Ladislav Roth Biography

Ladislav Roth
Biography
Uzhgorod
Ukraine
Date of interview: October 2003
Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

Family background
Growing up
During the war
After the war
Glossary

Ladislav Roth is short, plump and baldish. He speaks with a peculiar Hungarian accent and occasionally uses Hungarian words in his speech. He is very sociable and vivid. He and his wife are very hospitable and friendly. Ladislav Roth and his wife Maria live in a cottage built before World War II in the center of Uzhgorod. They bought this house in the middle 1950s and for almost 10 years they repaired and restored it. Their furniture is from the mid 1950s. In their rooms there are many books: in Hungarian, Russian and also in Yiddish. Their children and grandchildren grew up here and now their beloved great grandson spends much time with them. A beautiful orchard is surrounding the house. The host and hostess are particularly proud of it. Ladislav's son Stepan, is a biologist and botanist; he grows new plants there. It's hard for Maria and Ladislav to work in the garden, now this has become Stepan's responsibility.

For a few generations my father's family lived in Subcarpathia 1, in Uzhgorod [700 km from Kiev]. My grandfather Bernat Roth was born in Uzhgorod in 1847. Grandmother Zali Riesenboch, was born in Uzhgorod in 1852. I don't know what my grandfather did for a living. My father told me that they were very poor and my grandmother had to work as a dressmaker. She was very good at it. She worked at home and received her clients at home. She didn't have any assistants and worked alone.

There were 8 children in the family: 2 sons and 6 daughters. They were all born in Uzhgorod. I don't know any birth dates of my father's brothers or sisters, but I know their sequence of birth. The oldest was my father's brother Sandor. Then came three sisters whose names I don't know and I never saw them. My father Jeno Roth was born in 1890 and he was the second son. There were three younger sisters living in Uzhgorod: the oldest was Jolan, then a middle sister whose name I don't know and then came the youngest whose name was Regina, Reizl in Yiddish.

As far as I can imagine from what my father told me, Uzhgorod of his childhood and youth was very much like the Uzhgorod that I know. This was a multinational town and Jews constituted a large

part of its population. Jews owned trade business and were craftsmen and wagon drivers were also Jews for the most part. There were few synagogues and a yeshivah in Uzhgorod. There were cheders, Jewish primary schools and a grammar school in the town. I can't say that everyone was wealthy, but one wouldn't have met a Jew beggars in the streets. There were no beggars in the town. There were poor families, but not poor to the extent when they had to beg for alms. The rich helped the poor. Every store owner had few less fortunate Jewish families to support.

Every Friday before lunch they came to a store owner and he gave them food and money for Sabbath. Charity was a matter of honor. Even families living from hand to mouth believed it was their duty to support the poor. Poor students of yeshivahs who came from other places had lunch with local families. Such students were called bukhers. Usually 7 families patronized one bukher and this student had lunch with another family every day. There was a Jewish soup kitchen for the poor in Uzhgorod. They even provided meals to the non-Jewish poor. There was a free Jewish hospital for the poor. There were Jewish doctors and Jewish patients in it. The diner and hospital were funded by the Jewish community of Uzhgorod. Few wealthiest Jews, factory and plant owners made their contributions to support them.

My grandmother and grandfather had a small house in the center of Uzhgorod. It was built of air bricks, the local construction material. Straw was finely cut, mixed with clay and bricks were made from this mixture. The climate in Subcarpathia is mild and those air brick houses were warm enough.

My father and his bothers and sisters received Jewish education. The sons went to cheder and the girls had classes with a teacher at home. All of them finished 8-year Hungarian school. Both girls and boys attended the state school.

My father's family were religious, but they were not fanatics. They were Neolog 2. They observed some Jewish traditions, but not all of them. They wore common clothes, men didn't have beards or payes and women didn't wear wigs. They did not go to the synagogue on Sabbath and didn't follow kashrut. The only mandatory Jewish holiday for them was Yom Kippur and many often celebrated Pesach. [Editor's note: In theory the Neolog stream was also supposed to observe all Jewish holidays and Kashrut just as the Orthodox one. In practice they were much less strict on such matters.] Some families didn't celebrate other holidays.

Grandfather Bernat died in 1903, when he was still relatively young. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Uzhgorod in accordance with Jewish customs. His gravestone was not to be found after World War II like many others in the Jewish cemetery. Germans used them as construction materials breaking them to make pavements.

After my grandfather died the family had a hard life. My grandmother didn't earn enough by sewing to support the family consisting of numerous members. My father's older brother Sandor became an apprentice of a tailor. In the late 1900s Sandor and three older sisters emigrated to America. [Great masses of the Hungarian poor from the countryside, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, emigrated to America at the beginning of the 20th Century, seeing no other option escaping economic hopelessness.] Perhaps, my father corresponded with them at the beginning, but not when I could remember it. After finishing school my father went to work as an apprentice waiter in

Bercsenyi restaurant that belonged to the Jewish family called Szilagyi. It was a wealthy family. I think the grandfather owed the restaurant and his two sons and daughter helped him to run it. They were to inherit it and the grandfather wanted to teach them everything about it. The restaurant was named after the Hungarian Count Miklos Bercsenyi. [Count Bercsenyi inherited the castle of Ungvar (Uzhgord) in the late 17th Century, which he modernized, significantly rebuilt and also constructed a palace in. Bercsenyi played a major role in the Hungarian uprising against the Habsburgs (1703-11), led by Ferenc Rakoczi II, heir of the Transylvanian Principality. After the uprising was put down the Bercsenyi estates were confiscated and the castle was transferred to the Habsburg crown.]

The restaurant was in a 2-storied stone building with columns on its façade. There was a big garden with trees and many rose bushes around the building. There was a big hall with a stage for an orchestra and dancing area on the first floor. This hall was often leased for wedding or family parties with a number of guests. There were 3 smaller halls for 8-10 tables upstairs. Here visitors were families with children for the most part. There was also music there, but it was a violinist or a piano player playing there. There was a summer café in the garden from spring till autumn when it was warm outside. Visitors could sit outside in the shade of big trees having a glass of wine, a cup of tea with cakes or ice cream. Parents brought their children to this café during their walk in the town. When it got dark there were bulbs on tree branches to light the area. It was beautiful.

The restaurant opened in the morning when visitors could have breakfast before going to work and closed at midnight. One year later my father began to work as a waiter. He earned well and received good tips too. My father went to study in Uzhgorod Trade School. He worked during day and attended classes in the evening. My father’s master paid for his studies: it was very kind of him. My father supported his mother and younger sisters too till they got married. All sisters married Jewish men and had traditional Jewish weddings. Of course, neolog weddings were a little different from more traditional Jewish weddings. [Orthodox] Neolog young people hardly ever sought help of shadkhanim, matchmakers. When they met they started seeing each other and when they decided it was time for them to live as a family they went to ask their parents’ blessing. Brides didn’t have their hair cut before chuppah as Jewish customs required. Married neolog women did not cover their heads or even more so wear wigs. The rest of a chuppah ritual was followed: bride and bridegroom’s mothers escorted a bride to under a chuppah and the bride and bridegroom’s fathers escorted a bridegroom.

A rabbi conducted the wedding ceremony and the newly weds were given a glass of wine that they had to sip taking turns. Then they were to throw the glass on the floor to break it. The glass was wrapped in a napkin before it was thrown. Wedding parties were also slightly different from traditional Jewish weddings. [Orthodox] There are separate tables for men and women at a traditional wedding. Even a wife is not supposed to sit beside her husband. Neologs were sitting together. When a bride danced with other men, except her husband, they were not supposed to hold her by her hand. A bride had a handkerchief in her hand that her partner held by its edge. Neolog pairs danced holding each other by the hand. Guests, men and women, danced together. Of course, paying tribute of respect to traditions there was traditional kosher food cooked for wedding parties. This was followed even if they didn’t follow kashrut at home.

All my father's sisters married after 1918, in the Czechoslovak times. My father's older sister Jolan married Wolf Hibler, a Czech Jew. He was chief of the Uzhgorod jail. Jolan and her husband had two sons. The older one was called Bernat after grandfather. I don't remember the name of the second son. The second sister married chief of the social department of the mayor office in Uzhgorod. I don't remember his name. Regina, the third sister, married Bohus Militke, lieutenant colonel, a military from Brno. He was responsible for logistics supplies to the military unit of Brno. After the wedding Regina and her husband left for Brno. [Moravia, mid-western part of contemporary Czechoslovakia] There she studied and graduated from the Medical Faculty of Brno University. She became a therapist and specialized in cardiology. Her son Otto became a dentist. In the 1930s they moved to Bratislava. All sisters had a good life with their husbands and were quite wealthy.

