Eva Gora Moldovan

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Brasov

Romania

Interviewer: Andrea Laptes

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Mrs. Eva Gora looks rather young for her 73 years; her black hair only has some white strands in it, and her black eyes are vivid. She lives alone in a three-bedroom apartment, which is a bit crowded but neat. She has doilies on all the tables. She always has some home-made cherry brandy, cookies and coffee ready for guests. She socializes a lot with her neighbors. She speaks in a laconic and unique way: she doesn't hold back, but she seems to believe that her personal experiences and life are of little relevance.
She has a suppressed sense of humor, and she speaks of all the hardships in a very accepting and indulging way.

My family background

My paternal grandparents, Perec – or Pavel, as I have seen it written in other documents – and Fraidla Feld, lived in Poland, in Belchatow, but that's all I know about them. I never met them because my father, Samuel Feld, came to Romania as a young man and they remained there. My father came from a large family: he had ten siblings, but I don't know their names. I only know that one sister left for the USA – I don't exactly know when – and lived in New Jersey. I don't know more about his family because I don't remember him ever talking about them.

My maternal grandparents were from Poland as well, but I never met them either. My grandmother was called Etel Friem. I don't know her maiden name and I don't know my grandfather's first name, either. I couldn't find it in any documents. They lived in Kulikowka, and that's where my mother, Rifke Feld, was born. I think they moved to Lvov after that because my mother used to tell me stories that happened in Lvov. My grandfather worked as a baker there, and my grandmother was

a housewife. They had twelve children, and they weren't rich, but they managed to raise them somehow. They lived in a house and shared a courtyard with the owners of other houses.

My grandparents were religious, but not Orthodox Jews; I can guess that from the way my mother observed tradition. My mother used to tell me that at one point, one of her siblings died, and her mother bewailed him or her so desperately, that her neighbors came to her and told her, 'Come on, don't be so upset, you have eleven other children!'. But grandmother, in her grief, said, 'No, I have only one Smuel, one Iosif…' and so on. She meant that each child was unique for her. When World War I broke out, my mother told me, that they had to hide the flour, so that it wouldn't be confiscated. Grandmother died during World War I. Many of her elder children were already married and had their own households. My grandmother found out that street fights were about to break out, and, as a caring mother, she ran over to one of her daughters' house, to warn her to close the gates. But when she got there, the gates were already closed, street fights broke out and she was shot in the street.

My mother, Rifke Feld, nee Friem, was born in Kulikowka, Poland, in 1897, and her native tongue was Yiddish. I think she went to elementary school as a child, but that's all the schooling she had. Of all my mother's siblings, I know only of Eugenia Goldstein, nee Friem, who lived in Resita, Romania, with her family. She moved there some time before World War II, but I don't know the exact year. That's why my mother came to Resita: her family found out that Eugenia was ill, and they wanted to send somebody from the family to take care of her, and that was my mother. She came to Resita in her early twenties, some time at the end of World War I, and she never went back to Poland again, nor did she see her parents again. Her mother died shortly after my mother left for Romania, and her father passed away some time after that. She came by train to Resita, to look after her elder sister Eugenia, and she stayed here for good. My mother told me that the journey to Romania was a nightmare: she came with a train full of soldiers, and, as you can surely imagine, that wasn't easy for a young single woman.

My father, Samuel Feld, was born in Belchatow, Poland, in 1893, and his native tongue was Yiddish. I believe he graduated from high school. He came to Romania to look for a job when he was a young man, and he ended up in Resita because the town had a strong metallurgy industry. There were many factories and one could find a job as a laborer much easier. And that's what my father did for a living in his first years here. He met my mother in the Jewish circles in Resita, I think. They met, fell in love and got married in 1918. It was a religious wedding, but I don't know if they went to the synagogue or if the rabbi came to their home. It was at the end of the war and times were rather troubled. My parents didn't have Romanian citizenship for a very long time, I think they only received it after World War II: periodically, they had to pay a fee and renew their passports.

In the beginning, my parents worked very hard to support themselves. My father worked as a laborer. My mother used to raise and fatten geese, slaughtered them and sold the lard and liver. Those were rather expensive and most people preferred goose lard to unrefined oil because it tasted better. When I was little, my mother still raised a few geese and stored the lard in cans for winter, but that was just for our own use. All the time I can remember, my mother used goose lard for cooking.

In 1920 my mother gave birth too early to a baby boy – she was eighth months pregnant – and he died. After that, in 1921, she gave birth to Etel Feld, my sister. I never got to know her though

because she died in 1929 or 1930 of meningitis. My parents were devastated; she had been the joy of their lives. From what my parents told me, she was a very smart girl: she was the first in school, and she always received prizes and so on.

Growing up

I was born in 1931, and at that time, my parents lived in a rented house with three rooms, whose owner was an old Jewish woman, Schwartz neni [Hungarian for Aunt Schwartz]. The furniture was ours. I remember I had my own room, and the furniture was white, and the edges had little black wooden beads on them; I even had a mirror and a dressing table. The house had a garden with beautiful roses, but we weren't allowed to enter it; the roses belonged to the owner. We had running water and electricity, but it was the same everywhere in Resita. We didn't have a big library at home, but we did have some religious books, like the siddur, which my mother and father used on the high holidays. My parents never advised me what to read; there was no need to.

