

# Dr. Gabor Lazar

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Kovaszna

Romania

Interviewer: Emo Major

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*Dr. Gabor Lazar and his wife live in Kovaszna, in a storied house they built by their own efforts.*

*They both gave me a warm welcome, I was even given a bag of apples when saying goodbye.*

*Gabor Lazar is a helpful, open person, he has a large sphere of interest, though since his retirement he takes the most pleasure and time in going into Esperanto.*

*He is a member of the Universal Esperanto Association, moreover, he is the Romanian representative of the Esperanto Universal Medical Association, and he publishes articles regularly in the International Medical Journal.*



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## • Family background

Our family on my father's side was Sephardi; they were Spanish Jews, who were expelled from Spain [1](#). They drifted, then settled here in Transylvania [2](#). My paternal grandfather, Jeno Lazar was a bailiff, a land-agent in Patohaza [in Romanian Potau, 22 km east of Szatmarnemeti], which is in the region of Szatmar [short for Szatmarnemeti, in Romanian Satu Mare].

There was an estate where my paternal grandfather was employed, where they were involved in agriculture. Then at some point after World War I, during the 1920s, they moved from there to Szatmar, where they bought a house.

My paternal grandmother was Jozefa Stein, the family called her Pepi. I can't relate anything good about the old woman, because she set her sons against each other all the time, causing the family many problems. So I don't have any good memories of my paternal grandmother.

My paternal grandparents were Orthodox Jews, religious people: my grandmother had her hair cut, and she wore a wig all the time. They followed the laws of the kashrut, and like us they had

animals slaughtered by the shochet.

My grandfather was a very skillful man. He did the cooking, the shopping, he did everything. My grandmother was in poor health; she went to the doctor all the time as she was diabetic, she had cardiac disease, she had many complaints. They didn't have a servant, my grandfather did everything in the house.

He died suddenly at the age of 76 but could move perfectly well until then, he was never ill. He went out on a Friday to the local market to do the shopping, to buy vegetables etc. When he came home, he said, 'Pepi, I don't feel well.' He laid down on the couch and was dead in an hour.

He must have had a heart attack. That's how he died, that's what my grandmother told us. He was buried that very day, as for Jews it is compulsory to bury someone on a Friday because of Sabbath. He's buried in the Orthodox cemetery in Szatmarnemeti.

After that, my grandmother's children took care of her until she was deported in 1944 with all her family, everybody. She died there in Auschwitz, together with her children and their families.

Everybody was deported and died in Auschwitz, except for two cousins: Anna Lazar, who came back to Szatmar; and Miklos Farkas, who also came back. Nobody else survived from the family on my father's side.

My father Jozsef was the eldest of his siblings. After him came two brothers, Lajos and Sandor, then two sisters, Laura and Ilona. They had one more brother, who died at a young age and is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Szatmar. I don't know his exact name, as the family always called him Lali or Lalika.

Lajos Lazar was a landowner in a village close to Szatmarnemeti, in Szamoskorod [in Romanian Corod, 12 km south-east of Szatmarnemeti]. His wife was called Laura and they had a daughter, Anna. She was the only one of my father's family who returned from deportation.

Anna Lazar became Anna Weisz when she got married after the war [World War II] in Szatmar; she and her husband then left for Israel, where she still lives. Her husband has since died. Sandor Lazar never married; he lived in Szatmarnemeti with his parents and assisted his brother, Lajos Lazar in farming.

The third oldest sibling was a girl named Laura. She got married in the Avas, in a village called Turc [in Romanian Turt, 38 km north-east of Szatmarnemeti], which was famous for its plum brandy.

[The Avas or Avassag, in Romanian Tara Oasului (the Land of Oasa) is a depression opening to the plain, in the historical Szatmar county, at the foot of the Oasului Hills. In the Middle Ages its villages belonged to the estate of the royal fortress of Szatmarnemeti. Its population is mainly Romanian. Its Romanian name (Oas) comes from the Hungarian name (Avas).] Laura's husband was called Samuel Farkas.

Their son, Miklos Farkas, who also came back after World War II, did forced labor. Miklos lived in Szatmar after the war, then he emigrated with his family to America in the 1960s. He had three children who still live in America, but he has since died.

Miklos had a sister called Ibolya, who was married to a doctor, Dr. Ferenc Rosensamen; they lived in Szinervaralja [in Romanian Seini, 33 km east of Szatmarnemeti], and had two children, twins, who were ultimately deported together with their mother.

They too were deported from Szatmar, because everybody was gathered there from the surrounding villages. They died there. Dr. Ferenc Rosensamen returned after being deported, and then went abroad.

The youngest sibling was a girl called Ilona who we knew as Ilonka; she was married to Ignac Katz and they didn't have any children. They lived in Temesvar [a city in the Banat region of western Romania], and when the Second Vienna Dictate [3](#) was pronounced, they came home to Szatmar, and ended up being deported from there. If they had stayed in Temesvar, and hadn't returned to Northern-Transylvania, they wouldn't have been deported.

My father, Jozsef Lazar, was born in 1891, in Nagybanya [in Romanian Baia Mare]. He had a final examination certificate, which showed that he graduated from a school of commerce. He was a bank clerk in Szatmar when he was young; then, when a common army [4](#) was established for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during World War I, he enrolled there as a first lieutenant and fought throughout the World War.

He fought on all front-lines, starting from Galicia [5](#), Romania and Serbia, and they occupied Bucharest as well; there's a place to the north-west of Bucharest called Gaesti, where he was a town-mayor. During retreat he withdrew with the Austro-Hungarian troops, which is how he got to Hungary.

Since he knew it would reflect badly on him in the eyes of the Romanian authorities that he had been a town-mayor in Gaesti, he didn't return for a few years, and instead settled in Hungary.

My father had many medals; Franz Joseph [6](#) even gave him a retirement deed, awarding him a pension which would have enabled him to live carefree. But the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy failed, so nothing came of it. My father had 48 wounds, he even lost one eye. Thus he was a war invalid, so he at least received a disability pension.

In those times there were large estates, and as my father was good at farming, he became a bailiff near Nagyecsed [a town in Eastern Hungary], at Zsirospuszta, looking after an estate in the fens of Ecsed, while the owner called Forray lived in Budapest. Forray had three land agents, one of whom was my father, and another was Moricz Vertes, the husband of one my mother's elder sisters. My parents met each other there, when my mother was visiting her sister, Malvin.

My maternal grandparents, Karoly and Veronka Groszman, lived in a large village, in Szakoly [in Eastern Hungary], near Nagykallo. There was another large estate, where my grandfather was the bailiff. After that they moved to Debrecen [the second largest city in Hungary after Budapest], I think in the 1930s.

I remember visiting them in that village, in Szakoly, but then I have memories of them as living in Debrecen. They lived in a small street in Debrecen, called Zsak Street. The house was bought by Moricz Vertes, and my grandparents lived there with him and his family. They were already old, and I suppose my grandfather had some saved money, and they lived off it.

They observed religion, but they weren't quite Orthodox. My maternal grandmother didn't cover her hair. We moved to Romania, so we weren't really in contact with the maternal side of my family. I can only say that we, the grandchildren, very much loved our maternal grandparents, they were very good people.

Thankfully my maternal grandparents were deported from Debrecen to Austria; they were in concentration camps, but they didn't end up in the gas chambers. When they returned from deportation, they went home to Debrecen, and lived there until their death.

[Most of the Jews from Debrecen weren't taken to Auschwitz, but to Strasshof, which was a transit camp near Vienna, Austria; from there the deported persons were sent to different workplaces. One had a real chance to survive Strasshof, likewise the different industrial and agricultural places to which they were sent to work from there.] They lived with one of my aunts, Erzsebet Laszlo [Erzsike], who looked after them until they died in around 1949-1950. They were about 80 years old, and were buried in Debrecen.

There were five children in my mother's family. First was Malvin, then Rebeka, then Erzsebet, then my mother Sara, and lastly Jenő; he was the only boy. Malvin's husband was Moricz Vertes, they magyarized their name [J](#). They lived in Zsirospuszta [in Hungary], her husband was a bailiff, a land-agent there, my mother and father met at their house.

They had a daughter, who lived in Mateszalka [a large town in Eastern Hungary], whose husband was a doctor; they died following deportation. I didn't know them. They also had a son, Andras Vertes. Andras was the director general of a wood company in Budapest after the war [World War II], but he died many years ago. I don't know anything about his family, as we didn't have any contact with them.

The second of the siblings was Erzsebet; her husband was Jozsef Laszlo, they also had a magyarized name. They had two sons, the elder Istvan, the younger Laszlo. Laszlo died in an accident before deportation and is buried in Debrecen. My aunt's husband died before the war. She was the aunt who took care of my grandparents.

After my grandparents died, Erzsebet moved to Budapest with her son, Istvan, and she died there. Istvan, after he came home from forced labor, was an activist in the catering trade union. He was a very upright person, he wasn't married. He died suddenly at the age of 45.

Rebeka lived in Nyiregyhaza [a city in North-east Hungary], where her husband, Lajos Fulop, had a printing shop. They had three daughters, two of whom were deported together with the parents; they all died there. Only one daughter survived, Lilike; she was in Budapest, so they couldn't take her. After the war she left for Israel, and lived in Haifa; she died in 2004.

After my mother came Jenő Groszmann. Jenő changed his surname to Gal. In 1945 the Arrow Cross [8](#) carried him out of Budapest, and he didn't return. His daughter, Agnes Szanto, lives in Budapest. His son, Gyorgy Gal was doing forced labor during World War II, and he also didn't return. My mother was the only one of the siblings who wasn't deported. After the war three cousins were left in Hungary: Istvan Laszlo, Andras Vertes and Agi [Agnes] Groszmann; only Agi is still alive.

My mother, Sara Groszman, was born in 1899 in Nagykallo [a small town in Eastern Hungary], in Szabolcs county. She finished elementary school, I think it had six grades back then.

- **Growing up**

After they got married in 1924, my father was a land agent on a large estate. Then they moved to Hajdunanas [a town in Eastern Hungary] in 1925. In Hajdunanas my father rented a town hotel and restaurant, called 'Bocskay Vendeglo es Szalloda' [Bocskay Restaurant and Hotel].

My brother and I were both born in Hajdunanas. My brother, Istvan Lazar was born in 1925, and I was born in 1929. My father was demanding, so our home was very strict. I can tell you honestly that when my father was at home, we couldn't breathe a word. When he left, well, then we had a good time.

My mother was a very good woman, she loved us very much. I was certainly more attached to her, and she was more attached to me. She was an excellent mother, she loved me very much. What can I say? They raised us, they made men of us.

We moved from Hajdunanas to Debrecen around 1930. My father ran a restaurant there too, 'Kossuth Vendeglo es Szalloda' [Kossuth Restaurant and Hotel], which I remember as a small child. The restaurant and hotel were on the square in front of the central railway station in Debrecen.

We lived there for about three years, but homesickness brought my father home to Romania. His parents were living there, and they lured my father to come home. They persuaded him to buy a small area of land in a village near Szatmar, in Vetes [in Romanian Vetis, 10 km west of Szatmarnemeti].

But their ulterior motive was that he would bring home the money he had saved, buy the land, that my grandparents would run the farm, and we would stay in Hungary. But my father didn't go along with this; he also came and there was a big domestic argument because of this. At the same time, he bought half of the family house from my grandparents.