There was no anti-Semitism in Subcarpathia during the period of Austria-Hungary or later, when Subcarpathia was annexed to Czechoslovakia in 1918. [First Czechoslovak Republic] 3. Many nationalities lived side by side through many generations and they respected the nationality and religion of their neighbors. During the period of Austro-Hungary the population commonly spoke Hungarian. [That was true for the western part of Subcarpathia only, including Uzhorod (Uzhgorod), where the majority of the local population was Hungarian. Towards the north and the east the most used language was Ruthenian.]

When Czechs came to power many older people failed to learn Czech and continued speaking Hungarian. The situation for Jews improved during the Czech rule. Czech authorities appreciated and supported Jews in every possible way. Jews were allowed to hold governmental positions. [Editor's note: Jews were able to hold governmental positions previously, in the liberal Austro-Hungarian Monarchy too, that recognized the equality of all nationalities as well as of every religion. After the 1867 'Ausgleich' Jews increasingly entered state bureaucracy and often made careers there, sometimes great ones (i.e. Vilmos Vazsonyi, Hungarian Minister of Justice). It is also true, however, that the governmental positions remained rather atypical for Jews all along until World War I. They were still more often to be found in key positions in the Hungarian economy as well as in the free professions.]

I hardly know anything about my mother's family. My mother's parents lived in Satu Mare in Romania. [Editor's note: Present day Satu Mare, called Szatmarnemeti at the time, was attached to Romania as late as 1920 as a result of the Trianon Treaty 4. His maternal grandparents lived in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.] Their family name was Rosenberg, but I don't know their given names. There were two children in the family. My mother Hermina was an older child. She was born in Satu Mare in 1896. In 1900 her younger sister Ilona was born. I hardly know anything about my mother's childhood. My mother's parents were religious. [It is very likely that they were Hasidim. The later to be Satu Mare, Szatmarnemeti - or commonly Szatmar - at the time was the center of the famous Satmar Hasidim, today to be found in New York and Israel.] My mother and her sister received Jewish education. They had classes with a visiting teacher. They could read and write in Yiddish and knew prayers.

My mother's family should have followed kashrut since she followed it strictly after she got married. My mother and her sister finished 8 grades in a school for girls. My grandmother and grandfather died when my mother and her sister were in their teens. When my mother turned 18 she decided to move to Uzhgorod with her sister. My mother parents' distant relatives lived there

and they promised to help two sisters. [In 1914 when she was 18 both towns were still Austro-Hungarian, so she did not go abroad. She merely moved to her relatives about 100 km away to another town of Eastern Hungary.] Here my mother met my future father, but I don't know any details. All I know is that in 1920 they had a traditional Jewish wedding with a rabbi and a chuppah.

After the wedding my parents bought an apartment in a 2-storied house in Sobranetskaya Street on the outskirt of Uzhgorod. [The street was called different in 1920, when it was transferred from Hungary to Czechoslovakia. Most probably the Hungarian street name was changed to a Slovak/Czech one. Sobranetskaya is the contemporary Ukrainian name of the street.] This street ended where the farmlands of a neighboring village began. Our apartment was on the first floor on the right. There were two rooms, a kitchen, a closet and a bathroom. There was a common laundry in the basement. The laundry was dried in the attic. There was an orchard in a big yard and tenants of each of four apartments in this house had their plot of land in the garden. Across the street there was a house with a deep basement. Since there were no fridges then tenants kept their food stocks in this basement. My mother kept food preserves for winter in this basement. She made pickles and tinned tomatoes and jam without sugar. We bought stocks of potatoes, carrots, onions and beetroots for winter. There was a market in the center of Uzhgorod, but my mother bought fruit, vegetables, milk and dairies, meat and chicken from villagers from a neighboring village.

By the time he got married my father worked as senior waiter in Bercsenyi restaurant. My mother was a housewife after she got married. We were wealthy. This lasted until the early 1940s.

I was the first baby and was born in 1922. I have the name of Ladislav in my Czech birth certificate, my Jewish name is Laizer. My sister Ella was born in 1924 and my brother Stepan was born in 1926. At home my brother was called Pista in the Hungarian manner. [Pista is the diminutive of Istvan, that is Stepan in Slovak or Czech] I don't know my sister's or brother's Jewish names. My brother and I were circumcised in accordance with Jewish traditions.

My mother's sister Ilona also got married in Uzhgorod. When my mother and father were seeing each other my mother mentioned that she had a younger sister. My father introduced Ilona to his colleague and friend Ignac Klein, a Jew, a waiter of Bercsenyi restaurant. They got married one year after my parents' wedding. They also had a Jewish wedding. The Kleins had three children: 2 daughters whose names I don't remember and son Vojceh. They lived nearby and my mother often saw her sister. We, children, were also friends with our cousins.

My father was a neolog. Neologs were religious, but they didn't have patriarchal looks. They didn't have a beard or payes, they didn't wear a tallit or common for Jews round black hats or black jackets. Only Hasidim looked that way. There were many Hasidim in Uzhgorod. They had a synagogue on their own and neologs went to another synagogue. [Neologs and Orthodox maintained separate communities in Hungary.] When I asked my father why neologs didn't have as many Jewish holidays as Hasidim my father explained that it wasn't necessary to observe all Jewish traditions. It was important to have a heart of a Jew and it didn't matter how one dressed or what holidays one celebrated. It was important to identify oneself as a Jew and that was all.

My father wore common clothes and had his hair cut short. My mother had a different opinion. Though she didn't wear a wig and dressed in fashion of the time she found it necessary to celebrate Sabbath at home, celebrate Jewish holidays and follow kashrut. I don't remember that my parents argued about it one single time. My mother cooked kosher food and watched that meat and dairy products did not mix. There was a shochet nearby and my mother had him slaughter her chickens. The shochet did not only slaughter the chickens, but he also identified whether they were kosher or not. My mother didn't cook non-kosher chickens, but always gave them to her Hungarian neighbor. My mother liked cooking Jewish food. She often made chicken broth with little kneydlakh from matzah flour or broth with homemade noodles. Every week my mother bought a big goose for Sabbath. She melted goose fat and cooked on it.

My mother started her preparations for Sabbath on Friday morning. There was a Jewish bakery nearby where they sold bread and challah for Sabbath. My mother bought bread, but she baked challah at home. We had a big stove with an oven in the kitchen. My mother baked challah and then she also made cakes or a tort for Sabbath. She fried a goose in the oven and made gefilte fish. When her cooking was over she put a pot with cholnt into the oven. Then my mother's sister came and they went to the mikveh. We had a big bathtub in the bathroom, but on Friday my mother followed the ritual going to the mikveh. Other women came to wash and make pedicure and manicure there. Then my mother and Ilona went to a hairdresser. My mother came home with a beautiful hairdo and put on a fancy dress.

My father often worked in the evening, including Friday. Regardless of whether my father was or wasn't at home my mother lit candles and prayed over them. Then we all sat down to dinner. On the next day, if my father was working, my mother took the children to visit her sister or grandmother Zali, my father's mother. Sometimes my mother's sister Ilona and her children came to visit us. We played with our cousins and my mother and her sister talked having coffee and cakes. Sometimes we went to walk in the town park. My parents didn't go to the synagogue on Sabbath. Neologs didn't recognize a ban for work on Saturday. My mother heated a meal on Saturday and lit lamps in the evening.

My parents only went to the synagogue on Yom Kippur or on anniversaries of death of my father's father and my mother's parents. [Yahrzeit] There were two holidays celebrated at home: Pesach and Yom Kippur. My mother kept her crockery for Pesach in the attic. It was taken down on the eve off Pesach when other dishes were taken away. There was special crockery for Pesach and if there were not enough utensils then pans and casseroles were koshered. There was a special spot for koshering on the bank of the Uzh River, near the Hasid synagogue. There was a huge pot with boiling water. People dropped their utensils into the pot and a shochet told them when they could take it out. We always had matzah at Pesach. Only few stores sold kosher matzah, but there was also matzah sold in many other stores. However, we also ate bread at Pesach. My mother made traditional food at Pesach: chicken broth, gefilte fish, chicken neck stuffed with fried flour and chicken giblets. There was always strudel from matzah flour filled with raisins and jam. My mother kept goose fat in special pots in the basement. My mother also bought wine for Pesach at the synagogue. In the evening we sat down to the table. My mother always served all traditional food: boiled meat, hard-boiled eggs, horseradish and salty water in a saucer. My father didn't conduct seder. We just said a prayer.

On Chanukkah my mother lit candles in the chanukkiyah. Sometimes we had guests and they gave us some money. [Chanukkah gelt] This was all about celebration of Chanukkah. We always celebrated Yom Kippur at home. My parents celebrated it according to traditions. On the evening before Yom Kippur we had a sufficient dinner. Fast began after the first star appeared in the sky. My parents fasted 24 hours. We didn't fast when we were small. At the age of 6 children began to fast half a day and at the age of ten – 24 hours like adults. We always had the Kapores ritual on Yom Kippur. My mother bought white chickens for Ella and herself and white roosters for my father, my younger brother and me. They were to be turned around our heads and we had to say: 'May you be my atonement'. Then my mother took these chickens to the synagogue and they gave them to the poor.

