

# Bela Muller

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Kolozsvár

Romania

Interviewer: Attila Gido

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The 81-year-old Benjamin Muller is a well-respected member of the Jewish community in Kolozsvár. His politeness and attentiveness earned him the respect of his entourage. He spends his mornings at the community center, performing religious and administrative related activities. As for the rest of the day, he fills it by reading the newspapers and watching television. He wasn't willing to uncover the integrity and intimacy of his home, and so we arranged to meet during his time at the community center. Benjamin Muller told me the story of his family in the modestly furnished, unheated community center library room.

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## Family background

By the time I was born, only my grandmother on my mother's side was alive. She was living in Szaplonca, located in Maramaros. My maternal grandmother was probably born in the 1850s, and her name was Perl Ganc. I don't remember my grandfather's name. If I recall correctly, he was a religion teacher in the cheder in Szaplonca. It was an Orthodox [1](#), observant family, and they raised my mother according to this spirit, as my parents did with me. As a small child my mother used to take my siblings and me to Szaplonca to my grandmother. I have no particular memories of the time I spent there. Szaplonca was a very small village in Maramaros, where people were in need and the Jews had a difficult life. There was a famous rabbi there called Abish. This rabbi was famous all over Maramaros, because he was a great tzaddik – a great Bible scholar. People used to turn to him with all kinds of grievances and litigations for justice. Many asked him to pray for them in order to remedy their problems.

For the holidays my grandmother used to visit us in Kolozsvár. She was a traditional Jewish woman, always wore a black dress and a shawl on her head, and in regard to the tradition, she wore a wig. The prescription was that since hair was every woman's adornment, they had to cut it off before the wedding. Thus they wanted to prevent married women from being attractive to other men. She used to wear a black apron over her dress. She lived in modest conditions, but had a strictly religious life. After she became a widow – I don't know when this happened, but probably before

World War I – her children supported her materially. I remember when I was a child my late mother used to visit her during the winter holidays. She even took me along several times. When I was summoned for forced labor in 1943, my grandmother was still alive; she was about ninety years old then. She was probably deported. This is all I can recall about my grandmother from Szaplonca.

I had two uncles and one aunt from my mother's side: Smil Leib Ganc was one of my mother's brothers, and the other one was called Nosen. They both lived in Szaplonca. I don't know anything particular about them, only that they were involved in transportation. My mother's sister was Blima and she lived in Szatmar. She visited us quite often. Her husband, whose name I don't remember anymore, was a carpenter. They lived a very religious life. The only difference between Auntie Blima and her siblings was that, as opposed to the others, she spoke perfect Hungarian. This was because of the fact that she was quite young when she left Szaplonca and went to Szatmar, where she learned the language perfectly. She was my only relative I didn't speak with in Yiddish, but Hungarian. She had two daughters, but I don't remember their names. All of my mother's siblings were deported with their families. None of them survived.

My mother's name was Gizella Ganc, and she was born sometime in the 1890s. She wasn't very educated: she had only finished four grades of elementary school in Szaplonca. My parents never related anything about how they got acquainted. By the time they came to Kolozsvar, they were already married. They got married in Szaplonca, around the 1910s. My father's parents lived in Ganya [today Hanyci, Ukraine] in Transcarpathia [2](#). I don't know their names; I didn't meet them, as they died before I was born. My father was born at the end of the 1880s, and his name was Wolf Muller.

Ganya, my father's home village, was a small religious settlement. They were very poor, as well, and my grandparents had lots of children that they had to raise. My father's siblings spread around the world. Our relatives were quite far away so we didn't keep in touch with them. Unfortunately, I don't even know their names. My father told me very few things about his childhood and education. I know he finished four grades of elementary school and the yeshivah in Ganya. He didn't serve in the army, I don't know why. My late father was a religion teacher. I think this is how he ended up in Kolozsvar, because the Orthodox community was in need of a religion teacher, and he applied for the job. My father was a follower of the famous rabbi from Vizsnic, that is, he was a 'vizsnice chussed' [Hasid [3](#) from Vizsnic]. The Jews used to say the prayers using Hasidic melodies, written by chazzanim. The rabbi from Vizsnic wrote his own melodies for each prayer, including the one on Friday evening. My father always used to say the Shalom Alechem, the Kol somer sabosz kados mechalelo and the Eshes Chajil with the melodies taught by the rabbi from Vizsnic.

Even today there are Hasidim from Vizsnic. I met several in Borszek myself. Three or four years ago my wife Anna, my grand-daughter Renata, and I, spent our summer holiday in Borszek, and there we saw Jews from America and Israel who said the prayers and the Friday evening songs with the melodies of the rabbi from Vizsnic. Otherwise there are many Jewish tourists that go to Borszek, because it's probably the only spa in the country where you can find an operational synagogue and a ritual bath, a mikveh. There's no Jewish community in Borszek anymore; the synagogue and the mikveh are supported by the national community center: the Federation. The Federation operates a spa network, where retired Jews with low incomes and the youth involved in teaching the talmud torah or in the choirs can spend their summer holiday at very reasonable costs.

I have to tell you my mother was my father's second wife. His first wife died, and I don't know anything about her. However, they had three sons. The eldest was Ignac, and the next was Jakab. I don't remember the name of the third one. They were several years older than my elder sister Eszter. I don't remember too much about them. Ignac and Jakab immigrated to America in the 1920s. The youngest boy emigrated in the same period and settled down in a village in Hungary. Before they emigrated the three boys lived with us, with our family. In 1943 my half-brother from this village came to Kolozsvár and looked us up. By then I was on forced labor and I wasn't able to meet with him.

My parents were poor people. My father worked all his life as a religion teacher at the Orthodox community, and supplemented his income by tutoring the children of the wealthier families in the afternoons, teaching them religion. My father was a strictly religious, very fair, honest man. My mother was a housewife and raised the children. When my sisters grew old enough, my mother's situation became somewhat easier, because they used to help her out around the house. We didn't have our own house; we lived in a rented apartment in Kolozsvár in modest conditions. Our apartment was modestly furnished, and consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. It was arranged in order to accommodate a family of eight. We slept two children in one bed. It was always a problem to obtain wood for the winter. Since my father was an excellent chazzan, that is Baal tfile, he used to get himself a job at a prayer house in Kolozsvár for the period of the holidays of fall – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. From the money he earned as a chazzan he usually bought wood for us to have something to heat with.

