

Leizer Finchelstein In Front Of The Bahai Gardens



This photograph was taken in Israel in 1969 when I first traveled there as a tourist. The photograph was taken in Haifa, probably in front of the Bahai Gardens.

I traveled abroad during Communism, but only to Israel. I managed to travel there approximately 18 times as a tourist. I was among the few tourists who were on the first airplane after tourism with Israel was resumed in 1969. My parents had already left to Israel some 18 years earlier. I only saw my father over there. I didn't get to see my mother anymore, she had already died. And since then, I left every 2, 3 years, for that's how it was in those days. If you had a passport, you were allowed to travel abroad once every 2 or 3 years. Certainly, that is if you had "good grades" [with regard to the check performed by the Securitate]. Otherwise, you weren't issued a passport.

When I traveled to Israel for the first time, I brought back a small transistor radio. A neighbor of ours who was a secretary at the courthouse visited us one day and she tells my wife: 'Oh my, such a marvel, a radio! Where did you get it?' 'My husband just brought it from Israel,' my wife replied. 'Does it also speak Romanian?', the neighbor asked. And we thought we were more backward, while this neighbor was working at the courthouse. Over time, we bought other household appliances as well, depending on our financial means.

We wanted to leave to Israel. And we prepared for the departure and for 5 years they tormented us and repeatedly rejected our request. My neighbor was patient and kept addressing complaints, after 8 years she was granted permission to leave. But we stopped trying after 5 years, we lost patience writing addresses. The emigration requests were filed at the county Militia, there was a standard form to which you had to attach some photographs. If the request was accepted, you went to the Israeli Embassy where the emigration department offered you transportation money. However, our requests were never accepted. Most of those who filed the requests in the beginning of the 1950's received negative replies. There was a big emigration wave in 1962, but we had given up trying to get our paperwork accepted. During these 5 years of waiting to leave, we worked and prepared ourselves and we gathered only things that we could take with us: bed linen,

silverware. And finally, we said: 'That's enough, we can't live like beggars anymore.' And we started arranging our home.