Thus in 1933-34, when I was about four years old, we came to Romania, but with passports. I spent my childhood in Vetes. We had 20 hectares of land, with cattle, horses, pigs and poultry. We hired a worker, who was a permanent employee; he looked after the animals and helped my father with the everyday farming work. He got an allowance, a salary in kind. The land we had was very good; we grew wheat, barley, oats, maize, potatoes, and fodder for the animals of course.

I lived on our farm until the age of five. But what happened? We also lived for a while in Szatmarnemeti, but only for about a year, because one day my parents were given notice to leave the country within 24 hours, through the 'Sziguranca' [complete Romanian name Siguranta Generala a Statului, i.e. the General State Security], this was the former Romanian Securitate [9](#).

I think some kind of reporting must have played a role in this, since how could the Sziguranca otherwise know who my father was? And the charge was that he had been a town-mayor in Gaesti during World War I. Somebody had recognized him and reported him. There was even an article published about the fact that he had been an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army.

The root cause of the dispute with my grandparents was that when we came to Romania from Hungary, they made my father buy half of their house in Szatmar. There wasn't a problem until my brother started to go to high school, and our parents thought we would move into our house in Szatmar. We got into trouble over this, as my grandparents didn't want us to move there. So in 1936 they sent us away.

We packed up and went back to Hungary, to Debrecen, and stayed in a furnished room on Csok Street. We had to leave so suddenly, we only took a few suitcases with us. We tried to come over to Romania once with my mother; my father didn't dare to come, so my mother and I came to take some more belongings.

We would have tried to settle things, but our names were reported at the frontier at Ermihalyfalva; we were blacklisted, so they prevented us from entering Szatmar. They put us on the next train back to Debrecen. As a war invalid, my father received a higher pension, which is what we were living on in Debrecen.

I remember his pension was increased from 35 to 50 pengó per month as a war invalid. Back then, the pengó was very valuable; 150-200 pengó was a great salary. We lived on the war invalid pension, we sold things too, and the family, the relatives supported us.

In 1938 we moved to a large village called Csenger, which was next to the border, in order to be able to farm. There one could apply for a dual frontier crossing permit issued for landowners, and one could cross over to cultivate the land. My father only had land in Vetes, but even so they issued him a permit.

This gave us an opportunity: the rule was that we came in the morning, and had to go back in the evening, so my father could look after the land. It wasn't far by horseback or on a cart, the frontier is about seven or eight kilometers from Vetes.

I started school in Szatmarnemeti in 1935 and finished the second year of elementary school in the Jewish Gymnasium of Debrecen in 1937. I then attended the local Jewish elementary school in Csenger for third and fourth grade. After I finished elementary school, I spent the first year of grammar school at the Jewish Gymnasium of Debrecen.

We lived in Csenger until 1940, when Miklos Horthy [10](#) marched in on his white horse, then we could return home.

After we came back, my father continued farming. Since my father was a Hungarian citizen, he wasn't allowed to buy land in Romania, and he had been rash enough to give the land over to my paternal grandmother in 1933-34, when he had bought the land in Vetes.

Anti-Jewish laws [11](#) were issued and the land was expropriated; the only thing he managed to achieve was that they expropriated only half of the land; we still had the other half in 1944.

We lived in Vetes for about two years; then we moved to Szatmar because of school and attended the Reformed Gymnasium. And I will tell you now what the circumstances were then. In 1944 the Jews were taken. Prior to that everyone who wasn't reformed had to bring a document to school – which confirmed that they had learned about religion, and which gave them a mark out of ten.



We had to bring one from the rabbi. The Jews had been deported in 1944, so I couldn't bring anything from the rabbi to the school to put in my school report, so they didn't issue it. We had such laws. Otherwise the rabbi had given everyone a mark of ten out of ten. In 1945 they issued it without further ado.

We didn't attend the religious school, the cheder; my parents employed a teacher who spent about a year when I was seven or eight years old teaching us the prayers, everything.

My paternal grandparents were Orthodox Jews and my father was too. He spoke Yiddish as well, and I bear a grudge against him for not teaching me, because it is also an international language, like Esperanto. This was typical of Jewish families: children weren't supposed to understand what the grown-ups were talking about.

My mother didn't speak Yiddish, they spoke in Hungarian, but my father talked with his parents in Yiddish. My mother didn't cover her hair, but she was religious as well, and we tried so hard to follow the kashrut, that in 1944, when one couldn't find anything kosher, we preferred not to eat meat; instead, my mother cooked vegetarian food, as we observed our religion.

My mother kept a kosher household until my brother moved her to Bucharest in 1949, where she didn't keep an entirely kosher home.

There weren't any Jewish families in Vetes, just us. There were some in the surroundings, but in Vetes it was only us. There wasn't a synagogue [prayer house], but while we stayed in Vetes, we went to Szatmar for holidays. We too, the boys, not only my father.

Moreover, there was a synagogue in Hungary, in Csenger too, which we went to. We didn't go to the synagogue in the morning, at noon and in the evening, only on Friday evening, on Sabbath and the high holidays.

### • Our religious life

There were two marvelous synagogues in Szatmar. We frequented the Orthodox one and there was a smaller synagogue next to the Orthodox one, which is still there. But Jews sold the Neolog [12](#) one; it was then demolished, and the County Police station was built there.

There were a lot of Jews in Szatmar, within the town itself 13,000 Jews lived, which was a third of the town's population. So there was a serious religious life. There were Hasidim [13](#) too, who wore special kaftans. Most of these observant Jews from Szatmar emigrated to America.

My cousin is there too, in New York, where a Hasidic community has been established. There was a Jewish district in Szatmar, the ghetto was made there. A few hundred people came home to Szatmar after being deported, and many people moved there too, but they left. Now there are no more than forty. They are responsible for the cemetery.

The Jews had wonderful rabbis. The rabbi of Nagykallo was such a wonderful rabbi too. Allegedly the song, 'Szol a kakas mar'[a well-known traditional Hungarian Hassidic tune], was composed by this wonderful rabbi of Nagykallo.

This rabbi was from Hungary, but there were great rabbis in Romania too, for example the Hasidic rabbi of Bikszad was very famous, he lived in Szatmar. The rabbi of Bikszad was the leader of Orthodox Jewry in Szatmar and lived in a street next to ours.

He also led a Talmudic school there, where they were exclusively engaged in studying the Talmud, the scriptures. Back then we had a farm, we had poultry, and I remember my mother had to send him fresh eggs every day, because the rabbi ate only what was kosher.

Wherever there is a Jewish community, there is a ritual bath next to the synagogue; it's called a mikveh. Jewish men go there on Friday afternoon, I saw this in my childhood. There were two bathhouses in Szatmar: there was a town bath, which was quite neglected, and the Jewish bath, the mikveh, which was close to the synagogue.

The Jewish community maintained it, and it opened regularly. Non-Jews attended it too, as it was the better bath. [From a Halakhic point of view, non-Jews cannot be excluded from attending the mikveh. In former times, and mainly in smaller towns and villages the mikveh had a public bath function as well.] People didn't have bathrooms back then, so we went there to take a bath. It had cubicles, a basin, a bath, shower and toilet and a steam bath as well.

Boys' coming-of-age is celebrated when they reach the age of 13, nowadays it's the same for girls too, that's what I saw in Israel, what I heard. [Editor's note: it remains age 12 for girls, in Israel and throughout the world.] When we turned 13, my brother and I were brought into adulthood; this celebration is called bar mitzvah.

One has to prepare for this, like for confirmation. We didn't go to preparatory classes, because we could already read Hebrew. My bar mitzvah was celebrated in the Orthodox synagogue in Szatmar, which is where we lived when I was 13.

They take the Torah out of the Holy Ark, and invite the 13-year-old boy to read the portion of the Torah designated for that week, since there is a section for each week. After his bar mitzvah he is a full member of the congregation, not a child anymore and can count towards the ten Jewish men that are needed for a service [minyan].

Jewish men wear tefillin on their left arm and on their head while praying [for the morning prayers]. After becoming bar mitzvahed, we also had to wear them. I think I gave our tefillin to my cousin, who left for America after World War II, as I studied at university and I didn't use mine.

We weren't very Orthodox, but we were religious and observed all the holidays. Jewish holidays start on the eve of the holiday. Sabbath also starts on Friday evening, and the end of Sabbath is celebrated through a prayer. On Friday evening the holiday [Sabbath] started when my mother lit the Sabbath candles.

My mother lit four candles, because there were four of us in the family, then she recited the prayer, she blessed them. My father took us to the synagogue. After we went home, there were two braided loaves of bread on the table, called 'barhesz' [challah]. My father recited the blessing while he cut them, and gave a piece to each of us.



For the holidays we also had wine, he recited a blessing over it as well, then it was a custom that the father blessed the children [this is customary on Friday nights]. He put his hands on our head, and recited a blessing, and we only sat down to dinner after that.

My mother prepared all the meals for Sabbath on Friday, so that she didn't need to do anything on Sabbath [in accordance with Jewish law]. Our national meal was chulent.

My mother prepared it uncooked in a pot; when we lived in Szatmar, we took the chulent to the bakery, where they put it into the oven, and next day at noon as we came out with my father from the synagogue, we brought the delicious chulent home.

We, the children, carried the chulent to the bakery and brought it home. Where we lived, we had an oven, we also prepared bread at home, and took it to the bakery. It was a very delicious meal.

From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur there are ten days, known as the ten days of repentance; according to our religion, everybody's destiny is decided during these ten days, and then is signed and sealed in a metaphorical 'book.' Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, this is the most important day [in the Jewish calendar] and is a fast day.

Before the fast we performed a ritual, symbolically freeing us of our sins through an offering of a chicken. Every member of the family recited a prayer, each person performed the ritual using their own chicken, which was then slaughtered by the shochet.

It was a humane procedure for sure; because he had such a sharp knife, the animal died in one second [in accordance with Jewish law]. The festive dinner was prepared from these chickens. In the evening after dinner, there was a service in the synagogue, then the 25 hour fast began. We, the children, also fasted for 25 hours, and prayed in the synagogue from morning to evening [children are not obliged to fast until after their bar mitzvah].

Then other holidays followed. First the Feast of Booths, Sukkot. We didn't celebrate Sukkot in booths [sukkah], but we observed it in the synagogue. Then we have Simchat Torah, which is the celebration of the Torah, the last of the fall holidays. They take out all the Torah scrolls from the Holy Ark, and they carry them several times all around the synagogue, while the chazzan is singing.

One of our great holidays is Chanukkah, which falls in the same season as Christmas. Chanukkah also lasts eight days, and commemorates when the Jews reoccupied the Temple, there was only one pot of oil to be used to fuel the eternal flame, which would only have been enough for one day, but a miracle occurred, the oil burned for eight days.

There is a special Chanukkah menorah, which has eight candle holders; we didn't have such a menorah. They light one candle on the first evening, two on the second, then three and so on, throughout eight days. People usually put it out in the window. At Chanukkah we lit candles, that was all. Any member of the family could light the candles.

We also played with spinning tops, called dreidels. My mother didn't prepare cakes for Chanukkah, we didn't get presents, just sometimes some coins from the parents, known as Chanukkah gelt.

The next holiday of the year which falls the day after the Fast of Esther, is Purim. They celebrate it for two days, and we observed Purim as well. We didn't keep the Fast of Esther.