We got along well with our neighbors, with the owner, Schwartz neni, and with the Tauber family, who were also Jewish and had a daughter older than me. Her and me weren't close friends, but we got along well.

By the time I was born, my parents already had a small-wear shop, and from what they told me later, the business didn't go very well until I was born. I brought them luck: after I was born, the business started to pick up. The shop was in the house we lived in; from the shop you went through a door into our living room. It was small, only one room, and thickset with all sorts of merchandise: clothes, fabrics and so on – I think you could find anything in it! My father usually went to buy merchandise at different fairs, my mother worked as a cashier in the shop and they had one employee who attended customers. We could also afford a Hungarian servant to do the chores around the house: she did the cleaning and the shopping. I don't remember ever going to the market with my mother.

Although we had a servant, my mother did the cooking herself, and there was never pork on the table for as long as she cooked. She had a separate pot for milk, but she didn't observe all the kashrut laws strictly. She didn't have separate utensils for dairy and meat products, for example. And, my father even had some salami when he didn't eat at home. And the poultry was always cut at the 'sakter', that is the shochet. On Friday evenings my mother said the blessing and lit the candles and there was soup for dinner. We had challah as well. My mother made the dough and took it to the baker's; I don't remember if it was on Thursdays or on Fridays. On Sabbath we usually had geese and one of my mother's puff pastry specialties. Most of our time was spent with eating and drinking, as one does on a holiday.

Whenever there was a high holiday, I received presents. I was a spoiled child. My parents had already lost two babies, they were rather old and I was their treasure. Heaven forbid something should have happened to me! So on Chanukkah I received Chanukkah gelt, and on Pesach, I hid matzah [the afikoman] and my father never found it, of course. You can imagine what tragedy it would have been if he had found it – no present for me!

My favorite holiday was Pesach, probably because there were many presents. I received more or less what I wanted: toys, clothes and things like that. My father asked the mah nishtanah, and I answered with mah nishtanah ha-layla ha-ze [Why is this night different (from all other nights)?].

There was a big cleaning before Pesach, but we didn't have special tableware for Pesach. My mother just boiled all the pots. Of course, nobody ate any bread on Pesach. The seder was observed in the family, and my father led it. I remember we always had as a guest an old Jewish lady – I don't remember her name – whom I pretended to be my grandmother because I was jealous that all other children had one, and I didn't. She always brought some dessert with her, but I don't remember what it's called; it's a paste made of apple, sugar and ground nut kernels. I didn't do anything special with this lady, I just liked to call her grandmother.

On Yom Kippur my parents fasted, and I fasted, too, but when I was little, I only fasted half a day. My father never took me with him when he went to the synagogue on Sabbath, I only went on high holidays with my mother. And he never taught me religion. We never read from the siddur together, for example, but it happened that he explained things to me, like why we light candles and so on: I remember him telling me that there are two Sabbath candles because they should remind us that there were two tables of laws. [Editor's note: According to widespread belief, the fact that there are two candles refers to two versions of the ten commandments, where two different words remind us that Jews have to keep the Sabbath. One is 'zahor' which means 'Remember!', that is 'do not forget it' and the other is 'shamor', which means, 'keep it!', that is, observe it. In many places they light as many candles as there are children in the family.]. When we went to the synagogue, I couldn't wait for the Yizkor to be read, because the children whose parents were still alive weren't allowed to listen, and I could go out in the synagogue's courtyard to play with other children. [Editor's note: Yizkor, read out during the maskir ceremony, is a memorial prayer for the deads' souls. In the Ashkenazi ritual, it is said after the reading of the Torah, during the morning service of the last day of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot, and on the Day of Atonement.**]** I don't remember dressing up for Purim, or building a sukkah on Sukkot, but all the family went to the synagogue.

My parents never punished me for anything, but they didn't have a reason to: I was a good child and rather obedient. My mother told me later, when I had grown up, that she used to be a bit jealous of me because I was always daddy's girl. I don't know if I really was closer to my father; I loved them both the same.

I don't know how big the Jewish community of Resita was, but there was a beautiful temple, and there were functionaries like a chazzan, hakhamim, shochetim, and so on. The community wasn't Orthodox, I remember in the temple there was an organ, and I know the Orthodox Jews don't have that. There weren't particularly Jewish neighborhoods in Resita. Most of the Jews I knew were merchants, jewelers, shoemakers, rofim [Hebrew for doctors] as well as lawyers.

My parents' closest friends were the Pollacks, who were also Jews. They had a boy, Aristide, who was older than me, but would still play with me sometimes. Later, they also had a girl called Reghina. They owned a tailor's shop. Mr. Pollack, whenever he saw me he gave me pinch on the cheek and told me to wash my eyes because I had very black eyes. And he said that he wanted to have a little girl just like me! My parents were also close to my aunt's family, the Goldsteins. We spent holidays together sometimes. However, the Pollacks were always visiting us.

When I was little, I had a fraulein [governess], but I don't remember if she was Hungarian or German; she stayed with me only for a little while. After that I went to the normal state school, but it was only for two years because the anti-Jewish laws in Romania 1 were introduced. I remember

rather little from those two years in Resita, but I do remember I was a strajer 2.

