was no food or water, no sanitation. It was cold and muddy, only I know what I suffered because of the cold and the rain. It was during the raining season, about two weeks, and we stayed like that. My father took the blankets we had brought with us and he made some sort of a tent, but it wasn't useful, there was water from beneath us as well. In the end, we accepted to be taken anywhere, just to be taken away from there. At Reghin some sort of a record of all the people there was made. The SS was already there, the SS had taken over us from Sfantu Gheorghe. And some people from the convoy slowed down, and the SS militaries started to yell: 'Loss, loss!' ['Faster, faster!' in German]. They took everything from us, the clothes, the jewelry and the money and all we had.

We stayed in Reghin for a month, we left in June. We left home in May, at the beginning of May, and we left Reghin at the beginning of June, so we stayed there for a month. There was another operation in Reghin, which was meant to rip us off, some SS soldiers came together with Hungarian policemen, that I don't know for sure, and they built up a room and they started making enquiries there. And they enquired, who was rich, where the money was, they tortured people, they did everything a SS soldier did to make them confess where was the fortune and to make them give it up, what factories they had and where. For example, the director who was my father's colleague at that factory was taken there with his daughter and they abused the daughter in front of her father to force him to say where the money was. But his daughter was a very smart woman, already a woman, and very decent, and she didn't speak at all. The money is still in a bank in Switzerland today, because he made the deposit under somebody else's name, for fear the SS would find that

money: Irina Magyary, a teacher from Covasna who was their friend. The rightful owners of that money from the account under the name of Irina Magyary are still looked for. But because nobody from that family came home, that nice and kind girl, the director died together with his wife, they all died, the money is still in Switzerland. They had a lot of gold and a lot of money and rumor has it the fortune still exists. That's what they did to several other persons, they beat them; that was their strategy. I know there was another woman, a doctor, whom they took there and I saw her when she came out, I was still a young woman at the time, and I got sick from the fright when I saw that woman coming out of that room so badly beaten; my father had to take me to a doctor, an acquaintance from the ghetto there, who gave me some sedatives. It was the first time I got sick because of all these things I knew were going to happen.

They did that for a month, and when they finished the enquiries, we were taken to Auschwitz, I don't know the exact date, the 10th of June I think it was. [Note: the Jews from Reghin were deported on June 4th, 1944.] We left everything there, we couldn't take anything with us, no food, no jewelry, no coats, they said we wouldn't need anything; they knew why we wouldn't need anything because the gas chamber waited for us there. There was a militiaman there, a Hungarian boy from Zabala, very kind, Goncz, who was the leader of the train which took us to Auschwitz, and he told me: 'Don't be afraid, Miss' we were terribly worried, you can imagine the situation, my brothers were in the army and we were all going where we were going. The told me that the young would be taken to labor and that if we made it there, we still had a chance. He was right and at least he comforted me. I think it took us five days to get to Auschwitz. We went in a cattle wagon, but there were no chairs, absolutely nothing to sit on, very little place, no food, no water, no toilet. He, the boy, was very nice. I remember I looked him up when I came home, I wanted to thank him at least for his help, but I didn't find him. He brought us a bucket, a clean one and a dirty one and he stopped the train where it was possible, he took care and gave us water at least, because we couldn't get off the train. I don't know where he got a peasant's bench from, and my mother had that bench to sit on, and we could at least sit down, not stand the whole way.

Before we got to Kosice the train stopped and I asked him where we were and what was going on, and he said: 'we are 10 km away from Kosice, and the SS guard waits for you at Kosice, you will be turned over to the SS. That's it.' And then, as a kind and decent and merciful man that he was, I say that to this day, he left his rifle next to me in the wagon and said: 'Look, I will let my rifle here.' He wasn't allowed to leave his rifle, he was a militiaman. 'I'll go, he said, up to the last train wagon and we will stay here for at least an hour or two, and there's nobody, they are all with me in the last wagon.' He did anything but telling me outright to run where I wanted, that's why he left his rifle, so that I could run. And I didn't. I said, how could I leave my parents and leave alone? Nobody could come with me and even if I ran away, we were already in Czechoslovakia, I didn't know a word of Czech. Whe he came back and saw me there, he said: 'Why didn't you run away?', he said: 'I gave you the opportunity to run.' I couldn't, it wasn't possible and God wanted it like that and that's how it happened. The guard changed, we were turned over to the SS, and from there on I don't know how much farther we went on, because the doors weren't opened after that. Until then, we traveled with the doors of the wagon open.

I know we arrived to Auschwitz, Oswiecim it was called, at some time, after an hour or two. They told us we had to get off the train and leave everything there, although there was nothing to leave behind. I kissed everybody and I didn't know it was for the last time, and we got off. Mengele and

all his curs were there, may they still be cursed, and they lined us up. And there they separated us, they separated us immediately, from mother, father and my little brother Otto. I think Otto went with my father, I don't know for sure to this day, because I never heard of him again after that. My father never had a missing tooth, he didn't know what a headache was, he had never been ill in his life until he got there. Mengele was there to select people, who went to the gas chamber and who still went to work, those went in the barracks. [Editor's note: it is only a presumption that Mengele himself selected people]. There were women prisoners, Jews from Czechoslovakia and Poland, who had to show the way for the new comers. I and my younger sister, Edit, were taken to some place and my elder sister, Livia, was immediately taken somewhere else, to a armament factory, where bombs were made, in the town Stutthoff, in Poland; there she had the number 39401. She was assigned there and that's where she remained. She made bombs, the poor soul, and the gas she worked with ate up her organism, her bones, and she suffered the consequences of that all her life. In November 1944 my sister Livia was taken from where she was, from Stutthoff, to Bergen-Belsen. I know that the allies' army advanced and surrounded Germany, and they started to evacuate the prisoners from different factories, and then she was taken to Bergen-Belsen. Until the liberation, I had absolutely no news from her.