Purim is a joyful holiday for Jews, they do a lot of cooking and baking, they prepare all kind of good meals and sweets, all kind of delicious cakes. There is a certain cake with walnut, the 'kindli' cooked for this day, which looks like milk loaf with walnut cooked by Christians at Easter.

And there are the hamantashen, named after Haman: it is a triangular pastry, with walnut and jam filling. It is quite difficult to prepare it, it is wrapped-up in a specific way, my wife can't do it, but it is very delicious. The Romanians call it 'humantas.' And the custom is to send a plate of cookies to other families and acquaintances in exchange or as a gift. We didn't send cookies in exchange, and we didn't dress up in masquerade either [as is customary on Purim].

Following Purim comes the holiday of Pesach. There were separate pots for Pesach they used only then, not during the rest of the year. We had separate Pesach pots as well. And we did a lot of cleaning before the holiday, because no crumbs could be left in the house, everything had to be cleaned up. If something is left by any chance, it has to be sold.

One has to conclude a formal contract on selling the 'hamec' [chametz], that's what it's called. My mother wrote such a contract too, she wrote there a fictitious name saying that every piece [of flour] and all crumbs were sold, if any were left by chance after cleaning the house.

Starting from that moment there wasn't any [chametz] in the house. They kept it, but it was stored separately, we didn't touch it. At Pesach my mother cooked using matzah meal ['breadcrumbs' made from matzah instead of bread].

We observe Pesach to commemorate the miraculous escape of our ancestors from Egypt. The Jewish holidays are divided into main and half holidays. The first two days of such eight-day holidays are the high days, and the last two days are also high days, the other four days are just half-holidays, one might work, everything.

For eight days – in Israel for seven days – people eat only matzah. Here in the Diaspora holidays last eight days, in Israel they cut one day off, it seems they found this period too long, they celebrate for seven days [Editor's note: there are historical reasons for celebrating 7 days in Israel, compared to the 8 days of the Diaspora, nothing to do with finding the period too long.

It was to do with the time taken to report the citing of the new moon, which set the dates of the holidays].

We observed seder night at home. The seder night begins with the well-laid table, everything is fixed there, because the word seder means order in Hebrew. Well, first they put a big plate on the table, the seder plate, on which was placed a roasted egg, a small piece of roast beef, bitter herbs called maror, parsley, then there is a mixture, it has grated apple and smashed walnut, mixed with wine, and they put a little horseradish [Editor's note: Gabor Lazar refers here to the charoset, which doesn't have any horseradish, that one being part of the maror symbolizing the bitter herbs], all these recall the exodus of Jews from Egypt.

At Pesach one of the traditional foods for Jews was also the egg; I think Christians took over the custom from them [Pesach falls around the same time of year as Easter]. The matzah is put on the table and it is covered, three matzot are separated by three white serviettes.

Everybody has their own glass, and there is a superfluous cup put on the table for Elijah the Prophet. We poured a glass of wine for him, and when my father reached a certain passage in the prayer, we opened the door so that Elijah the Prophet could come in.

Before they eat and drink, they say a prayer, called Kiddush. After that one has to wash hands. First one has to dip parsley into salt water, and recite a blessing. Then the head of the family breaks the matzah to put aside the afikoman as well, they hid it.

In our family my father put it under his pillow, the seder table is organized in such way that the head of the family has to sit leaning, pillows are put to support him, this is the ritual. And the youngest member of the family puts questions to the head of the family, four questions.

I was the youngest in our family, I had to ask: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' That's how it started. Then the whole ritual is built on this, that the head of the family has to answer the questions in order to explain to the participants why they are celebrating Pesach, and he relates how Jews fled from Egypt.

Then everybody who is sitting at the table has to wash hands, then a blessing is said over eating the matzah, and all those who sit at the seder table are given matzah. After that they eat the bitter herbs, this is a tradition for recalling the misery and exploitation our ancestors had suffered in Egypt. Then the dinner itself comes. We had a normal dinner, but without bread, we had matzah. We had everything, we had meat-soup, second dish, dessert.

After dinner they take out, distribute and eat the afikoman. Children have to find the afikoman, and whoever finds it is rewarded. At the end the prayer after dinner is recited, and seder night ends with the humorous story from the end of the Haggadah – which is the prayer book of the Pesach night service – the Chad Gadya, that is One Kid Goat.

[The Chad Gadya and the Echad Mi Yodea are songs formulated in children's language, but which have a profound religious and historical significance, and bear moral teachings.] We didn't sing, my father told the story, and then we went to bed.

Well, that's how a seder night goes. It lasts three hours, and the second night the same service is repeated. This was a family tradition for us, unfortunately since I left the family house in 1947, I participated for the last time, then I started to study, and I didn't have the chance for it.

After Pesach comes Shavuot; this corresponds to Pentecost, and commemorates the day when we were given the Ten Commandments. This is also the festival of the harvest, as that's when the harvest starts in Israel. We have one more great fast, that falls on the 9th day of [the Hebrew month of] Av. The First Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE, the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the two events fall on the same day, which is why it's a day of mourning. These are the traditional holidays.

- **During the War**

In 1944 deportations began. All the members of our family were deported. We were so lucky that they exempted [14](#) us from enforcing anti-Jewish law, as my father was a lieutenant in World War I, and he was a war invalid.

Since we had been in a quite difficult financial situation in Hungary when we had returned there, my father had submitted a request to increase from 50 to 75 percent [the degree of his invalidity]. This was our great luck, because he wouldn't have been exempted as a 50 percent war invalid, but with this 75 percent we could stay there.

In Szatmar only three families were left in 1944: us, there was a tailor called Salamon, who had also acquired merits during World War I, he had I don't know how many children, so he got exempted, and there was the widow of a man who had died in World War I, Mrs. Dancziger, she and her two daughters weren't deported either. But the authorities knew my father, and in 1944 the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie did its best to also send us to Auschwitz.

It was a close shave that they didn't take us, and also that they didn't kill us [in Szatmarnemeti]. In May 1944, when the ghettos were built up in Szatmar, we were out on the farm, in Vetes. The gendarmes came, the cock-feathered gendarmes, they loaded us instantly, and carried us off to the local school of Szamosdob [Doba in Romania, is located 14 km south-west of Szatmarnemeti], but after two days an officer let us go when he saw our papers.

We went back [to the farm], but the gendarmerie couldn't resign to the fact that we stayed there. So they took us for the second time after one month, in June, after they took away everybody [all the Jews] from Szatmar and the whole surrounding area; they took 13 thousand Jews from Szatmar, one third of the town's population.

Let me tell you how it happened. We were on the farm in Vetes, and one morning Levente-soldiers [15](#) surrounded the farm. They didn't say a word, but stood there and watched us so that we wouldn't escape. Next day gendarmes came, they put us on our cart, and took us to the parish hall.

We packed up what we could, and I remember we had a red alarm-clock; well I put it into my package. When they examined our packages in the parish hall in Vetes, the gendarme found the clock. He says boorishly, 'You won't need that!' Like this. And they took it.

From Vetes they took us to Szatmar, and handed us over to the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie. They put us in the police prison of Szatmar to wait and see how they would decide upon our fate. The whole family was there: my father, my mother, my brother and I.

I was fifteen years old. We were there for almost one month in detention under remand. They sent our papers to Budapest to be certified. They took our family jewels too, and sent them with the 'gold train' to Budapest, to the National Bank; they never gave them back to us. We didn't have much, we had just a few, because we were engaged rather in the land, but they took the few family jewels we had.

In the meantime my brother got ill. He got an effusive pleurisy, he felt bad, and we had no choice but to report that he was ill. There was a clerk [police officer] called Sarkozi, he stood in the door of the prison and said, 'Who is ill?' We said it was my brother.

He stroked his pistol, I can still picture him: 'I will cure him!' Like this. Finally the ambulance came and they took him to the hospital and treated him there. We stayed there until fortunately our papers arrived from Budapest saying that our family couldn't be taken. There were plank-beds, we were sleeping on those, but they couldn't take us away.

However, after this we didn't dare to go back to Vetes, but stayed in the town. This Salamon family accommodated us, we stayed at their house in Szatmar, at the lower water-front of the Szamos river until September, when the great bombings started.

Szatmar was bombed, so we had to go back to Vetes. [There were air raids in Szatmar on 16th, 17th and 19th September 1944; seventy-six streets were attacked, the Soviet heavy bombers dropped bombs on thirty of these at least two times.]

Only one month was left until 15th October 1944, when Miklos Horthy announced the armistice [16](#). I remember we were very happy, we calmed down thinking that everything would be over finally. One night somebody was knocking at the window. Who might that be?

A villager called Acs, who I have since I heard has died, may he rest in peace, told us that the night before he was in the pub together with some Germans, they inquired about us, and allegedly the judge from the village informed them that there were Jews, so now they are coming to get us. It's amazing what kind of people exist! Our house in Vetes was two or three kilometers away from the village, but that man came to us and let us know about this.

Well, we had a cart and horse; we got on the cart, and left immediately for Szatmar. It's ironic where we hid in Szatmar. My father had a very good friend, Dr. Bela Wiesler, a Swabian lawyer, who had been the leader of the Volksbund for a while in Szatmar.

He was a very upright person. He and my father were very good friends, he received us into his house, we were there from 15th to 26th, October and we lived through the liberation by the Red Army, that's how we escaped.

The fact that we survived is due to the Red Army. I still say that I'm grateful, because if the Red Army hadn't come, who knows what would have happened, our turn would have come too. The Red Army took away our cart and the two horses. When we went back to Vetes, one morning we woke up to find that our eighteen years old mare, called Lepke [Butterfly], had fled home, and waited at our kitchen door.

### • After the War

When we went home to Vetes, people told us that the day after we had left, Germans had indeed come out looking for us, they had turned the house upside down completely. We found our house plundered, they stole the cattle, they ruined us completely.

Allegedly Germans took many things, but I think others took part in this as well. Well, we tried then to somehow restore the farm, but we didn't stay there, we moved to Szatmar, because our family house was there; my grandparents had been deported from there.

In 1945 a new town leadership was needed, so we organized the People's Police. What happened then? There were just a few people in Szatmar who could have been taken into account [as

communists]. In Romania the Siguranta [17](#) had imprisoned the illegal communists [18](#).

They had had two possibilities, either they were beaten to death, or they spoke. Thus the Red Army tried to gather those who had suffered persecution, so they appointed my father, who as a former lieutenant was well versed in army matters, to be the commander of the town police where we had been imprisoned.

The first parade was on 9th May 1945, on the 'day of victory' [when World War II was over officially]. My father was the commander of the police for one year, until there was a huge Jewish hospital in Szatmar, where he became the warden.

My brother worked for a few months at the police as well. After that, well, the democratic state had to be established, you know, so the Romanian Communist Party was established; he became a party activist, and they were organizing the Romanian Communist Party.

The elections had to be falsified, it was a great circus back then that the communist party won the elections in 1946, I think the first so-called election was held that year. Well, I remember for example going twice to the polls. The dead voted. That's how they managed to overthrow the Liberal [in fact National] Peasants' Party [19](#) led by Maniu and Bratianu.

My father was working, my brother was an activist, so at the age of 16 I was the one who managed the farm in Vetes. In 1945 we got back the other half of the land they had expropriated [due to anti-Jewish laws]. We were Hungarian citizens, and in 1945 we obtained Romanian citizenship. I still have Hungarian citizenship, I have a dual citizenship.