The first time I was confronted with anti-Semitism was when I was in the 2nd grade of elementary school, in 1939 or 1940. One day my teacher came to our house, and told my parents, 'Please don't send your daughter to school anymore, we are not allowed to accept her. I didn't want to tell her that in front of the other kids!'. He was a good man considering that he thought of that. I heard that the principal of another school in Resita, who was a legionary 3, told the Jewish kids in the classroom that they were stinking Jews, and that they wouldn't set foot in that school again; and he said all that in front of the other children.

During the war

After that, my father lost the shop, and a Nazi, a German, took it over. Soon after that, the legionaries gathered all the Jews in the house of a Jewish lawyer, Deju was his name. He was single and he had a big beautiful house. Rumors had it that they were going to be shot or deported, and my father was taken there, too. I remember I went to that house with a little package for my father, and the legionary guarding the door allowed me to talk to him. He called him to the window and let me give him that package. I was a very cute kid – black eyes, curly long hair – and he was probably touched. However, soon after that the legionaries broke their necks [on 21st January 1941], and I believe that's why the men weren't deported or shot. I was just a kid, I knew nothing of politics, but I believe not even my father knew more about what happened back then. After the legionary rebellion had been defeated, they were simply allowed to go home. All of them felt pretty lucky because from what my father told us later, it was almost certain that they would have been executed, if it hadn't been for the defeat of the legionaries.

We were affected by the anti-Jewish laws. First I was thrown out of school, then my father was sent to forced labor in Oravita [small town in southwestern Romania, in Caras-Severin county], and we had to go with him, so our forced residence was there as well. We went to Oravita in 1941 in a cattle truck, and the soldiers guarding us told us that if we stuck out our heads, they would shoot us.

In Oravita, we rented a small place with a courtyard; we lived in only one room that had a kitchen and a bathroom, and we had electricity and running water. We didn't breed any animals or grow vegetables in the garden, but my mother was busy all the same with the chores around the house. Moreover, we had no income: my mother was a housewife, and my father wasn't paid for his work. We had to manage with our savings.

My father had to work hard; he was in Lisava [Lisava tunnel on the Oravita-Anina railway, 91 meters long, located near the town and small river Lisava, in the Semenic Mountains] and in Tantari [former name of commune Dumbravita, in Brasov county], building railways, bridges and tunnels. The unfair thing was: my father wasn't even supposed to be taken to forced labor because there was an age limit, and he was above it. From what I understood, another Jew from Resita was supposed to go, but he had high connections, so he got out of it and my father was taken instead. All the Jews from Resita were taken to forced labor, except the rofim and the lawyers; I don't know why, they were probably needed. Life was hard in those three years. We barely saw my father: he came home and then he was sent to another workplace again. There wasn't much of a family life. I spent most of my time in school. The occasions when all the family was reunited were rare. I remember we tried to observe the high holidays, to the extent it was possible, but it wasn't on a

regular basis.

The Jews deported to Oravita organized some sort of school there, so that the Jewish kids wouldn't miss out on years: an accountant taught arithmetic, a lady dentist taught Romanian literature , and so on. We also had some religion classes, where we learnt some Hebrew; a chazzan taught us. All the classes were held in a building that belonged to the synagogue in Oravita. Moreover, we were allowed to take exams at the Jewish high school in Timisoara, so we, the Jewish kids, went there periodically by train, accompanied by an adult. Of course the classes we improvised were small: three kids in the 1st grade, two in the 2nd, and the like. I remember, one time when we were traveling to Timisoara, the train was derailed and we got stuck in the snow; it was winter. Another time, we were in Timisoara, in the Jewish high school, taking an exam, and the Americans came in to bomb the city [the American raids occurred on 4th April 1944]. The teachers took us out of the classroom and brought us to some trenches dug in the courtyard: I remember seeing human bones there. The place had probably been a graveyard. You can probably imagine that we were scared to death.

Immediately after 23rd August 1944 4, the Germans came to bomb with their Stukas [JU87 Stuka model airplanes, the dive bombers used by the German Luftwaffe during WW II]. That in-law cousin of mine, Dezideriu Lowinger – he was the husband of my aunt's daughter, Etus, who had been a fervent communist for a short period of time, just like many Jews during that period – realized that the Germans would come looking for communists. It was known that all communists and their families had to suffer repercussions from the Germans, had they been caught, so Dezideriu wanted the whole family to go to Lugoj [town 70 km from Oravita] immediately. I don' know if we needed or got any special approval to go there.

Dezideriu had a sister in Lugoj, Irma Weiss was her name, and we all went there until the bombings were over. We stayed in his sister's house. We were ten people crowded in just one house. The Germans were still bombing with their Stukas; it was dangerous to stay out in the courtyard – an old man was killed that way. One time, my mother was at the market with my cousin, when the alarm went off, and the bombing began. She told me there was total panic, people were running, falling off the bridge. While we were in Lugoj, the Germans bombed the railway station. We didn't live far from it, and when a bomb fell, the milk pot, which was on the windowsill to cool, flew all the way right into the middle of the room. We stayed in Lugoj for a few weeks, until the Germans were defeated, and then we moved back to Oravita.