We were many children, six in all. There were three girls and three boys. My sister Eszter was born around 1910. She was the eldest. She attended elementary school in the school of the Orthodox community, and she finished seven grades there. Next she learned the sewing profession at a private contractor. In 1936 she married Moricz Nuszen here in Kolozsvár. My brother-in-law was a clothier. Due to the difficult economic situation, it was very hard for them to get by, so they decided to immigrate to Argentina. As a matter of fact, it was entirely my brother-in-law's idea, and he wanted it badly. First Moricz emigrated, toward the end of the 1930s, and my sister followed him shortly after. They settled in Buenos Aires, and stayed there right until the end. Moricz continued to work in his profession, while my sister became a housewife. In spring 1980 they sent me an invitation letter, so I was able to visit them. I stayed there for six weeks. There I met their daughter and son. Now both of their children are married, her daughter has three children, while her son has two children. I don't know their names. Eszter passed away three years ago, in 2000.

My next brother, Josef, Jozsef to be precise, was born in 1912. He was a cabinet-maker and he immigrated to Palestine in 1936. He was able to emigrate with the help of the Transylvanian Zionist movement, as a member of a Zionist organization unknown to me. Emigration took place in an organized way. Palestine was the mandated territory of Great Britain [4](#) then, and they refrained from the emigration of the Jews. There was a fixed number of people each year they issued certificates for immigration. I didn't know how many certificates were issued for Transylvania [5](#), and how many of those for Kolozsvár. The Zionist movement distributed these certificates amongst the militants. This way my brother Jozsef got to Palestine and began to build up his life. He married a girl from Zsibo [today Jibou, Romania], and they emigrated together, and they founded a family. The name of the girl was Sara Weisz. Before the state of Israel was founded, they lived in very difficult conditions, but after 1948 my brother became an independent contractor. He established a

carpentry workshop and this way continued his life. They had three children, and they lived in Kiryat Motskin [Israel]. All the children have Jewish names: Matithiau, Echud and Ciporah. Josef died in 1994, while his wife Sara in 2001.

Chaja, in Hungarian Helen, was born in 1914. Like Eszter, she also learned to become a dressmaker. She got married in Kolozsvar, and she moved to Apahida. Her husband's name was Mozes Aron. They had a small grocery store. They had two rooms, and the grocery store was in the front room. The store was so small that it didn't even have an emblem. She had two children, but I remember only the name of one of them. His name was Mozes, after his father. They were all deported in 1944. They didn't come back home.

Slomo was the fourth sibling; he was born in 1917. He was a student at a Bible university, in the yeshivah of the famous rabbi from Vizsnic. This elder brother was a real Bible scholar. They summoned him in 1936 to Arad. Unfortunately, he was a weak man, he didn't resist to the instruction. He got lung-disease, and he was sent home. He died in 1938 in Kolozsvar. He had no family.

## Growing up

I was born in 1922 as the fifth child of the family. I had a sister, Lea [Lili]; she was born in 1924. After she graduated from the seven grades of the Jewish community school, she worked in a hosiery shop. She was a seamstress. She was very young when they took her to the concentration camp in Auschwitz [today Poland], but she survived.

We were a strictly Orthodox family; we used to observe the Jewish holidays regularly. The holiest holiday of the Jews is the Sabbath, on Saturday. Actually, there's only one even holier holiday: Yom Kippur. Every Jewish family, including my parents, of course, prepared very well for Sabbath. Our home was spotless, even we, the children, had to help out in the cleaning. My parents had special care for the Friday supper. I don't exactly remember the preparations anymore. On Fridays, my mother used to light the candles. We, the boys, went with our father to the synagogue. When we came back from the synagogue, the table was laid with a white tablecloth, and there were two big loaves of challah covered, and the candles were lit.

We sat at the table and my father said the prayers and bentsched us. That is, he gave us a blessing. I don't know the origin of the term bentsched. [Editor's note: This is a Yiddish term. However, it does not mean to bless the children but to say the blessings after finishing the meal.] I can't remember the text of the blessing, as it was in Hebrew. I think it began with 'God bless the children of Abraham, Jacob and Yitzak [Isaac]...' Even today the observant families do it the same way, but there are no such families in Kolozsvar. The Friday evening supper was a ceremony in itself. We used to sing songs at the table; we sang Friday evening songs: the Shalom Alechem, the Kol somer sabosz kados mechalelo and the Manei ha B'simcha. The meals had a specific order, as well. First we ate the fish aspic. This meal can only be prepared in Jewish households. My wife prepares fish aspic quite often even today, she knows the recipe, and I don't. Then came the meat soup, the beef and then the farfel.

On Saturday morning we again went to the synagogue with my father, then we came home and we had a festive dinner. The Saturday dinner had already been prepared on Friday. We ate chulent then. The chulent was made from bean and hulled barley. They used to put meat in it and poured

water over. After that [on Friday] we took it to the bakery and we put it in the preheated stove. We left it there for the night, and the shabesgoy brought it home on Saturday. On Saturday afternoon we used to go to the cheder, where we attended religion classes.

We used to socialize with families of similar conception. Apart from Jews, we also had relations with Christians, especially with our neighbors. For example, on Saturdays, when we were not allowed to put on the light or light the fire, one of our Christian neighbors, the shabesgoy, used to come over. We gave him a piece of challah, a plate of chulent, and he used to put the lights on or off or lit the fire in the stove and put some wood on the fire, when we needed it.

I liked Pesach best, because seder was a very nice family event. Even before seder my mother used to clean up the house, paying particular attention not to leave in the house chametz, that is, any meal that was made using yeast. On seder the family used to sit together, my mother used to read from the Haggadah, and the meals were exquisite. Each holiday has its special type of meal. On Pesach the main meal is matzah, as we aren't allowed to eat anything containing yeast, only meals without yeast. In the meat soup my mother used to put special matzah balls. We had potato doughnuts, which is a traditional Jewish meal for that period.

Unfortunately we didn't know Hebrew, we knew how to read, but we didn't really understand the text. However, we always got some explanations from our father with regard to the prayers. Otherwise, in the family we used to talk in Yiddish. My parents' mother tongue was Yiddish. We learned it living in a Hungarian environment.

It was customary in the Jewish families to send the boys to religion school, called cheder, even from the age of four or five. There I had my first contact with the Hebrew alphabet and I learned to read from the prayer book. I can clearly remember our teachers, Rebbeim Goldner and Samuel, as well as Rebbe Heszl. They were very strict about teaching. We had to rehearse the weekly verse – the five books of Moses were divided into weekly verses. Each week they read one verse in the synagogue, and they taught the same verse in the cheder. In later years I continued to get a religious education, but to be honest, to no avail. However, through my parents, I picked up the most important basic principles of the Jewish life, and the essential elements for tending the Jewish tradition.