My mother and my father were immediately taken to the gas chamber, and I remained with Edit. Otto went with my father, I don't know for sure, I couldn't find out anything about Otto, nobody found him, none of my acquaintances knew anything about him. Only Edit and me remained from this large family, the rest were scattered and none knew anything about the others. I didn't know anything about my brothers Emil and Francisc, and they didn't know anything about each other, each one of them was in a different place with the army. I was left with my younger sister, we were taken to the bathroom and tattooed. When my sister saw that my number was thirteen, she started crying, because I let it be thirteen. It was 20513A. She thought something bad would happen to me. She watched over me more than I did over her. I was older than her, but she was more careful. I told her that if no one else came home, she definitely would come home, she was so enterprising, and she didn't come home after all.

I was in Auschwitz two times. The first time I only stayed there a week, I think, they put us in some barracks, and after a week we marched to the doctor. We went to the train station, and from there we were transferred to Krakow. The camp there didn't have a name. Everybody told us we should be happy, because there was no gas chamber there and they didn't kill people. They told us to go there and stay there for as long as we could. It wasn't ok there either, but there was no gas chamber and there were barracks and there was better food than in Auschwitz. They cooked some surt hay soup, from thorns and thistles, and that's what we had. In the evening we had a small slice of bread, but very-very thin, bread made from bran: it was about five cm long and 5 mm thick. That was the bread for all day; except that we had coffee, a black liquid which contained who knows what. They put bromide in the water we drank, so that we would be calm and not rebel. We only found out that after the liberation. All people were like animals, passive. In Krakow, we sometimes had a teaspoon of marmalade on the slice of bread, and we had a soup in the after noon, made from cabbage and margarine, and it wasn't bad, it tasted like soup and it was food after all. This is what we ate very day, it was autumn and the cabbage was in season. The camp had connections with the Polish resistance from Krakow and they sent this and that with the carts with the hay for the militiamen's, the camp's general staff, horses, who enjoyed riding: of course, they had horses, just as fat as they were, only we were so thin. And they sent hay from the city and under it they hid

sugar, flour, marmalade. They cooked and gave us to eat very quickly so that no one would see anything.

We had to carry rocks to a big hill and my shoes were torn in the first weeks and I was left without shoes. There was a shoemaker's for the SS, but for whoever didn't have shoes, they made some with wooden soles, some sort of slippers; it was something to cover your feet in and that's what we walked in for three months. For as long as we were there, in these three months, I climbed those hills 10 times, 15 times every day, in those shoes which didn't hold onto the foot, I ruined my feet, that's why I have arthritis now. There were people in the camp who worked at the train station, that's where the camp was, and it was close to the coal mines and many were selected to work there: there were small wagons these foodless people had to push and many were ruined there; it was better to go to the hills. I had an acquaintance who came from Comandau, from Covasna, a Mrs. Vertzberger, whose son was a friend of Otto, my brother. The boy came back home, but he didn't know anything about my brother, they were separated. His mother was there with me, in the camp in Krakow, and, poor woman, she died there, they didn't know how to cure her. She was still young for her age, a very nice woman. There was one painful thing for us in Krakow: there was a Pole with us, I don't think he was a Jew, and he had a eight years old child with him and every day he was beaten at the call in front of his father, but beaten so badly that blood came out, it was a scene that terrified and pained us all. Men and women were separated in the camp in Krakow, they weren't together at the call either, they were in separate rows, but everyone could see the scene.

We stayed in Krakow until September I think, we left in June and we stayed for about three months: June, July, August. In September we came back to Auschwitz, because that's when the red army surrounded Krakow. Then we were quickly evicted and the SS soldiers ran with us to Auschwitz. When we came back to Auschwitz in September we were all taken to roads and railways constructions, but we didn't go up in the mountains, we went on a field, but we had to go through a 10 km long forest, we had to go there, carry the rocks from there here and back again, that was our job, it was only meant to get us tired as soon as possible and finish us. The second time we were in Auschwitz we were mixed with those who came from Holland, Greece, Italy and France, and some of them were Jews and others weren't.

We stayed in Auschwitz, and from October it started getting worse. The rainy season came and the cold and we weren't allowed to wear clothes, if they found somebody wearing a topcoat or some clothes they were forced to throw them away. We had the call at 5, 6 o'clock in the morning, although it was still dark, even in summer, and they counted us after blocks, it had to be the exact number of the block and we had to stay for the call. Men and women were separated. That's what killed us, the calls, we had to stand for three, four hours, whether it was cold, raining, snowing, and having to stand there, thin and starving as you were, it was terrible. There was some sort of a sickroom, and if someone fell ill and could be cured without medicine, because there weren't any, then the people working there helped as much as they could.

