

Fani Cojocariu As A Girl



This is I, Fani Cojocariu, when I was perhaps around 16-17. This photograph was taken at a time in my life when I was much, much younger. I had to take the photograph for my identity card, and the photo studio gave you more duplicates than the Militia required, and I could keep some of the photographs that weren't necessary for the identity card.

We didn't have a happy childhood, as other children did. It is a known fact that Jews especially raise their children very well, they give them milk, butter... We saw none of those. We led a very hard life. God forbid! My father managed to build that house as best as he could, with toil and bitterness, but he didn't install any electricity, despite the fact that there was electricity downtown, and the post was in front of the house. I don't know, to have the post in front of the house and not to install electricity... Because that's what he thought: "We have to pay the bill for it eventually." And they couldn't afford it. We struggled with gas lamps our whole life! And whenever the lamp broke and they didn't have another one to replace it with, as we had no extra one, my father took it and glued it back together with paper. And just as no electricity was installed, they didn't make any terra cotta stoves, either. Had they at least built a brickwork stove or a kitchen range stove - they didn't do that either. They installed a tin stove in the room, with wood as fuel, and it only gave a little heat, as long as the fire was burning, after which it became cold. Tin gets cold, it doesn't stay warm like terra cotta. We were freezing. During winter, my mother - I remember - used to sweep whole basins of snow off the walls. During winter, we used to move from room to room until we reached the last room, and we were freezing with cold. My father bought potatoes for the winter, so that we had food to eat. We slept on the bed, and underneath the potatoes became as hard as

stones. When we took the potatoes from underneath the bed, they rattled like stones! They froze inside the house. But you should see how water used to freeze... They didn't let us leave the tiniest amount of water lying about over night as it turned to solid ice.

We studied at the Romanian school. Both Jews and Christians attended the Romanian school, mixed together. But there was no hatred or enmity, or persecutions against on account of our being Jewish. All in all, I graduated 4 grades. But you should know that's how it was back then. In Jewish families, for instance, if a child had 4 grades, it was enough. They taught them to read and write and then they quickly had to learn a trade - become either a barber, or a tailor, or a shoemaker... It wasn't like today, when everyone must go to college - back then it was unheard of. Children had to learn trades!

After graduating the 4 grades of primary school, both my sisters and I started a trade. We all chose different trades. The eldest was working for various employers, she learned a tailor's trade and worked as a tailor. Initially, the second-born started learning a tailor's trade as well and learned from a lady, but she abandoned it subsequently, and she learned knitting: vests, blouses, sweaters... For in those days, during World War II, right after the war, you couldn't find these things in stores, there was a shortage of fabrics as well. And she took me under her wing, and I helped her. For she could barely keep up with the workload. That's because she didn't have a knitting machine, you had to do it by hand, loop by loop and row after row - that was my expression -, and that takes time.

I myself was apprenticed to a tailor. Oh my, they were actually relatives of ours from my mother's side, Jews like us, their names were Hova and Ita - two sisters. Naturally, they were living together until they got married, and they had a workshop at home. Their family name was Rachita. They were many sisters, and their father had a cart drawn by horses. For Jews did this too in those days - they carried wood for various people, or something like that. And, God, how I learned a tailor's trade as a small child... Given the fact that they sent us to Transnistria when I was 12, I think they apprenticed me to a tailor when I was 9-10. Back then, pleated skirts were in fashion - the whole skirt was made of overlapping pleats. They were made from terylene, a fabric people wore in those days. And I was in charge of stitching them, so they could iron them. How was it that I managed to do that, how did I find the skills for that? Just an example, overcasting a girdle at the ends to prevent fraying - for people wore girdles in those days, it was fashionable. I just managed. But still, I didn't remain there afterwards, I quit.