My parents stayed in the synagogue a whole day on Yom Kippur. They began to take me with them when I turned 10 years old. Every visitor had a big candle with him. Candles were burning since morning and it was hard to breathe. I felt giddy and couldn't wait to take a breath of fresh air. My mother had lemon peels wrapped in a handkerchief with her. When she felt giddy she smelled them and it made her feel better. My father and I were downstairs and my mother was upstairs where women sat. Sermon in the synagogue lasted until the first evening star. Then the fast was over and it was allowed to go home to have dinner.

We spoke Hungarian at home. There were Slovak, Czech, Romanian, Jewish, German and Hungarian schools in Uzhgorod. My parents sent me and then my younger brother to a Slovak school. My sister went to a Czech school in the center of the town. The Slovak school was near our house, so I guess, that was why we were sent there. [Besides geographical proximity the reason for choosing Slovak and Czech schools for Hungarian speaking Jewish children probably was getting accustomed to the state languages.] There was no segregation of schoolchildren to Jews or non-Jews. There were few other Jewish children in my class, but we never faced any anti-Semitic attitudes. Well, truth to tell, I had an incident with a senior boy once. We had breakfast at home and took sandwiches to school to eat them during an interval. Once a senior pupil wanted to take my sandwich. I didn't give it to him and he called me 'zidovska svina' [Slovak for Jewish pig]. I hit him. Then a teacher came to find out what happened. I told him and he stroked my hair. As for my offender, he was not allowed to come to school for two weeks. I was never hurt again.

Actually, this was the only incident of this kind at school. During the Czech rule there was no anti-Semitism. Any anti-Semitic demonstrations were punished. Life was wonderful; during the Czech rule. One could travel to other countries When I studied at school, I decided to go to a football game in Budapest. I bought tickets to go there from an agency and they also arranged for a ticket for a game, hotel accommodations and meals for me. My parents could afford to pay for my trip. People also could go to work in other countries or visit their friends or relatives. My family visited the Klein family, my mother sister Ilona husband's relatives, in Hungary. [After the break up of the Austro-Hungarian state -after World War I- many people ended up living in countries different from their friends', families' or part of their families'.]

I studied in a primary school and a cheder. Cheder was in the center of the town. We had to pay for the cheder. There were 15-20 children in each class. In the first grade we studied Hebrew letters and then we learned to read. We could read a little in the second grade. We read with Yiddish

translations. Later we read the Torah and the Talmud and discussed what we had read. Each of us had to prepare a report on an article from the Torah that we were learning at the moment. We went to school in the morning and then I went home for lunch and after lunch I went to cheder where our classes started at 2 p.m. We didn't have classes in cheder on Saturday. There were classes at school on Saturday though. When there was a Jewish holidays on Satruday, Jewish children were allowed to stay home from school. I studied in cheder for 3 years and then I stopped going there. I can't remember why.

In 1934 grandmother Zali Roth, my father's mother, died. She was buried near grandfather in the Jewish cemetery in Uzhgorod. There was a Jewish funeral. My father recited the Kaddish over grandmother's grave. Nobody sat the mourning [Shivah] after grandmother. It wasn't customary with neologs.

At 13 I had bar mitzvah. My father and I went to the synagogue on Saturday. I was called to the Torah and read an article from the Torah. For the first time in my life I had a tallit on. It was quite a ceremony. In the evening we had guests at home and my mother made a festive dinner. They greeted my parents and me. I don't remember any details, but I remember that it was very festive.

My father had liberal views and sympathized with communists. He didn't join the Communist Party, but he was fond of communist ideas. My mother was against communism. She believed that if communists were negative about religion there could be nothing good about communism.

I finished school in 1936. My parents wanted me to continue my studies, but I wanted to be independent. I asked my father to help me become an apprentice waiter in Bercsenyi restaurant. I wanted to work and study in the trade school in Uzhgorod. I studied three years at school. Besides major subjects future waiters had to study confectionery, butcher and cooks' trades.

Bercsenyi restaurant employed me. My father was senior waiter there. Another leading waiter was a Hungarian man whose surname was Lantosi. They worked in shifts: my father worked from morning till afternoon and then Lantosi came to work and next week my father came to work in the afternoon. Waiters also worked in shifts. Since I was just an apprentice I only came to work in the morning and stayed at work until afternoon. Only experienced waiters worked in the evening. There were 20 employees in the restaurant and 6-7 of them were Jews. I spent my vacations traveling. In 1938 my friend, my classmate in the trade school, and I spent two weeks in Switzerland. We traveled across Switzerland and spent few days skiing in a resort. This was inexpensive and apprentice waiter could well afford it. [It is unlikely that a Czechoslovak waiter could very easily afford such vacations in the 1930s in Switzerland. Mr. Roth is probably idealizing the relatively well off and developed Czechoslovakia.]

Besides learning a profession I also had to do errands for senior waiters. Before lunch I always went to a small kosher store. Chief waiter Lantosi liked kosher food very much. Although waiters had two free meals per day at the restaurant, Lantosi liked what they made in this store and I went there every day to buy him cholnt, chicken broth with matzah or goose stew. I liked work and learned fast.

At work I met Maria Leschinsky, a Slovakian girl from Goronda village [37 km from Uzhgorod, 670 km from Kiev] Uzhgorod district. Maria was one year older. She was born in 1921. We came to work at the same time. Maria was an apprentice of a cook. One year later she began to work as a cook. We began to meet and fell in love with one another. We worked the same shift and saw each other at work and after work. Maria was a Catholic. My parents or Maria's parents had nothing against our marriage when we learned to earn our living. Maria's parents had four sons and three daughters. Maria was the oldest of all children. Her father was a worker in a quarry and her mother was a housewife. They kept a cow and had a plot of land. They were poor and Maria's parents were very happy that Maria was going into a nice family. They believed that Jewish men made the best husbands.

In 1938 Subcarpathia became Hungarian again. [According to the First Vienna Decision the predominantly ethnic Hungarian parts of Czechoslovakia – Southern Slovakia, including Uzhorod (Ungvar, Uzhgorod) and the rest of Southern Subcarpathia- were annexed to Hungary in 1938. The rest of Subcarpathia was occupied by Hungary in 1939, after the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.] Many of the older residents of Subcarpathia had good memories about life during Austro-Hungary and looked forward to this change. They met the Hungarians like they would welcome dear guests. Nobody had an idea what fascism was like. Bercsenyi restaurant also prepared a welcome party. Only officers of the Hungarian army were allowed to go to restaurants and soldiers went to bars or taverns. The restaurant employees made dishes of Hungarian cuisine and prepared tables for officers.

The owner of the restaurant decided to engage more waiters so that guests didn't have to wait. I was also told to stay in case they needed my assistance. In the evening about 15 Hungarian officers came to the restaurant. They were waited for: there were tables prepared for them, flowers and an orchestra was playing Hungarian tunes. The best waiter of the restaurant, a short Jewish man, waited on one of the tables. Officers drank a lot and at about 2 o'clock in the morning one of them, a handsome middle-aged man, called the waiter: Come here, you dirty little Jew!' We all came to standstill. This was the first time we faced anything like this. We, waiters, were taught to avoid scandal by all means. This man went pale, but he looked calm on the outside. He came too the table and said: 'I apologize, Mr. Officer, I will go home and get washed and won't be dirty tomorrow'. Other officers began to calm down their comrade telling him that he was drunk and that there was nothing to make a fuss about. The incident hushed up, but there was a hard feeling about it. Later officers and gendarmes often came to our restaurant. Nothing of the kind happened again in the first year after Hungarians came to power, but every time Hungarian officers came to the restaurant this caused tension. There was no persecution of Jews in the first year.

I managed to finish my trade school and receive a diploma. A year later anti-Jewish laws 5 came in force. Jewish were forbidden to own stores, factories, shops or restaurants. They had to transfer their property to non-Jews without any compensation. Or the state expropriated their property without compensation. The older Szilagyi, owner of the Bercsenyi restaurant, died in the early 1930s and his two sons and daughter inherited the restaurant. In 1939, when the law depriving Jews of the right to own anything bringing income came in force, Szilagyi was obliged to transfer his restaurant to somebody called Kucsek who came from Hungary. It was simple: representatives of financial department came and ordered Szilagyi to give away keys from his storerooms and restaurant. The restaurant had huge stocks. There were big wine cellars. So, it was just a matter of

giving keys to all his property: no compensation or agreements. Next day we came to work and Kucsek met us and said that we would receive everything from him. That simple. Then Kucsek announced that he only needed one Jew waiter. The others decided that I should stay since I was just a beginner and would not find work easily. However, I said that the waiter having 3 children should stay. I went to work in the Korona restaurant [Hungarian, meaning Crown], present-day 'Verkhovina'.