My sister Edit and I stayed until November together, I don't know how we got in the group that went in the gypsies' camp - because they too had been deported. On November 27th, Mengele came and asked for workers from Auschwitz; the Pauline army [Note: the German 6th army, led by the marshal Friedrich Paulus (1890-1957), which had been defeated at Stalingrad on February 2nd, 1943.] had been defeated, 200,000 men, and the factories were left without workers. [Note: because the majority of the German adult men were on the front, prisoners from the camp were

taken to work in the German factories.] I was completely crushed, I was so thin that nobody could recognize me, I didn't have a strong organism; my sister did better, she was stronger and younger, at 17. Mengele came and selected people, those for the factory to the right, those for the gas chamber to the left. I was selected for the row to the left, and my sister cried and screamed...I just sat there and I couldn't cry. Somehow, somebody came to me and asked: 'What's going on?', 'I was separated from my sister.' My sister went and talked to Mengele and signaled me to run in the other group and I did it. [Note: it is a presumption it was Mengele, but it is not likely.] The people from the other group hid me among them and no one saw me running. I thought I had made it, but those selected for the factory weren't enough, so the next day Mengele made another selection: he came to see the others again, and I don't know how, but from all those people he saw and selected all those months, he recognized me and said to me in German: 'I selected you yesterday, how did you get here?' Of course I pretended I didn't understand, although I did, and I didn't say anything. 'Ready, who's in this group is off to the gas chamber!' he said, and my sister screamed, and cried, poor thing, and I said 'Whatever happens, it will be as God wants it.' And I was taken to the waiting room of the gas chambers, where we all had to take our clothes off and had to go in like that. But there was a certain number of people needed for the gas chamber so that they would turn on the gas, and we weren't enough, and I saw him with my eyes when he said: 'They are not enough, I will make another selection in the morning and then we gas them.' I spent one night there. What can I say? Can I say what happened that night? I only thought that it should be as God wants it, and I prayed to God to watch over my sister, to keep her healthy and help her get home.

We got there in the evening, at 5 or 6 in the after noon, and we stayed there until morning. What happened the next day, you can't imagine! Around 3 or 4, it was still dark, it wasn't even morning, a heftling came ['prisoner' in German], a messenger, one who ran and delivered the news immediately. It was a very beautiful 'heftling', a pretty 16-year-old French girl, and the poor thing came with joy and brought news. The telegram from Himmler, who was Hitler's deputy, number two in Germany, had come, and it said: 'stop all executions immediately', signed by Himmler. That was it, nothing more. Everybody cried, they said no one who had been in that room where we stayed until morning ever came out alive, and we, those who were there, were set free. It was a great thing, God, God made this miracle happen, that this piece of news came in the last moment, not too late, just in time to save me! Not only me, there were others there as well, but I know it saved my life.

After I was taken out of the gas chamber, SS soldiers didn't guard the camp. And then the Czech and Polish prisoners came, they had more strength, those who had been there for a while, the poor souls endured many things we don't even know about, they didn't even have a roof over their heads when they were taken to the camp, they built those barracks where we lived. They said that we, all those who were in the waiting room, should be taken to a barrack and that there we should be given something good to eat to recover; if God saved our lives, they would see to it that they save us from there on. There was a leader in that barrack, a Greek woman, Dezi, I remember, and she went to the kitchen and got from the cooks buckets full of boiled potatoes. A boiled potato there was more valuable than a million lei is here, and they gave us ten boiled potatoes each, twice a day. And we got more bread, a quarter of bread and soup, so that we somewhat recovered in a month, though not fully.

I lost a lot of weight, because since September, when we came back from Krakow, there were rainy cold days, and it was cold in that forest in Auschwitz, and I had nothing to wear, and I fell ill with pneumonia. We had to carry wood, to break rocks for the railway. The selection for the gas chamber was made daily. I went to the sickroom, but they had no medicine, the doctor did what she could and then said: 'Only God can save you.' And God saved me then as well from a serious illness, I wasn't aware of anything for two weeks, I was unconscious, I didn't eat. I know that at some point another patient came to me and forced some food in my mouth and forced me to drink some coffee, so that I wouldn't starve to death. In the end I recovered, but I was a wreck. After a month I had to go to work again in that forest that was 10 km away; if I didn't go I didn't get any food. Sometimes I didn't go, when it was cold I would have rather not eat, but that meant ruining my health even more. Christmas passed, New Year's Eve as well. I got sick because of the cold, I had no shoes, I wasn't dressed and I ended up being unable to move my leg; it was sciatica, but I had to go with the others in the forest and they told me, 'you will freeze here, it's cold, you have to come', but I couldn't move my leg. And then those girls, weak as they were, carried me in their arms, and carried me like that for 10 km.

In January my arm froze as well, and the next day it started swell, it was hot and the swelling went up to the heart. Then I said I had to go to the sickroom about my arm, and when the doctor saw me – she was a Russian, not a Jew, she was a political prisoner; her name was Lubova or Lobovaica or Lubovita, an elderly woman, but strong and fit – she started cursing in Russian, I don't know what she said. She said 'to surgery', that I understood, and she showed me a bench where she performed the surgeries; she brought chlorine and she used that to put me to sleep, she didn't have anything else. I didn't feel anything, I just counted to thirteen, I remember that, until I fell asleep, and I only felt when she touched me with the knife. When I woke up, she was slapping me to wake me up: 'Wake up, I want to tell you something!', and she joked: 'Do you want to write your will, do you want to write your will?' She took me as I was, just in my shirt, to a cot, she lied me down and wrapped my arm in toilet paper, there wasn't anything else. That woman operated very well: from the frostbite the arm was full of liquid, she had to drain it.

There were some clues while I was in the camp that the allies would come. A soldier from Wehrmacht, who guarded us while we carried the rocks, when I was still in Krakow, said: 'Now I sit in the armchair, but believe me, in two months I will carry the rocks and you will sit in the armchair!'. He said that in September; October, November passed, the man wasn't mistaken a lot, in January the red army surrounded Auschwitz. The red army was also in Poland when Krakow was evicted, but they didn't make a move then, they waited for the allies, although they could have got to Auschwitz, but they didn't have guns, or back-ups, I don't know what. On January 27th they came with the allies.