Bar mitzvah is a very important event in every Jewish family. They taught me every detail beforehand. I had to read in the synagogue the maftir of the weekly verse of the Torah. [Editor's note: Maftir, informally, refers to the final section of the weekly portion read on Sabbath and holiday mornings in the synagogue from the Torah scroll; technically, it means the person who is called to read that section. The maftir section is usually a repetition of either the last part, or the entirety of the previous reading. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maftir>] It was the first time they called me to read the Torah. After the reading I had to deliver a short speech, praising my education. I had to praise my parents' devotion and love and I vowed, of course, that I would conduct my life according to the education I received in my father's house. Because with the occasion of bar mitzvah, at the age of 13 one is graduated to be of full age, and beginning with that moment one is responsible for one's deeds. Until one's bar mitzvah the father holds the entire responsibility for the deeds of his son. At the end, the relatives and acquaintances attending the ceremony congratulated my father and me. Next the Kiddush followed, which was some kind of a festivity at our home. Pastry, strong and light alcoholic drinks were served. It's customary to give

gifts on this occasion. I don't remember anymore what presents I got, but these used to be fountain pens, watches or books.

I attended the elementary school of the Orthodox community; I didn't graduate from high school. Overall I was a good student. My favorite subjects were mathematics and history. My teacher was a man called Uncle Binder, who taught me from first to fourth grade. From fifth grade we had different teachers for each subject. The mathematics teacher was called Uncle Bihari. I completed eight grades.

## Kolozsvar

I can clearly remember the Kolozsvar of my childhood. There was a very large Jewish community in Kolozsvar. There were some sixteen to seventeen thousand Jews back then. [Editor's note: According to the census of 1930, the Jewish population of Kolozsvar consisted of some 13,000 people.] The Jewry of Kolozsvar was divided into three communities. The largest one was the Orthodox community, followed by the Reformed and the Neolog communities [6](#), and there was the strictly religious community, the Sephardim [7](#). The latter was the smallest; they had their own prayer house. In the city there were around 15 to 20 prayer houses and five larger synagogues. These greater temples were on Papp Street, Mikes Kelemen Street, Malom Street, Horea Street and Baritiu Street. Only the one on Horea Street was Neolog, the rest were Orthodox temples. We belonged to the Orthodox community.

The Jewry of Kolozsvar played an important role in the economic and cultural life of the city. There was a Jewish philharmonic society, the Goldmark [8](#), which was comprised of amateur Jewish musicians. This philharmonic society organized a concert every year, and my family used to attend these concerts.

There was a Jewish sports club, the Haggibor [9](#), where the Jewish youth could play sports. I didn't participate in the activities of the Haggibor. When the weather allowed us to, I used to go on trips with my friends. I had mainly Jewish friends, but this had no special reason, it just worked out this way. These were simple walking tours to the surroundings of Kolozsvar. One of our main distractions was cycling. I was a poor child; I didn't have a bicycle of my own. I used to get one from one of my wealthier friends, who lent it to me so that I could ride a bit. I learned to skate similarly: one of my friends took the skates off and gave them to me. My parents had no money to buy me skates.

The Jews also played their part in the economy. I remember that the main square, the main streets and the Szechenyi Square were full of Jewish stores. There were many craftsmen among the Jews, such as carpenters, tailors and tinsmiths.

In Kolozsvar, in the 1930s, there was a strong Zionist movement. The Hashomer Hatzair [10](#), the Hanoar Hatzioni [11](#), the Barissia [12](#) and the Aviva [13](#) had activities of education, preparing the young people participating in the movement for emigration. They established several agricultural ranches in Transylvania and trained the people there, who were idealists and aimed to build the Jewish homeland. They learned agriculture there. There was such a ranch in the vicinity of Kolozsvar, as well. They rented a plot of land, they had agricultural tools, and several young Zionists lived there. Not every young person who immigrated to Palestine participated in these agricultural trainings, but these were the majority of those who were favored to emigrate. In



Kolozsvar the Zionist movement was very diverse; there were different trends. There were the observant and the less religious, the leftist and the rightist ones. I was still religious then, just like my parents and siblings, and I used to go to the Mizrahi [14](#), a religious Zionist organization. Its members came from families pertaining to the religious level. I don't remember the name of any of its leaders.

As far as the authorities were concerned, and because Kolozsvar was an academic city, each year, on 24th January, when celebrating the Romanian national day [the unification of Muntenia and Moldova in 1859], the Iron Guard [15](#) fascist organization used it to organize the students for anti-Jewish demonstrations on this day. During these demonstrations they used to break the windows and doors of the Jewish stores and profaned the Jewish temples. If they managed to get hold of the Sefer Torahs [the Torah scrolls], they burned them. We were afraid to go out onto the streets on this day. Only the next day, when we got out, we could see the damage that had been done. A particularly aggressive pogrom was the one in December 1927, during the student demonstrations in Kolozsvar [16](#). The Romanian students marched through the main streets of the city and attacked the buildings owned by Jews.

After I completed school in 1936, I began to work, and I became somewhat self-dependent. My father was on good terms with a Jew called Wieder, who owned a hosiery shop. I worked there as an apprentice and I learned knitting and weaving. In the beginning I used to sweep the floor, but after three months I learned the profession so well, I was able to work on my own. I got a machine that I worked on. The owner received the orders from the merchants, and based on different samples I executed the work. In the factory there were both Jewish and non-Jewish employees, the owner didn't care about the origin of his workers.

Since my parents were poor, I contributed weekly with part of my income to help them with their expenses. With the balance of my income, I saved some money and used some money for my entertainment. In 1940, at the time of the [Second] Vienna Dictate [17](#), I managed to save a decent sum of money in the bank.

Kolozsvar was a center of music. Since I had my own income, I used to go quite often to the Hungarian opera house, to concerts, and my favorite entertainment was music. There was a Jewish journal in Kolozsvar, appearing in Hungarian: the Uj Kelet [18](#). We used to read it regularly. It was especially my father who read it, but if I found an interesting article, I read it, as well. Then I began to read literature.

For a while, the Jewish youth was allowed to go to high schools and universities. Around 1938, when anti-Semitism got stronger, even here [in Romania] authorities began to declare the Numerus Clausus [19](#). The Jewish youth weren't allowed to go to university, nor to high school. The situation got worse after 30th August 1940, when part of Northern Transylvania was annexed to Hungary [20](#). By then in Hungary the Anti-Jewish laws [21](#) were already in effect, and the situation of the Jewry got significantly worse. Unfortunately, we weren't aware that the Vienna Dictate would bring nothing good for us. We knew the Anti-Jewish laws were already effective in Hungary. We read about the trial of Tiszaeszlár [22](#) from 1882, when an innocent Jew was accused of murdering a Christian girl. We knew that, unfortunately, this turn of events would not bring anything good for us. But, to be fair, anti-Semitism was already very strong in Romania, too. The Iron Guard was already active and, furthermore, when the Cuza government [23](#) was instated, pogroms became

more frequent. From this point of view it was almost irrelevant what control we were under. We couldn't expect anything beneficial from any of them.