There was one Jewish employee there and they could employ me. I worked in a big hall. One of newly appointed officials, a fascist, often came for dinner there and he always demanded to be waited on by a non-Jew sending me away. There was another hall for Jews in the Korona restaurant. It used to be a banquet hall, but when persecution of Jews began they made it a hall for Jewish visitors to avoid conflicts. There was one Jew working there. His name was Borukh Leibush and when there were too many visitors, it was difficult to wait on all of them. There were complaints. I had hard feeling after each visit of this official and asked senior waiter to let me work with Borukh in the hall for Jewish visitors. This hall was 4-5 times smaller than the others, but it brought ten times more income.

Jews had a feeling that there was nothing good for them to expect and spent their money lavishly. The Jewish hall was always full, they ordered expensive dishes and gave big tips. It turned out that it was very profitable to work in the Jewish hall.

My younger brother and sister couldn't continue their studies after finishing school. When Hungarians came to power in 1939, Jews were not to be admitted to higher educational institutions. My sister became an apprentice of a hairdresser. She began to work a year after she started her training. My brother became an apprentice in a women's clothes shop. The owner of the shop was a Jewish man whose surname was Hertzog and his wife was a Christian. Hertzog officially transferred his saloon to his wife and continued to manage it as he did before. Stepan was doing well with his training and began to build up his own clientele. All three of us were earning well. We brought our earning home and put them in a drawer in my mother's dressing table. We only took some money for our pocket expenses and my mother handles the rest of it. We never cared how much each of us spent. Most important for us was that there was good food at home, we had good clothes and there was always some amount available at home when we needed it.

We never came to borrowing money to buy something. My mother only cooked kosher food at home and watched it that we didn't bring home non-kosher products. My brother, sister and I didn't follow kashrut outside of our home. We worked nearby. At lunch I went to a small store in the shopping center where they sold ham and delicious homemade sausage where I bought some for myself, my brother and sister that I took to their work. My mother would not probably be happy about this kind of meal, but we never mentioned it to her.

In the first year of Hungarian rule there were no persecutions of Jews or attacks on synagogues, but in 1940 Jews began to fear going to synagogues. Young men with sticks waited for them in front of synagogues to beat them. Thank God, there were no bombs, but they beat Jews with sticks until they started bleeding. Then Jewish young men began to unite in groups. Before a sermon in the synagogue they also stood there with sticks and didn't allow hooligans to come near. There were

also attacks on passers by with typical Semitic looks. They were particularly mad seeing a Jewish man with a Christian woman, but I continued to see Maria. I didn't look like a Jew, I was more like a Slavic type of man and we didn't get in any incidents.

My sister Ella was also seeing a non-Jewish man. Her friend Stepan Baksa was a Slovak. He lived in Uzhgorod and worked on the Slovak border as a part of the Hungarian customs in Chop [690 km from Kiev, 28 km from Uzhgorod]. Baksa was a very nice man and my parents liked him. My father and my more religious mother believed that my sister would be well with him and it was more important than his being a non-Jew.

It went on until 1942 when I was recruited to a work battalion. Jews were only recruited to work battalions. Guys of 1922 year of birth got together at the railway station where we boarded a train and headed to the frontier with Austria. Then we were separated into groups of 20 men in a battalion. In my battalion there were 10 men from Subcarpathia and 10 from Budapest. From there we were taken to Koszeg, a frontier town. We were accommodated in barracks. There were no beds or plank beds. We slept on straw on the floor. It was October. There were 40 of us in the barrack and there was only one iron stove and they didn't allow stoking it, though it was already cold. We threw away straw since there were many bugs in it and we slept on our coats on the ground floor. We didn't get any uniforms and wore what we brought from home. After breakfast we went to work. Our battalion worked clearing up a forest.

We cut dry trees, removed branches and trunks making a road. In the afternoon we had a lunch break. They delivered a meal from the camp. We went back to the barrack before dinnertime. Hungarians supervised this camp. We got sufficient food. In the morning we got a cup of coffee and had a loaf of bread each for the rest of the day. At lunch we had thick soup with meat and meat with rice and beans for a second course. In the evening we got a piece of sausage and tea. Nobody was hungry.

We stayed in Koszeg for a month. In November we were taken by train to Uzhok [60 km from Uzhgorod, 625 km from Kiev], in Subcarpathia. Our trip lasted 2 days. We went across Hungary. Jews were not persecuted in Hungary and felt at ease there. I don't know how Hungarian Jews found out that there were work battalions in our train, but on every stop they brought us food: bread, tinned meat and boiled chicken. We never asked for food, but they were only happy to give it to us. We were going through Uzhgorod. My family got to know about us and came to the railway station, but I only saw my sister. She managed to get to my railcar and gave me a basket with food. My mother, father and brother saw me only from afar.

In Uzhok we were accommodated in Ukrainian houses. There were 11 of us in the house. There were two rooms and a Russian stove 6 with a stove bench in one room. The father of the owner of this house was lying on this bench. The owner and his wife had four children: two girls of 10-12 years of age and two little children. We, 11 workers of our work battalion, dwelled in another room of 10-11 square meters. We slept on homemade rugs on the ground floor. We went to construct bunkers in the forest on a hill slope every day. We were to climb up about 800 meters to the work site. There were planks down the hill. Two of us carried an 8 m long plank on our shoulders up the hill. The walls of the bunker were planked. We dug a pit: 17 m long, 6 m wide and 4 m deep. It was hard work. There were layers of soil and layers of rock that we broke with picks and crowbars.

There were 6-7 workers and 2 Hungarian guards on each site.

Our guards took turns every two hours to warm up. One of them called Szegedi was a rough man. He always yelled at us and even beat us if we failed to complete our one-day scope of work. It was cold and there was a thick layer of snow in the mountains. When the pit was ready we planked the floor and walls. Then we installed planks to make the roof on the ground level and covered it with tarred paper. Inside we made plank beds for four people. After we built few bunkers we were sent to cut wood. Few crews were accommodated in Finnish huts near the jobsite. There was a round steel stove in each hut and we took one tree with us after work. We made a fire and one person had to be on duty all night to watch it burning. If the stove went down it was freezing half an hour after.

We were not allowed to correspond with our families. We didn't know whether they were alive or not. Local residents told us that in 1944 all Jews in Subcarpathia were ordered to wear yellow stars on their clothes [editors note: yellow stars – hexagonal star of David, a Jewish symbol. Fascists forced Jews to wear these stars for Jewish identification in all ghettos and concentration camps]. We didn't wear yellow stars, but in February 1944 we were ordered to wear yellow armbands. There were Neologs and more religious Jews among us, but we were not allowed to observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. Our Hungarian guards didn't even allow us to speak Yiddish. It wasn't a problem for me since I was used to speaking Hungarian at home. Many Jews, particularly those from villages, preferred to speak Yiddish.

There were no combat actions in the vicinity of Uzhok. Later, when Hungarian troops were crossing Uzhok, in February 1944 we were taken to Sobrance in 22 km from Uzhgorod. We were lucky staying in the mountains since few work battalions were sent to the front in Ukraine. They were to dig trenches and prepare combat positions for Hungarian and German troops. Hardly any of them survived. Our battalion worked near a health center built near mineral water streams. Hungarians wanted to use this center for recovery of their military after release from hospitals. We installed sewerage and laid pipelines. There was no construction equipment and we had to make trenches in frozen soil. However, after construction of bunkers this work did not seem too hard for us. There were few abandoned Jewish houses in Sobrance. We were accommodated there. Few of us accommodated in a shed that we cleaned from manure and dirt. It was warm enough. We slept on heaps of straw. There were straw and hay stocks for cows in the attic and we had straw to replace it often to have no bugs or lice.

My fiancée Maria continued to work as a cook in the restaurant. From Sobrance I managed to send my family and her letters through a Slovakian farmer. A Hungarian supervisor of our camp often went to have dinner in Bercsenyi restaurant and Maria met him and asked him to issue her a pass to our camp. Sobrance was guarded by Hungarian gendarmes and it was impossible to get there without a pass. Maria visited me several times bringing me food and letters from my family. We talked or just sat silent holding hands. For me those infrequent meetings were a part of my peaceful life in the past and they gave me strength. My sister Ella's fiancé Stepan Baksa also visited me. He had his uniform on working in the customs. He went to the commandant of the camp telling him that I was his brother-in-law and asked him to be kind to me. Stepan often brought me parcels from home and told me what was going on there. He said that war would be

over soon and he and Ella would get married.

