

Solomon Meir



This is me, Solomon Meir, in my office at the Jewish Community in Botosani in 2006.

My name is Solomon Meir. I bear the name - Solomon - of my great-grandfather, the father of my grandmother from my father's side. It is customary for Jews to name a child after a deceased person. I was born in the city of Botosani in 1933.

In fact, I learned Yiddish at home, as a child. Jewish [Yiddish, that is] was spoken in our home - naturally, Romanian as well, but also Jewish -, and I learned it from my parents. But I attended the cheder after I was 5 and a half, a school where they taught you to read and write in Yiddish; I learned to read the siddur, the prayer book - it is written in Jewish, not in Hebrew. And I attended the cheder until 1939. The Germans invaded Poland in 1939, and many Poles fled here from Poland, and there was a great rush of cars, something unusual for the city of Botosani - there weren't that many cars in Botosani. And as the cheder was at a distance of around 2 km, 2 km and a half from home, I had to walk there by myself and my parents didn't allow me to attend anymore - we were afraid of cars. The Poles came in cars, trucks, they were very well-off. They settled here, across Romania, and part of them returned to Poland after a few years, others remained here for good.

In 1940, at the age of 7, I was enlisted at a Romanian school - as the principal of that school, which was located near our home, was a friend of my father's - but I was pulled out of the school on the basis of the racial law in force at that time, in 1940. Afterwards, I stayed home during that year and my father enlisted me at an existing Jewish school in Botosani. I graduated 4 grades of primary school.

After I finished the 4 grades of primary school, in 1945, my father enlisted me at the Commercial High School in Botosani, where I graduated only 2 grades because a monetary reform was implemented and my father complained that he won't have the money to pay the schooling tax - the education reform hadn't been introduced yet and you had to pay a tax to go to school -, and I entered a trade in 1947, I think. He enlisted me at a school for professions run with French funds, it was called ORT - Organisateur Reconstruction de Travail, meaning Jewish Workforce Reconstruction - active around the world, not only in Romania, as this ORT school had branches in many countries. I studied there for 3 years. I graduated in 1950 and obtained the qualification of lathe operator.

On 1st February 1951 secured a job at the Mechanics Center in Botosani, where I worked for 40 years. I worked as a lathe operator for about [almost] 25 years. During the last years I was also a foreman and a CTC operator [Editor's note: CTC is a Romanian abbreviation for Controlul Tehnic al Calitatii (Technical Quality Control)]: I was a foreman for approximately 2-3 years and a CTC operator during the remaining period of time - around 14-15 years. I was in the army for 3 years, from 1953 until autumn 1956, I was doing construction work for the railroad work brigade. At first, I was sent to the county of Suceava, then I was stationed in Bucharest at the construction equipment station of CFR. I had the rank of front-ranking private.

From 1992 I was a ritual supervisor - it is called mashgiach - for the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania. You weren't required to have special studies, I know these things from my family, my family fully observed the kashrut, and I knew the rules, but I was examined by rabbi Rosen. I couldn't move there permanently, for my sister was still alive, I had to come home as well, spend time with her, and I went there for 4, 5, 6 months, and then I returned home where I stayed for several months, after which they called me there again. In the meantime, during the period that I was in Botosani, they hired someone else. I worked like that, intermittently, for 2-3 years.

I went to the slaughterhouse in Bucharest. There was a very large slaughterhouse in Bucharest - it is called Grina - and that's where they sacrificed the cattle for the ritual canteen of the Federation in Bucharest. I went there with 2 hakhamim and slaughtered animals. I was in charge of supervising the slaughtering. I also worked at the home for elderly people in Bucharest. I lived there during the time that I stayed in Bucharest, and I worked as a mashgiach for the canteen over there, as well as for the Federation's canteen where food was prepared for the assisted living in Bucharest.

I forget the year - in any case, I believe it was 10 years ago, if not more - when I was given the keys of the synagogue and started working here, at the Jewish Community in Botosani, on a full-time basis, my position is that of a gabbai. The gabbai is not supposed to hold the synagogue's keys, but as there was no synagogue helper and no shammash, I hold the keys as well. But I'm in charge of running the entire synagogue, of organizing the holidays, when people have to be called to perform the aliyah for the Torah, I am the one who has to call them, say their names, all these things.