When I got in the hospital, in the sickroom, a Polish nurse sat on the bed next to me. Niuta was her name, and she saw that I was conscious. Mengele entered the sickroom – I know he was Mengele, he was known among the other prisoners, and they pointed him out to me: his name was the first thing I found out when I got off the train – and he said: 'Everybody must get out!', but in a strange voice, not like he meant: 'Get out! There's danger! I'm telling you to go!', but not everybody left, Lubova stayed behind. All those who could move had left the camp, and 2,000 people who were sick stayed behind. I accidentally looked outside when the gate was open, before Mengele closed it, and I saw that there was nobody at the gate, and I said to myself: 'How come they left the gate

open?'; 10,000 healthy people left then. And I thought we had to go as well, no matter what, because it was known that the camp was mined all round, and if the SS left, then the camp would blow up, that was known, and I tried to leave, and there were -40 degrees outside. I got out to the gate in my sandals and with just a shirt on, and I took a blanket to cover myself. Mengele looked at me and said: 'What do you want?', I said: 'I want to go...', 'You want to leave? You will freeze after ten steps, you will fall and freeze to death there, there are - 40 degrees outside!' he closed the door in my face and said: 'Go back to bed, we will come to pick you up with the cars, we'll take you away', and I said: 'How do I know what car is that and where do you take us?' I knew that the camp would blow up and I only went back because he closed the gate. But you never know where God takes you. If I hadn't gone to the sickroom I would have been among those who had already left the camp, but in the sickroom I was undressed, weak, sick and Mengele, who had sent me to the gas chamber twice, saved me on that occasion, by closing the gate in my face, because otherwise I would have fallen and frozen to death there. Then I went back and I said: it's best, whatever God wants, let God's will be done, and then I went to bed and I stayed there and I thought about what and how would happen, if we would live until 12 o'clock in the midnight or not.

The nurse came at 5 o'clock, when it dawned, took my blanket and bed sheet and folded them, made a pack and sat next to me. I said: 'Niuta, what do you want, what are you thinking, what are you doing?', 'I don't want anything, my fiancée is coming at 12 o'clock!' I looked at her and I said to myself, 'how could her fiancée come after her during the night?', but she didn't leave, she just sat nicely on the bed. But she knew what she was talking about, because she had contacts with the Polish resistance who worked wonderfully in Krakow and here as well. All the merit for the Polish resistance. When the camp was mined, the Polish prisoners, not by the Jews, mined it; they were forced to plant the mines all round the camp, therefore they knew where the mines were. And although they were locked with us, they sent word to the resistance and when they got out they defused all the mines. I didn't know about that, but Niuta knew. And at 12 o'clock her fiancée was there, a pilot, a handsome and strong man, and Niuta said: 'look, there's my fiancée', and he waved her and they left.

Then the Russian soldiers came, and said: 'you're free', and when they came in all the patients ran to them and kissed them. They only knew Russian, but they had some bread, which they gave to the prisoners; they told us to be calm because the next morning the red cross would come and bring us food. And so it was, in the morning the red cross came, and after two-three days a group of doctors from USA came with the red cross and they made a record of everyone who was there, and they tried to persuade us to go to USA. There was a doctor Schmidt, who spoke in German and I understood him, 'Miss, come to USA, I can tell you still have to go to school, if you want to study for 10 years you don't pay anything for 10 years, for food or for housing, you'll have everything you want for as long as you go to school, and we will help you after that.' But I wanted to meet my brothers at least, with my sisters, because I knew my parents were dead.

After we were liberated, we were turned over to the Polish Red Cross. I didn't leave for USA because of my sister, and it was a good thing that I didn't, because she would have been left all alone. We stayed there, in Poland, with the Red Cross for a month, I don't know in which town, it was too long ago. After a month or two passed, at the end of April, the red cross took us to Cernauti [14](#), so that we would be taken to Romania from there. I was there on the day the peace was signed, on May 9th [Victory Day] [15](#), and rumor had it that we would get in train wagons and

we would all go to Romania, we were about 2,000 people who made it from Auschwitz alive: we were Romanians and Hungarians who had to get to northern Transylvania. A few days after the signing of the peace they came to prepare us to get on the wagons, so that we could go home. We went to the train station, at the train station they showed us a train in which we had to get on: on that train there was a plate which said Romania in Russian, and we stayed there for a whole day, we slept in the wagon.

The next day I saw a sentry by the train, who wasn't there until then. We knew we were free, but the sentry said that no one could come get in or get off the wagon. What had happened?! Someone from CFR ['Caile Ferate Romane', 'The Romanian railway company'], an Ukrainian, took the sign off the train. Next to us there was another long train on the other line, and he took off the sign from that train and put it on ours, and ours on that train. We didn't know what it said on the sign, it was in Russian: it said that the train had to go to Siberia, because it was full of German, fascist prisoners. The other train left, and the next day we left as well, and we saw that we were crossing the Niester, which we weren't supposed to cross if we were going to Romania! After that we found out that we weren't going home, but to Russia, and we didn't know where! We were miserable, in grief, to see that after Auschwitz we still wouldn't get home! Two or three men jumped off the train when they saw we were heading for Siberia.