I had a golden medallion with my family photograph and a ring. I was afraid that someone would steal them or that the Hungarians would take them away. Once a Hungarian soldier from our camp was going to Uzhgorod and I asked him to take these to Maria. One Hungarian officer saw me giving him something. They searched him asking who had sent him. I came there and said these were my things and that I didn't send him, but just asked him to give these to my fiancée. The officer began to ask me how much I paid him. I said I didn't pay him. He didn't believe me and ordered to hang me on a tree by my hand. It hurt and when I tried to grab a branch with another hand a Hungarian gendarme whipped me. Some time later I stopped feeling any pain in my hand. All passing farmers could see me. Many of them knew Maria. One villager went to tell her what happened. Maria came to Sobrance with him. I had been hanging for over two hours and was unconscious. My arm was bleeding. When Maria arrived I was lying in the yard and they were pouring water on me. They told Maria that I was alive. When I opened my eyes I saw her. A doctor seamed my arm and applied bandage. Few days later they sent me back to work. The officer that gave this order to hang me couldn't go out for over a week. The moment Slovakian villagers saw him they started throwing stones on him. This was not a single occurrence. There were cruel punishments and sometimes people died.

In April 1944 local farmers told us that all Uzhgorod Jews were taken to a brick factory and then to concentration camps in Poland. I asked Maria to let me know about my family and she said that had been taken to a concentration camp a long time before. Nobody knew those were death camps. We thought they were work camps.

We were taken to work to other villages. In Skole [100 km from Uzhgorod, 680 km from Kiev] we made tunnels and later soldiers installed explosives in them. Then we were taken to Kosice to install concrete tubes in trenches and explosives were also put inside them. Then we did various work and dug trenches. We were slowly moving in the direction of Austria. Finally we reached Austria in August 1944. We also made trenches moving across Austria staying overnight wherever guarded by Hungarian gendarmes. In October 1944 we were transferred under the German command. It happened in Austria near the Alps. Our guards were young Germans from the Hitlerjugend 7. Their commanding officer was from the SS. We were going across the Alps. Other work battalions were joining us on the way. We didn't know where we were going. We thought, we would be doing other work. We walked in the daytime and slept on the ground at night. Many people perished on the way. If the guards saw that somebody was exhausted and couldn't go on they killed them. At first they stopped to bury the dead, but later they didn't care. They pushed corpses away from the road. We were walking fast almost running. We ran out of food that we had with us, but they didn't give us food any longer. Every two days we made a short stop and a truck delivered some thin soup and bread.

Boys from the Hitlerjugend were bored and looked for entertainment. Once we stopped in the dusk near a village. Boys from Hitlerjugend climbed a hill and began to shoot at us. We didn't do anything bad to be punished. They were just competing in who was the most accurate shooter. I lay on the ground, but many others were standing. They killed over 100 people. Nobody removed the corpses. In the morning we went on. By the time we crossed the Alps we were exhausted. Some were falling and guards were shooting at them. It was dark and we were walking on corpses

not seeing them. There was a river flowing at the bottom and they pushed copses into it. We came down in the morning and were allowed to take a rest. It was light and we saw corpses in the river. I saw a man I knew. He was walking beside me on the march. He had a jacket with prominent buttons and I knew it was him by these buttons.

Then we moved on and the SS troopers transferred us to German gendarmes. They took us to a square in a town. We didn't know its name. They gave us food: a loaf of bread for 10 people and a bowl of soup. Gendarmes poured soup into casseroles from a huge bowl and then walked along the line of people sitting on the ground pouring soup to them. When they passed me I went back to the bowl and scooped some more soup with my mug. I went back when a German officer saw me. He hit me on my face over the left brow with his gun. I started bleeding, but I didn't drop my mug and ran away. He didn't go after me. I shared my soup with the others. Few years later my sight in my left eye grew worse and when I went to a doctor he said that it resulted from that injury that damaged a nerve.

We walked from morning till night. One day American planes flew by. We came to Mauthausen concentration camp. We stayed there few days. The Soviet army was advancing on one side and American troops were coming from the other. Groups of 500 people began to be taken to Gunskirchen concentration camp. It was in the woods. There 6 or 7 barracks for 800 hundred inmates, but they forced about 1500 of us in them. It's hard to imagine now how two of us fit on plank beds for one. I made friends with a guy from Mukachevo and another one from Budapest. We were the same age. We were in the same barrack and tried to stick together. Once a day we were given some junk food consisting of some slop water and rotten beetroots. Sometimes there was a piece of cabbage. We were given one loaf of bread for ten of us for a day. I don't know whether there was flour in this bread, but there was sawdust for sure. It didn't cut, but crumbled. We were allowed to leave barracks at certain time. There were containers with water outside. It was dangerous to drink this water: almost all who dank it fell ill with enteric fever.

There was a toilet for 10-15 people, but all inmates of a barrack were taken to the toilet at the same time. It even happened that some inmates dirtied their clothes failing to wait until it was their turn. It was not allowed to step aside or leave barracks at unscheduled time. The camp was surrounded with towers with guards with weapons on them. They started shooting if they saw an inmate coming out of a barrack at the wrong time. This was not all: there were also patrol dogs in the camp running across the camp watching that inmates didn't leave their barracks. 5-6 attacked a person like wolves pushing him down. We were so weak that we couldn't fight back, but I don't think that even a healthy man would be able to do something. Through the windows we saw dogs tearing people apart. It was scary. They dropped corpses into a swamp near the camp. If somebody died inside a barrack we pushed a corps out through the window and then they took it away from the yard. It's hard to say how many corpses there were in this swamp. Maybe more than water.

So we lived few months. We didn't know what day or month it was. At first I tried to count days making scratches beside my plank bed, but then I lost count. There were air raids of American and Soviet air forces. Our guards lived in separate barrack quarters. The planes bombed their barracks, but not a single bomb fell on our barracks. During air raids guards were hiding in the forest, but we were not allowed to leave our barracks. Finally the morning of 6th May 1945 came when we woke

up in the morning and didn't hear any guards' voices or dogs barking. It was unusually quiet in the camp. Few hours later American soldiers came to the camp. We ran out of barracks and began to hug them. Now I understand that such passionate welcome was an ordeal for Americans: we hadn't washed or changed underwear or clothes for a long time, but we didn't think about it at that time. Our rescue came. Americans told us that the war was over and that fascist Germany capitulated.

The Americans saw that we were starved and cooked macaroni with tinned meat. They wished us best, but they didn't know that starved people couldn't digest rich heavy food. I knew a little about it since I studied diets in trade school. So I told my friends that we were not to eat what Americans cooked for us. We crumbled some bread and added boiling water into our mugs. I also tried to tell the others, but they didn't listen to me. The smell from the bowl with meat fuddled our minds and I took a huge effort to stay away from them. So we ate our bread and didn't touch meat and macaroni. Few hours later those who ate meat suffered from stomach pain and in the evening many of them died. It was terrifying to look at the living ones: they were sitting still with their eyes dilated not seeing anything. Only their moaning indicated they were still alive.

The Americans made the lists asking each inmate where he was from and where he wanted to go from the camp. I said I was a citizen of Czechoslovakia and that I wanted to go home in Subcarpathia. The American making the lists spoke Czech. He told me that Subcarpathia didn't belong to Czechoslovakia or Hungary any longer and that it had been transferred to the USSR. He offered me to go to the US saying that they would help me to find a job, accommodation and medical treatment and give me an allowance. I refused. I was eager to go home and I was sure that my dear ones were also liberated from camps and that they returned home. Besides, Maria was waiting for me in Uzhgorod. My friend from Mukachevo also decided to return home. We had a vague idea of what the USSR was like at all, but we understood that if the soviet army was fighting against fascists then it had to be a very good country and we would have a good life there. They tried to talk us out of it, but our decision was firm.

We stayed in the camp few days while the lists were developed. Americans provided good food: chicken meat, vegetables, white bread, butter and coffee with milk. However, probably this swamp with decomposing corps was a source of infection. Many of us, including three of us, fell ill with typhus. I had high fever, I lost my hair and couldn't see. Then my typhus developed into enteric fever. There was a hospital in the town, but we were afraid of going there. There was German personnel in it. There were rumors that they added poison to medications. Many patients were dying in this hospital. Perhaps, they were dying of diseases and exhaustion, but we were not sure. We were more afraid of the hospital than we were of typhus. The Americans had a medical unit. We went there and they gave us medications. We stayed in the barrack. Many inmates had left and there was lot of space. We were ill for almost a month before we recovered. An American cook made broth and cereals for us. He brought us food in the barrack. I could explain myself in English that I studied in the trade school. My English improved a lot when I talked with Americans. Americans were friendly and sympathetic to us.