Only after we came back from Lugoj to Oravita we found out what had happened while we were gone. Across the street from us lived a woman, who was a big Hitler fan – we had no idea – and when the Germans came with the trucks in Oravita, she started screaming, 'Heil Hitler!' and other crap like that. She climbed on the trucks and started to scream that in that house – our house – there were Jews. The Germans came looking for us, but the owner told them that we weren't there, which was true, and when they wanted to come in, he told them that we were poor and that they would find nothing to take.

When the Russians came, it was truly a liberation, no matter what others say, even if it was short-lived: we could go back to Resita and reopen our shop. Of course we saw pretty soon what communism was all about, but its first effects were good for us. My father never joined the Communist Party, but many Jews did and I wasn't surprised.

After the war

When we came back to Resita from Oravita in 1944, we rented the same house we had stayed in before and we got our shop back. My mother's sister, Eugenia, and her family – her son, daughters and their families, who had also been deported to Oravita with us – didn't go back to Resita. They settled in Caransebes. Her husband, who had also been in forced labor, had died in the meantime, and her son-in-law, Dezideriu Lowinger, wanted to go to Caransebes. He had some business there I think, so they moved there.

We got our shop back, which was empty of course, so my parents struggled again to reopen it. The political situation got funny at one point after the war, I remember, because our shop was right next to the police station and we were good neighbors. When all the issues with Tito 5 in Yugoslavia began, nobody knew what to think, the news was so confusing: one day he was our friend, one day he was an executioner. My father had a picture of Tito and tried to keep up with the political preferences of the time because he didn't want any more trouble from the state. So he would put that picture up on the wall or take it off, depending on the political situation. And one of those days, my father lost track of what Tito was to us on that particular day, until the policemen came to him in a hurry and told him to hide the picture because Tito was an executioner again! But soon after my father got his shop back, communism forbade private commerce, nationalization 6 followed, he lost his shop, and he was destroyed: he wasn't a young man anymore, and he had to support his family somehow. So he went back to working as a laborer, but he did that only for a short period of time.

When we came back to Resita, I continued school – I was in the 5th or 6th grade – and after elementary school I went to high school. Luckily, the certificates I had from the Jewish high school were recognized. We had to have religious classes, and everybody went to study their own religion: Catholics went to their church, and we, the Jewish kids, went to the synagogue. We studied religion until it was banned from schools in 1948, I think, with the reform of the teaching system. [Editor's note: the reform in the teaching system banned religion from schools, imposed Russian as a foreign language, and started the sovietization of all high school and university curricula.]

I didn't suffer from anti-Semitism from my teachers or colleagues. I made friends in school with everybody, but my circle of Jewish friends was more like the nucleus, unintentionally, probably because we had more in common. There was Evi Klein, a Jewish girl and a good friend of mine to this day, even though she lives in Resita nowadays. I met her after school as well, we went to the theater or the cinema, and when our friends and we grew up, we started having parties on our birthdays and so on. I can't remember titles of plays or films; it was too long ago.

I had some private lessons, but I wasn't a constant pupil: first I wanted to know German, so I studied German. Then I wanted to know English, so I studied English, with an old lady who spent a lot of time in the USA and tutored little girls in American English. I went to her with another girl. Then I switched to music. I wanted to take accordion lessons, so I did. And then I took Gothic-writing lessons as well for two or three years. My gift was for languages, however, and I'm sorry I wasn't more diligent as a child! My parents probably couldn't afford it easily, but they thought my education was important, and so were my whims, as the only child!

I used to spend Saturdays at home, but it wasn't a rule, nobody imposed that on me. My mother was very close to me, even though the age difference between us was big. I never hid anything

from her, I told her anything I did or I was going to do, so that way she could keep an eye on me at all times. She didn't scold me, and let me experience things, not bad or dangerous ones of course, but I learnt not to be afraid of her and shared everything with her.

I spent the high holidays at home with my parents and we observed them, ate and drank mostly, like all people do. My mother was an expert when it came to puff pastries, pies and the like, so holidays were always a feast. My father used to make egg liqueur with vanilla; one third of it he blended with coffee, one third with cocoa, and one third remained plain. It was delicious, and I was allowed to drink it as well, on special occasions, like the high holidays or when we had guests. I wasn't so young anymore; I was a teenager and the liqueur wasn't very strong. During communism we only observed the high holidays, but we did go to the synagogue. Sabbath wasn't observed entirely because my parents had to work, but my mother continued to light the candles and say the blessing on Friday evening.

I don't remember eating out with my parents when we were in Resita. My parents tried to observe the kashrut: they could buy kosher meat, but they no longer kept separate pots for dairy and meat products. When we were on vacations we ate in somebody's home. They weren't Jews, however, so the food we ate wasn't kosher – but my father made arrangements not to eat pork at least. I always went on vacations with my parents; they had nobody to look after me, so I went to spas like Bazna [Bazna spa, located in Sibiu county, 18 km from Medias], Buzias [spa located in Western Romania, 37 km from Timisoara and at 25 km from Lugoj], and so on, for one or two weeks.

I don't remember the name of my father's sister, who was in the USA, but she was very upset with my father; they even broke up all contacts until World War II was over. She wanted my father and my mother to come to the USA before I was born, and they said they would. Everything was set and they even had the boat tickets that she had sent them. But my parents changed their mind at the last minute – I don't know why – and his sister was so angry that she broke all contacts with him.

