Sura Milstein

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Botosani

Romania

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Interviewer: Emoke Major

I visited Mrs. Sura Milstein at her simply and modestly decorated apartment located on the ground floor of a block of flats near the Public Garden of Botosani. Ever since her husband died in 1989, she has been living alone; her health is pretty frail, she is assisted by the Jewish Community in Botosani who employed a woman to help her with the household chores in exchange for the donation of her apartment to the Community. She speaks with difficulty, but she answered my questions with goodwill, her language denoting her former profession, that of teacher of Romanian language and literature.

My family background

My father was born in Dorohoi. [*Dorohoi is located 38 km north-west of Botosani*.] I believe his mother's name was **Estera Sulimzohn** and his father's name was **Usher Leib Sulimzohn**. My grandfather was a shopkeeper, he had a hosiery store – he sold hats, stockings, shoes. My father inherited his store. I didn't get to know the grandfathers from my father's side. They died when I was very little [*in the early 1920's*].

My grandmother had a sister whose son – I forget his name – was a physician in Bucharest. His sister-in-law, the sister of his wife – Zeli Suliteanu – was a folklorist, she worked at the Folklore Institute. I know that she too is very old at present – she is probably assisted by the Community. We no longer keep in touch, we don't even call each other on the phone, but I believe she is still alive. I read the Jewish Reality, and I find out about any demise there is. [*Editor's note: The Jewish Reality, a Magazine of the Jewish minority in Romania, which was issued between 1956 and 1995 under the name of 'The Magazine of the Mosaic Cult,' and under the name of 'The Jewish Reality'*

after 1995. It includes articles related to the social and cultural life of the community and it comprises a page in English and one in Ivrit.]

My father had only 1 brother, **Haim Sulimzohn,** who lived in Saveni, here, in the county of Botosani. [*Saveni is located 37 km north-east of Botosani*.] He too was a shopkeeper, he too ran a hosiery store. He was older than my father. He had a family as well, he had 2 boys. I no longer know whether they are still alive. They lived in Bucharest, but I believe they left to Israel as well. One of the boys was a pharmacist, the other was a physician.

The family ties with them weren't that great, as the Sulimzohn sister-in-law from Saveni was greedy and she dragged us through law-courts with inheritance lawsuits, things like these. This is why the family connections never improved afterwards. My father has always been tormented by this sister-in-law and her lawsuits. There were two houses. A house where the store was as well, and another one-storied house farther [*up the street*]. And they fought over these two houses. In the beginning we lived in the one-storied house, it was more spacious, more beautiful. Afterwards, we moved in the house where the shop was, and the other house was offered for rent, after which it was sold, I don't even remember how it happened. And she kept asking and asking, she always wanted more money, the margin for the house, that is. Then the war was upon us and Jews didn't have time for lawsuits anymore.

Afterwards, during the war [*World War II*], when the racial persecutions began 1, she and her family also moved from Saveni to Dorohoi and they were reconciled. They didn't live with us, they found something to rent. Their financial situation was better than ours. I don't think they were deported to Transnistria 2, as we were, they stayed in Dorohoi. They died in the meantime, for they were old, but I don't know any details. The two boys moved to Bucharest after World War II. I visited the one who was a doctor when I was sitting for exams in Bucharest, but I never visited the one who became a pharmacist. He made my stay welcome, but that atmosphere of chillness had still lingered in the family.

My father, **David Sulimzohn**, was born in Dorohoi. He only attended primary school, he did not continue his studies. He probably attended the cheder. He fought for the Romanian army during World War I. He did his military service during the war – I don't know how many years the military service lasted in those days, 2-3 years. He also received a medal that he had framed and he kept it on the wall. He wasn't wounded during the war. They used to tell us this and that about the war. My grandmother [*from my mother's side*] used to tell us stories about the war as well. She told us that her son, Nathan, had fought in the war too, and she told us terrible things. It reminds you of Rebreanu, of 'Itic Strul as a Deserter' – he wrote a short story about a Jewish boy who was persecuted by an anti-Semitic officer. [*Editor's note: 'Itic Strul, as a Deserter' is a short story written by Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944), which was published separately in Sburatorul in 1919 and as part of a volume collection in 1921. Rebreanu: Romanian writer and playwright, author of important social novels such as 'Ion,' 'Rascoala' (The Uprising), 'Padurea spanzuratilor' (Forest of the Hanged)*]. My uncle suffered too, but not as much as her. He told us about a Jewish classmate of his who was killed. There were utter horrors. My father told me he was kept prisoner by the Germans for a period of time. And when the war was over they let him return home.

My mother's parents were **Basea** and **Usher Soifer**. My grandmother's maiden name was Rabinovici, for my mother had a cousin in Paris, France – Patainic Rabinovici –, and my mother's

mother and his father were brothers. That's how it was in those days, before World War II, those who had financial means would send their children to study abroad in France, to learn. And he settled there. He was an economist, an accountant. He would come to visit us in Romania every now and again. I didn't meet his wife, she was probably a French woman. My grandmother had a sister, Rifca, who lived in Mihaileni. But then, when the evacuations started, she went to Bucharest to live with one of her daughters, Rasela. My mother also had a cousin in Galati – aunt Rebecca –, and she was the daughter of my grandmother's sister. She married in Galati, her husband's last name was Solomon. My grandmother's sister also had a son who was a physician and lived in Cernauti. I believe he died during World War II, I never heard from him since.