In the meantime I passed the final examination in 1947, at the Reformed Gymnasium in Szatmar, and I sat the entrance examination at the Medical and Pharmaceutical Institute in Marosvasarhely [Targu Mures in Romanian]; it was established just then, and was moved from Kolozsvar to Marosvasarhely. I got a scholarship.

In 1949 my father died due to cardiac disease and rheumatism; he is buried in Szatmar, in the Orthodox [Jewish] cemetery. We had a family burial plot in Szatmar, my grandfather is also buried there, my father is there, and one of his brothers [Lali Lazar]. My grandmother had her place there too, but she was deported.

There is a small house in the Orthodox cemetery in Szatmar, where plaques are placed; we, the relatives who came back, put memorial plaques there, in memory of those who had died there. So my grandmother has her own little marble tablet.

When somebody dies, that person has to be buried within 24 hours [according to Jewish Law, they must be buried as soon as possible]. The body is rolled up in a sheet, and they are buried wearing a white shroud [kittel]. The coffin is a rough board coffin, fixed with screws, because we believe that the Messiah would come on a donkey, and so the dead can rise again [and leave the coffin easily], that's what the Jewish religion says.

After the burial, the first-degree relatives mourn for him. Their garments are torn, they cut the material and wear that item of clothing for one year. [Editor's note: immediate relatives 'sit shivah,' shivah meaning seven in Hebrew. They openly mourn for seven days, during which time they wear



the torn garment to symbolize their loss].

I still remember, I was a second-year student at the university when my father died in 1949. My clothes were torn, but my colleagues didn't know why, so they came to me and told me, 'It's torn.' The deepest mourning lasts seven days. Mirrors are covered, and they sit shivah on the ground for seven days; well, they put something not to sit on the bare floor.

They get up only to eat and to go to bed. After that there is a further period of mourning which lasts until the thirtieth day after the death. The complete mourning for a parent [the timings differ for siblings and spouses] lasts one year.

This means that the dead person's sons go every day to the synagogue, and recite a prayer [the Kaddish] in the memory of the deceased at each service. We have a morning prayer, we have afternoon and evening prayers.

The mourner's Kaddish starts like this: 'Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di-v'ra chirutei'. [The son mourning his parent has to recite the Kaddish at the daily services for eleven months starting from the day of the burial. That's how he honors his dead parent]. This is what mourning means for observant Jews.

I was in Marosvasarhely at university when my father died, so I went a few times in the morning to the synagogue, but I had to go to lectures, I couldn't take a leave at noon and in the evening, so I arranged to pay somebody from the community, a poor man, who recited the Kaddish for me, every day for one year. We observed this, we observed this for my father.

So my mother became a widow, we were already adults. In the meantime my brother, already an activist enrolled to the faculty of law in Kolozsvár, finished his law studies there and became a lawyer.

They were looking for young people for the Official Gazette, and his dean, who later was considered a traitor as well, and was put in prison, recommended my brother to be employed together with a colleague of his. Thus he became the chief editor of the Monitorul Oficial [Official Gazette] in Bucharest, in 1950.

My brother took my mother to Bucharest with him, because he had a good job, and she was there until her death. She died in Bucharest in 1955, at quite a young age. She had an accident in November 1955: she was getting off the tram, it was dusk, the tram hadn't yet stopped, and she stepped down and fell. She fractured her femoral neck and they operated on her; back then the operations for femoral neck and pelvis were novelties, great interventions.

I went to Bucharest to the hospital and stood by her during the operation, and in a few days after I came home – I worked then in Marosvasarhely at the Blood Transfusion Centre – I was notified that she had died. Her condition was serious when she was operated on, she almost died on the operating table; she got pneumonia too after the operation, she also had asthma, and she died.

She was young, only 56 years old. My father was 58 years old when he died. When I start to think, I'm 76 already, my brother 80. That wasn't a decent life. They didn't have an easy life. We didn't have any ties in Bucharest, so we cremated my mother at the Belu crematorium, but when my

brother left for Israel, I brought the urn here, and she is buried in the cemetery of Kovaszna.

My brother worked at the Official Gazette until 1964. When they found out that he and his whole family put their name down to leave for Israel, they kicked him out instantly, and they expelled him from the party as well. Then they left and settled in Israel. They adapted to it well, they are fine.

He passed the language exam in Israel, but he passed all the legal exams too, and he worked as a prosecutor for the Israeli police, and when he retired from there, he opened a legal practice in Rehovot. They live in Rishon LeZion, and Rehovot is not far from there. Do you know why Rehovot is famous?

The Weizmann Institute [of Science] is there. They are very well. He's eighty years old already, and now he is a sick man, so he doesn't work. But he was always a good brother to me, because he helped me. While I was a student, my brother helped me, well, learning always costs. When they arrested me, he came at once. He came to the trial, everything.

He met his wife in Kolozsvár. His wife is Judit Lazar, nee Jakabovics; she is from Nagykaroly and she is Jew. She studied at the Music Academy of Kolozsvár. They have one child, Peter, who was born in 1958, he's married; his wife immigrated with her parents from Morocco. They have two beautiful children, one is called Maja, the other is called Gal. Maja is doing the army service now, her brother is one or two years younger, he's still at school.

It's only me who stayed here in the country from the family. I graduated from the Medical University in Marosvásárhely in 1953, with honors. In 2003 we had the 50th anniversary class reunion at the university; I got a golden diploma, they gave it to those who were alive. There were 120 of us who graduated that year, there were only 39 of us still alive. Doctors, pharmacists. And we had the 55th anniversary high school reunion in 2002.

I took the state examination in 1953, and then the placements followed. They held a general assembly, but before that they called me into the Rector's Office, Dr Andrasovszky was the rector of the university, he was a neurosurgeon. He started to ask me about where I wanted to work.

Well, I didn't know at all what to say. He then said, 'Our party needs comrade Lazar here, in Marosvásárhely, in an institute, at the Blood Collection and Storage Centre.' Well, I answered, if this is it, alright, it's fine with me.' 'Please be so kind as to confirm this in the afternoon, at the assembly.' And he said, 'Congratulations for your degree with honors.'

Those of us who received such a red certificate with honors could choose our place of work. But why did I get to the Blood Collection and Storage Center? Because a few Securitate-men were referred there, and I don't know what type of blood-plasma they were given, that a little water from the Maros river had poured into it; the blood-plasma was infected, because it was collected using primitive means, with the pump mounted on the water pipes, and all the Securitate-men had shivers.

I don't know about anybody who had died, but they carried out a serious investigation among the doctors, and many left. There weren't enough workers, they needed young people. That's how I became the consulting doctor for three years at the Blood Collection and Storage Center in Marosvásárhely.

In the meantime I was sent to Bucharest in 1954, to the hematological centre; it's called the Institutul de Hematologie si Transfuzie [Hematological and Blood Transfusion Institute]. I got my qualification in blood transfusion; I was the first physician in Marosvasarhely who had a certificate in this.

Nobody wanted to go to this course. My brother was working there, my mother was there, so I presented myself. I went there, finished the course and got a qualification. I came back to Marosvasarhely, and I lived there until 1956.

What happened then? Well, they issued a decree saying that everybody had to perform a six-month long service in a village. This applied to me as well, so they placed me here, in this region [in Kovaszna's surroundings]. First I was in Kommando in August and September 1956, from there they sent me to Kovaszna [today Covasna, in Romania, 191 km south-east of Marosvasarhely] to the hospital on the medical ward.

When the six months had passed, I started to think what to do, I had nobody in Marosvasarhely, only friends; my mother had died too. I thought I would try to leave Marosvasarhely entirely; I lived in lodgings there, I didn't have a chance of owning an apartment.

I didn't go back to Marosvasarhely after six months, I settled in Kovaszna. I met my wife here; she worked at the hospital as a clerk. In 1958 we got married, and since then I have lived in Kovaszna.

My wife, Rozalia Orban, was born on 28th June 1933, here in Kovaszna; she is reformed. Her father was a joiner, there is a house in the back of the garden, it is almost 200 years old, they lived there. My wife has a sister who lives in Szatmar, Terezia Orban; her married surname is Fazekas.

She was born in 1934 and has a son, Attila Fazekas. He also lives in Szatmar; he's married and has a student daughter. My wife finished high school in Kovaszna, and she was a clerk at the hospital and at the construction co-operative.

We built up our house with hard work; it belonged to my mother-in-law and was an empty lot; she gave it to us to build a house here. The construction co-operative built the house, my wife worked there too. We started it in 1969, we paid for it in installments, we both worked, so I remember that the greater part of the salary was paid as an installment, and we lived on my wife's salary; however we finished it step-by-step.

I have a son, Tibor Lazar, he was born in 1959. He finished at the timber vocational school, a technical school in Kezdivasarhely. He worked here in Kovaszna at the furniture factory, after that he was unemployed for two years, because the factory was liquidated.

Now he works in Kezdivasarhely as a technician in the furniture factory, called Mobexpert. He leaves every Monday, and comes back on Friday. He's very lucky that he doesn't have to commute, because his mother-in-law lives there and he stays at her place.

My daughter-in-law is a mathematics teacher here in Kovaszna, she has a good job, she also finished her studies with honors, and she has all the possible qualifications. She's quite well paid, and she also has private pupils, so they want for nothing.

They have an apartment in the center that I had bought for my son, back then when I could. They don't have any children, but they are ok. My son is reformed, he is also confirmed, but he's a member of the Jewish community of Brasso.

My career in Kovaszna: first I worked in the hospital, on the children's ward, from there they appointed me local medical officer, then I was a doctor. All the factories from Kovaszna fell under my responsibility, and I retired from there after 37 years of service as a chief medical officer, in 1990; in 1963 I passed the exam for the chief medical qualification too.

I never joined any party, not even the Communist Party. I just simply didn't, I'll tell you why. Because of my social background. I didn't want to be kicked out as a kulak [a category of relatively affluent peasants in the later Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and early Soviet Union].

My brother was in it, he had a job, but when they started to pry into things [20](#), and started to investigate him, he applied for a permit for his whole family, and left for Israel. But honestly I didn't believe in all this communist system. I could see that there too, there was an upper crust, who enjoyed everything, and well, there were the others.

The only thing was that unemployment didn't exist. Only this one. But we, who lived through these decades, we know how it was. I could have joined the party several times. When I started to study, they invited me then too, but I didn't enroll. I got on well with everybody, but I wasn't interested in politics.

When I was a student, they carried out an extensive verification of the party members. They organized it in the ceremonial hall of the university, and they invited me as an honest non-party person to participate; back then they called somebody an honest non-party person, if that person wasn't a class enemy, only class-alien.

Back then the Siguranta had been thrashing these former communists, and there had been two cases: either they had beaten them to death, or the communists had confessed; and what happened after that? During this assembly it turned out that those who had confessed were expelled from the party.

They took them one by one, and carried out an inquiry. There was a committee, who called up the party members, and whoever had a past, had been imprisoned and had confessed, they were qualified as traitors, expelled from the party, and they re-organized the party from those who didn't have a past. Those who didn't have a past became the good communists.

Gheorghiu-Dej [21](#) and his company had been in jail for 12 years, then they turned against those who had come home from the Soviet Union [22](#), so there were serious party struggles. I never got involved in this. Back then many such trials took place, they executed for example Laszlo Rajk [23](#) as well in Hungary. What Rakosi organized there [the Rajk trial] [24](#), Gheorghiu-Dej and his company did the same here.