We only heard of her after the war, when everybody was trying to find whatever relatives they had left. So, a chazzan from Resita went to the USA after World War II, and my father gave him his sister's address and asked him to contact her if he could. He was a nice man, he did, and my father's sister was so happy that he was alive, that she forgot all her grudge. I remember she sent us a package with chewing gum, nylon stockings and other things we couldn't find here. It was nice of her.

I know this aunt of mine had sent a letter to the Red Cross to find out what had happened to the rest of her siblings and their children. She found out that the only survivors were two girls from one of their brothers. She sent my father a letter with all the data about their siblings, how and when they died, but unfortunately I threw it away. I didn't think I would ever need it again. Anyway, this aunt wanted to help her relatives: one of her nieces was in Israel, and she helped the other get to the USA. However, my aunt died before she could meet her nieces, in 1947, I think. This aunt had three children of her own, two daughters and a son, my cousins. They wrote to us, one of them even sent us a package with oranges that got rotten on the way, but the intention was nice! But after father died, in 1950, and after we wrote to them about it, they cut all bonds with us and never wrote again.

My father had a work accident, a severe burn, and shortly after, he died of a heart attack. Of course, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Resita, and someone from the community recited the Kaddish because there was nobody from the family who could have said it. After my father's death, I sat shivah with my mother. Because of my father's death, when I finished high school, I had to go and look for a job –I was the only one who could support the family. My mother didn't speak Romanian very well, she mostly spoke Yiddish. It was difficult to find a job, however, because my origin wasn't 'healthy': we had owned a shop and I was what was called a petty bourgeois. I finally got a job at the designing department of a plant. Once I got there, I had no problems with my colleagues because of being Jewish.

Nobody at home was involved in politics in any way, but I was a member of a Zionist organization, Hashomer Hatzair 8, for a short while, in 1948. I didn't participate much in any activities, but I remember one time I went to a camp in Sangeorz [town in the Northern extremity of Romania in Bistrita-Nasaud county, situated upstream the river Somesu]. The idea of making aliyah got into my head somehow, and I was so stubborn, and I nagged my parents so much, being the spoiled child and them being old and all, that they finally filed for emigration. We were refused, and we filed again, and so on. And after my father died in 1950, we gave up the idea of emigrating: my mother had no qualification whatsoever, she didn't know the language, and I was just out of high school and sitting on a fence, so to speak, as far as my future profession was concerned, so we didn't file the papers once more. And from then on, I never mentioned in any CV during communism the word Zionism again; it wasn't well seen.

Anyway, my cousins', the Lowingers' papers for emigration were approved, and so were our friends', the Pollacks'. Cousin Lowinger had been a fervent communist for a while, but he woke up soon, and he filed for aliyah as soon as he realized what communism was all about and that the communists weren't the liberators everybody thought they were. However, they were liberators in so far as they did set us free from the anti-Semitic laws. They left in the early 1950s I think, but my aunt, Eugenia, who wanted to emigrate as well, died before that. It wasn't a problem keeping in touch with them, I received all letters and so did they. They didn't come back to visit, though; it wasn't possible during communism. I didn't have much family abroad to keep in touch with during communism: I only had three cousins. One cousin of mine, Etus Lowinger, left for Israel, then her husband, Dezideriu, who had a weak heart, died, then she remarried and moved to the USA, and left her son behind in Israel. And then she came back to Israel in the end, where she eventually died in 1992. All my three cousins died in Israel.

I met my husband, Mircea Gora Moldovan, in my society circles, at the end of 1950, when we were having birthday parties an so on. It didn't matter to me that he wasn't a Jew, but my mother wasn't very thrilled, at least at first. She gave in when she saw that he was a good man. I never met my mother-in-law, she had died before I got to know my husband, but I knew his father, Isidor Gora Moldovan. He wasn't excited about our marriage either at first, but he grew very fond of me later, and we went to visit him in Suceava, where he lived.

My husband was born in Brad in 1926. He studied at and graduated from the Faculty of Constructions in Timisoara. He worked as an engineer. We got married in 1954, but we had no religious wedding. After that, we received a two-bedroom apartment in Resita because of my husband's position: he was chief engineer at a plant in Resita. Soon after that, in 1959, our son, Marius Gora Moldovan, was born, and then we moved into a three-bedroom apartment. My mother

lived with us.

I started celebrating the Christian holidays after I got married: I always trimmed a Christmas tree on Christmas. I was more into it than my husband was, he didn't insist that we have one after our son grew up; he said it was for kids. But I didn't give up. I still always have a Christmas tree, I think it's a beautiful custom! There weren't many Jewish traditions kept in our house during communism. The kashrut wasn't observed because there wasn't a hakham, and I cooked pork as well. But my mother, to the day she died, never ate pork, even though she was living with us. We kept Jewish and Christian holidays alike: my mother and I fasted on Yom Kippur, we had matzah on Pesach and didn't eat bread for eight days, we had a chanukkiyah, which we lit on Channukah. But we also had red Easter eggs, we had a Christmas tree, and so on. My mother used to light the candles on Friday evenings and say the blessing, but I didn't, not even after she died. I thought it was too late for me to take it up. My son knew I was Jewish, I never hid it from him, and he considers himself a Jew.