My grandfather had a brother whose name was Schechter. My grandfather's name was Soifer, the other's name was Schechter – that's how the registrar's office worked back then. And they were brothers. My grandfather's brother lived in Dorohoi. I can tell you that he attended the synagogue on a regular basis, he was learned in the field of religion. He didn't have a position at the synagogue, but he was known as a learned man. And in his youth he traded timber from the woods together with his brother, my grandfather. He died long before World War II, and is buried in Dorohoi. He had several children: there was Sura, Simcu, Toni, Clara, Aron, and Saie. Sura lived in Dorohoi. Her actual name was Sura, like mine, but she later married a Christian, and her husband changed her name to Silvia – I don't remember their last name, I forgot it. She died last year [*in 2006*], she was 91 or 92 when she died. Simcu lived in Dorohoi as well, he is buried there. He was an accountant. He was married, his wife's name was Ficuta, and they have a daughter, Mirela – but I don't know her last name –, she lived in Bucharest, then she went to Israel, she got married there. The name of my mother's cousin, Toni, changed into Broder after she married. She didn't have a job, she was a housewife, and her husband was a Party activist [*The Romanian Communist Party*] – I think he held a high position in the party, since they helped them to leave Dorohoi and settle in Bucharest. They had an only daughter, Reli; she went to Israel together with her mother, I think, and married a doctor or something like that – I don't know their family name. They live in Hadera. Aron and Saie Schechter died a long time ago here, in Romania. Clara had settled in Israel with her husband, they both died over there.

The grandparents from my mother's side lived in Bucecea. [*Bucecea is located in the county of Botosani, 22 km west of Botosani.*] My grandfather worked in the woods of a boyar. I don't know what he did exactly, he went into the woods and took care of things, supervised – in the employment of a boyar. And my grandmother was a housewife. They had a nice house, with three rooms and a kitchen. My grandfather's financial situation was better. They also raised livestock, but that was before I was born. They didn't raise fowl. I don't even know what animals they raised, it was either a horse or a cow. And it was there, in that shed, that my grandfather improvised a bathtub. He ordered a wooden bathtub, he bought a small cauldron, and we'd take baths there with walnut leaves and salt. We could stretch inside the bathtub. Only the family used this bathtub. They had a small flower garden. My aunt – my mother's sister –, was skilled in these things, both in gardening and everything else. When they painted the house she worked alongside the workers and helped them choose the colors. She was very talented, an all-round person. She could also sew, she had a sewing machine – she sewed for the household – a dressing gown and the like.

My grandfather died in Bucecea when he was 68-69, approximately. I was around 10-12, so it must have happened in 1932-1933. I didn't attend his funeral. They left me and my sister at home with

Toni – a first-degree cousin of my mother's –, and my parents went to Bucecea, at the funeral.

My mother had two older brothers, Nathan and Marcu, and a younger sister, Ana. Their actual name was Soifer, and they took the name of Safir. And this younger woman, who is my aunt, went by the name of Ana Safir. But officially they never changed their name.

Nathan, **Nachman** was the eldest. He moved to Bucharest after World War I and became an accountant. His wife was a pharmacist. They had a son, Relu – his pet name was Luli. Their son was born long after I was born. We are cousins, but this is how it came to pass, he was much younger than me, we were born more than 50 years apart. My uncle settled in Israel with his family [*after World War II*]. He left out of patriotism, as it was in the days when people were leaving, but also for the sake of their son, so that he could have a future – he was still little, a child or in his teens. And indeed, he made a career for himself. He was an aviator, now he too is retired, and may God keep him safe for he is an aviator and I believe they are recalling reservists into service. Uncle Nathan was employed in Israel as well, he also knew Hebrew, and he worked as expert accountant. He died before my mother did, he was actually older than her. Luli came to visit me this summer [*in 2007*]. He has a family of his own, he is married and has two daughters, grandchildren.

As for the other brother, **Marcu**, he lived in Grenoble, France. He went to France in order to study, he graduated the Commercial Academy and settled there, he had a job there. He used to come to Romania every now and then. The Germans shot him. The people he lived with loved him very much, they were older French Catholics and they loved him as if he were their own son. And these hosts offered him a hiding place during World War II, they kept him there, protected him all the time, but they couldn't hide him towards the end of the war. German soldiers took him out of the house and shot him.

My mother's sister's name was **Ana** and she was married to Leon Solomon. I was about 8-9 when they married. They lived in Herta [*nowadays Gertsa, Ukraine*], near Cernauti, my uncle owned land, forests over there. They had an only child, Suzana, who is 10 years younger than me. When World War II broke out and people fled Herta, they fled as well. He was doing forced labor, and she and their daughter fled on the last train and went to Bucharest where she had a brother, Nathan. After the war, her husband returned as well, they lived together in Bucharest. He had a job, he worked in a factory, while she worked for private individuals: she knitted women's underwear – it was fashionable in those days –, she earned some extra money. She had a sewing machine, and she was good at it. Her husband died in Bucharest, he is buried there. After her husband died, my aunt – she was ill by then – left to Israel with her daughter. Their daughter, Suzana, got married when she was very young, while she was still here in Romania. She was very beautiful, people said she was the most beautiful in the family. My aunt died in Israel, some 10 years ago, I believe. My cousin is still alive, she is living in Nazareth, and she calls me on the phone from time to time to lift my spirits. She is an engineer, as a matter of fact. She lives alone with her husband, they didn't have any children.

My mother, **Haia Sulimzohn**, was born in Bucecea. She was 6-7 years younger than my father. She didn't attend secondary school either, she stopped going to school after graduating primary school. But she had a private tutor – employed by my grandfather –, and she took French and German lessons. She was a beautiful woman. She was more severe than my father, he was gentler than her.