When we recovered they took us to another town. I don't remember its name. We were accommodated in a hotel in the airport. Czech officers came to drive us on vehicles to a small town. From there Czechs went to Prague and we were taken to Melk. Russian officers were waiting for us there. They gave us tickets to Uzhgorod and food for the road. We went to Uzhgorod via

Vienna and Bratislava. I decided to visit Bratislava. My father's sister Regina Militke lived there. I hoped to hear something about my family from her. I easily found my aunt. She and her husband lived at the same place. Her son Otto had just returned from the army. He was a doctor in the Czechoslovakian Corps. When Regina and her husband moved to Bratislava, Otto stayed in Brno. When World War II began students of the third year of studies and senior went to the front where they were assistant military doctors. Otto was at the front through the whole war. My aunt worked in a state hospital. She was one of the best cardiologists in Bratislava and rescued many people from death. When Jews began to be taken to camps and there were posters ordering them to come to appointed locations with their luggage, chief doctor of her hospital convinced my aunt and her husband to not go. They had a non-Jewish surname and didn't look like Jews. My aunt worked throughout the war. They didn't live at home, but stayed in chief doctors' office in the hospital. Although many of the townsfolk knew my aunt, nobody gave her away.

My aunt and her family were very happy to see me. I was happy to see them. This was the first time I met my family members after the war. My aunt didn't know anything about my family. In the evening her acquaintance from Prague came to see my aunt. We met and I told him that I was on my way from a camp. He said that there was a girl in the train who was also returning home from a camp and she mentioned to him that she wanted to find her aunt in Bratislava. Somehow I thought it was my sister Ella. I understood there were many girls returning from camps and they had relatives in Bratislava, but couldn't help thinking that it was Ella. I went to the railway station. I saw my sister in the square in front of the railway station. It was hard to recognize her so thin and exhausted she was. We embraced each other. She didn't know anything about our parents or brother. They were separated in Auschwitz. Ella was sent to Bergen Belsen work camp along with many other girls from Uzhgorod. She was there with our cousin, daughter of my mother's sister Ilona Klein. Ella supported her as much as she could, but the girl was weak. She died in the camp.

Ella didn't know what happened to the others. She wanted to return home. She didn't know anything about her fiancé Stepan, but she hoped that he survived. I kept telling my sister to stay with our aunt in Bratislava and I decided to come back to Bratislava after I found my parents, brother, Maria and Stepan Baksa in Uzhgorod. We agreed on this and on the day of my departure Ella came to the railways station with me. All of a sudden she said that she was going with me. We didn't know then that we would never be able to come back to Bratislava. We went home together. The bridge across the Uzh River was destroyed and we had to cross the river. There were other tenants in our house. We stayed with our acquaintances looking for our family. Some Jews had come back from concentration camps. My cousin Vojceh Klein, my mother's sister's, Ilona's son, was home. From Auschwitz he was sent to a camp somewhere in Yugoslavia where they mined for lead. Vojceh survived, but he was very ill. He was lead poisoned and died of it in 1950. He told us that my parents and Ilona and her younger daughter perished in gas chambers in Auschwitz.

Ilona's husband Ignac Klein died in a work battalion. We had no information about our younger brother Stepan. Once we met a woman who had lived near our former home. She said she worked as a servant in Poland during the war and she saw our brother in Krakow. She asked him whether he was going to return home and he said there was no reason for him to go home since he believed that his dear ones had probably perished. Then my sister happened to talk to another woman who was in a concentration camp in Poland. She told my sister that she saw our brother in a barrack before Russians came to their rescue. He was making a coat for the senior man of a barrack. She

knew that his name was Stepan and he came from Uzhgorod. We began searching for him through the Red Cross. There was no information coming from then and later we terminated this search. Soviet authorities didn't appreciate of searches for relatives living abroad 8, but I incline to think that he perished in a camp or he would have found the way to let us know that he was alive.

We found my sister's fiancé Stepan Baksa. When we arrived he wasn't in Uzhgorod. His mother told Ella that Stepan was in Budapest and would return soon. When he returned they got married. Ella and Stepan had two children. Their daughter Yekaterina was born in 1952 and son Andrey - in 1956. Ella returned to work in the same hairdresser's where she worked before the war. Stepan worked in the customs. In the late 1980s after Stepan died Ella and her family went to Kosice in Czechoslovakia. Her whole life in the USSR Ella regretted having made a decision to move to Subcarpathia with me which deprived her of an opportunity to leave the USSR. She continued to identify herself as a Czechoslovak, although she received a Soviet passport. It was hard to live on her pension of a hairdresser. Ella thought that Czechoslovakia had higher standards of living than the USSR and that she and the children would do better there. Fortunately for my sister in the late 1980s perestroika 9 began, and citizens of the USSR got an opportunity to travel abroad for the first time in their history. She died in Kosice in 1996 a and her children live there. We still keep in touch with them.

Of course, I met with Maria as soon as I arrived in Uzhgorod. She was waiting for me through these three years. We got married in July 1945. It goes without saying that we didn't have a Jewish wedding. We Reginastered our marriage in a Reginastry office and invited our friends to dinner in the evening in Maria parents' home. She worked as a cook in the former Bercsenyi restaurant that was now called 'Ruta' [means rue]. I went to work there as a waiter. I heard about the terrible fate of one of the Szilagyi brothers, a former owner of this restaurant. He owned big underground storage facilities located in a town park. It was a real underground labyrinth and of course, Szilagyi knew all entrances and exits. When in 1944 Jews began to be deported from Uzhgorod he decided to take shelter there. Somebody reported on him and gendarmes came after him. They beat him severely and he was more dead than alive when they carried him into a railcar. He, his brother and sister and their families perished in Auschwitz.

When we returned to Uzhgorod my sister and I went to our home. There were other tenants there: a husband and wife. We had documents proving our ownership, but they were in the house and we couldn't get in. I didn't know Soviet laws and I didn't know that I could claim for our apartment and belongings. I went to an executive office [Ispolkom] 10 where they told me that this new tenant man was a partisan and they were not going to make him move out of there. My father's acquaintance who knew me when I was a child gave me a room in his apartment. My wife came to live with me there after the wedding. When I went to work in the Ruta restaurant a waiter from there suggested that I move into his apartment. 11 There was one room and a kitchen. He got married and moved in his wife's flat, and I stayed in his flat. I didn't have anything: no furniture or household things. We had to start from scratch. Our children were born and grew up in this apartment.

There was too little space for the four of us. I had little hope to receive a dwelling: the executive committee gave apartments to those who arrived from the USSR. I was thinking of building a house, but I didn't have money to implement this plan. We started saving money to build a house,

but then I happened to hear that an old woman was selling one half of her house. I went to look at the house and I liked it. The owner didn't charge much, but there was a condition that she lived in one room till she died. My wife and I agreed. There was another tenant who rented a room from the owner. I gave him my apartment where we lived and then we finally bought the house where we live now. The house is near the center in Bercsenyi Street. There were two rooms and a kitchen in our part of the house and the hostess lived in the third room. We moved in and began to put 0the house in order.

We repaired the house gradually, one room and then the kitchen and then we built another room. There was a tiled stove in each room. In the late 1950s, when gas pipeline was installed in Uzhgorod we had gas heating in the rooms, but we didn't destroy the stoves. They were so beautiful. We sometimes stoke them. They bring such a feeling of comfort. There was a big orchard near the house. When construction of nearby houses began the garden became smaller, but even now its 1000 square meters big. When the children were small my wife took care of the garden. Now it has become our son's favorite pastime. He is a biologist/botanist and grows new sorts of fruit and berry trees in our garden. There are many flowers in the garden. Now Maria and I rarely go out and the garden is our favorite spot for rest.

Our great grandson Andras likes spending time there. At home my wife and I speak Russian or Slovak and my children, grandchildren and even my great grandson have a good conduct of Hungarian. I like speaking Hungarian in my family. When hearing the sounds of the language of my childhood I recall my childhood and my family. It is very sad, but pleasant.

Soviet laws didn't allow moving to another country at that time. We had to get adjusted to life in the soviet country. I worked in the Ruta restaurant for a few months. There was my resume in the human resource department where I mentioned that I studied in a trade school. The district Party committee offered me a position of director of a 'stolovaya' [canteen] for governmental officials: employees of the Reginaonal Party committee and directors of plants, about 200 high level officials in total. Of course, it's hard to explain now what it was like, but in the USSR there were many such canteens. There were no outside visitors allowed: visitors needed special permits and there were guards at the entrance.

These canteens were funded separately and delicacies that were often not to be found in expensive restaurants cost very inexpensive there. My wife went to work there as a cook and I became its director. Maria was a senior cook and had two assistants under her supervision. Although there was famine in Ukraine in 1947-48 there was enough food in the diner. A loaf of bread cost 500 rubles at the market, more than I earned in half month. I received for the diner 2 kilograms of bread, American tinned meat, fish, huge smoked mutton bulks from Greece, French butter, cheeses, etc. People never saw such products in all their lives. There was a lot of food left, particularly bread, and personnel was allowed to take leftovers home. Our visitors would have never eaten bread from yesterday.