### During the War

The situation was that in Transylvania, after the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Hungarian culture was predominant in the cities, and thus the Transylvanian Jewry spoke Hungarian and adapted to the Hungarian culture. In the villages, where the population was Romanian, the local Jewry spoke mainly Romanian. But Kolozsvár was, for example, a cultural city, so we assimilated the Hungarian culture. We considered Judaism as our religion, because we were raised in a religious spirit. But we spoke in Hungarian with our friends and acquaintances. We studied in Romanian [before September 1940], but outside school we spoke Hungarian. I didn't learn any other language, besides Romanian and Hungarian.

After the second Vienna Dictate, the Jews who worked after 1940 in commerce or industry felt the effects of the anti-Jewish laws, more and more to an extent that in 1940 the Baross Association was created by the Hungarian traders, specifically to economically repress the Jews. [The Baross Association was an association of Christian and Hungarian traders, industrialists and crop growers. They got their motto from Kossuth: 'The nation is living a colonial life, with our economic life in the hands of strangers.' Their aim was to tend and develop the Hungarian commerce, industry and crop growers. The exclusion was evident.] In 1943 the Jewish traders weren't receiving any products, and the Jewish industrialists were left without raw materials. Therefore the Jewish industrialists and merchants had to associate with Hungarian traders and industrialists and had to run their business under the name of their associates. This type of partnership was called the figurehead system.

I worked at a company called Kreier. In our profession, hosiery, there was a time of prosperity between 1940 and 1942, especially after [in 1941] Hungary entered the war against the Soviet Union. [They declared war on the Soviet Union, and WWII began for Hungary.]. In this period there was a goods shortage in Hungary, and we could sell in Budapest [today Hungary] any 'rag' we produced: stockings, pullovers and sweaters. We had a traveling salesman, who had connections with a Hungarian wholesale trader from Budapest, who bought all our products.

In fall 1943 the situation of the Jewry got even worse. The men able to work had been summoned for forced labor. I received my summon in October 1943 and I was enlisted at the 10th battalion. The 10th battalion was at Nagybánya. I was assigned to the fourth company, the 10/4. The people from Kolozsvár were usually assigned to the 10/2, but I got my summon in Kolozsvár with eight to ten days of delay, probably due to an administrative error. Thus I ended up in the 4th company. It was a famous company because the battalion commander, a general called Reviczky [24](#), was extremely nice to the forced laborers. He helped many Jewish families with numerous children, from which older people were summoned. The wives of the enlisted forced laborers used to go and have an audience with Reviczky, and he granted their husbands leave. He even discharged several men with large families.

From Nagybánya they took us to Oradna and to the nearby Rotunda – this is the name of a place in the vicinity of Oradna – to build fortresses. We had to do some very hard work, and the alimentation was poor. The company commander was called Morzenyi, and he was very harsh. From Nagybánya they took us to Transcarpathia. There we worked at a lumberyard, where we did



lumbering. Our quarters were in a forest. We had to carry logs: Two people had to carry logs of 40 to 50 kilograms for around four to five kilometers. If someone wasn't able to do that, or he did something against the rules, they punished him severely. For example, the most severe punishment in the Hungarian army was being tied up. This not only applied to the forced laborers, but to the regular army, as well. This was a very inhuman punishment. The two hands of the punished were tied behind his back, and then, he was hanged by his tied wrists on a tree, to a height at which the man wasn't able to touch the ground with his feet. This was so painful that nobody could bear more than 10 to 15 minutes without fainting. Then they took him down, splashed some water on him and hanged him back again.

The tying up was proportional with the severity of the disorder. Some were tied up for half an hour, others for a whole hour. It was considered a disorder if one didn't complete his daily piece rate. But punishments were given even for the smallest things. Once an army company marched by us and from their lines one of my Christian neighbors, Bela Gurat, recognized me. He lived on the same street as me in Kolozsvar. His parents owned a bakery, and until he was called in he worked in that bakery. When he saw me, he was very happy and he told me, 'Come, I'll give you some bread.' And he gave me four loaves of bread. I had no idea where he got that many from. I was punished because I stepped out of the lines for a moment and took those four loaves of bread.

Alimentation was very poor. There were occasions when we got our ration of bread in advance for two days. In the evening, there was a line for supper, which consisted of caraway soup, and eventually some other soup or a can of black coffee. By the time one's turn came, we ate half of our ration of bread for two days. Unfortunately for us, the bread was fresh, and it ran out quite fast. Many couldn't bear the famine, and when the Russians were closing in, many of the forced laborers tried to run over to them. But either the Hungarians or the Russians shot them. The Hungarians did it because they tried to flee, while the Russians thought they were spies. Epidemics and diseases were very frequent in the forced labor camps. We hardly had a place to wash up. As the doctor of the company, a photographer was assigned, because he said he knew how to do dressing. But other than that he knew nothing else.

In spring 1944 they took us to the front and attached us to a pioneer company from Transcarpathia. The front was on the line Sztaniszlov Sztrij [today Stanislov Striy, Ukraine], Gyelatin [today Delatin, Ukraine], Kolomea [today Colomea, Ukraine], and Koszov [today Kosov, Ukraine]. We lived in inhuman conditions. The members of the skeleton crew made fun of us, and there weren't few who starved and couldn't work, and died. We supplied the pioneer company with food and ammunition. The front was in a place unreachable with vehicles, only on foot or with horses. We carried the ammunition and food on our backs. The forced labor camp was even harder to bear due to the Russian progress, because we had to be on full alert all the time.

In fall 1944, when we were retreating, it was the first time I saw a Russian soldier who had been captured. We had to walk 35 to 40 kilometers each day towards Huszt [today Hust, Ukraine], and on the way we had to repair the roads, in order to allow the Hungarian troops to advance without problems. This retreat wasn't only difficult because we had to march, but because we only had five-minute breaks after each hour of work. During these five minutes our joints grew so stiff due to the long march, that when we had to start marching again we felt like our flesh had been cut with a knife. On one occasion, after several weeks of marching, the commander informed us about the route of our retreat. He declared that those who couldn't keep up and would fall behind could ask

for directions at the headquarters of the pioneer company. Then, together with other fellow forced laborers, we decided to flee. In the vicinity of Tecso [today Tyachiv, Ukraine], in Transcarpathia, as we were marching, it grew dark, and we jumped out of the lines and hid in the cornfield beside the road. Tecso was a major railroad center. By then the Hungarian army was so scattered, and it was so disorganized that not only we, the forced laborers fled, but also many of the Hungarian soldiers did, as well. The Russians troops were closing in so fast that the leaders of the Hungarian army couldn't control the situation anymore.