My parents' marriage was an arranged marriage, as was the custom in those days. They didn't talk about their marriage, but they had both a civil and a religious ceremony. We lived in Dorohoi. My mother was a housewife, and my father was a trader. We had a hosier's shop in Dorohoi that my father inherited from his father. The store was located in the house where we lived, in the old downtown area of Dorohoi. The street was called Grigore Ghica, opposite our house there was a cinema which no longer exists. The house was as old houses are, the rooms were placed like in a train carriage, without separate entrances, and it was very dark inside – we had the lamps burning during the day as well. We had two rooms and there was a small kitchen in the courtyard with a tiny adjoining room that we built. The store was in a larger room in front of the house – it was the only room that was spacious and well lit.

Growing up

As for myself, my birth name was **Sura Sulimzohn**, I was born in 1922 in Bucecea, in the county of Botosani. I spent my holidays there when I was little, at my grandparents' house in Bucecea. And before going to school I spent more time in Bucecea than I did at home. My childhood in Bucecea was the brightest period of my life.

Bucecea was a very small, modest town, with a few small shops selling odds and ends. There were linen shops – they were called manufactures –, and a couple of shoe stores. I also remember that we used to go and buy white candles – Jews use white candles. And Bucecea – which seemed appealing to me, nice – was a small town in the fashion of old Jewish towns: with one main street and a couple of side alleys. And for me it was heaven on earth. There were villages around the town of Bucecea – I forget their names – which fell under its jurisdiction. Our house [*the grandparents' house*] was located on the main street near the end of the town, and I used to go strolling towards the village and pick flowers on the way. There was a synagogue not far from our house and I would walk past it and politely greet the rabbi… The rabbi lived in the courtyard of the synagogue, and there was a lime tree in front of the house that had the nicest fragrance!

There was – I believe it still exists today – a small park in Bucecea with a remarkably good spring water. Bucecea had exquisite drinking water. And plenty of it too, even the city of Botosani was supplied with water from Bucecea. There were a few benches there, and I used to play with the other children in that park. I had girls as friends, but I don't remember any of them. We used to play tipcat. The game is played using a larger stick and a smaller one, and you strike the smaller stick with the larger one and throw it up in the air. But you had to make it land inside a certain circle – we used to draw it on the ground using chalk or a piece of stone. And you have to run after the stick, it is still you who has to pick it up. And there was another game: we drew one small square on the ground using a piece of chalk, then two small squares, then one, then two once again. And we remained outside the squares; you had to throw the pebble and make it land inside the square, then jump and kick the pebble along with your foot from square to square. We also played hide-and-seek.

It was my grandmother who looked after me. My grandmother was skilled in all sorts of things, she was a very good cook. She also baked pastry – apple strudel, walnut strudel… She spoiled me. Also, – before getting married and moving to Herta – my grandmother's sister lived in Bucecea, and she loved me very much. I was spoiled for a long time as a child. I was the first grandchild in the family and for 7 years I was the only child. And when my parents happened to scold me for my mischief, I

would ask to go to Bucecea. And when my grandmother scolded me, raised her voice at me – I would ask to return to Dorohoi. So much so that a friend of my aunt Ana's called me 'Voyaging jackanapes' – on account of the fact that no sooner was I in Bucecea than I was on my way to Dorohoi.

For 7 years I was the only child [*in the family*]. Afterwards, there was my sister as well, and she was a suckling; then my cousin was born as well, after my aunt married. My sister, **Erica**, was born in Dorohoi 7 years after I was born, namely in 1929. She came to Bucecea as well, but she was little. We didn't play together that much. She followed me around, but a 7-year gap is a big difference.

My grandmother was tougher than my grandfather. My grandfather was kinder, more forgiving. When he had business to attend to and he came to Dorohoi, he would take me with him by train. And he would take me along to state offices, he used a piece of string – of a certain length – and tied it around one of my coat buttons and pulled me along. My grandfather was kind and pious. He was bearded and wore a kippah on his head – that's what Jews wore to cover their head. My grandmother wore her hair short and covered her head with a scarf. She also had a wig. It was custom-made, I believe it was from Poland. It was nice, made of dyed, brown hair, and it had a loop at the back. And on Saturdays, on holidays, she wore the wig – she would cover it with a scarf – and she would go to the synagogue. She went to the synagogue on Saturdays. Only men attended the synagogue on Friday evening, the women went to the synagogue during the day, on Saturday. She also wore the wig when she visited people. She had a few friends and they used to meet, especially on Saturdays. My grandmother wore ordinary dressing gowns, with buttons all the way down to her feet, and I wore them myself for I enjoyed playing, dancing in these dressing gowns. They were made of marquisette – that's what that fabric was called –, it was transparent, for summer wear – you also wore it as a dress. And I would titivate myself with her dressing gowns and put on performances for the neighbors. She had dresses and she also had dressing gowns – her financial situation was fairly good. But she wore dark, sober colors.

My grandfather dressed in the German fashion, he wore a coat and a shirt. He was very religious, both of my grandparents were. My grandfather always attended the synagogue – I believe he went there every evening, or maybe every morning. My grandmother read prayers in the morning, too. She used to wake up early in the morning and sit in the dining room and read prayers. She was very religious.