We moved to Brasov in 1967 because my husband decided so. Our son Marius had started school, he was in the 1st grade – which he finished in Brasov – and my husband wanted us to move to a town, which had good schools and a university. He was offered a job in Bucharest, but he refused because he didn't like the city. He chose Brasov instead. I worked in Brasov as a commodity expert at ICIM [the state constructions and fitting company during communism] as well. My mother came with us, and we all lived in the apartment I still live in now, one with three rooms.

I entered the Communist Party because I had to. I worked as a commodity expert, and it was a year, I don't remember exactly which, when there had to be a precise percentage of female members and of male members. But the female members had to have a diploma or work as technicians because in the warehouse worked plenty of women without a diploma who could have joined the party. A colleague of mine was the secretary of the party, and he pleaded and insisted that he needed me to be a member because he had nobody else to turn to. I finally gave in and accepted. It wasn't like I was threatened; it was my choice to help him. I had no activities in the party, of course, I was just one more in the crowd.

My husband joined the Communist Party later because he was considered to have unhealthy origins: but the Party eventually accepted him because he had an important position. My husband had been chief engineer in Resita, then he was chief engineer when we moved here, to Brasov, and he worked at ICIM. After that he became manager of the building site, and then manager of the design department at Tractorul [factory in Brasov that manufactures tractors], where he retired from.

I was glad when I heard about the state of Israel being born in 1948, just like every Jew. And I was quite worried about the wars in Israel, in 1967 [the Six-Day-War] 9 and 1973 [the Yom Kippur War] 10 because my nephew, my cousin's son, was a soldier in both wars. Moreover, I had friends there: my childhood friend Aristide, the Pollacks and so on. We were worried for everybody in general, but when you know people there it's worse.

I didn't have many Jewish friends during communism, but the truth is I didn't care about my friends' nationality. We had a circle of friends at work and nationality didn't matter: I had Hungarian, German, Romanian and Jewish friends alike, and I still do.

I went to the synagogue during communism, on the high holidays, with my mother because she was too old and couldn't go alone. It was never a problem for me to go being a party member because I wasn't a director, or anybody important. We also went to the performances of the Yiddish theater from Bucharest when it came on tour to Brasov. My husband drove me and my mother there, and then he came to pick us up again. He didn't stay, of course, because he didn't understand the language.

I did have to participate in marches whenever Ceausescu 11 came to Brasov, and in party meetings, because I was a member and I couldn't get out of it. We were told that we had to go at all costs, and since I was – and still am – the kind of person who did what she was told she had to do, I went marching. It was something unbelievable in the 1960s! Everybody participating had to crowd in the street where Ceausescu would go, and of course he had to see lots of people saluting him and so on. And then the organizers realized that he wouldn't come this way, but some other, and everybody had to run to that other street, on foot, to meet him. There were no buses in the street when it was known that his car would pass. After we did this a few times, I actually felt like fainting from exhaustion, and I wasn't old! And I was afraid to just go home; I didn't want to get into trouble. I couldn't have cared less when his car passed by, I was just happy it was over and that I could go home. People talked against the government, but only at home, or with friends, where they knew they were safe: of course it was forbidden, but the jokes about Ceausescu were very popular all the same! I listened to Radio Free Europe 12 all the time it broadcast, at home. It was a necessity for me and my husband.

I wasn't a dissident during communism, but I didn't approve of the life style: you had to stand in a queue for everything you needed. There was a paradox, something people used to say during communism was: 'You couldn't find anything, but the refrigerators were loaded!' I shared my office with several colleagues, and it happened that one of them came in with the news: 'They have I-don't-know-what in Racadau [one of Brasov's neighborhoods]!' Everybody ran there like they were giving things away for free, and one had to stay behind to lock the office, and called after the others to keep him or her in line as well! That was no life, standing in a queue for hours for chicken wings! And every time I heard there was something, anything, in a shop anywhere, I would buy it, even if I didn't need it, and put it in the refrigerator because I didn't know when I would find it again! However, I cannot complain that I suffered from lack of heat, which was a serious problem for most people. The apartment block where we lived belonged to ICIM, and all the bosses from ICIM lived there as well, so we had our own little power station in the front yard.

I regret that there were all those restrictions concerning traveling because my husband and I loved to travel, and if it hadn't been for the regime, we would have seen much more of the world than we actually did. But in those circumstances, we saw all of the socialist camp. I remember, when there was this big fuss with Czechoslovakia [during the Prague Spring] 13, we were at the Czech border! We were on a trip in our car – my husband, my son and I – to see Hungary and Czechoslovakia. That was allowed. We visited Hungary, and then we headed for Czechoslovakia, but it was getting dark, so my husband and I decided to pitch our tent for the night and sleep before we would enter Czechoslovakia. We traveled with a tent, and near the road there was the skirt of a forest, where a lot of other people camped: there were Polish tents, Czech tents, and so on, and we thought of camping there, too, so that we wouldn't be alone, and cross the border with Czechoslovakia in the morning.