Because we were so many who fled, on that night the company commander, when they reached Tecso and saw many were missing, ordered the local fire-engine to go and search for us with searchlights. Those who had been found were shot in the head on the spot. I, for instance, felt the boot of Kenez on my cap's end – Kenez was the orderly leading sergeant. If he stepped on my face, that would have meant the end for me. From then on, every day of my life has been a gift. We waited in the cornfield for a while, and after four or five hours we set off for the village. Four of us fellow forced laborers, who were from the same company, got to an izba [rustic peasant home]. We asked the owner to let us sleep in the hayloft. A widow called Auntie Mari lived there. The next day we put all our money on the table – we received some money from home even while in forced labor – and asked Auntie Mari how many days she could accommodate us for. By then the front was approaching very rapidly and we wanted to wait for our liberation there. It was the third day we were staying there when the Russians came into Tecso. They were very nice to us because they saw our yellow armbands and that we were victims of the fascists. Two days later we set off for Nagybanya, through the woods. The locals warned us that the forest was mined and it was very dangerous. Under normal circumstances the trip should have taken us two or three days, but we weren't familiar with the area, and so we wandered for several more days through the woods.

Among the four of us I was from Kolozsvar, another one was from Nagybanya and I don't know about the rest. In Nagybanya I met several people from Kolozsvar and we started to walk towards Kolozsvar. At Ilonda [Nagyilonda] – some 50 kilometers from Nagybanya – we asked a Russian truck to take us aboard. We told them we were going to Kolozsvar, and the Russians replied with 'Turda' – Torda in Romanian – and we told them 'adyon,' meaning all right in Russian, and got on. I got off in Kolozsvar in front of the Romanian opera house. This was in November or December 1944.

I knew there was nobody left from my family, because I corresponded with one of our neighbors, Mrs. Kiss. I knew my parents and siblings were gone. During the forced labor, right until my parents were deported, we wrote to each other regularly. Later, I kept in touch with Mrs. Kiss. When the Jews were taken to ghettos and my parents were taken to the car, my father was so ill that he wasn't in a condition to be transported. Despite that, the gendarmes wanted to put him in the car, but then Mrs. Kiss went to the deputy mayor, Truca, who lived in the neighborhood. She told him, 'Uncle Muller is ill,' and she asked him to give her a certificate to prevent my father from being taken to the ghetto. Truca gave her the certificate, and Mrs. Kiss took my father to her place. A few days later she arranged for my father to be sent to the Jewish hospital.

The Jewish hospital was operational all through the war as a medical unit. Thus my father escaped the deportation, and I found out this way that he died here, in the hospital, in decent conditions. There was a forced labor unit here in Kolozsvar that worked at the food warehouse. They buried my father. From them and from this Hungarian family I learned where my father was buried. From my

family, my mother and my two sisters, Chaja and Lea, were deported. Chaja had two small children, and they perished, as well. Only Lea survived. She escaped from the jaws of death, from Auschwitz [today Poland], in 1945.

So, I wondered where I should go next! I stood nailed to the ground; I didn't know where to go. However, I went to the place my parents lived before the war. I wasn't able to get into the house, and they didn't let me in. I went to one of our neighbors, Mrs. Kiss, who looked after me for several days. Then I began to look for something so that I could go on with my life. Restarting my life was the most difficult thing to do. I don't even want to look back on that period and don't want to talk too much about it. A Romanian family, my father's close friends helped me out. After I left Mrs. Kiss, I stayed for months with the family of Gheorghe Capusan, until I managed to find my own way.

## After the War

When I came home to Kolozsvár the reception of the Jewish survivors hadn't been organized yet. A few weeks later an American Jewish aid organization [the Joint] [25](#) transformed apartments into quarters and provided hot meal, clothes and washing places for the people returning from the concentration camps and forced labor. The so-called Peter-Pal villa [26](#) had been transformed for this. When I arrived home, this villa wasn't operational yet, and I didn't use this opportunity because the Capusan family offered me lodging and meals. I wore the clothes I wore in the forced labor camp for eight months. I bought myself the first piece of clothing from a junk dealer, thus changing my forced laborer clothes, from the money the Joint gave me as assistance.

I was looking for work and I managed to get a job at the hosiery. It wasn't easy to restart; I ended up looking for my parents all the time. I knew that they had both died, but I still hoped that they would show up one day. As the months passed by, I met one of my old Christian friends, Lebovics, whose parents also operated a hosiery business. He had some inheritance, several knitting machines. Since I knew the profession and knew how to use those machines, he asked me to join him and to start a knitting company. We managed to start off and to produce. Thus my life began to take shape and I managed to pull myself together materially.

In the meantime, in Spring 1945, my little sister Lea came home, whom I had to support in every way. A few months later she immigrated to Israel. She got married there, to a Jew who emigrated from Romania. I don't remember her husband's name, but I know he wasn't originally from Transylvania. She had a daughter, who's now a kindergartner. Lea died in 1975.

After the war, I sympathized with the communist movement, because this was the ideology I considered I could regain my human dignity as a Jew. I believed in the ideas communism propagated. Unfortunately, it took me some time to make sure that ideology and practice are two different things. I joined the Party in 1945, but in 1949 they excluded me because they considered that my activities after the war as craftsman were against the class. I had no regrets for this. I was proud I was working honestly and I didn't have to stay in line with those who used their 'red booklet' [the party membership booklet] to idle their time away and to jaw at the meetings. I kept quiet, but worked honestly. I never requested them to allow me to rejoin the Party.

In 1953 people still believed in the communist ideology. They were sorry Stalin had died. Later, they discovered that nothing the regime had promised was accomplished in reality. I watched

closely through the radio and the newspapers the events of 1956 [27](#). I was listening to the radio stations from Budapest and to Radio Free Europe [28](#).

In 1949 I got a job at the state hosiery in Kolozsvár, the Somesul, and that was the first time I worked as an assistant master, and later as a fashion designer. I worked in this factory for 33 years, until 1982, when I retired. People have always respected me for my work. In the communist era there was a covered nationalist spirit, but I never felt an explicit, public discrimination towards me as a Jew. I did my work honestly and they respected me for that.