Nobody investigated me, I was an honest non-party man, I just simply didn't join. I was very active within the labor union, I was vice-president of the local council. I couldn't be the president, because I wasn't a party-member. I was very active within the Red Cross, which gave me many distinctions, and I also helped the Women's Committee.

I was a works doctor when in December 1986 I got arrested. I didn't grant sick-leave to a woman worker. She had a relative at the Securitate, and she reported me. She wanted to ask for holidays, and I gave her one week. She wasn't satisfied with this, so went to the gynecology department, and there she got ten more days.

After that she came back to me. There were about three, four or five people in the waiting-room, and this woman came and handed over a prescription. I took my oculars, took a look, and saw she had some kind of discharge, and the gynecologist prescribed her some medicine to purchase from the pharmacy.

I only said, 'You go to the pharmacy, and buy your medicine.' Well, this was only adding fuel to the fire, so she said, 'You give to whoever you want to, and to whomever you don't want to, you don't give. Just wait and see, because I'm going to fix this for you.' And she ran away. I couldn't prolong her sick-leave after the gynecologist. If he had had a proposal, if he had written there that he proposed further examinations, then yes. But I couldn't.

What happened after a few days, maybe ten days? A car stopped in front of the consulting-room. I was just about to go to visit a patient, when they sent me back to the office; they turned it upside down, but they didn't find anything significant. Then I thought there was something more to it.

Somebody brought me a small packet, every doctor got things, it was put in my locker. And when they opened the locker, I told them, 'I got this today from someone.' But I didn't know what was in it. They opened it, there was some coffee, and hundred lei. But if I report myself, according to the laws in force I could have been let off.

Accepting a gift or money was considered bribery and was sentenced with three to six years of prison. I never asked anybody, and if the patient was poor, I gave back what they put in my pocket, so that the patient would buy their medicine from that.

Whoever willingly handed the bribe over to the authorities, or reported it, couldn't get punished. That was the law then, proceedings couldn't be started against a person who reported themselves. But it didn't count at all, they didn't take this into consideration, it didn't matter that I presented them the packet, and it wasn't the Militia who found it. They came to my home too, they searched through the whole house, they didn't find anything here that would have shown excessive wealth for a doctor.

The substitute chief of the police of the inspectorate came out from Sepsiszentgyorgy [Sfantu Gheorghe in Romania, 30 km west of Kovaszna ], and they took me in the night, after the house search, and after that I saw Kovaszna again after being away for nine months.

They took me at the end of December 1986: first I was in prison in Sepsiszentgyorgy. They knew I was a Jew, and a Jew has gold even under his skin. They found out that my brother was in Israel, as they traced everything, so they thought I would have I don't know how much gold and foreign currency and things like that.

In the meantime they made me include in my statement, 'gold and currency'. I told them I had neither gold, nor currency. They took away all the family jewels they found, well they gave those back later.

I got fed up with all those interrogations, and then it came to my mind that wait, I have gold medals; I got them from the Red Cross. I told them, 'I have got something.' They weren't interested in that. Then they interrogated me about traveling abroad too much. Whenever it was possible, we went with the family to the Czech Republic, Germany, we visited the Soviet Union, they issued a passport once in every second year, so we traveled somewhere.

And they say I was abroad a lot. I said, 'Yes, I have relatives. Besides, if you're that interested, you have the files, take a look to see where I was.' The passport department was in the same building as the police's lock-up, so they knew very well where and when we were traveling.

In January they took me to Codlea - Feketehalom in Hungarian, near Brasso [14 km north-west of Brasso], there's a huge prison there, where the trials took place. The charge against me was that I had been bribed, well, every doctor was given cash, people did that in those times, and they do today as well. This was the main charge, that's why they planted that packet.

The woman who brought it was an undercover agent. They called on people from the factory for hearings, to give statements against me. Well, people found out that this woman had brought me that packet, and they gave her a good trashing.

After that she came to the consulting room, the nurse told me, and she was repeating that she was so sorry, that she felt so sorry for me, if only she had known, and so on, and so on; she was excusing herself. All this in vain, because I had already been caught and taken away.

It occurred to me, when I was already in Codlea, which way the wind was blowing. One of this woman's relative was a party secretary in Sepsiszentgyorgy, at the county branch of the Securitate. And she set me up through that person.

I remembered this, because once [in Kovaszna] a woman worker came to me and asked me to prescribe her no matter what kind of medicine, because her son was working at the Securitate, so she could get it. So I started to think, well, these two women had the same name, they came from the same family.

They collected some 19-20 statements against me about having paid me this and that amount. However only three of them admitted at the court that they had indeed given me 50 lei or I don't know what. So this was enough, I got sentenced to 18 months, the minimum.

I actually served half of it. I wasn't a party member, that was the problem. Because if I had been a party member, I wouldn't have been put in prison, they would have changed it into a deferred sentence.

The party was behind those. But nobody did anything for me. People collected signatures for me, to try to save me. There were people who told the others not to sign, because who knows what might happen to them.

Moreover, I had a patient who was a colonel in Bucharest, at the college of the militia, the police had a university, it still has. He came here every year with his pharmacist wife for summer holidays, and I was their doctor, they always came to me.



People called on him as well, but he didn't do anything either. There was a public prosecutor in Bucharest, who knew all the prosecutors, people went to him too, what's more he was a Jew as well, but he didn't do anything for me either.

They didn't hurt me at all in prison. But one isn't taken for a human being, at least that's how it was back then. Whenever we went out or came back, they counted us like one counts cattle. Every morning and evening there was a roll call, where they took stock of everybody to see if the number was right. One spring they took us to work in the bakery in Codlea.

I finished my work and sat down a little to take a rest. There was an officer, a very nasty character, who saw that I was sitting. So he grabbed a stick, and stroke once one palm, once the other. And he says, 'Now you come with me.' He gave me work until we went home in the evening, to keep me occupied.

When we entered the prison gate, they knew me there and greeted me from afar, hi doctor etc. So he found out I was a doctor. He found this out just right then. Well, from that point I got so much respect from him, he gave me exceptional treatment from that moment. They weren't allowed to shake hands, but he shook hands with me. He was beating the others a lot, and he was the worst, he was a very cruel fellow.

I was exempted from army service, but at the police in Sepsiszentgyorgy, when they compiled my file, when they took me away, they wrote that I had completed my army service. This was my luck. This way, after a part of my sentence passed, they made me a supervisor, a 'free,' that's how they called it in prison.

Instead of the striped clothes they gave me brown clothes, like the warders had, and a truncheon and whistle; we had training every morning in the prison's yard, military exercises, they gave orders about what and how, and taught secret signs.

They took us to farms, factories, and we were the guardians, guarding the working groups. An under-officer came with us, there was about five or six of us who were guardians. The under-officer had a gun, we only had a truncheon and a whistle. But they didn't escape. And when we were coming home, everybody had to be searched, to check that they didn't bring something in.

There were all kinds of prisoners in Codlea, half of them were gypsies. Sometimes there were even thirty or forty of us in the room, and sometimes only eight or ten. The rooms were large, with bunk-beds, sometimes we slept two in one bed, there were so many of us. And when they made me a supervisor, they separated me, I had better conditions.

After that it turned out that the prison doctor was a professor from Bucharest; he was sentenced to six years, and was taken to Bucharest. So the physician's office was left without a physician. Before him a doctor from Brasso worked in the physician's office, he was also a medical officer, his wife had reported him in revenge.

Then this professor. They helped me out with medicine etc., what one could get only with backing. Well, then I became the prison's physician in their place. I worked for the men's section, a woman doctor from Brasso worked for the women's section, she had a similar story. From that point I had a good life. The last two and a half months or so passed more easily.

Once the under-officer I mentioned before had a problem with his tooth; he came to my office, saying that he had a toothache and that it should be pulled out. I had never extracted a tooth in my life before, I can tell you that. I had an assistant there, a pharmacist, who had been sentenced to six years.

We had equipment in the office, all kinds, and the assistant said he would extract it. We sat the officer down, I was holding his head from the back, the assistant took the forceps and took hold of the tooth to pull it out. But he didn't even move it, when he started to wail, 'Ouch, ouch...' What could we do? I said, well, let me see this.

I looked into his mouth and I see that his tooth was barely attached. The situation took a turn. I took the forceps and pulled the tooth out straight away. 'Thank you, thank you', he said. Sterility didn't exist then, instead we gave him a lot of antibiotics to avoid infection. I became this officer's favorite, this one who stroked my palm at the bakery.

Once they scolded my wife badly in the prison for not speaking Romanian. She came to the office, and they were listening to what we were saying. She was speaking Hungarian. So they scolded her badly, as they wanted to understand what she was saying to me.

I will tell you what one goes through. A commission decides whether to release someone who has served half of their sentence, if they had a good behavior. The commission summons those whose sentence is prolonged. One afternoon the commission holds a meeting.

My case was due as well, since my file was submitted to the commission. I knew they would set me free within a few days. A prosecutor called Balea came from Brasso. So they came and told me, doctor, go to the commission. I was running, there was a club-hall, and the commission was there, one had to spring to attention of course.

I said: 'At your command!' The president of the commission told me to bring him some medicines. I took them, and also brought the blood-pressure apparatus. I measured his blood-pressure, then he told me it was alright. But the anxiety I went through, worrying what would happen, why had they called me in, I was running. Such circumstances, you see. And they let me go home a few days later.

I got home around 23rd August 1987. The nine months had passed, and they released me provisionally. People welcomed me in the town like a national hero. This colonel from Bucharest, to whom I was the consultant, and who did nothing for me, even though he could have, because he was close to the militiamen and the prosecutors from the region, well, he was here in a hospital.

After I came home, he fell on my neck, he kissed me. Then he came to visit us. He told me why they didn't do anything for me. They were afraid of Ceausescu [25](#), they were afraid of spies, and that was the reason for not being able to do something. Thank God I lived through it, well, this is an experience as well, not everybody goes through such an experience.

Those who had done this lousy trick, they all died, without exception. For example I'll tell you one thing. The person who led the house search, who was the substitute inspector at the county militia, he was called Magureanu; he was an extremely malicious character. He organized everything, the interrogation, the house searches, everything.

At the age of 52 these militiamen could retire. Then he got a very lucrative post as some kind of manager at the health insurance company. I don't know what kind of dirty trick they did, they sold something, and I don't know what he did with that money; in brief this Magureanu hanged himself and left a farewell letter. The Antena1 channel showed him laying on the catafalque. He died.

And what else happened! I got home. I was on duty at the hospital, the doctor on duty, when one evening somebody knocked at the door. Who should be standing there? Well, one of these crooks, a militiaman from Kovaszna, but very humbly, he says he has something to ask me.

I say, 'What?' In those times those who traveled abroad needed a medical certificate to confirm they did not have diarrhea. And he came to ask me for such a certificate. I told him to go to the district medical officer, it was his job. He said he couldn't, because he was leaving in the night, he was going to Hungary.

Well, I had pity on him, so I wrote him a certificate. He got leukemia and died of that. One more case. I was on duty again. One night they brought the child of the person who reported me. Her husband was a shepherd in Vajnafalva [Voinesti in Romanian], and a sheepdog had lacerated their child.