The Sabbath in Bucecea was very nice. We had candlesticks with candles, my grandmother baked knot-shaped bread at home. For every holiday people baked *colaci* [*elongated, knot-shaped bread*] – knitted bread with egg and a little sugar. [*Editor's note: Colaci or coilici are variants for challah, similar to the word 'kajlics' used by some Hungarian-speaking Jews in Romania. These words have the origin in the Hungarian word 'kalacs.'*] They were nice, they rose nicely. She baked them herself. And she placed wine on the table and two large, nice colaci covered with a piece of cloth. When my grandfather was no longer allowed to drink wine, they made wine out of raisins – it was a sort of wine –, and they used it during the Kiddush – they recited a prayer for blessing the wine and the bread.

On Friday evening, when my grandfather returned from the synagogue, before eating dinner, he would intone the Saturday table prayer, he would bless me, and afterwards we all sat down to eat. As an exception, on Friday night we ate meat dishes, fowl or beef – as was the case. And noodle

soup and pudding for dessert. And on Saturday afternoon it was the same, only on Saturday we didn't light the fire and the food was kept in cold storage, in the cellar, and the meal was a hotchpotch with fowl meat and vegetables, which had the consistency of gelatin and was served cold. Sometimes people came to light the fire for us, but one couldn't always have them come over because it was a small town, inhabited entirely by Jews. There was a village at the end of the town, but sometimes you could find a Christian to light the fire, and some other times you couldn't. The Friday lunch meal wasn't anything specific. We had meatballs, also made from fowl, we bought fish when we could find it in the stores – fish wasn't always available in the stores.

My mother was less of a zealot. She lit candles on Friday evening, but she wasn't that strict about the separation of meat and milk. The rule about having separate dishes for milk and meat is a very complicated business and, in addition, you must have a lot of dishes. She did have separate dishes for meat and milk, but she would mix them. As for washing the dishes, she washed them all together.

She didn't have a wig, nor did she cover her head. She attended the synagogue only during the autumn holidays, that was all. My grandmother attended the religious service every Saturday, but she didn't. My mother used to light 2 candles. Since my grandmother was more devout, she had 4 candlesticks and she lit a candle in each of them; my mother had 2 candlesticks and she would light two candles and recite the prayer. The candlesticks were placed on the table where we sat down to eat.

My father wasn't religious. He didn't go to the synagogue frequently, he too attended the religious service only during the autumn holidays, that was all. Also, he didn't recite the prayer before the Friday evening dinner. Business was slow, and they didn't always have wine for Saturday either, there was nothing with which to perform the ritual. My mother didn't bake knitted bread, we bought bread from the town.

On Passover, my mother was more scrupulous, more serious, and more severe. We used special dishes on Passover, which we kept in the attic, wrapped in paper – we took them down on the eve of Passover and only used them during the 8 days, at the end of which they were placed back in the attic and weren't used until the following Passover. And the house had to be cleansed of chametz. They placed a few crumbs [*of bread*] in the corners of the rooms and then my father would take a feather and sweep the crumbs, place them in a wooden spoon and burn them, that's what I remember. They also recited a prayer. Both my father and my grandfather did it. And the shammash from the synagogue would visit each household on the eve of the Passover holidays and make a list of all chametz food to be found in each house. And this chametz was kept somewhere hidden and nobody touched it, and it wasn't used at all during Passover.

For 8 days you weren't allowed to eat anything leavened. You were allowed to eat pasca [*matzah*], and cornmeal – mamaliga [*polenta*]. We bought the matzah at the Community Center, it was the Community that supplied the matzah. For a while, it was also baked locally – before World War II people baked it in Dorohoi –, but afterwards they stopped baking it locally and it was received from Israel. We ate the same dishes on Passover as we did on all other holidays: noodle soup, the meat that was boiled in the soup, and pudding – for the third course. People made noodles from crushed matzah mixed with eggs and then left to dry; these were added to the soup as a substitute for regular noodles. On Passover, people made cakes from matzah and walnut – we called them

macaroni.

On Passover, my parents observed the seder evening. They prepared it as tradition requires – with matzah and prayer rituals. We had a table that we pulled next to a divan and then placed a few chairs on the sides. We, the children, sat on the divan; I used to read a novel in the meantime – I wasn't religious. My father and my mother would recite what needed to be recited and they would make that traditional gesture of opening the door for the prophet Elijah to enter. And when I was in Bucecea my grandfather would trick me, for I was little and I believed him. 'But – I used to say – I see the glass hasn't been drunk from.' For there was a glass set aside especially for the prophet Elijah, but it didn't show at all [*that he might have drunk from it*]. And I wasn't too gullible. 'But – my grandfather would say – what do you expect, he can't possibly drink a full glass at each and single household!' My grandfather used to send me to open the door. I would ask my grandfather in advance the 4 questions that you have to ask. He asked me, he taught me how to ask them. We rehearsed this in advance, he would instruct me. And on the seder evening my grandfather would lie on the bed on one side. And the custom was to place the afikoman under the pillow – my grandfather would hide it there every time, and I found it, of course I did! I wouldn't get anything as a reward. I wouldn't find it at home, in my family, my father didn't observe this tradition. In the families where there were boys, these customs were respected more closely…

The custom on **Purim** was to prepare sweets and various dishes, and guests would come over – family friends – in the evening, wearing disguises. The adults wore disguises, the children didn't. The disguises were simple, modest, people only wore masks. The main thing was to have one's face covered. Those wore good times, I believe it was in the 1930's. When I was at my grandfathers' place, I also saw musicians come over on Purim – they were gypsies who came and played music, and they were paid for it. They played traditional music, Jewish and Romanian. They even spoke Yiddish, they lived among Jews.