When I worked as director in 1949 I was recommended to join the party. In those years it always had a great importance, particularly for high positioned officials. I submitted an application for admission to the district Party committee. There was a meeting where I told about my biography. They approved my documents. After my candidateship term was over I asked the district

committee when they were going to admit me and an official replied that the secretary of the district Party committee didn't like something in my biography and he was against my admission. I didn't insist or try to prove anything.

Some time later my management notified me that I was working very well and the diner improved, but there was another person to replace me as director. He had higher education and was a member of the Party. Of course, besides not being a member of the Party, perhaps, my Jewish nationality mattered here as well, but nobody pronounced it. But they did mention that the new director was a member of the party. They offered me the position of administrator in the diner, but I refused. There were many new cafes opened at that time. I was offered a facility that they authorized me to refurbish for a café. My wife and I decided to work together: she would work in the kitchen and I would take care of the bar. We had cold snacks, cakes and coffee on the menu.

Maria had everything made before the café opened and later she only made coffee. I received orders and issued checks and in the morning I helped Maria to do the shopping. We had permanent visitors. Many people ordered cake delivery to their homes, for a party or just for weekends. They said that not every housewife could make such delicious cakes as my wife did.

My wife and I had few friends. We were friends before the war and we made some new friends too. Most of them were Jews and there were some Hungarians and Slovaks. Maria and I had bikes. On weekends we went out of town or to the riverbank with friends. We also liked going to theaters and to the cinema. In winter we went skiing.

Our first daughter Yudita was born in 1950, when my wife and I worked in the hush-hush canteen. [Secret canteens for the communist elite where food was available even during the greatest hardships.] Maria kept working and was taken to the maternity hospital right from her stove. Our second child Stepan, our son named after my brother, was born in 1953, when Maria and I were working in the café. I offered Maria to stay at home in the last months of her pregnancy and I could find a replacement for her, but Maria couldn't entrust her favorite job. And, like it happened the first time, an ambulance arrived at the café to take her to the hospital.

Shortly after my son was born I got a job offer to work in the biggest and most prestigious restaurant and hotel in Uzhgorod: Verkhovina [high hill area]. At first I worked there as a waiter and then I became an administrator. I didn't like this administration job and I went to work as bartender. There were few other employees working in Verkhovina before the war when it was called Korona [Hungarian: Crown]. My colleagues treated me with respect. I worked there until I retired in 1990. Although I wasn't a Party member, in 1955 I became chairman of the trade union unit of the Verkhovina hotel and I held this position till I retired. There were over 200 employees there.

Many people who had moved to Subcarpathia from the USSR told me that they came to a different country with a different way of life. We were like foreigners to them. They admired our stores full of goods, at least, at the beginning, and shop assistants were polite and honest. They admired that there was no rude attitude in the sphere of services. Subcarpathia was a European country during the rule of the Czechs and the Hungarians and everything was European style. They began to cheat in stores 10-15 years after the Soviet power was established when most native residents of

Subcarpathia moved out and were replaced with the citizens of the USSR. Before annexation to the USSR religion was a natural and integral part of everybody's life and people obeyed the law of God while in the USSR practicing religiosity was almost crime 12.

Life here was different from life in the USSR where people lived in barracks and communal apartments, and dreamed about an apartment of their own like about something they could never have while here almost every person could build or buy a house to his liking and capabilities. Before we were annexed to the USSR we never even heard about communal apartments. Since childhood we were taught to help people and take care of the less fortunate than we were. And they were taught that charity was humiliating for its recipients. Sometimes, when I got tired or angry with what those newcomers were saying I said to myself: 'How much good did these people see? They are different. They grew up in different conditions and had different values. Different life, different culture, different principles... I didn't care about what was happening in the USSR and what Soviet people worried about. It had nothing to do with me and I couldn't care less.

I remember how they grieved after Stalin in 1953. It was strange for me to see grown up men crying in the street and that they were not ashamed of their tears. I didn't care about anything else. This was not my life. Only 2 events stirred me up destroying my indifference. This were the intervention of Soviet troops to Hungary in 1956 13 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 [Prague Spring] 14. I was agitated, confused and upset. Probably then I lost all illusions about the USSR. In my opinion, this was real aggression like Hitler's attack. Every country had the right to choose its own ways.

I didn't care about Soviet holidays. We had to celebrate them at work. On 1 May and 7 November [October Revolution Day] 15 my wife and I went to parades in the morning with employees of the Verkhovina restaurant. After the parade there was a banquet for employees in the restaurant. Of course, my wife and I took part in all mandatory ceremonies, but we didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. Those who were born and grew up in the USSR celebrated them, but for us they were days off that we could spend with children and friends. Only Victory Day, on 9 May 16 was my holiday. On this day American soldiers liberated us from concentration camp and on this day this horrible war that had taken away so many lives of my dear ones was over. In the morning our colleagues and we went to the ceremonial meeting and in the evening my wife made dinner and we recalled our dear ones and those who were lost to this war.

After Subcarpathia came under the Soviet rule I didn't observe Jewish traditions. Soviet authorities were intolerant to any religions. Of course, some people continued going to the synagogue when it still operated and celebrated Jewish holidays, but they were older people who had nothing to be afraid of. Those who worked couldn't afford it. They could fire or demote to a lower position, even if a person wasn't a Party member. My children grew up atheists like other Soviet children. They studied in Soviet school and were young octobrists 17, pioneers and Komsomol members 18. Of course, I understood that anti-Semitism came to Subcarpathia at the time of the Soviet rule. I didn't face it: I didn't look like a Jew, but the others told me about prejudiced attitudes toward Jews. Therefore, we chose for our children to be Slovaks like their mother. It was written in their passports. We wanted to keep them safe of routine state-level anti-Semitism and make their future life easier.

The only Jewish tradition that I could observe was charity. It was always an important part of Jewish life and my parents taught me to do charity when I was a child. Jews always helped those who had a more difficult life. I knew three old Jews who knew our family before the war. They returned from work battalions and their families perished in work battalions. Every Friday those three old men came to my work and I gave them money. My wife and I helped them with food products and this lasted until they died.

I never faced anti-Semitism since I didn't look like a Jew and at work they valued me high: I never had financial problems or they never saw me drunk at work. I never allowed myself to have one gram of alcohol at work, though I worked with alcohol. I started work during the Czech rule when one could only cheat once and then nobody would have employed him. It was unacceptable for me and they valued me for this. Besides, I learned to arrange banquets in trade school. I was always asked to make arrangements for banquets even when they were to take place in other restaurants. So, even at the most trying times my management felt more comfortable ignoring the fact that I was a Jew. If they had fired me it would impact business.

I didn’t feel any persecution in the USSR for being a citizen of fascist Hungary. I had a Czech passport [Czechoslovak]. Hungarian rule was short and they never changed our passports to Hungarian ones. I know that ethnic Hungarians in Subcarpathia were often called ‘fascists’, but I never heard anything like that about me.

My wife didn’t want to quit her job to stay at home with the children. She was a cook and was afraid of losing her qualifications. When the children were small we had a baby sitter and when they grew older they took care of themselves. Of course, I couldn’t spend with the children as much time as I wanted. The restaurant was open on weekends too. Whenever I had free time I tried to spend it with my family. We liked walking in Uzhgorod and going to the park, spending time on the outskirts of Uzhgorod and hiking in the mountains. I also spent summer vacations with my family. We went to the Crimea, Caucasus and the Black Sea. We enjoy spending time together. Even when the children grew up and had their own families they went on vacations with us. At home my wife and I spoke Hungarian and sometimes Russian.

After finishing school my older daughter Yudita entered a Communication College. After finishing it she worked at the post office, at the communication department. When during her studies in college she was taking a training course in Lvov [250 km from Uzhgorod, 550 km - from Kiev] she met Shliagerman, a Jew who came from Romania. He taught dentistry in the Lvov Medical University. A year after Yudita finished her college they got married. They had an ordinary wedding. Yudita moved to her husband in Lvov. She didn’t work after she got married. In 1973 their son Eduard was born and in 1975 their daughter Anna was born. In 1990 Yudita and her family moved to Israel. Of course, their life was hard at the beginning, but later things improved. Yudita’s husband worked as a dentist in a polyclinic and then he started his own dentist’s business and Yudita worked as an assistant in his office. They live in Rishon Le Zion. When they began to earn more they bought an apartment. Recently Yudita’s husband quit work due to his poor sight. My granddaughter Anna finished the Stomatological Faculty of Medical University and he gave her his business. Now she works in his office. Anna is married and has a 2-year-old son, my great grandson. Eduard served in the army and got married. He works as an engineer. He also has a son who has turned a year and a half recently.