At the end of the 1940s I got acquainted with Anna Szakacs, whom I married in 1952. We only had a civil marriage. Neither of us was religious, so we didn't feel it was important to have a religious ceremony. Besides, my wife isn't Jewish, she's Reformed. She didn't convert to Judaism. I had and I still have a harmonious marriage. We never had any disagreements related to our origins. We always saw the benignity in each other, not the ethnic origin or religion.

My wife was born in Jarabanya in 1929. She went to school in Jara [Alsojara], six kilometers from Jarabanya. They were a simple middle-class family. Her father owned a mill in Kisbanya, and later he got involved in the transportation business in Kolozsvár. He used a truck. My wife's family moved to Kolozsvár in 1940. Anna graduated from the business college in Kolozsvár, and later she worked as an accountant for different companies. She had one sibling, whom I never met and who died very young.

There was a period when we planned to immigrate to Israel. But my wife's parents were very old when we were still young enough, and they needed our help. So we gave up the idea of emigrating.

From our marriage we had one child, born in 1956. He's my son Laszlo Muller. We didn't bring him up in a religious spirit, but we never kept his origin secret. He considers himself a Jew. He finished high school in 1974, and then he entered the Technological University. He specialized in the field of information technology. He still works in this domain here in Kolozsvár. He has a family. Interestingly, his wife, Agnes Grunwald, is Jewish, too. But this is only a coincidence. None of them were frequenting Jewish circles, and they didn't attend Jewish events. From this marriage I have a granddaughter called Renata. She was born in 1988. Renata is now almost fifteen, she took up sports, she's a good student and she brings us a great deal of joy. Her parents didn't educate her in the Jewish spirit, but they never kept her origin secret.

Our circle of friends was diverse. There were Jews and Christians, as well. And this hasn't changed. We have nice acquaintances we get together with on important days and birthdays, and we always spend a few pleasant hours together. Our circle of friends consists of simple, honest people from the community or from my former workplace.

I have many friends and acquaintances in Israel. My siblings Jozsef and Lea lived there. I have been to Israel three times. First I went there in 1969. I had to request to be allowed to travel abroad, and only then I could get a passport. In the communist era it was much harder to leave the country. I visited Lea and Jozsef alternately. I liked Israel very much; I traveled around the major cities.

We were and are living in an environment where the majority are Christians, so it's natural for us to respect the Christian holidays, like Christmas. We don't observe them, of course. As opposed to this, we try to observe every Sabbath and Pesach, but this is more like a commemoration than a

holiday. And we started doing this only at the beginning of the 1990s.

In 1989 [29](#) we hoped the dictatorship would come to an end and the economic situation would bounce back. I look back disappointed to those hopes we had there. The situation hasn't improved very much since then, as we are living in the same poor conditions. The only difference is that we have more freedom.

After 1944, I didn't abandon my religion, but I didn't go to the synagogue, I wasn't a religious man. There's an old saying, according to which the closer one gets to 'Joe Black' [Editor's note: that is, to 'death'], one remembers one's childhood and one's origins. Now, as a retiree, I began to go to the synagogue. And currently I perform different activities at the Jewish community of Kolozsvár, and I'm a member of the management. I'm in charge of the religious issues. My official title is 'consilier cu probleme de cult' [counselor in charge of religious issues]. I ended up at the community because after 1989 they needed someone who knows the religious prescriptions. Since they knew I got a religious education, they asked me to get involved in the activities of the community.

I have to tell you I'm not going to the synagogue because I'm religious, but because the Jews are the only nation on the face of the Earth whose history is strictly bound to religion. So going to the synagogue means for me to tend to the Jewish tradition. And this is how the majority of the other Jews in Kolozsvár feel. Currently there are around three hundred Jews living in Kolozsvár. The community is a very old one, and we have no rabbi, of course. Despite all this we are trying to practice the religious traditions, and we observe every holiday: Sabbath, Chanukkah, Pesach or Purim. We teach our youth Talmud Torah, and we have a choir, as well. Talmud Torah includes learning Hebrew, and the choir sings Jewish religious songs, such as Avadim Hayinu and Dayenu. I would like to emphasize that we are doing this because we want to maintain the Jewish traditions.

## Glossary:

### **1 Orthodox communities**

The traditionalist Jewish communities founded their own Orthodox organizations after the Universal Meeting in 1868-1869. They organized their life according to Judaist principles and opposed to assimilative aspirations. The community leaders were the rabbis. The statute of their communities was sanctioned by the king in 1871. In the western part of Hungary the communities of the German and Slovakian immigrants' descendants were formed according to the Western Orthodox principles. At the same time in the East, among the Jews of Galician origins the 'eastern' type of Orthodoxy was formed; there the Hassidism prevailed. In time the Western Orthodoxy also spread over to the eastern part of Hungary. In 1896, there were 294 Orthodox mother-communities and 1,001 subsidiary communities registered all over Hungary, mainly in Transylvania and in the north-eastern part of the country,. In 1930, the 136 mother-communities and 300 subsidiary communities made up 30.4 percent of all Hungarian Jews. This number increased to 535 Orthodox communities in 1944, including 242,059 believers (46 percent).

### **2 Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, Russian and Ukrainian name Zakarpatie)**

Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian

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

### **3 Hasid**

The follower of the Hasidic movement, a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that God's presence was in all of one's surroundings and that one should serve God in one's every deed and word. The movement provided spiritual hope and uplifted the common people. There were large branches of Hasidic movements and schools throughout Eastern Europe before World War II, each following the teachings of famous scholars and thinkers. Most had their own customs, rituals and life styles. Today there are substantial Hasidic communities in New York, London, Israel and Antwerp.

### **4 Balfour Declaration**

British foreign minister Lord Balfour published a declaration in 1917, which in principle supported the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At the beginning, the British supported the idea of a Jewish national home, but under the growing pressure from the Arab world, they started restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine. However, underground Jewish organizations provided support for the illegal immigration of Jews. In 1947 the United Nations voted to allow the establishment of a Jewish state and the State of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948.



## **5 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.

## **6 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.

## **7 Sephardi Jewry**

(Hebrew for 'Spanish') Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Their ancestors settled down in North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, South America, Italy and the Netherlands after they had been driven out from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the 15th century. About 250,000 Jews left Spain and Portugal on this occasion. A distant group among Sephardi refugees were the Crypto-Jews (Marranos), who converted to Christianity under the pressure of the Inquisition but at the first occasion reassumed their Jewish identity. Sephardi preserved their community identity; they speak Ladino language in their communities up until today. The Jewish nation is formed by two main groups: the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi group which differ in habits, liturgy their relation toward

Kabala, pronunciation as well in their philosophy.