We set up the tent and went to bed, and after a while, we heard some sort of rattling, and the tent turned all orange: there was light coming through its cloth like it does when the sun is shining through. My husband opened the tent, looked out, and said, ‘There’s an army! Tanks! Russian tanks!’ This was happening during the night, and I was afraid that my son would get scared, and I kept whispering to my husband, ‘Don’t stick your head outside! Don’t look!’ When it finally dawned, heads started to appear, carefully, from all the tents! And then we turned on the radio and we found out from [Radio] Free Europe that the Russian armies had entered Czechoslovakia. What to do next? The Czechs said they were going home, but they didn’t let anybody cross the border, not even the Czechs. Finally, everybody headed back to Hungary, only we stayed behind, at the side of the road, alone, near a forest!

My husband said, ‘This cannot last long, we are still going to visit Czechoslovakia!’ Everybody left – they were scared – whereas we started cooking breakfast, with a small cooker we had with us, and then we thought of what to do. Clearly the only option was to go back to Hungary. My husband still wanted to go to Czechoslovakia, but I was afraid that we would end up shot, so I said, ‘The hell with it, we will go when all this is over!’ So we went back to Hungary. When we approached the Hungarian border, we heard the words: ‘Ki jon ott?’, ‘Who is coming?’ You can surely imagine: we were calmly driving to Hungary from Czechoslovakia, and they knew that the border was closed. Who knows what they were thinking! Our luck was that I could speak Hungarian, so I explained the situation to them. Then the frontier guard asked me, ‘Do you speak German?’ ‘I do’, I answered. ‘Then please explain to these people that they cannot pass’, he burst out. There was a party from the GDR [German Democratic Republic], who wanted to pass through Czechoslovakia, then to Austria and flee. I told them that they had bad luck, and that what they had planned wasn’t going to happen.

The Hungarian authorities set up some sort of camping for the unexpected Polish, German visitors, where they could stay until this mess with Czechoslovakia was over. All the others had gratuities, but the Romanians had to pay for their stay there; I don’t know why. So we stayed in Budapest, in a camp near the Roman baths, Romai Furdo; we had Czech money with us, but nobody wanted to exchange that. Luckily, my husband had stashed away some Romanian lei, and they accepted those, and that’s how we paid for the camping. We weren’t allowed to take Romanian money out of the country, or just a small standard sum, I think, but as you can see, taking more with us proved to be very useful. I wanted to go home immediately, but my husband hoped it would all be over in a couple of days. It wasn’t, our money ran out, so we eventually went back home and gave the Czech crowns back to ONT [‘Oficiul National de Turism’ in Romanian, the National Tourism Office, the only travel agency in Romania during communism], and that was the end of our trip. We visited Czechoslovakia after all, but in another year.

Our son went on trips with us, but I think the one in Czechoslovakia was the last one we went on together. After that we traveled to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the GDR, but he stayed back home with his grandmother because she was too old and couldn’t be left home alone. Moreover, my son already took more pleasure in the company of his friends.

My son studied for three years at the Faculty of Polytechnics in Brasov, but he didn’t finish it. He didn’t have problems because he was a Jew. People knew that his mother was a Jew; I never hid that. My son’s wife was Jewish too, Liliana Davidovici was her name before she married. She was from Tecuci. They got married in 1984, but they had no religious wedding. She was rather religious,

though. She lit the candles every Friday evening.

After university, Marius worked as an engineer at Codlea, where he was assigned to, then at Tractorul and then at Rulmentul [factory in Brasov that manufactures bearings]. He left for Israel in 1988, but he had to wait rather long before his file was approved. It was a period when a lot of Jews from Brasov were able to go: Jacques Friedel's son [Edward Friedel], the former president of the Jewish community, [Milu] Leibovici, and so on. I don't know why, but all who were about to leave had to go to the police headquarters rather often, and answer: 'Present!'. But many of them were at work during those hours, so I asked from the community for a list with the people who had to be there, and I answered for them; it was a mere formality.

When he left, my son was married already, and his wife was pregnant with their first child. They left together in early February 1988, and they settled in Tel Aviv, that's where they did the ulpan 14, and that's where they found work: he works as an engineer, and she worked as a doctor. They have two children, Silvia Gora Moldovan who is 16 years old, and Stephanie Gora Moldovan, who is six. Liliana died last year, in 2002. When my daughter-in-law died, it was around Rosh Hashanah, so my son couldn't sit shivah after her. [The topic is very distressing for Mrs. Gora, and she refuses to say more about it]

I went to Israel before 1989, in the fall of 1988: that time I stayed over at my cousin Etus' in Holon, the one who had returned from the USA, because my son and his family were in the ulpan. I went because their first child was born in April and I wanted to see her. I could see them all in the ulpan, where they lived in a small room; conditions weren't great at the time.

When the revolution [see Romanian Revolution of 1989] 15 broke out, I knew exactly what was about to happen from [Radio] Free Europe. My husband and I were both retired – I retired in 1987 – and I remember he was sick and in treatment. We heard shots being fired close to our apartment block, but that was the closest we came to the events back then.