We traveled for four days, maybe more, and we got to Berdichev. We stopped there, because after four days they had to give us something warm to eat. It was a barrack and they could get us out of the wagons because there was nowhere to run. We didn't know Russian, we couldn't talk to the sentry, so we waited to see what would happen. There was a canteen in front of the train station and we went in to eat; next to the station master there was a soldier. And our Jewish girls cried out from one wagon to the other: 'Come, let's go eat, wash ourselves a bit!' in Yiddish. And that soldier came, looked at them and went up to the one who cried out and asked her: 'How come you know Yiddish?' 'how could I not know, I am a Jew, I speak my people's language', 'Are you a Jew? What are you doing on this train?' 'We are all Jews and we come from Auschwitz.' 'And where are you going?'. She answered that we were going to Romania. The man didn't say anything, but asked who the leader was, there had to be someone to coordinate everything for so many people. The leader was someone we called Mihai, a Jew, but a Romanian, who knew Russian well. And he took the Hungarians' leader, a man Berger, as well, and asked them to write down everything they knew, where we came from, why, and where we were going. Berger wrote that, he knew Russian as well, and gave it to that soldier, and we stayed for one more night in the train, but after that we went on, not in the original direction however, we were told that we were going to Slucak, which is now in Belarus, 20 km away from Minsk. There we were taken to a large garrison. Italian prisoners were with us as well, an entire detachment, soldiers who had surrendered, they had to be sent home with the same train we were supposed to get home. We were told that everything would be all right, and we were given good food. That's where we found out that because of that Ukrainian an entire train with SS soldiers got away.

The memorial was sent to Moscow, and the next day a plane was sent for Berger and took him. Five days after that, Mihai received a letter from Berger, from Budapest, with the diplomatic mail, in which he said that he got home and that he was alright, that the whole affair had been cleared and that we would be set free: the memorial was taken to Stalin's office, and there it went to the secretariat, where the general staff was, and there, the general, that soldier, knew one of the

secretaries, went to her and gave her the memorial. The woman looked at the memorial and told him: 'this is my husband's handwriting!', imagine that, she recognized her husband Berger by his handwriting. She had been a Moscovite: during the war communists were called Moscovites. And she ran to Russia, but her husband was deported. Mihai told me this story, we met after the war, he was a receptionist at Coroana hotel, here in Brasov.

We stayed there in Slucak until August, three months, because there weren't any railways, we needed papers, one couldn't send 2,000 men just like that, without anything, without checking. They checked us, and in the meantime we were very well treated, Americans sent us cans with ham every day, in a cart for us and we had some other food except the macaronis one could find during the war, they had some concerts arranged for us, some performances to make us feel better. We were allowed to go in town, but not somewhere else, because we had no papers and we could get lost anywhere, or we could get shot by any security guard. We stayed there calmly, and recovered a little.

After the war

On August 16th I got home, I came through Arad by train, I don't know the exact itinerary. There was a hostel specially for us Jews in Arad and I made a phone call from there. I was the only one who had a relative in Romania, in Timisoara. I phoned, I had an aunt, my mother's sister, Laszlo Juliana and a cousin, Laszlo, who hadn't been deported. I went there and I found my sister Livia there, who had come since April; I should have been home by then too, if it hadn't been for all that mess. I met my sister and I was very happy because I wasn't alone anymore, I had been desperate before that. I have always been close to my sister Livia. She had been like a mother to me, this is what this sister had been to me. I was left without a mother when I was 23-24 years old, it shouldn't have happened to a woman of that age, I needed my mother to tell me how to do this and that, what to do...she was to me anything she could after my mother died. We came home to Covasna, where we left from, but we didn't find anything there, not even a nail in the walls. Then I went to the Jewish Community from Sfantu Gheorghe, because Covasna was a smaller town and belonged to Sfantu Gheorghe. Only my sister and me came home, from a family of 8; only my brother Francisc came after us, who had been to Mathausen in November 1946; that was all.

After World War II, we kept in touch with Ignac because he was all we had left, the rest of the family died. During the Holocaust he had been in Budapest, in the ghetto. He took care of us, he helped us, he did everything he could from Hungary. When we came and didn't have as much as a nail in the walls, he helped us as much as he could. And then, after the borders were opened, after we returned from deportation, he invited us to spend each vacation with them in Hungary. And I went every year, together with my sister. After that, under communism, he was a clerk at CEC [Casa de Economii si Consemantiuni, 'The Loan Bank']. [Editor's note: Mrs. Gotterer was using CEC which is in Romania, however the identical loan bank in Hungary is called Takarekszo vetkezet.] Ignac was a kind man indeed, honest and warm-hearted like my father. I loved him very much.

They gave us something in Sfantu Gheorghe, from the Jewish community there, very little money, 50,000 lei, you couldn't buy a pair of socks with it; money were sent, but the money got lost on the way somehow and didn't get where it was supposed to, the money was stolen until it got here. And then my first husband came (we weren't married, not even engaged, at the time), but we were good friends.

My first husband, Francisc Pollak, was a Jew, and he was born in 1914 in Serbia, in Novi Sad. His mother was from there, but his father was from Sfantu Gheorghe. He grew up here, in Romania, in Sfantu Gheorghe, and his mother came after her husband here; he studied in Timisoara, at a French school for priests, but the school had nothing to do with Judaism, he studied together with everyone else. Then he went to high school there. His parents, his father, his brothers, had land, they worked at a lumber station, in forestry operations. After that, when he was 14 years old, his father died and he remained an orphan. He had a brother who was drafted in the army during World War II and who died at the bend of the river Don. Francisc was in the second largest camp after Auschwitz, where the political members were sent, at Buchenwald.