And there was a feast organized on Purim. Regular dishes were served, but there were also humantase [*hamantashen*] and honigleicheh. Honigleicheh is a flat bread with rose jam filling and walnut, it was sliced in little squares. The rose jam is made from rose petals, it has small scraggy leaves. Its color is pink to red, it smells a little of roses. Especially in the north of Moldavia, they still sell roses for making jam, mainly during spring. And people still prepare jam – the elderly housewives.

On **Chanukkah** the custom was to light candles, an additional candle on each successive evening. We didn't have a menorah for this. But we placed a small candle on a piece of wood. And the service candle, which is used for lighting the other candles, was a bit to the side, but still aligned with the other 8. They were placed on the table. We never had toys for Chanukkah. (We had a domino game at home. My father had a domino game from his parents, and relatives came by our house and they all played domino in the evening. The parents, that is, the children didn't play domino.) But we received money. They used to give us a few coins, Chanukkah gelt. We bought sweets with that money. Later, when they no longer afforded to give me that much, they gave me less and I needed more.

I liked reading stories, and when I had money I used to buy a storybook. Creanga was my favorite. [*Editor's note: Ion Creanga (1837-1889) is a classic of Romanian literature, acknowledged for the craftsmanship of his yarns, fairy tales and stories; his most celebrated autobiographical work is '*

Amintiri din copilarie' (Memories of My Boyhood).] Ana Safir, my mother's sister, was the one who looked after me and bought me books every now and then. She gave me money or went with me to the bookshop and asked me to choose a book that she would then buy for me. Also, there were libraries in Dorohoi. There was the Jewish Community library and the state library.

I wasn't involved in Zionist movements. We only had – like every household – one of those blue boxes 3 with magen David, and we, the family, used to put some spare change in it, and someone would come to collect it. We had that box since 1925-1927, I think.

I spoke Yiddish with my grandparents. I didn't speak Yiddish with my parents that much – mainly Romanian. In time, I even almost forgot Yiddish. And I refused to learn how to write, how to read, I – ridiculous – didn't want to. There was an elderly woman in Bucecea who went to people's houses to teach children [*how to read and write Hebrew*] and she was a little senile, she smelled of urine; I didn't like her and I didn't want to learn. As for the cheder, I stopped going there. I don't even know if my sister went to the cheder.

I went to school in Dorohoi. I started attending primary school when I was 6 – in 1928. There was also a Jewish school – but no high school –, yet my parents enlisted me at a state school. I studied for 4 years there, then I completed 8 years of high school in Dorohoi, at the State High School 'Queen Mary.'

During the war

I graduated high school in 1940. That was the last year when [*Jewish*] people could attend state schools, and starting with the fall of 1940 it was no longer possible 1. But Jews founded a Jewish high school. They brought 2 unemployed Jewish teachers from Siret and a Jewish girl from Bucecea itself, who had a degree in French and was unemployed, too; they also brought a few lawyers knowledgeable about teaching who filled the remaining departments. And they purchased school manuals – as long as they could find them – and that high school was in existence until I don't know when, for we were deported in the meantime, in 1941. The high school kept providing education for the children and parents that were left there.

I tutored every now and then, I would take a child in junior high school and tutor him with home assignments for all subject matters. From 1941 we all wore the yellow star 4. We wore it until we were deported. People were no longer wearing it when we returned home. We were allowed only 1 hour a day to go out to the market, to go shopping, that was all. It also depended on the street sergeant, if he happened to be a kind person he would allow it, but if he were harsh as in our case, he wouldn't allow us to go out. On some occasions we didn't have any bread in the house, because my father didn't manage to buy any. The queue for bread was quite long at the 'Federala', as the bakery was called, and his turn to buy came late and people chased him away. He didn't buy bread anymore. And there were all kinds of obligations: to hand in men's shoes and clothing for the soldiers – if you didn't have any, you had to buy it and hand it in. *[Editor's note: All Jews were obliged to surrender clothes to the authorities, the reason being that the (Romanian) army and society needed them. Jewish properties, businesses, factories, lands, farms were confiscated. In the area of Banat this process had already started in December 1940. Although these were governmental decisions, they were not entirely legal, actually they were not based on an actual law. Usually the orders were followed on the basis of verbal commands of the legionary leaders. During the Antonescu regime all these decisions became authorized and continued during 1941*

and 1942. (Source: Victor Neuman 'Evreii din Banat şi Transilvania de Sud în anii celui de-al doilea r ăzboi mondial' (Jews from Banat and South Transylvania during the years of World War II), in Romania and Transnistria: The Issue of the Holocaust, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2004, Bucharest, p.152.)]

In the meantime, the law regarding small localities was passed: Bucecea and Mihaileni [*Mihaileni is located 21 km west of Dorohoi.*] and Saveni, and all these other small localities – the small market towns – had to be evacuated, and they were evacuated to Dorohoi, the capital city of the county. Our grandmother came to live with us – everybody did what they could. The deportation of the Jews from Dorohoi was scheduled in three stages. Two groups of people left while the third stayed waiting. We left with the second group. They were probably choosing certain parts of the town. And since we lived in the old town center, we were included in the second group. Actually, I didn't even know much about what was happening, for I stayed mostly inside. Afterwards, I was deported to Transnistria together with my parents, my sister and my grandmother. The street sergeants let us know. They would come and tell us to have our backpack ready as we were about to be deported.