Then after I got home I was trying to get a job, since I was released, but my practice permit had been suspended for one year. However I could obtain one thing, thanks to a former classmate of my wife, who was the party secretary for county organizational issues: they repealed that year at the court, and certified that I wasn't forbidden from practicing my profession. I got employment, but as an assistant. I was an assistant for a few months in my own office.

In January the great amnesty was granted, when Ceausescu had his birthday, they granted general amnesty. So they repealed everything, and in January 1988 I got all my rights back. A substitute had been appointed in the meantime in my office. I was lucky that he was from Bucharest, and he wanted to go back no matter what.

His father was working in Bucharest, I don't know what kind of job he had. And I was making arrangements, I even went to Bucharest, to have my file settled, to get my job back.

And I was waiting and waiting, it was January already, and despite the amnesty, we could see that they didn't send back anything. So this one's father went there, they took out my file from the minister's drawer, and they arranged it. I got the paper about getting back my job, they assigned me as the works doctor again, but with a minimal salary, like for a beginner.

In the meantime they introduced Law No. 18 in 1987 against those who had acquired their possessions illegally. They asserted it officially against everybody who had been imprisoned for bribery. They started proceedings against me as well.

I had some saved money in the savings bank, they demanded me to pay back from that money 112 thousand lei to the state. I won the trial at the court of first instance, but the prosecutor from Kezdivasarhely appealed against the judgment; he's a great crook, he's still a prosecutor, unless he's retired by now. So my case was transferred to Sepsiszentgyorgy.

We visited a former classmate of my wife, who was the county party secretary, she was in a high position, to show her that all the calculations were false, and they compiled the document against me with all kind of addition and subtraction errors. I mean intentionally, in order to obtain a certain amount. She told me, 'I'm not here to re-calculate this for you,' she picked up the phone, and sent us to the president of the court, to a person called Andras Ordogh; he is dead too by now.

We went to him indeed, well he received us, because the county party secretary had called him, and when we sat down, he told me to stay calm, because all this was very clear for him too. He told me I should leave the paper there, because he would get the case anyway, even if the prosecutor appealed, there wouldn't be any problem. So, he reassured me that justice would be done.

Well, indeed, the first trial took place, I presented my arguments, how things were, and that their claim was unjust. They declared the sentence about two weeks later. We went there and I was confident that they would rule to my advantage.

But no! They ruled that the amount owed to the state, 112 thousand lei, was a lot of money. They knew I had some saved money in the 'Csekk' [CEC, that is Casa de Economii si Consemnatiuni, the Romanian National Savings Bank]. And when I went back to the president, he said he couldn't help it, the sentence was final.

My lawyer told me to go to Bucharest, and start the retrial procedure again. The court president answered to this, 'This could drag on for twenty years. You have to pay this out, because this is final. Then, he said, you can sue this further.'

I said I wouldn't sue over this. In a few days I received the demand that it had to be paid, I had no choice, I drew out my money from the Savings Bank, I gave it to them, let them be happy. The head of the financial department, who is now the mayor, told me, 'Doctor, you are the first to have to pay.' I don't know how many others suffered such proceedings, but here in Kovaszna I was the only person who had to pay.

When the revolution was over in 1989 [26](#), my wife went to the court to take out the file, because all the invoices and receipts were there, everything. And she was told that the file wasn't in the archives anymore, because they had given it out to a prosecutor or judge for re-examination.

It wasn't enough that they robbed me, they wanted to start the proceedings again. So luckily for me the change came, I had luck with the revolution, and they couldn't start any proceedings, so the matter was dropped, it didn't have any continuation. But that's what they did.

In 1989, when the so-called revolution took place, I had a lot of patients in Kovaszna, a lot of people respected me; they all welcomed me like a national hero when I had come home from prison. And when the change occurred, a council was established at the hospital.

Then the local council had to be organized, so we marched to the town hall with flags; the flags [the arms in the middle] were cut out, and they elected me to be a member of the Democratic National Salvation Front council as a representative of the hospital, so I became part of the town leadership.

However I could see after three or four months that things were changing back to how they were, everything was turning to its former shape, so I never went there again. I didn't even ask for a revolutionary certificate, I left everything and let them do it. Politics didn't suit me.

I didn't join any party again after 1989, I'm not a member of the RMDSZ [Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania] either. My wife doesn't even go to vote. I did, but she's right, because in fact they don't do anything right.

In 1990 I retired. I had had a high salary before they had taken me away, and I wanted to have a pension based on that salary. When I came home from the prison, I was 58 years old, and I had to work until I would be sixty [the retirement age], but I tried to retire as soon as possible for my pension to be based on a high salary.

There was a law that at retirement one had to choose five of the last ten years of work, whichever you wanted them to take into account when calculating the pension. I could see my salary was low: when I came home from prison, first I got employed as an assistant, then I had a beginner doctor's salary; so when I turned sixty years old, I applied for retirement.

So I've been retired since 1990. I substituted with my colleagues sometimes; we had a surgery at the pensioners' association and I did that as a volunteer, until the family doctors' system was established, then I stopped doing it and let the young people do it.

I'm a member of the Jewish community in Brasso. They usually organize seder night, they invite me each year, but I can't go to Brasso, it's too far. [Brasso is 54 km south-west of Kovaszna] I got the invitation for the fall holidays just today.

They organize Purim too, the table is laid, everybody can eat and drink, and usually a great celebration is organized, with a show, they set up plays about Haman, Esther, this is usually on Sunday. I could go to see this, I think we went there twice.

Even today I observe three fasts. One of these is the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, after New Year. The other is the Fast of Esther, and the third is Tisha B'Av, on the 9th day of Av; this is a day of mourning, because the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE, then in 70 CE by the Romans, the two events occurred on the same day, and we observe this fast in the memory of this.

I observe these three fasts, this is my pledge. I went through so many things, as I related to you, so I observe these. I don't eat or drink for 24 hours. I take dinner, and after 24 hours I take dinner again.

Moreover, let me tell you one thing. This summer we went on a very nice trip to Greece. And the 9th day of Av fell during this period. So I solved this problem, since our first day on the Isle of Crete was the day of the fast, and we got meals there, I brought forward the fast by one day, so that I didn't have to break it. I observe the [Christian] Good Friday as well, I fast like Christians. I value everyone's religion, I respect my wife's religion as well.

I observe Pesach, well I eat bread, but I have matzah too, for the sake of tradition. For example my brother doesn't observe it; they are modern Jews in Israel. I have a mezuzah on my door. I went to the community office, and I told them I would like to buy one. They took one out of a drawer and

gave it to me. As a gift. And it is fixed on the doorpost. Well, we don't really have such things here in Kovaszna. [This is said to be the only mezuzah in the town.]

I pray each day at dawn and before falling asleep: I recite the Jewish prayers: the Shema Yisrael, Hear O Israel, that's the main prayer, and I also recite the Lord's Prayer. I believe there must be something that created the universe.

I went through many things, and I think there is something in the universe, what should I call it, I don't know, which directs one's destiny. I study other religions a lot, I'm in touch with many denominations, this is a hobby too, like the Esperanto.

Recently I got in touch with a foundation, its headquarters is in Bucharest, it is called the Bridge of Friendship, Fundatia Crestina Podul Prieteniei in Romanian [Bridge of Christian Friendship Foundation]. They contacted me, they sent me books, and they send me greetings for each holiday, they observe the Jewish holidays as well. They believe in the Messiah, there are Christians and Jews among them. I believe in him too.

There were Zionist organizations in Szatmar, but we weren't members of those. To tell the truth I didn't really know what it was about. The only thing I knew about Zionism, was that its aim was the creation of the state of Israel [27](#). Tivadar Hertzl [Theodor Herzl] [28](#) was the conceiver of the state of Israel, he was a Jew of Hungarian origin.

He has a marvelous mausoleum in Jerusalem, we visited it. In fact the state of Israel was proclaimed on May 14th 1948, right on my birthday. Israel was born on that day, David Ben-Gurion [29](#) announced Israel's independence.

We visited Israel in 1980. We were there for one month and visited all the holy places: we were in Bethlehem, in the Church of the Nativity, in Jerusalem, in Nazareth, at the Dead Sea, we were everywhere. It is a very nice country, and one can see they created there a land of plenty indeed. It is a wonderful country, only if there would be peace, shalom. Attempts occur all the time.

My brother's wife had a cousin, Gyorgy Jakabovics, he was a lawyer or a notary in Holon. Once there was a huge attack at Pesach. They organized seder night in the Park Hotel, near Holon. This family went there together with the children. The parents entered the hotel, and the children went to look for a place to park their car.

This was their luck, that's how they survived, because the parents died inside. The hotel and the restaurant, where the Pesach seder night was organized, were blown up. This happened about five years ago. [Editor's note: this terrorist attack took place in the Park Hotel in the coastal town of Netanya in 2002.]

I also counted on leaving for Israel after I was released from prison. But I started to think it over and decided not to leave, since we already had our house built, everybody knew me here, I didn't want to start a new life, to learn a new language. It would have made no sense at all at the age of 58 or 59.

Though doctors were very well off there, they didn't even have to pass any exams, but I didn't leave. The fact that we lived in a mixed marriage also played a role. I knew very well that my wife



would have never felt good under the circumstances that were typical for Israel back then. Now things have changed, it doesn't matter if someone is a Jew or Christian, but then it counted from a social point of view.

After the war we repaired the house in Szatmar, and moved in. When my mother moved to Bucharest and I was studying, my cousin Miklos Farkas lived there; they also left for America, and because they didn't know I was in the country, they nationalized the house, as it was unclaimed.

When properties could be claimed back, I took my succession certificate, and claimed it back. There were four of us who were eligible to inherit it: two cousins, one of whom left for America and Anna, who was in Israel, and my brother and I. I claimed it twice. I submitted the request and in 1996, they approved to give it back.

The house was already sold, there was nothing to do, they had to indemnify us. But they didn't pay anything, because they wrote that only after the house had been appraised could they give some indemnity. In the meantime Law No. 10 was introduced, so I submitted the documents again.

Eventually they appraised the house, and I got an indemnity. My brother renounced it in my favor, so I got one third. This matter has been dragging on since 1996, and I got it back recently, they paid 337 millions.

At the same time we had 20 hectares of land in Vetes, but after the revolution only ten could be claimed back. However, they established there a huge experimental station for fruits, and our property fell in that area. This experimental station covered I don't know how many hundreds of hectares.

When we could claim it, they didn't give it back, but I became a shareholder of the experimental station. Sometimes they paid, more often than not they didn't. When the new law was issued, I submitted the request as well, so they gave me back ten hectares.

The land has a little orchard, not a big one, I have fruits approximately on one hectare from the ten, and the remaining land is plough-land and hay fields. They didn't give back the land where our property was, that had a very good soil, but it was given to the local insiders.

However, this part isn't bad either, it is closer to the village, I have seven hectares in one piece, and three hectares a little further away. Szatmar is 600 km from here, well I can go there once a year at most to look around and think about what to do with this land; there is a local innkeeper who rents it.

He pays a ridiculously low price: he gave me five and a half million for ten hectares, but the advantage is that the land is cultivated, and it doesn't lose value. Unfortunately it seems that after he got rich enough, he didn't cultivate the land anymore, because due to the drought the harvest was poor two years ago.

So I got the land back. It's a little relief considering the pension, and I'm particularly glad to have the land because of my son; I won't sell it, who knows what the situation will be, he has a job for the moment, but he could lose it in a second.