He had come on the same train from Timisoara to Sfantu Gheorghe as me, but we didn't meet on the train, I tracked him down after that. We knew each other well, since 1938, from Covasna, he was adopted by some business partners of my father's. We went together to Sfantu Gheorghe, we thought we would receive some more substantial help from the community, but they didn't give us anything, there was no hostel made for us. In Arad there was a very beautiful and well-attended hostel, and food, and all who had come could stay there for a month, or two or three. What could we do? We had no money, my poor aunt didn't have any either because they too were evicted during the war by the legionaries, but they still said that we should stay in Timisoara with them if we could, because whatever they had they would share with us. And so they did. We stayed there for two weeks, until we recovered a bit, especially me. And then we went to the community in Sfantu Gheorghe and my husband said (he was part of the community) that I should remain there as a secretary, and we would see, they would give me a salary and food as well, so I stayed there. I stayed there and I worked in the office in the community and next year, in 1946, we got married. We had a religious ceremony as well, the rabbi from here, from Brasov, Deutsch, came. There was a canteen at the community in Sfantu Gheorghe, and my husband hired a can manufacturer from Bucovina, Zisu Percel was his name, he was a Jew. My husband went to him and told him about our wedding and asked him to send some food. And he sent lots of cans, but I didn't receive anything, not a piece of bread, nothing. Everything was stolen. Ferencz sent food, he sent canned meat for cooking, ham, the most beautiful meat. Everything was sent to the community's canteen and when I asked for the food to be brought, they said that 'everything has already been eaten'. It wasn't true, I found that out after a long time that they sold everything, they stole it and sold everything for money in town. A month after that we came to Brasov.

I worked at the community in Sfantu Gheorghe for a year, but after that I wanted to make some money and you couldn't do that at the community. And then I wanted to go to the textiles factory from Sfantu Gheorghe, because the director there was our godfather at the wedding. He told me to go to the factory because he would hire me. And when I got to the factory he signed all the hiring papers, and when I got out of the gate a woman from U.F.D. [Uniunea Femeilor Democrate, 'The Democratic Women's Union'] and told me I was taken out of the production and that from the next day I would work at UFD. I didn't work in the factory for one day, and that's how I got to UFD. I was an accountant, a cashier and a secretary. When I was in UFD, a lady from Bucharest came and wanted to take me to the Women's Central Committee in Bucharest, but I wanted to stay with my sister, who was all alone, and with my husband, I didn't want to move from Sfantu Gheorghe and I said that. She said she understood and she didn't promote me.

After the forests were nationalized [16](#) my husband was first hired at a coop, there was no state commerce back then, there were coops. At the coop he was director at the biggest unit in Sfantu Gheorghe for a while, and after that he worked for a while at O.CI [The Commercial Organization] in commerce, at a commercial unit. When the state commerce was introduced he was commercial director. When my husband was deported he was young, he wasn't into politics, and when he came back, he was labeled as a communist, although he wasn't a communist, he was a social-democrat. He was a party member, and for a while he was a member of the World Jewish Council, he was the leading member from Sfantu Gheorghe, and when the party purification [17](#) was made, they found out and kicked him out of the party. The one who kicked him out was the biggest fascist, Magyari was his name, I knew him personally, he was part of the Hungarian fascist party that deported us.

I didn't have any children with my first husband. I observed the Jewish holidays during communism. I was at U.F.D. and when the autumn holidays came, I dressed up, I went to our secretary, who was our leader and I said: 'I have a Jewish holiday, the biggest holiday, Yom Kippur, I couldn't celebrate it in the concentration camp and I want to celebrate it at home.' 'Go home nicely, and go to church and come back when the holidays are over.' This secretary, Magdalena Vas was her name, was very nice. She had been a colleague of my younger sister, Edit, and she knew me since then. There was a synagogue in Sfantu Gheorghe, very beautiful. After deportation, after I got married, I celebrated the holidays at home, but I didn't cook kosher. I always light two candles on Friday, even today, and I say the prayer, I know it by heart. That's what supported me in camp, I always thought about my mother lighting candles on Saturdays, and that I had to make it home to light the candles. I always said the prayer in camp, it was the only thing that they couldn't take from me.

After repatriation, I had more Jewish friends. That's how it turned out then, Jews were more around Jews and Christians around Christians. Each was comfortable with his kind. When I heard that the state of Israel existed, we had a big dinner at home, all my friends came, I was very happy. I had many friends, we were a circle of 20 persons, but they left when aliyah was made in 1960, and they all left. Clara and I lost contact. I don't write letters to her anymore, but when I go to Covasna, we meet and talk.

I knew I couldn't emigrate, because I couldn't stand the heat. My sister couldn't leave either, she was still ill after the camp, and my husband didn't want that because he too was sick. I would have liked to go even in those conditions, but my husband told me I wouldn't stand the heat and that we wouldn't go there so that I could get sick. My first husband always listened to the radio from Israel, and my sister and me listened as well. The 'Bucuresti 500' TV had appeared then, in the 1960s, and he bought a radio and a TV. He always listened to radio and records. I listened to Free Europe [18](#) under communism, I knew everything that happened around me.

Francisc died early, from a heart attack, at 50, in 1965 in Sfantu Gheorghe. He suffered a lot in concentration. I remember I used to say something that my husband remembered in his last hour, when he died. He said that I was right after all. I used to say that communism has good parts as well, it has beautiful and good ideas, but that Lenin understood that this ideas were not for a nation that wasn't cultured, that doesn't know much and that has a lot to learn first to understand communism. I still sustain this idea, that the cultured men should uphold the society.