For me, personally, life didn't get better after the fall of communism: my husband passed away in 1990, my son had left for Israel. Of course, the system changed and it was good to be able to go visit my son and his family whenever I wanted. After that I went to Israel every year to visit my son's family in Tel Aviv, except for one year, when Liliana's parents came to visit, and I stayed with my cousin Etus again. The first times I went to visit, I saw a lot of places: the Dead Sea, Nazareth, Haifa, and so on. But in the last years, I didn't go around to visit so much, I preferred to stay with the children and enjoy my time with them. I usually stayed a month or two, but last year, when my daughter-in-law died, I stayed for three months because the children needed me. I talk to my granddaughters both in Romanian and Hebrew.

My mother died when she was 99 years old, in 1996. She had no help from the community or from the state, even though she was entitled to social help, but we didn't know that at the time. She was a member of the Jewish community, and after she passed away I became one, too. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery here, in Brasov. Somebody from the community recited the Kaddish. I intended to keep Yahrzeit after both my parents, but I didn't know the exact date, and I postponed it. I didn't sit shivah after my mother because it was on Yom Kippur. You are absolved of sitting shivah if the death occurs during a holiday. I did sit shivah after that year, though.

I only became active in the community when I started working there, not long ago. I offered my help before, but they didn't need it. When the lady who had filled my position previously left, they called me. I work as a cashier and accountant for the community's canteen until 3 o'clock. I come home tired, but I like the fact that I have an occupation; it's important at my age to still feel useful.

I don't go to the synagogue on Saturdays for a minyan, especially since women don't count, as far as the number of ten is concerned. It's enough for me that I go there during the week. I do go, however, when there is a high holiday, or a special event with important guests. I don't receive help from the community, only the salary, like every other community employee. And I receive some support from the state because I was able to prove that we were forced to move to Oravita during the war. Under law 118, I have the benefit of free bus and train rides, I receive a little more money for my pension, I don't pay taxes, I have some free medication, and free rental TV and radio. It doesn't sound like much, but my life-style has certainly improved a bit since I started receiving all this.

Glossary

1 Anti-Jewish laws in Romania
The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime. According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery. More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish property, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city, were confiscated by the state, as part of the 'Romanisation campaign'. Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc. Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

2 Strajer (Watchmen), Strajeria (Watchmen Guard)
Proto-fascist mass-organization founded by King Carol II with the aim of bringing up the youth in the spirit of serving and obedience, and of nationalist ideas of grandeur.

3 Legionary
Member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions. The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political

twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland) that represented the movement in parliamentary elections. The followers of the Legionary Movement were recruited from young intellectuals, students, Orthodox clericals, peasants. The movement was banned by King Carol II in 1938.

4 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.

5 Tito, Josip Broz (1892-1980)

President of communist Yugoslavia from 1953 until his death. He organized the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1937 and became the leader of the Yugoslav partisan movement after 1941. He liberated most of Yugoslavia with his partisans, including Belgrade, made territorial gains (Fiume and the previously Italian Istria). In March 1945 he became the head of the new federal Yugoslav government. He nationalized industry but did not enforce the Soviet-style collective farming system. On the political plane, he oppressed and executed his political opposition. Although Yugoslavia was closely associated with the USSR, Tito often pursued independent policies. He accepted western loans to stabilize national economy, and gradually relaxed many of the regime's strict controls. As a result, Yugoslavia became the most liberal communist country in Europe. After Tito's death in 1980 ethnic tensions resurfaced, bringing about the brutal breakup of the federal state in the 1990s.

6 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.

7 National Peasants' Party

Political party created in 1926 by the fusion of the National Party of Transylvania and the Peasants' Party. It was in power, with some interruptions, from 1928 and 1933. It was a moderately conservative and staunchly pro-Monarchy party. Its doctrine was essentially based on the enlightenment of peasantry, and on the reform of education in villages, where teachers were to become economic and social guides. Its purpose was to give the peasantry a class conscience. The National Peasants' Party governed Romania for a short period of time, between 1928-1931 and 1932-1933.

8 Hashomer Hatzair

Left-wing Zionist youth organization, started up in Poland in 1912, and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to emigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-

called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to emigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups had been established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettoes and concentration camps.

9 Six-Day-War

The first strikes of the Six-Day-War happened on 5th June 1967 by the Israeli Air Force. The entire war only lasted 132 hours and 30 minutes. The fighting on the Egyptian side only lasted four days, while fighting on the Jordanian side lasted three. Despite the short length of the war, this was one of the most dramatic and devastating wars ever fought between Israel and all of the Arab nations. This war resulted in a depression that lasted for many years after it ended. The Six-Day-War increased tension between the Arab nations and the Western World because of the change in mentalities and political orientations of the Arab nations.

10 Yom Kippur War

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, was a war between Israel on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other side. It was the fourth major military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. The war lasted for three weeks: it started on 6th October 1973 and ended on 22nd October on the Syrian front and on 26th October on the Egyptian front.

11 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.

12 Radio 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 Europen 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.

13 Prague Spring

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969. In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of ‘socialism with a human face’, i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.

14 Ulpan

word in Hebrew that designates teaching, instruction and studio. It is a Hebrew-language course compulsory in Israel for newcomers, which rapidly teaches adults basic Hebrew skills, including speaking, reading, writing and comprehension, along with the fundamentals of Israeli culture, history, geography, and civics. In addition to teaching Hebrew, the ulpan aims to help newcomers integrate as easily as possible into Israel's social, cultural and economic life.

15 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.