The trip to Sargorod lasted for 3-4 days; we were locked in cattle carriages watched by the army. The carriages were crowded, there were, say, approximately 40 persons in one carriage. The train stopped a few times, but we didn't get anything [*we weren't allowed to get off the carriages*].

We left in November 1941 and returned in December 1943. We stayed in Sargorod 5 the whole time. Life over there is beyond description. We lived in a house – a Jewish family from Poland lived there as well. Their entire house had been occupied and a couple of rooms were given to those who came from Dorohoi. We were around 4 families crammed in a single room, and that room had no windows anymore – the glass was broken –, and we slept on the floor, each family sleeping in a corner of the room, we had managed to get some straw and that's what we slept on – I suffer the consequences now, the rheumatism. Well… there is much to be said. I had typhus. A hospital was improvised there, in Sargorod, and I was taken there for a few days. I also had typhoid fever… I don't even know how many diseases, no sooner would I recover than I'd fall ill again. The first winter was… [*awful*] My grandmother died – she was elderly. And then – my father. Our father was suffering from a heart condition, he had a stroke and died. The filth killed him soon after our arrival in Sargorod. We arrived in autumn – he died in winter. He was around 50 when he died.

Forced labor was compulsory. From our family, they took me – since I was a small girl – only 2-3 times to pick tobacco. And they would give us a loaf of bread – the pay for a day's work. We stayed alive by selling our shirts, our things, what we had brought along with us in a backpack. We sold these to Ukrainian peasants. Some folks from Bukovina knew their tongue, Ukrainian, and acted as intermediaries. They took your things, sold them, and brought you back some money. German Marks were used there, that was the currency they used in these occupied areas. People were also using Romanian money, but to a small extent. And there was a small market in the town, and you could buy potatoes there – we also ate the potato peels. And when we still had money to buy food with, we'd buy something and boil it on a stove – it was called a 'pripicic'. There was a sort of metal lamp on an oval table and you placed wood chips in it, that's what you used as firewood; the upper part was a round pipe where you placed the pots, and that's where we cooked, turn by turn, all 4 families, a warm broth from what we managed to find.

Finally, in the end, when it was possible, we received support, help from Bucharest. My mother's brother sent us some money every now and then and that's how we survived. He sent it by mail, and we received it through the Community. A Jewish Community had been formed in Sargorod by the Jews from Bukovina: from Suceava, Campulung, from... The Community received the money by mail and called us and handed it over to us. But this was later, around 1942 or 1943 – I forget when it was exactly. About a year – shall I say –, not long before returning home.

The Community had set up a bathroom with showers, and we were taken there for a shower from time to time. We were also given a shower before leaving Sargorod. They took us and washed us clean, there was a drying stove for our clothes, and they took us to the train station; we were boarded on train carriages and on our way to Dorohoi. We traveled from Sargorod to Dorohoi, I forget for how long. It wasn't long, 2-3 days and 2-3 nights. But it no longer made any difference for us that we were lying and sleeping on the ground, for we were used to it. I was with my mother and sister. We were three. That's all that was left of our family... Two of us were left there, buried in common burial grounds. I wouldn't even know where to go... [*to visit their grave.*] If I wanted to go to Sargorod, Ukraine, what could I see? A common burial ground?

When we returned from Transnistria, we found our house occupied by other people – there were even Jews among them. They settled there randomly. We had some relatives, friends, and we went to live with them. I lived at our friends' place in the beginning, Meirovici was their name – Moise Meirovici and his wife, I forget her name – they were older than my parents. And it hasn't been easy for me. Afterwards, little by little, I found some girls from the countryside whom I helped with their home assignments, and they would bring me flour, food, even some money. Afterwards, there were various deeds, papers – I don't know what to call them –, and they hired me as well to record, jot down – I forget what kind of papers they were –, and they gave me some money for it. I also received help from the Community.

And when I managed to earn a little money, we rented a small room – a sort of shed, I don't know what it was – and the three of us lived there together. We received some planks from the Community and that friend of ours – Moise Meirovici, a skilful man – made a bed from them. And that's what we had. Some of our relatives and former neighbors returned some of our things, for they spirited away certain things after we left. But when we returned in the state we were in, they gave us a piece of rug, well, they lent me an item of clothing... Also, we left some bed linen with some neighbors – they were Jewish, too, their name was Goldhammer –, who had left for Bucharest in the meantime; they were rich people, actually, and they sent it back to us.

And then I made an address to the Town Hall, and little by little... we got our house back. I had relations. I knew the mayor because his daughter was a former classmate of mine. Her name is Lovinescu – if she's still alive, I don't know if she's still alive –, she's Lovinescu's niece who lives in Paris. [*Editor's note: Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943) was a Romanian literary historian and critic, literary theoretician and cultural sociologist, memorialist, playwright, novelist and short story writer.*] Eugen Lovinescu had a brother in Dorohoi who was mayor during that period when the authorities withdrew, leaving the city without leadership. I don't know how he was elected, but we had a mayor, we had a Town Hall, a few institutions were running again. So the mayor himself helped me. He came over and made quite a fuss requesting that they leave the house – a Jewish barber lived there.

It took over a year until we finally settled in the house. It was difficult. They didn't give us back the entire house right from the start. They only gave us the rooms in the back, while they still occupied the front part of the house. The small kitchen was no longer there, it had vanished. It was old and probably it wasn't that sturdy, what do I know… So at first we lived in the two small rooms in the back. We entered the house through the adjoining street and went out of the house through the courtyard in the back. And various offices were put up in the front part of the house. For a while, it housed a barber's shop, then a shoemaker's shop, then a syndicate – I forget which syndicate was housed in the front room. But the mayor helped me and intervened and they evacuated the house and it was returned to me entirely.