## **8 Goldmark**

The Goldmark Philharmonic Association was founded in 1936 as the cultural section of the Neolog community in Cluj/Kolozsvar. One of its most prominent figures was the composer Boskovits Sandor: due to his efforts the orchestra became one of the best in the area. The orchestra was acclaimed for its symphonic concerts, although the ensemble was just formed by "amateurs" such as professors, engineers and doctors. In 1940 the ensemble had 74 members.

**7 Haggibor:** Jewish sports organization in Cluj/Kolozsvar. After Transylvania's annexation to Romania (1920) the Zionist movement became more intense. Along with social, cultural, pedagogical and sanitary organizations, sport organizations were founded as well, in order to raise a hardy Jewish youth. Haggibor was founded in 1920; at the same time similar associations were organized in Satu Mare/Szatmarnemeti, Sighetu Marmatiei/Maramarossziget, Arad/Arad, Timisoara/Temesvar, Brasov/Brasso, Oradea/Nagyvarad. The Transylvanian Jewish sports organization joined the Maccabi international Jewish sports organization in 1921. The Maccabi World Organization was founded in 1921 at the 12th Zionist Congress in order to gather Jewish sport organizations all over the world and to promote sport, as well as cultural and social activities among the Jewish youth. Haggibor members practiced in many disciplines: football, tennis, ping-pong, swimming, water-polo, boxing, etc. They took part in national and international competitions.

## **10 Hashomer Hatzair**

'The Young Watchman') Left-wing Zionist youth organization, which started in Poland in 1912 and managed to gather supporters from all over Europe. Their goal was to educate the youth in the Zionist mentality and to prepare them to immigrate to Palestine. To achieve this goal they paid special attention to the so-called shomer-movement (boy scout education) and supported the re-stratification of the Jewish society. They operated several agricultural and industrial training grounds (the so-called chalutz grounds) to train those who wanted to immigrate. In Transylvania the first Hashomer Hatzair groups were established in the 1920s. During World War II, members of the Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

## **11 Hanoar Hatzioni in Romania**

The Hanoar Hatzioni movement started in Transylvania as a result of the secession of the Hashomer organization in 1929. They tried to define themselves as a centrist Zionist youth organization, without any political convictions. Their first emigration action was organized in 1934. Five years later (1939) they founded in Palestine their first independent colony called Kfar Glickson. The Hanoar Hatzioni organizations of Transylvania and of the old Regat (Muntenia and Moldova) formed a common leadership in 1932 in Bucharest called Histadrut Olamith Hanoar Hatzioni. In 1934 the Transylvanian organization consisted of 26 local groups.

## **12 Barisia**

Zionist youth organization under the rule of the Erdelyi Zsidó Nemzeti Szövetség (Transylvanian

Jewish National Federation), which organized the Jewish youth without taking into consideration any ideological differences. The Aviva girl-organization, the fellow organization of Barisia operated in the same way. Following the Transylvanian and Romanian example, other European countries founded their own Aviva and Barisia groups. In 1939 the Transylvanian Barisia had 23 local organizations and 1,564 active members. Unlike other Zionist youth organizations, based on the idea of chaluc-training (chaluc means emigrant), Barisia emphasized the cultural and social aspect.

### **13 Aviva**

Zionist youth organization under the rule of the Erdelyi Zsidó Nemzeti Szövetség (Transylvanian Jewish National Federation), which organized the Jewish girls without taking in consideration any ideological differences. The Barisia-organization, the fellow organization of Aviva operated in the same way. Following the Transylvanian and Romanian example, other European countries founded their own Aviva and Barisia groups. In 1926 the Transylvanian Aviva had 62 local organizations and 740 active members. Unlike other Zionist youth organizations, based on the idea of chaluc-training (chaluc means emigrant), Aviva emphasized the cultural and social aspect.

**14 Mizrahi:** The word has two meanings: a) East. It designates the Jews who immigrate to Palestine from the Arab countries. Since the 1970s they make up more than half of the Israeli population. b) It is the movement of the Zionists, who firmly hold on to the Torah and the traditions. The movement was founded in 1902 in Vilnius. The name comes from the abbreviation of the Hebrew term Merchoz Ruchoni (spiritual center). The Mizrahi wanted to build the future Jewish state by enforcing the old Jewish religious, cultural and legal regulations. They recruited followers especially in Eastern Europe and the United States. In the year after its founding it had 200 organizations in Europe, and in 1908 it opened an office in Palestine too. The first congress of the World Movement was held in 1904 in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia), where they joined the Basel program of the Zionists, but they emphasized that the Jewish nation had to stand on the grounds of the Torah and the traditions. The aim of the Mizrach-Mafdal movement is the same in our days too. It supports schools, youth organizations in Israel and in other countries, so that the Jewish people can learn about their religion, and it takes part in the political life of Israel, promoting by this the traditional image of the Jewish state. (<http://www.mizrachi.org/aboutus/default.asp>; [www.cionista.hu/mizrachi.htm](http://www.cionista.hu/mizrachi.htm); Magyar Zsidó Lexikon, Budapest, 1929).

### **15 Iron Guard**

Extreme right wing political organization in Romania between 1930 and 1941, led by C. Z. Codreanu. The Iron Guard propagated nationalist, Christian-mystical and anti-Semitic views. It was banned for its terrorist activities (e.g. the murder of Romanian Prime Minister I. Gh. Duca) in 1933. In 1935 it was re-established as a party named Totul pentru Tara, 'Everything for the Fatherland', but it was banned again in 1938. It was part of the government in the first period of the Antonescu regime, but it was then banned and dissolved as a result of the unsuccessful coup d'état of January 1941. Its leaders escaped abroad to the Third Reich.

### **16 Pogrom of 1927 in Transylvania**

The pogrom of 1927 is generally considered one of the most severe anti-Semitic manifestations in Transylvania. On 4th December 1927, Romanian students, who were on their way back from the national student congress organized in Oradea, in Cluj alighted from the train and marched through

the main streets damaging the windows of the Jewish stores and places of entertainment, and breaking into the synagogues, where they smeared the furniture and the Torah scrolls. Many people were wounded, mainly Jews and those who 'seemed to be' Jewish. Although the event was debated in the Romanian parliament and the Romanian authorities were disapproved of idleness by international Jewish organizations, the perpetrators were not punished.

## **17 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.

## **18 Uj Kelet (New East)**

Transylvanian Jewish political daily in the period between 1918-1940. The paper was published under the direction of Erdelyi Zsido Nemzeti Szovetseg (Transylvanian Jewish National Federation), and promoted Jewish nationalism, Zionism, culture and interests. It has been published in Tel-Aviv since 1948.