My son Stepan entered the faculty of Biology of Uzhgorod University after finishing school. He got married when he was a university student. His wife Klavdia is Russian, but I was quiet about my son's choice. Her nationality didn't matter to me. I saw that Klavdia was a nice girl and that they loved one another. Klavdia also studied in the Faculty of Biology. After graduation my son worked as a biologist at the plant selection facility and Klavdia specialized in microbiology. They have a son named Ladislav after me. He was born in 1972. My grandson stepped into his parents' footsteps. He is also a biologist. Ladislav married his Ukrainian co-student Natalia Sergienko when they studied in University. Is also a biologist. Her parents moved to Uzhgorod from somewhere in Eastern Ukraine after World War II. Their son Andras is 6. My son and great grandson live in Uzhgorod. They often come to see us and my wife and I help them to raise our great grandson. Andras is our only great grandson whom we can see whenever we wish and we spend a lot of time with him.

When in the 1970s Jews began to move to Israel, many of my friends and acquaintances left there. However, some of them just gave in to some burst of feelings. I thought about emigration, but I am not used to be guided by emotions. I like to give anything a goof thought. We had good work and a nice house here. I couldn't even think about selling our house for peanuts and leave it to strangers. Why start something new when we were all right here? I thought it over and talked with my wife. We decided that when our children grew up they would decide whether they wanted to go there, but there is no reason for us to go. We would hardly find a job there and people do not give up everything and start life anew at our age.

About 80% of Jews left Subcarpathia then. Newcomers from the Soviet Ukraine came here instead. It was hard to tell whether there were Jews among them. It wasn't a custom here for Jews to change their surnames to conceal their nationality. My great grandfather was Roth, so was my grandfather, my father and I am Roth, my son is Roth, my grandson is Roth and so is my great grandson. The newcomers had non-Jewish surnames: Zhukovskiy, Smolianskiy, etc. In 70 years people got used to the fact that it wasn't safe to be a Jew. They refused to confess that they were Jews. Only recently when Hesed was established they began to sign up as Jews. It has become advantageous to be Jews. It seems, there are only 13 native Jews left in Uzhgorod.

When perestroika began in the USSR, I didn't care like I didn't about many other things happening in the USSR. There were promises about bright future and life in communism. We were told once that people lived a better and happier life in the USSR than elsewhere in the world. Of course, many who were born during the Soviet rule never saw anything different. There was a reason why residents of the USSR were not allowed to travel abroad: Soviet officials didn't want them to see life abroad with their own eyes and could compare things afterward and they fenced the USSR for many decades with iron curtain 19. To make this long story short, I didn't believe one word Gorbachev 20 said, but later I made sure that those were not sheer promises. There is more freedom.

People could speak their minds not being afraid of KGB or informers. Mass media published many materials describing the situation in the USSR through all these years. It became possible to travel abroad or invite relatives from abroad. Anti-Semitism began to reduce at that time. It became easier for Jews to enter a college or get a job. Jewish life began to restore. It became possible to

openly go to the synagogue or celebrate Jewish holidays, but people didn't need it any longer. They lost their habits. When there was a Jewish funeral they couldn't even gather 10 people for a minyan. Almost 50 years of the soviet rule broke the habit of religion. People felt subconsciously rather than in their minds that it wasn't safe to be religious.

The Jewish life began to improve after Ukraine announced independence. When in 1999 Hesed was established in Uzhgorod, it became easier for Jews to live. Hesed takes care of us. We receive food and medications and those who need medical treatment can get it free in the hospital of Hesed. Hesed involves younger people and adults and children in the Jewish life and gives them opportunity to study the Jewish history, religion and traditions. However, when Hesed was established there appeared to be about 600 Jews in Uzhgorod. Where did they come from? Many Jews perished during World War II. Over 200 of my contemporaries were taken away from Uzhgorod and only 6 of them came back. It's hard to imagine how many people in total were taken away: younger and older than me. When it became advantageous to be a Jew they forgot that they had concealed their Jewish identity for many decades. I don't think they are Jews.

If you are a Jew why don't you go to the synagogue? Why do you become a Jew only when you are going to receive something? Even recently only 10-15 people came to the synagogue. Now there are many more and young people begin to observe Jewish traditions. It is undoubtedly an accomplishment of Hesed. I have attended the synagogue for five years. On Friday I go there alone and then my grandson comes to take me home. I also celebrate holidays in Hesed. Of course, this is my tribute to traditions since I haven't become religious, but I try to take part in the Jewish life and Jewish community. I've always identified myself as a Jew and have been proud of it. My son, grandson and great grandson also attend Hesed. When I ask my 6-year-old great grandson to say 'Hallo' to me he shouts with joy 'Shalom'. And when I ask him who he is Andras says proudly: 'Jew!'.

Glossary:

1 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie): Reginaon situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The Reginaonal capitals are Uzhgorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919. It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population. In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the Reginaon, was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944. In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The Reginaon became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the Reginaon became an administrative Reginaon under the name of Transcarpathia.

2 Neolog Jewry: Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was supposed to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into to (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network. The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

3 First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938): The First Czechoslovak Republic was created after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy following World War I. The union of the Czech lands and Slovakia was officially proclaimed in Prague in 1918, and formally recognized by the Treaty of St. Germain in 1919. Ruthenia was added by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Czechoslovakia inherited the greater part of the industries of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new government carried out an extensive land reform, as a result of which the living conditions of the peasantry increasingly improved. However, the constitution of 1920 set up a highly centralized state and failed to take into account the issue of national minorities, and thus internal political life was dominated by the struggle of national minorities (especially the Hungarians and the Germans) against Czech rule. In foreign policy Czechoslovakia kept close contacts with France and initiated the foundation of the Little Entente in 1921.

4 Trianon Peace Treaty: Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on 4th June 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries concerned. The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary). The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia). Hungary lost 67.3% of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4% of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian Reginames.
5 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary: Following similar legislation in Nazi Germany, Hungary enacted three Jewish laws in 1938, 1939 and 1941. The first law restricted the number of Jews in industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and in certain occupations, such as legal, medical and engineering professions, and journalism to 20% of the total number. This law defined Jews on the basis of their religion, so those who converted before the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, as well as those who fought in World War I, and their widows and orphans were exempted from the law. The second Jewish law introduced further restrictions, limiting the number of Jews in the above fields to 6%, prohibiting the employment of Jews completely in certain professions such as high school and university teaching, civil and municipal services, etc. It also forbade Jews to buy or sell land and so forth. This law already defined Jews on more racial grounds in that it regarded baptized children that had at least one non-converted Jewish parent as Jewish. The third Jewish law prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and defined anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent as Jewish.

6 Russian stove: Big stone stove stoked with wood. They were usually built in a corner of the kitchen and served to heat the house and cook food. It had a bench that made a comfortable bed

for children and adults in wintertime.

7 Hitlerjugend: The youth organization of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP). In 1936 all other German youth organizations were abolished and the Hitlerjugend was the only legal state youth organization. From 1939 all young Germans between 10 and 18 were obliged to join the Hitlerjugend, which organized after-school activities and political education. Boys over 14 were also given pre-military training and girls over 14 were trained for motherhood and domestic duties. After reaching the age of 18, young people either joined the army or went to work.

8 Keep in touch with relatives abroad: The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

9 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring): Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

10 Ispolkom: After the tsar's abdication (March, 1917), power passed to a Provisional Government appointed by a temporary committee of the Duma, which proposed to share power to some extent with councils of workers and soldiers known as 'soviets'. Following a brief and chaotic period of fairly democratic procedures, a mixed body of socialist intellectuals known as the Ispolkom secured the right to 'represent' the soviets. The democratic credentials of the soviets were highly imperfect to begin with: peasants - the overwhelming majority of the Russian population - had virtually no say, and soldiers were grossly over-represented. The Ispolkom's assumption of power turned this highly imperfect democracy into an intellectuals' oligarchy.

11 Communal apartment: The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

12 Struggle against religion: The 1930s was a time of anti-religion struggle in the USSR. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue or to church. Places of worship, statues of saints, etc. were removed; rabbis, Orthodox and Roman Catholic priests disappeared behind KGB walls.

13 1956: It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest started in which Stalin's gigantic statue was destroyed. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union

withdrew its troops which had been stationing in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's announcement that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the rising on 4th November and mass repression and arrests started. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy, and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989, the fall of the communist Reginame, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

14 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.

15 October Revolution Day: October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

16 Victory Day in Russia (9th May): National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

17 Young Octobrist: In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

18 Komsomol: Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

19 Iron Curtain: A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

20 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-): Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and

perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People’s Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party’s control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.