After the war

And then, gradually, life returned to normal, meaning that I was employed. For in the meantime, this mayor protected me, I received a job at the Courthouse, I was a court clerk for a few months – for I had qualifications, I had been to school –, then I was secretary for the Prosecutor's Office. These were special institutions organized by the population that hadn't left Dorohoi. There were also Romanians who didn't flee and remained there. Some people fled to who knows where… to Ardeal [*Transylvania*]…

Laws were passed that offered us protection [*Editor's note: Mrs. Sura is referring here to the Voitec Law 6*], I entered the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, as I had relatives there – my mother's sister –, I could live with them. I attended the faculty from 1945 till 1949. I didn't actually live in Bucharest throughout the 4 years, I attended under the optional attendance system. I would stay there for 1-2 months at a time – I would take a leave of absence from work without pay. After I graduated the university I entered the educational system from where I retired as a teacher [*of Romanian language and literature*] in 1977. I enjoyed my work as a teacher. I wouldn't have chosen it, had I not liked it. There were even some discussions: some of my relatives wanted that, since I had acquainted myself with the work at the Courthouse, I should study Law. But I didn't want to. I chose what was to my liking.

My mother didn't get a job. She was a housewife, she had no qualification. Neither did my sister, as she was little, she was 7 years younger than me. My sister was in her second year of high school when we left for Transnistria and she stopped going to school then; she didn't resume her studies when we returned. We were in dire straits. I had to provide for the three of us: for myself, my mother, and my sister. And my uncle Leon – the husband of my mother's sister – placed my sister in one of those Jewish hostels where they prepared you for going to Israel. And she stayed for a short time in that hostel in Bucharest and then she left to Israel in 1947 or 1948. Officially, her name was Erica, but they called her Edna in Israel. I don't know why, but she had her name changed in Israel. I don't know what job she had there – whatever she could find on arriving where they sent them from that hostel. We only received mail indirectly, through aunt Ana – because she had no job, she wasn't afraid. There was a time when you weren't allowed to have connections in Israel, so we didn't. And we received news indirectly… After a period of time, it was allowed, and we wrote to each other.

My sister met her future husband, Max Sinai, in Israel. He is from Romania, too, from Darabani – the market town of Darabani – located near Dorohoi –, he raised cattle for a living in Israel. [*Darabani is located 38 km north-east of Dorohoi.*] They married in 1964 [*Editor's note: probably in*

Bat Yam, that is what the wedding photograph reads, the photograph rosmi031]. My sister died around 1980, I forget the actual year. And her husband calls me on the phone once in a blue moon. He is still alive and is living in Israel, but I don't know which city they moved to.

I came to Botosani when I got married. I so-called sold the house in Dorohoi, but I sold it for a song, I gave it away almost for free to a slyboots doing business over there. I haven't been to Dorohoi in a long time. I used to go there in the beginning, when I had just moved here in Botosani – I also had a relative in Dorohoi, Sura Schechter – but I stopped going afterwards. I know that Dorohoi itself is a different place now, more developed… Our house no longer exists at present, it was completely demolished. They built blocks of flats on that piece of land.

My mother came to Botosani as well and lived with me. She died here, in Botosani, in 1963 or 1964. She is buried in the Jewish cemetery – she has a grave, unlike my grandmother. I used to go to her grave when I was still able to do so, now my health no longer allows it.

My husband, **Bernard Milstein**, was from Botosani. He was about three years older than me, so he was born around 1919, something like that. He had an older brother, Isac Milstein, he too is dead. He lived here in Botosani, he was an accountant. He was married but didn't have any children.

We met through a common acquaintance and got married around 1962 or 1963. We had no religious ceremony performed, we were both afraid to do it. My husband didn't really talk much, he wasn't a very talkative person. But he was kind, he got along very well with my mother, his mother-in-law. I was a teacher, and he – chief accountant at the Town Hall. He had graduated high school, had no higher education, and yet he was chief accountant at the Town Hall. He would have needed a diploma, but he received an exemption, he was exempt from needing higher education as he was very skilled and the institution needed him.

I didn't have any children. Neither me, nor my sister. I think we developed this infirmity in Transnistria. When we arrived there – my sister was younger, she hadn't yet reached that age –, but I had started to have my menstrual period, and it stopped occurring for a couple of years – until we left there. It was because of the cold, the hunger, the filth… everything.

I have never been to Israel. I was afraid of flying. I had high blood pressure ever since I was young and I was afraid to fly on an airplane so I didn't go there. Neither did my husband. But here, in Romania, we would travel every summer – until his legs failed him because of a medical condition. During Communism we received tickets from the Syndicate and we would travel. It was good for me – if I hadn't been year after year to the seaside [*the Black Sea*], at [*lake*] Techirghiol, perhaps I wouldn't have been able to move at all. You can imagine, sleeping there for two and a half winters on the ground and nothing but straws… I underwent medicinal mud treatment sessions at Techirghiol. I also went to Dorna [*Vatra Dornei*], and I don't even remember where else I have been.

I don't observe almost any Jewish tradition anymore. Humantasch [*hamantashen*] and honigleicheh on Purim – that is all. But I can't prepare them any longer – the lady from the Community comes over and prepares them for me. I no longer light candles on the Sabbath, I have forgotten all customs. I stopped observing the traditions after I got married. My husband observed them even less than I did, he was an atheist. He didn't even believe in Communism. He didn't even want to be

a member of the [*Communist*] Party. I don't know what his father did for a living, he too worked for some boyars, and there was something wrong with his personal file. And he was afraid to join the Party, lest they should rummage through his file for information about his father. It could be possible that they urged him to do it, but he stood his ground and didn't join the Party. And he was a good accountant, they promoted him, made him chief accountant of the Town Hall where he worked until he retired.