In 2000 the Law No. 189 on allowance was introduced, which applies to those who had been persecuted between 1940 and 1944. Since in 1944 we had been victimized, they robbed us, I also applied, and my application was approved.

This is almost like the war invalidity pension, it means a lot of discounts, reduced fares, I don't have to pay a house-tax, then the medical treatment and medicines are free. Well, I have been rejoicing over it since 2000.

Moreover, I got a small amount from Hungary too, an indemnification, because they had plundered us completely, the retreating German troops had ravaged all our property. Since 2004 the Claims Conference grants me a life-annuity, since I'm a Holocaust survivor.

We travel somewhere each year, if we have some money saved up. Last year we visited Italy, we spent four days in Venice, and from there we went to Padua, Florence and Rome, we visited the Vatican too, then on the way back we saw San Marino, Vienna and Budapest.

It was a very nice, two week long journey. We also went to Greece, we toured the whole country, and spent the last week in Crete. We visited many interesting places, and people welcomed us cordially everywhere. This trip lasted 13 days, and we stayed full board the last seven days, there was buffet lunch and dinner.

This cost 460 euros per person, besides spending money. We were in many interesting places. It was a nice experience for me as a doctor, that the first night we slept in the small town where Hippocrates had lived and worked, in Katerini.

My main hobby is Esperanto. I'm a member of the Universal Esperanto Association, the Universala Esperanto Asocio, moreover I'm the Romanian representative of the Universal Medical Esperanto Association, whose headquarters are in Rotterdam.

The Medicina Internacia Revuo, the International Medical Journal is also issued in Rotterdam. I have a lot of articles published. I was awarded a prize for this in 1984, founded by Hideo Shinoda, who is an extremely rich hospital owner; he established a foundation, and was the honorary president of the Universal Esperanto Association.

The prize consisted of a 250 gram pure silver medal and of 500 Dutch guilder. For a while I was on the committee, which awarded this prize worldwide. Now the awarding process is different, and they give a smaller medal, because the association's financial situation has changed.

Every year there is an Esperanto world congress, where 3 to 5 thousand people who speak this language gather together. The last one was in Lithuania in July, before that in China; the location always changes. In 1978 I was in Varna at the Medical Esperanto Congress, in 2001 we were in Zagreb at the World Congress, and I also spoke in Eszek, at the Medical Congress.

The Medical Esperanto Congress is organized every second year. I go to that more regularly; last time it was held here in Romania, in Nagyvarad. In 2006 a scientific medical conference was organized in Hodmezovasarhely, where I had three presentations. In 2008 there will be a congress in Krakow, when we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the UMEA, the Universal Medical Esperanto Association.

- **Glossary:**

**1** Expulsion of the Jews from Spain: In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders.

There were more and more false blood libels, and the polemics, which were opportunities for interchange of views between the Christian and the Jewish intellectuals before, gradually condemned the Jews more and more, and the middle class in the rising started to be hostile with the competitor.

The Jews were gradually marginalized. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. Many Jews were forced to leave their faith. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412.

The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians, who were accused of secretly practicing the Jewish faith. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith.

At the end of July 1492 even the last Jews left Spain, who openly professed their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (Source: Jean-Christophe Attias - Esther Benbassa: Dictionnaire de civilisation juive, Paris, 1997)

**2** Transylvania : Geographical and historical region belonging to Hungary until 1918-19, then ceded to Romania. Its area covers 103,000 sq.km between the Carpathian Mountains and the present-day Hungarian and Serbian borders. It became a Roman province in the 2nd century (AD) terminating the Dacian Kingdom.

After the Roman withdrawal it was overrun, between the 3rd and 10th centuries, by the Goths, the Huns, the Gepidae, the Avars and the Slavs.

Hungarian tribes first entered the region in the 5th century, but they did not fully control it until 1003, when King Stephen I placed it under jurisdiction of the Hungarian Crown. Later, in the 12th and 13th centuries, Germans, called Saxons (then and now), also arrived while Romanians, called Vlachs or Walachians, were there by that time too, although the exact date of their appearance is disputed.

As a result of the Turkish conquest, Hungary was divided into 3 sections: West Hungary, under Habsburg rule, central Hungary, under Turkish rule, and semi-independent Transylvania (as a Principality), where Austrian and Turkish influences competed for supremacy for nearly two centuries.

With the defeat of the Turkish Transylvania gradually came under Habsburg rule, and due to the Compromise of 1867 it became an integral part of Hungary again. In line with other huge territorial losses fixed in the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Transylvania was formally ceded to Romania by

Hungary.

For a short period during WWII it was returned to Hungary but was ceded to Romania once again after the war. Many of the Saxons of Transylvania fled to Germany before the arrival of the Soviet army, and more followed after the fall of the Communist government in 1989.

In 1920, the population of Erdély was 5,200,000, of which 3 million were Romanian, 1,400,000 Hungarian (26%), 510,000 German and 180,000 Jewish. In 2002, however, the percentage of Hungarians was only 19.6% and the German and Jewish population decreased to several thousand. Despite the decrease of the Hungarian, German and Jewish element, Transylvania still preserves some of its multiethnic and multi-confessional tradition.

**3** Second Vienna Dictate: The Romanian and Hungarian governments carried on negotiations about the territorial partition of Transylvania in August 1940. Due to their conflict of interests, the negotiations turned out to be fruitless. In order to avoid violent conflict a German-Italian court of arbitration was set up, following Hitler's directives, which was also accepted by the parties.

The verdict was pronounced on 30th August 1940 in Vienna: Hungary got back a territory of 43,000 sq.km. with 2.5 million inhabitants. This territory (Northern Transylvania, Seklerland) was populated mainly by Hungarians (52 percent according to the Hungarian census and 38 percent according to the Romanian one) but at the same time more than 1 million Romanians got under the authority of Hungary.

Although Romania had 19 days for capitulation, the Hungarian troops entered Transylvania on 5th September. The verdict was disapproved by several Western European countries and the US; the UK considered it a forced dictate and refused to recognize its validity.

**4** KuK (Kaiserlich und Königlich) army: The name 'Imperial and Royal' was used for the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as for other state institutions of the Monarchy originated from the dual political system.

Following the Compromise of 1867, which established the Dual Monarchy, Austrian emperor and Hungarian King Franz Joseph was the head of the state and also commander-in-chief of the army. Hence the name 'Imperial and **Royal**'.

**5** Galicia: The Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, or simply Galicia, was the largest and northernmost province of Austria from 1772 until 1918, with Lemberg (Lwow) as its capital. It was created from territories taken during the partitions of Poland and lasted until the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Its main activity was agriculture, with some processing industry and mining, and the standard of living was proverbially low.

Today it is a historical region split between Poland and the Ukraine. Its population in 1910 was 8,025,700 of which 58% was Polish, 40% Ruthenian, 1% German and 10% other, or according to religion: Roman Catholic 46%, Eastern Orthodox 42%, Jewish 11%, the remaining 1% Protestant and other. Galicia was the center of the branch of Orthodox Judaism known as Hasidism. Nearly all the Jews in Galicia perished during WWII.

**6** Franz Joseph I Habsburg (1830-1916): Emperor of Austria from 1848, king of Hungary from 1867. In 1948 he suppressed a revolution in Austria (the 'Springtime of the Peoples'), whereupon he abolished the constitution and political concessions.

His foreign policy defeats - the loss of Italy in 1859, loss of influences in the German lands, separatism in Hungary, defeat in war against the Prussians in 1866 - and the dire condition of the state finances convinced him that reforms were vital.

In 1867 the country was reformed as a federation of two states: the Austrian empire and the Hungarian kingdom, united by a personal union in the person of Franz Joseph. A constitutional parliamentary system was also adopted, which guaranteed the various countries within the state (including Galicia, an area now largely in southern Poland) a considerable measure of internal autonomy.

In the area of foreign policy, Franz Joseph united Austria-Hungary with Germany by a treaty signed in 1892, which became the basis for the Triple Alliance. The conflict in Bosnia Hertsegovina was the spark that ignited World War I. Subsequent generations remembered the second part of Franz Joseph's rule as a period of stabilization and prosperity.

**7** Adoption of Hungarian names (Magyarization of names): Before 1881 the adoption of Hungarian names was regarded as a private matter and the liberal governments after the Compromise of 1867 treated it as a simply administrative, politically neutral question.

At the end of the 19th century the years of the Millennium brought an upsurge in the adoption of Hungarian names partly because the Banffy cabinet (1895-1899) pressed for it, especially among civil servants. Jews were overrepresented among those adopting a Hungarian name until 1919 (the last year when more Jewish than Christian people were allowed to do so).

After WWI, during the Horthy era, politicians did not consider the nation a mere political category anymore, and one had to become worthy of a Hungarian name. Assimilation of the Jewry was also controlled by this process (only the Minister of the Interior had the right to decide on it), and in 1938 the adoption of Hungarian names by the denominational Jewry was practically stopped.

After WWII, between 1945 and 1949, 50,000 petitions were filed, about a third of them by Jews, on reasons for changing German or Jewish sounding names.

**8** Arrow Cross Party: The most extreme of the Hungarian fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The party consisted of several groups, though the name is now commonly associated with the faction organized by Ferenc Szalasi and Kalman Hubay in 1938.

Following the Nazi pattern, the party promised not only the establishment of a fascist-type system including social reforms, but also the 'Solution of the Jewish Question'. The party's uniform consisted of a green shirt and a badge with a set of crossed arrows, a Hungarian version of the swastika, on it.

On 15th October 1944, when Governor Horthy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the war, the Arrow Cross seized power with military help from the Germans. The Arrow Cross government ordered general mobilization and enforced a regime of terror which, though directed chiefly against

the Jews, also inflicted heavy suffering on the Hungarians.

It was responsible for the deportation and death of tens of thousands of Jews. After the Soviet army liberated the whole of Hungary by early April 1945, Szalasi and his Arrow Cross ministers were brought to trial and executed.

**9** Securitate: (in Romanian: DGSP - Directia generala a Securitatii Poporului) General Board of the People's Security. Its structure was established in 1948 with direct participation of Soviet advisors named by the NKVD.

The primary purpose was to 'defend all democratic accomplishments and to ensure the security of the Romanian Popular Republic against plots of both domestic and foreign enemies'. Its leader was Pantelimon Bondarenko, later known as Gheorghe Pintilie, a former NKVD agent.

It carried out the arrests, physical torture and brutal imprisonment of people who became undesirable for the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party, and also kept the life of ordinary civilians under strict observation.

**10** Horthy, Miklos (1868-1957): Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Relying on the conservative plutocrats and the great landowners and Christian middle classes, he maintained a right-wing regime in interwar Hungary.

In foreign policy he tried to attain the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty on the basis of which two thirds of Hungary's territory were seceded after WWI - which led to Hungary entering WWII as an ally of Germany and Italy.

When the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, Horthy was forced to appoint as Prime Minister the former ambassador of Hungary in Berlin, who organized the deportations of Hungarian Jews. On 15th October 1944 Horthy announced on the radio that he would ask the Allied Powers for truce.

The leader of the extreme right-wing fascist Arrow Cross Party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, took over power. Horthy was detained in Germany and was later liberated by American troops. He moved to Portugal in 1949 and died there in 1957.

**11** 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.

**12** 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 two (later three) communities, which all built up their own national community network.