I found out when the wars in 1967 and 1973 happened, I listened to the radio. In 1967 Israel broke the diplomatic relations with a lot of countries, but they were always good friends with Romania. I

know who Moses Rosen was, Moses Rosen [19](#) arranged so that so many people could leave. And I always said that he did a very good thing.

I think I was there, at U.F.D., for a year, and after that I made to an agreement with the secretary, who was a member of the party bureau. I told her I would like to go to a company, where I could improve in my job, to be a good accountant, because I couldn't progress there. I told her that I couldn't go on the field, because I had walked enough, I had to stand for a year in the camp, and that that wasn't for me, I wanted to be in an office, where it's warm. She asked me where I wanted to go, and I said: 'to the bank'. There was only the National Bank back then, but exactly at that time the Investment Bank from Sfântu Gheorghe was set up. A director, a general instructor from the board had come to organize the Investment Bank in Sfântu Gheorghe, which was the county's capital, because a county branch had to be set up; the first name on the hiring list was mine. The party secretary at the time, Sogoran, was Luca's brother-in-law, Vasile Luca was in power then [20](#). And Luca came from our county, and therefore his brother-in-law was first secretary there. And when this bank instructor came to organize the county branch, he first went to the party to see how things were and ask for help. The party secretary said: 'the first thing I have to say is that I'm hiring Mrs. Pollak (that was my name after my first husband, Mrs. Pollak). I say she is an excellent clerk'. He saw my reports, about what I had done in a year at U.F.D., I had a recommendation for Ferdinand Furgaci, who was the director of the bank, and I was hired at the Investment Bank. Because I was not qualified, they hired me at first as a secretary-typist and secretary-cashier, and then I caught on fast, I learnt accounting in three months, and after that I was promoted accountant, main-accountant, and then I was promoted chief-accountant. Then I was promoted inspector, and chief inspector, and I was director for two or three years, but it wasn't for me because I didn't want to get involved in politics. The director had to get involved in politics from time to time. I said I'd rather do my job and I remained assistant director.

My work colleagues were good and bad. The good ones were the friends, I remember an accountant, they were usually the people in my suborder. But there were about three inspectors who couldn't stand me, who wanted to get me fired several times, but I had a good friend among the communists as well, he was a Jew, Lemorti, who had been a chief in Bucharest, and who had come home to Targu Mures, to the party committee. He was an old communist, but he was a true communist, not one of the phony ones. He told me 'don't worry, when you have problems let me know.' I didn't intend to do that, but a friend from Sfântu Gheorghe went to him and when he asked 'How are the Pollaks?', he was told 'they are firing Mrs. Pollak from the bank because she has some colleagues who want her job'. But a call came, and a telegram, which said that they should leave me alone if they don't want to be fired from the bank.

I once had a problem because I was Jewish. I went to a meeting in Bucharest once. It was summer, and I went in a blouse with short sleeves and one could see the number. A very nice and kind colleague, the Greek Linbidis, came to me and she said to me privately: 'Next time get a blouse with long sleeves, because these [the communists] can't stand Jews'. And indeed I felt that in their attitude. But I also had a very good colleague, a Romanian from Bucharest, he was a boss and he always asked me if I had any displeasures. Of all my colleagues, there was one who was a Jew: he was a director at the Investment Bank, a certain Weis, but he was accursed, he wanted to be more Catholic than the pope, Jews are like that, and he was also a great communist, and in the end he ended up in the canal [Note: Mrs. Gotterer refers to the canal Danube-The Black Sea [21](#), for whose

construction political convicts were used.]

I was not a party member, my file was so well made up. They asked me once and they told me I had to bring a recommendation from certain people. And I said: 'If I, who has been to Auschwitz have to bring a recommendation from that person, who was the biggest fascist, then I don't want to get in the party!'. And it was like that, I never signed in, but I didn't have any other problems either. Under communism I had to know everything that was going on in the country, we had to read the newspaper, and we had to explain what we read in the newspaper during party meetings. I had to take a course on communism, I had to know who was Stalin, since when he was in power, things like that, and I had to take an exam. I didn't want to get involved into politics, and I didn't, I kept clear of these issues, but I knew what was going on. I never had problems, they couldn't do anything to me because my file was made up by the party secretary. One of our superiors from Bucharest told me that I could have been a minister with the file I had.

I participated in different events, I marched where we were told to go. Every year, on May 1st, on August 23rd [22](#), we had to go out, to listen to what they said there, from the stands. The lines had a degree of economic importance, we, the ones from the bank, were in the second line, but I don't know who was in the first line. All these units had to take part in the marching in front of the stands, after that we could go home.

Communism in Romania wasn't bad at all. I had a good job, but a lousy salary, I got half a kilo of salami every month like everyone else, and half a kilo of meat. But I say there were good things as well, some, but they weren't done correctly. For example, at the bank in Sfantu Gheorghe I didn't agree with how people were elected, it was full of fascists there. They are well written by Lenin, but you know how it is, it's like a housewife who has a good recipe but who doesn't cook it well. That was my opinion. I worked in Sfantu Gheorghe until 1975, when I retired.

I had a brother, Emil, who was drafted to forced labor during Holocaust and who ended up after that in Bergen-Belsen. He was liberated by the Belgian Red Cross, which he also joined as a volunteer, and in 1945 he got to Brussels. He was a merchant there, but it didn't work out very well for him, because even after the war there was an anti-Jewish atmosphere. There were no laws or violent things, but he had obstacles as a merchant. Around 1952 he decided to go to Liberia. He wrote to me, and I wrote back. But I had a job with a lot of responsibility and my letter came back with the mention 'unknown addressee', but in fact it never left Sfantu Gheorghe. I was a trustworthy person for them, I never did anything wrong, but still they gave me a hard time with the correspondence.