My husband died in the year when the Revolution 7 took place. He died in summer, in June 1989, and the Revolution broke out in December. He is buried here, in the Jewish cemetery in Botosani. The Community prepared his body for the funeral. There is a funeral chamber at the cemetery where they take care of all these things. There no longer was any rabbi to conduct the religious ceremony. There were older Jews empowered to perform the rites. But it is harder and harder now – they are fewer and fewer. I sat shivah for 8 days [*E.M.: In Botosani, I have often come across the custom of sitting shivah for eight days instead of seven.*], and I was in mourning for 1 year. I did this even though complete mourning is not compulsory in the Jewish tradition, only a black apron – that's what people normally wear as mourning. But I wore a completely black mourning attire – it wasn't even difficult, I was old by then and had black clothes.

I sat on the ground for eight days on a small pillow, with my back leaning against the bed. Well, I'd get up to move and walk when I needed to, but I never sat on a chair. I had friends and relatives who saw to it that I had food to eat. During the 8 days of sitting shivah, the mirrors are usually covered, but I had no mirrors in the house that I could cover. The period of intense mourning lasts for a month – it is called sheloshim –, after which you go for a stroll and recite a certain prayer. For during the four-weeks period the soul of the departed wanders around the house, and you recite a prayer on that occasion, by means of which the soul is released, so to speak. I recited this prayer – I received the book containing the prayer from the Community – while walking outside around the entire house. And I hired an older, more religious Jew through the Community, I paid him and he recited the Kaddish for an entire year after he died, every day during the evening when they perform the evening ritual at the synagogue.

I built a very beautiful monument for his grave. I made an effort, I knew somebody who contacted a foreman in Piatra-Neamt who erected the monument from black marble. Now, as far as I'm concerned, I have a place next to him, but entirely modest, an ordinary monument – however, it did cost me 10 million lei. And I'm waiting for my turn to come…

My life changed after the Revolution in that I have aged and become ever more helpless. There's no way around it. For me, what does it matter how people live abroad? At first, poor me, I nurtured illusions that I would retire and go to every movie and theatre play, that I would go everywhere. We have a theatre here, in Botosani, and a Philharmonic. But you end up not going anywhere, you are ever more helpless. Life gets increasingly lonely, withdrawn… There was a time when my friend from high school used to visit me, but now she too is ill. She is somewhat older, around 3 years older than me. We weren't classmates, but be that as it may, we knew each other from high school. And, even though I live across the street from the block of flats where she lives, I can no longer walk up to the 4th floor.

As a Transnistria deportee, I receive that German pension which came more and more irregularly lately. I kept receiving an address requesting me to certify I was still alive. And I received the

money, but perhaps its delivery was delayed. In any case... I receive nothing from the Romanian authorities. The Community helps me, because I donated the apartment [*I live in*] and everything inside it to the Community. Time was when there was a canteen – the Community Canteen –, and it was actually easier. There was a man who brought me food from the canteen. But now, for the past 5 years or so, there has been no canteen anymore. Poverty and few people. There are two ladies at the Community, and one of them comes to see me twice a week and it is she who cooks for me. I'm no longer able to do anything... If it weren't for her, I'd be six feet under for a long time now. I am very weak.

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 Transnistria

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed in the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

3 Keren Kayemet Leisrael (K

K.L.): Jewish National Fund (JNF) founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel. From its inception, the JNF was charged with the task of fundraising in Jewish communities for the purpose of purchasing land in the Land of Israel to create a homeland for the Jewish people. After 1948 the fund was used to improve and afforest the territories gained. Every Jewish family that wished to help the cause had a JNF money box, called the ‘blue box’. They threw in at least one lei each day, while on Sabbath and high holidays they threw in as many lei as candles they lit for that holiday. This is how they partly used to collect the necessary funds. Now these boxes are known worldwide as a symbol of Zionism.

4 Yellow star in Romania

On 8th July 1941, Hitler decided that all Jews from the age of 6 from the Eastern territories had to wear the Star of David, made of yellow cloth and sewed onto the left side of their clothes. The Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced this ‘law’ on 10th September 1941. Strangely enough, Marshal Antonescu made a decision on that very day ordering Jews not to wear the yellow star. Because of these contradicting orders, this ‘law’ was only implemented in a few counties in Bukovina and Bessarabia, and Jews living there were forced to wear the yellow star.

5 Shargorod

A town in Ukraine, also known as Sharigrad. During World War II Jews from Romania were deported to various towns in Transnistria, which was then under German occupation. Large-scale deportations began in August 1941, after Romania and Germany occupied the former Soviet territories of Bessarabia (today the Republic of Moldova) and Bukovina. Jews from the newly occupied Romanian lands (Bessarabia and Bukovina), as well as from Romania were sent across the Dniester river to Transnistria. The severe living conditions, the harsh winter and a typhus epidemic contributed to the large number of deaths in the camps established in many towns of Transnistria.

6 Voitec-law

named after communist minister of education Stefan Voitec, and adopted in 1946. According to this law all those (regardless of their nationality) who had to interrupt their studies during World War II could take exams and apply for high school or university following an accelerated procedure.

7 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 December 25th 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.