## **19 Numerus clausus in Romania**

In 1934 a law was passed, according to which 80 percent of the employees in any firm had to be Romanians by ethnic origin. This established a numerus clausus in private firms, although it did not only concerned Jews but also Hungarians and other Romanian citizens of non-Romanian ethnic origin. In 1935 the Christian Lawyers' Association was founded with the aim of revoking the licenses of Jewish lawyers who were already members of the bar and did not accept new registrations. The creation of this association gave an impetus to anti-Semitic professional associations all over Romania. At universities the academic authorities supported the numerus clausus program, introducing entrance examinations, and by 1935/36 this led to a considerable decrease in the number of Jewish students. The leading Romanian banks began to reject requests for credits from Jewish banks and industrial and commercial firms, and Jewish enterprises were burdened with heavy taxes. Many Jewish merchants and industrialists had to sell their firms at a loss when they became unprofitable under these oppressive measures.

## **20 'Hungarian era' (1940-1944)**

The expression 'Hungarian era' refers to the period between 30th August 1940 and 15th October 1944 in Transylvania. As a result of the Trianon Peace Treaty in 1920, the eastern part of Hungary (Maramures, Partium, Banat, Transylvania) was annexed to Romania. Two million inhabitants of

Hungarian nationality came under Romanian rule. In the summer of 1940, under pressure from Berlin and Rome, the Romanian government agreed to return Northern Transylvania, where the majority of the Hungarians lived, to Hungary. The anti-Jewish laws introduced in 1938 and 1939 in Hungary were also applied in Northern Transylvania. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19th March 1944, Jews from Northern Transylvania were deported and killed in concentration camps along with Jews from all over Hungary except for Budapest. Northern Transylvania belonged to Hungary until the fall of 1944, when the Soviet troops entered and introduced a regime of military administration that sustained local autonomy. The military administration ended on March 1945, when the Romanian administration was reintroduced in all the Western territories lost in 1940 - as a reward for the fact that Romania formed the first communist-led government in the region.

## **21 Anti-Jewish laws in Hungary**

The first of these anti-Jewish laws was passed in 1938, restricting the number of Jews in liberal professions, administration, and in commercial and industrial enterprises to 20 percent. The second anti-Jewish Law, passed in 1939, defined the term "Jew" on racial grounds, and came to include some 100,000 Christians (apostates or their children). It also reduced the number of Jews in economic activity, fixing it at six percent. Jews were not allowed to be editors, chief-editors, theater directors, artistic leaders or stage directors. The Numerus Clausus was introduced again, prohibiting Jews from public jobs and restricting their political rights. As a result of these laws, 250,000 Hungarian Jews were locked out of their sources of livelihood. The third anti-Jewish Law, passed in 1941, defined the term "Jew" on more radical racial principles. Based on the Nuremberg laws, it prohibited inter-racial marriage. In 1941, the anti-Jewish Laws were extended to North-Transylvania. A year later, the Israelite religion was deleted from the official religions subsidized by the state. After the German occupation in 1944, a series of decrees was passed: all Jews were required to relinquish any telephone or radio in their possession to the authorities; all Jews were required to wear a yellow star; and non-Jews could not be employed in Jewish households. From April 1944 Jewish property was confiscated, Jews were barred from all intellectual jobs and employment by any financial institutions, and Jewish shops were closed down.

## **22 Ritual murder trial of Tiszaeszlár**

Ritual murder trial of Tiszaeszlár: A 14-year-old servant girl, Eszter Solymosi of Tiszaeszlár, disappeared on 1st April 1882. On the same day the Jewry of the surrounding settlements arrived to join the local Jews in electing the shochet. The coincidence opened the door to charge the Jews of using blood in religious rites. The accused Jews were defended by Karoly Eötvös who not only proved their innocence, but also the impossibility of the charge itself. At the time of the action at law (summer of 1883) anti-Semitic disturbances broke out. The crowd attacked and robbed Jewish shops and flats in the bigger towns, and then in the country. This also influenced the foundation of the National Anti-Semitic Party by Győző Istóczy in the fall of 1883 (which obtained 14 seats in the elections a year later).

## **23 Goga-Cuza government**

Anti-Jewish and chauvinist government established in 1937, led by Octavian Goga, poet and Romanian nationalist, and Alexandru C. Cuza, professor of the University of Iasi, and well known for

its radical anti-Semitic view. Goga and Cuza were the leaders of the National Christian Party, an extremist right-wing organization founded in 1935. After the elections of 1937 the Romanian king, Carol II, appointed the National Christian Party to form a minority government. The Goga-Cuza government had radically limited the rights of the Jewish population during their short rule; they barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. In February 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system.

#### **24 Reviczky, Imre (1897-1957)**

During WWII Imre Reviczky was the commander of the 10th work service battalion in Nagybanya, Northern Transylvania. Every Jew enrolled into his corps received immediately vaccine and food, respectively proper accommodation irrespective of his state of health or age. Reviczky was well-known by forced laborers due to his humanity. He helped them as far as possible, and he forbade torture. Thanks to Colonel Reviczky many young teenage men escaped deportation, as they called them in for work service by changing their age. After the German occupation too Reviczky tried to save from deportation as many Jews as he could. He pursued his activity until the Germans arrested him and sent him to Dachau. After the war he served in the Hungarian army for a few years. In 1966 Yad Vashem awarded him the "Righteous among the Nations" distinction. (See on his life: Adam Reviczky: Vesztes haboruk - megnyert csatak / Lost Wars - Won Battles, Budapest, Tenyek es tanuk series, 1985.)

#### **25 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.

#### **26 Peter-Pal villa**

House in Kolozsvár/Cluj, where the Gestapo set up its headquarters in April 1944 during the German occupation of the city. The house was later nationalized by the communists. After 1989 the villa was transformed into an apartment building.

#### **27 1956**



It designates the Revolution, which started on 23rd October 1956 against Soviet rule and the communists in Hungary. It was started by student and worker demonstrations in Budapest and began with the destruction of Stalin's gigantic statue. Moderate communist leader Imre Nagy was appointed as prime minister and he promised reform and democratization. The Soviet Union withdrew its troops which had been stationed in Hungary since the end of World War II, but they returned after Nagy's declaration that Hungary would pull out of the Warsaw Pact to pursue a policy of neutrality. The Soviet army put an end to the uprising on 4th November, and mass repression and arrests began. About 200,000 Hungarians fled from the country. Nagy and a number of his supporters were executed. Until 1989 and the fall of the communist regime, the Revolution of 1956 was officially considered a counter-revolution.

## **28 Radio Free Europe**

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

## **29 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.