My sister Livia married Izidor Berkovics, who had a tragic fate. He was shot in the head during the war, while he was at forced labor probably, and he had locomotory and speaking deficiencies, Livia bought a tobacco shop and a took care of it. When I came home I took her to the doctor, I did everything I could, but in the end she still died because of that, her bones grounded, from osteoporosis; she died in 1995 in Sfantu Gheorghe.

I met my present husband, Alexandru Gotterer after a few years, in 1980. He was from Brad, from Hunedoara; his father had been a teacher, and his mother had been a housewife and a sahter's daughter. During Holocaust he was in Brasov, at forced labor, between 1942 and 1943. He came once in Sfantu Gheorghe with rabbi loles from Sfantu Gheorghe. I was there, and I asked that my sister would be given a package as well, if it were possible, because my pension was small and I

had to help her. My sister had a very small pension, 400 lei, that was nothing. And I told him to help us; that's how we met and then we got married in 1984, here in Brasov, in the synagogue. There was a cantor from Bucharest at the ceremony. The civil marriage was held in Sfantu Gheorghe. In 1984, after I became Sany's wife (that's what I call my husband, it comes from Sandor, the Hungarian version of Alexandru), I moved here, in Brasov, I went to the synagogue; he was employed as vice-president of the community for 18 years. I learnt here some things I didn't know, and I heard about the things that happen in Israel, I celebrated the independence day at home.

My husband has been married before, but his wife died in Brasov in 1981, and he has two children from his first marriage, Ivan Gotterer and Veronica Iancu. They both consider themselves Jews. Veronica was born in Brasov in 1963, and she died here in 1996. Ivan was also born in Brasov in 1953, and now he lives in Rehovot, in Israel. He had brit mila, and he married religiously in the synagogue in Targu Mures, where he studied medicine. He left for Israel in 1984. He worked as a surgeon in Israel, at Hadasa hospital, in Tel Aviv. He has two daughters, Iris, who is a dentist-surgeon, and Karen, who is a psychologist. I keep in touch with my husband's children, and we get along very well.

We thought everything would be all right after the revolution [23](#). I wasn't glad that they killed Ceausescu [24](#). We thought that culture, freedom were coming...but, what do you know, something came, but there are a lot of steps to be made. I receive help from the German government, because I was deported. It is a monthly fund, and we don't receive as much as the others, we only get 100 euro per month, others, in other places, receive food as well. In the meantime I received compensations in marks. My health is very bad: I went to the doctor a few days ago and he told me that he couldn't cure anything, I could walk until now but because of the advanced age the state of my legs has worsened. Now I spent most of my time at home, reading, filling in information in the files I have made about the Jews in Sfantu Gheorghe, and walking with my husband.

Glossary

[1](#) Franz Iosef (new)

[2](#) Kuk (Kaiserlich und Koeniglich) army

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

[3](#) Szalasi, Ferenc (1897-1946)

The leader of the extreme right Arrow-Cross movement, the movement of the Hungarian fascists. The various fascist parties united in the Arrow-Cross Party under his leadership in 1940. Helped by the Germans who had occupied Hungary in March 1944, he made a coup d'état on 15th October 1944 and introduced a fascist terror in the country. After World War, he was sentenced to death

and executed.

4 Trianon Peace Treaty

Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on 4th June 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries concerned. The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary). The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia). Hungary lost 67.3% of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4% of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian regimes.

5 May 10th (new)

6 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.

7 Uj Kelet (new)

8 Second Vienna dictate (new)

9 Battle of Stalingrad (new)

10 Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957)

Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary.

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

11 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary

Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

12 Forced residence in Northern Transylvania (new)

13 Legionaries

Members 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.

14 Cernauti (new)

15 Victory Day in Romania

9th May commemorated the signing of the capitulation of Germany, which was the end of World War II in Europe. In Romania the communists attributed a special significance to this day because they tried to supplant 10th May, the former national holiday in the collective memory of the nation. Until the communist takeover in Romania, 10th May commemorated the crowning of the first Romanian King, and the creation of the Romanian Kingdom, which took place on 10th May 1883.

16 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.

17 Party purification (new)

Ethnical and social purification policy inside the Romanian Communist Party, by means of which any 'dubious' persons from the point of view of the communist principles (unclean ethnical origins, kulak parents, relatives abroad, aso.) were removed from managerial positions.

18 Free Europe

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

19 Rosen, Moses (1912-1994)

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

20 Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group

After 1945 there were two major groupings in the Romanian communist leadership: the Muscovites led by Ana Pauker, and the former illegal communists led by Gheorghe Dej. Ana Pauker arrived in Romania the day after the entry of the Soviet army as the leader of the group of communists returning from Moscow; the Muscovites were the major political rivals of Gheorghe Dej. As a result of their rivalry, three out of the four members of the Political Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party were convicted on trumped-up charges in show trials in 1952. The anti-Semitic campaign launched by Stalin in 1952, which also spread over to Romania, created a good opportunity to launch such a trial – both Luca and Pauker were of Jewish origin. Georgescu was executed. Luca was also sentenced to death but the sentence was changed to lifetime forced

labor. He died in prison in 1960. Pauker was released after Stalin's death and lived in internal exile until her death.

21 Forced labor at the Danube-Black Sea Canal (new)

22 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.

23 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.

24 Ceausescu, Nicolae (1918-1989)

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