The Neologs were the modernizers, who opposed the Orthodox on various questions. The third group, the so-called Status Quo Ante advocated that the Jewish community was maintained the same as before the 1868/69 Congress.

**13** Satmarer Hasidim: At the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century Szatmarnemeti (today Satu Mare, in Romania) was one of the centers of the Transylvanian Hasid Jewry. When Yehuda Grunwald, who had a Hasidic attitude, was elected rabbi in 1898, Hasidism prevailed once and for all over the Orthodox congregation of Szatmarnemeti.

For this reason its opponents parted from the community in the same year, and established a separate status quo community. Around WWI the Orthodox/Hasid community of Szatmarnemeti was one of the largest and most influential congregations in Hungary.

Its significance wasn't diminished, not even after the change in ruling. Joel Teitelbaum, the member of the famous Teitelbaum rabbinic dynasty, former rabbi of Nagykaroly (today Carei, in Romania) was elected in 1934 as the religious leader of the Satmarer Hasidic community. He fulfilled this function until 1944.

After WWII the Satmarer Hasidim became known world-wide, partly due to public figures originating from their community..

**14** Exemption from Deportation in North Transylvania: In March 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary and North Transylvania. After the occupation, the openly Nazi-friendly and anti-Semitic Dome Sztojay formed a government, and a series of anti-Jewish laws were introduced.

The law for ghettoization of Hungarian Jewry made exceptions in certain cases. The sphere of exemptions was defined in a decree on 10th May 1945.

The widows and children of those Jews who received a high commendation for bravery in World War I, or those widows and children of Jews who disappeared or died a hero's death in World War II as soldiers (not during 'forced labor' in the Labor Battalions) were exempted. Foreign Jewish citizens living in Hungary were also an exception. There were other modes of escaping deportation.

Rezső Kasztner, Zionist leader from Kolozsvár, exemplified this when he secured the release of 1300 Hungarian Jews (250 of which were Kolozsvár families) as a result of negotiations with Adolf Eichmann. The North-Transylvanian Jews' other means of escape was to flee to Romania, and hide there with Christian help.

Three doctors played a major role in hiding Kolozsvár Jews: Imre Haynal, Dezso Klimko and Dezso Miskolczy, offering help through their exaggerated diagnoses and extra-extended treatments. In spring 1944, the clinic of Imre Haynal hid and sheltered a number of Jews, the greater part of his 'intensive care' ward were Jews fleeing deportation, since the expulsion of the seriously ill was often overlooked by the authorities.

**15** The Levente movement: Para-military youth organization in Hungary from 1928-1944, established with the aim of facilitating religious and national education as well as physical training. Boys between the age of 12 and 21 were eligible if they did not attend a school providing regular physical training, or did not join the army.

Since the Treaty of Versailles forbade Hungary to enforce the general obligations related to national defense, the Levente movement aimed at its substitution as well, as its members not only participated in sports activities and marches during weekends, but also practiced the use of weapons, under the guidance of demobilized officers on actual service or reserve officers. (The Law no. II of 1939 on National Defense made compulsory the national defense education and the joining of the movement.) (Source: Ignac Romsics: Magyarország története a XX. században/The History of Hungary in the 20th Century, Budapest, Osiris Publishing House, 2002, p. 181-182.)

**16** Horthy declaration: On 15th October 1944, the governor of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, announced on the radio that he would ask for truce with the Allied Powers. The leader of the Arrow Cross party, Ferenc Szalasi, supported by the German army, which had already invaded Hungary in March 1944, took over power.

**17** Siguranta Generala a Statului (The State General Security): (The State General Security): Created as a result of the Law for the organization of the Internal Affairs Ministry of 20th June 1913, it was subordinated to the Department of Police and General Security. It was the main secret agency whose duty was to collect and use intelligence that was relevant for the protection of State security. It was composed of two departments: the Data Department (central body which gathered and synthesized intelligence) and the Special Security Brigades (territorial bodies in charge of field operations and counter-espionage). In 1929, the Security Police Department was restructured into two services: the Intelligence Service and the Foreigners Control Service.

**18** Communist Party between the two World Wars in Romania: The Romanian Communist Party was formed on 11th May 1921, by laying the Socialist Party on communist bases, as a result of the decision taken at its convention. Its joining the 3rd International, which placed it under Moscow's orders, determined the response of the Romanian home security forces. The following conventions of the Party (Ploiesti, 1922; Vienna, 1924) maintained the affiliation with the Communist International and established that the fight to separate some Romanian provinces from the State territory was a priority. The Vienna convention chose Elek Koblos as secretary general. Until 1944, this position was held by Romanian citizens belonging to minority groups (Boris Stefanov, Stefan Foris) or by foreign citizens (Vitali Holostenko, Alexander Danieluc Stefanski), because it was believed that Romanians didn't have a strong revolutionary spirit and nationalistic inclinations. In 1924, the 'Marzescu law' was passed. The activities of the party became illegal, and its members went underground.

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

**20** Purges of the Romanian Communist Party: The building-up of the communist system in Romania involved rivalry between different groups, respectively the "showdown" with each other.

Two main trends took shape within the Romanian Communist Party, which seized the power over the country, and the main struggles for power took place along these lines. One of the trends (the so-called Muscovite faction) consisted of those party members, who left for the Soviet Union between the two world wars, then returned to Romania after WWII (Anna Pauker, Laszlo Luka). The so-called local faction consisted of those who stayed in the country.

In 1948 Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the RCP, making use of the anti-Semitism spread out from the Soviet Union, started to purge his political adversaries, first of all the Muscovites. His first victim was Lucretiu Patrascanu, the charges brought against him being nationalism and rightist deviation; he was executed in 1954.

Patrascanu was followed by Laszlo Luka (he was sentenced to life imprisonment), then Anna Pauker was expelled from the Party. The purge of the Party aimed at not only the highest leadership, but it covered the circle of simple members as well.

**21** Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe (1901-1965): Leader of the Romanian Communist Party between 1952 and 1965. Originally an electrician and railway worker, he was imprisoned in 1933 and became the underground leader of all imprisoned communists. He was prime minister between 1952-55 and first secretary of the Communist Party between 1945-1953 and from 1955 until his death. In his later years, he led a policy that drifted away from the directive in Moscow, keeping the Stalinist system untouched by the Krushchevian reforms.

**22** Ana Pauker - Vasile Luca - Teohari Georgescu group: After 1945 there were two major groupings in the Romanian communist leadership: the Muscovites led by Ana Pauker, and the former illegal communists led by Gheorghe Dej.

Ana Pauker arrived in Romania the day after the entry of the Soviet army as the leader of the group of communists returning from Moscow; the Muscovites were the major political rivals of Gheorghe Dej. As a result of their rivalry, three out of the four members of the Political Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party were convicted on trumped-up charges in show trials in 1952.

The anti-Semitic campaign launched by Stalin in 1952, which also spread over to Romania, created a good opportunity to launch such a trial - both Luca and Pauker were of Jewish origin. Georgescu was executed. Luca was also sentenced to death but the sentence was changed to lifetime forced labor. He died in prison in 1960. Pauker was released after Stalin's death and lived in internal exile until her death.

**23** Rajk, Laszlo (1909-1949): Hungarian communist politician, Minister of the Interior from 1946 to 1948 and Foreign Minister from 1948 to 1949. During his period as Minister of the Interior many religious, national and democratic institutions and organizations labeled as fascist and reactionary groups were banned or dissolved.

He took an active part in launching the first show trials and he pitilessly fought against all alleged and real anti-Stalinist forces, but finally became a victim of his own machinery.

He was arrested on false charges in 1949 during the purges initiated by Stalin's anti-Tito campaign. He was accused of crime against the state and treason, more precisely of having been a secret agent in the 1930s. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1949. His show trial was given much publicity throughout the soviet block. In March 1956 Rajk was officially rehabilitated.

**24** Rajk trial: Laszlo Rajk, Hungarian communist politician, Minister of the Interior (1946-48) and Foreign Minister (1948-49), was arrested on false charges in 1949 in the purges initiated by Stalin's anti-Tito campaign.

He was accused of crime against the state and treason (of having been a secret agent in the 1930s), sentenced to death and executed. His show trial was given much publicity throughout the Soviet block. In March 1956 he was officially rehabilitated.

**25** Ceausescu, Nicolae (1918-1989): Communist head of Romania between 1965 and 1989. He followed a policy of nationalism and non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries.

The internal political, economic and social situation was marked by the cult of his personality, as well as by terror, institutionalized by the Securitate, the Romanian political police. The Ceausescu regime was marked by disastrous economic schemes and became increasingly repressive and corrupt.

There were frequent food shortages, lack of electricity and heating, which made everyday life unbearable. In December 1989 a popular uprising, joined by the army, led to the arrest and execution of both Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, who had been deputy Prime Minister since 1980.

**26** Romanian Revolution of 1989: In December 1989, a revolt in Romania deposed the communist dictator Ceausescu. Anti-government violence started in Timisoara and spread to other cities.

When army units joined the uprising, Ceausescu fled, but he was captured and executed on 25th December along with his wife. A provisional government was established, with Ion Iliescu, a former Communist Party official, as president. In the elections of May 1990 Iliescu won the presidency and his party, the Democratic National Salvation Front, obtained an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

**27** Creation of the State of Israel: From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate.

On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks

designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states.

In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state.

On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

**28** Herzl, Theodor (1860-1904): Hungarian-born Jewish playwright, journalist and founder of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). His thought of realizing the idea of political Zionism was inspired by among other things the so-called Dreyfus affair.

In the polemical essay *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat*, 1896) he declares that Jews aren't only a community of believers, but also a nation with the right to its own territory and state. He was of the opinion that in the anti-Jewish mood extant in Europe, it was not possible to solve the Jewish question via either civic emancipation or cultural assimilation.

After a significant diplomatic effort he succeeded in the calling of the 1st International Jewish Congress in Basel on 29-31st August 1897.

The congress accepted the "Basel Program" and elected Herzl as its first president. Herzl wasn't the first to long for the return of the Jews to Palestine. He was, however, able to not only support the idea, but also to promote it politically; without his efforts the creation of the new state of Israel in the Palestine on 14th May 1948 would not have been possible.

Theodor Herzl died in 1904 at the age of 44 and was buried in a Jewish cemetery in Vienna. In 1949 his remains were transported to Jerusalem, where they were laid to rest on a mountain that today carries his name (Mount Herzl).

**29** Ben Gurion Dawid (real name Dawid Grin, 1886-1973): Zionist leader, Israeli politician, and the first Prime Minister of the state. He was born in Poland. Since 1906 he lived in Palestine. He was the leader of the Poalei Zion party, co-founder of the He-Chalutz youth organization, founder of the Achdut ha-Awoda party and the Histadrut trade union congress. Since 1933 he was a member of the Jewish Agency executive committee (in the British mandate Palestine), and since 1935-1948 its chair.

He opposed the Revisionist movement within Zionists. After the 1939 announcement of the so-called White Book by the British authorities, limiting the Jewish immigration to Palestine, he supported the development of the Jewish self-defense forces Haganah and illegal immigration. He fought in the 1948 war.

On May 14, 1948 he proclaimed the creation of the state Israel. He was Prime Minister and Defense Minister until 1953. After a two-year withdrawal from politics he returned and became Prime Minister once more. In 1965 he became the leader of the new party Rafi (Israeli Labor List) but lost the elections. In 1969 he retired from politics.