

# Gyorgy Neufeld

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Kolozsvár

Romania

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## Family background

My paternal grandfather, Jakab Neufeld, had a small village shop in Boncida. He sold village supplies and industrial articles: scythes, hoes, whips, harnesses, nails. From horseshoe-nails to pipe tobacco, you could find everything there, except food. The apartment was at the back of the shop, so one could also go in that way. My grandfather went to the synagogue not only during religious holidays, but every morning and evening, at which time the shop was closed. They observed every religious rule - it was definitely a religious household. I know very little of his life in Boncida as we only went there a few times, and just for a day or two. He had also a little bit of land, as far as I know, but other people worked it for him.

My grandmother died very early, I must have been ten or twelve years old, so 'Grandmother' is all I know of her; I don't even know her name. She married twice; her first husband died. His name was Rosmann and they had two children together, Samu and Hanna, and after that she married my grandfather and they had three more children. I only remember her from photos; she had a smiling, good-natured face. When my grandfather was widowed, he moved from Boncida to Kolozsvár. He wasn't working anymore by then. I was about thirteen or fourteen at that time.

When he was quite old, at the end of the 1920s, my grandfather decided to go to Palestine to see the sacred places. My father didn't want him to go. My grandfather was determined to see the Wailing Wall in his lifetime and he went away by boat. There was no such state as Israel before the war [1](#), but there was territory under British rule, and the examples of the kibbutzim which had been built by then weren't religious.

As a child I was already sentimentally attached to Zionism without knowing what it really was. I wanted to prevent my grandfather from starting to complain about the lack of religiousness of the youngsters there. As a child I asked him the question, 'It isn't nice that those there are playing football on Saturday, is it?' He looked at me and said, 'When should they play, if they are working on Sunday?' As a religious man, he could accept this, though it was forbidden to play football on Saturday.

I can remember another story he told me. He went to a restaurant [in Palestine] and the waiter pointed out to him that a rabbi was sitting at another table. The rabbi wasn't wearing his hat. My grandfather told me, 'I went to his [the rabbi's] table, introduced myself and asked him how it came that he, a rabbi, was eating without his hat on? The rabbi answered him, 'The good Lord ordered us to walk and to eat with our hat on for people to be able to distinguish a Jew from the others. Here, all are Jews, so we don't need any kind of signs.' I can remember these two stories. My grandfather was by nature, a man of few words.

My grandfather used to eat only at our place [when he was living in Kolozsvar]. He had lunch with us on Saturday and he was at our house on every Jewish holiday without exception. For his sake we very closely observed the kashrut. For instance, when not at home we, my parents and I, ate ham, but it was non-existent in our house for the sake of my grandfather. If we hadn't kept this [custom] my grandfather would have never come to our house to have his meals.

Before the war the religious circles were fashionable. The Orthodox synagogues had a hall where religious people got together, read excerpts from the Bible and explained their interpretations to each other. I've only heard about these, but I think that my grandfather sometimes went there. He had a small beard, but didn't have payot. I loved him very, very much. Later on too, whenever possible, when I had no evening courses at university, I would go to the synagogue with him. I sat beside him till the end of the service, we would come back home, have our dinner together and then I would see him home. He had a one-bedroom apartment not far away from us.

When he got old, it was difficult for him to climb the stairs and every day my mother sent him a portion of the food we had for lunch. When he got old he went blind. This was the reason why he wasn't deported. There were posters for the Jews to tell them where the residents of each street should gather. He didn't know about them as he never left his apartment and his neighbors didn't denounce him, which was very rare. So literally he was forgotten there, while the others were deported.

My grandfather had three sons, my father being the second. His eldest son, Mihaly Neufeld, born in 1887, was a lawyer, but he didn't take the oath for Romanian law in 1918 [when Transylvania came under Romanian rule [2](#)] He rather accepted the position as director of a small Romanian-Belgian fabric plant, interrupting his career as a lawyer. The youngest, Mozes Neufeld, born in 1891, was a merchant. He dealt with bulk timber, as heating was based on wood in Kolozsvar at that time. He got the wood from the Forestry Office and sold it as firewood.

My father, Jeno Neufeld, born in 1889, was a doctor. There was a good fraternal relationship between my father and his brothers, but the two other brothers weren't religious. My parents kept the religion because of my grandfather. They weren't too strict, but the household was kosher.

When my parents were deported in April 1944, Bella, the Hungarian wife of Mozes appeared at my grandfather's place. By the way, Mozes divorced his first Jewish wife with whom he had a daughter, Marta-Agnes. Even though Bella had been cast out of the family [before WWII] and her existence was kept secret from my grandfather, she then brought him food every day, washed him and took care of him till my father came back to take over the task from her in 1945. From then on my grandfather always spoke of her as his daughter Bella.

In the house where my grandfather lived a close acquaintance of ours had a fabric shop. Mozes was on especially friendly terms with the owner of the shop and Bella worked in the shop, and that's how they got to know each other. I met Bella when I got home in 1946, but her husband never came back. Bella tried unsuccessfully to rescue her husband from deportation.

My father was born in Boncida, but later on he went to Kolozsvár where he attended medical school. He was a generalist at the hospital, had a private clinic and went to visit patients at home if it was necessary. As an army doctor during World War I he was held in captivity in Italy. Then my grandfather's family took my mother and me to Boncida from Kolozsvár, though of course, they kept the apartment in Kolozsvár. So I was in Boncida until the age of around one, or one and a half, and after that we left for Ilonda, to the home of my mother's sister Mina, until my father came home from captivity.

My mother told me that there was a big argument in the family between my grandfather and Mina. She was determined to look after us as long as my father was a prisoner. My grandfather argued that his son had told him to take care of us as long as he was in the war. He wanted to look after us, but he could do it only if we were there with him. My father was a prisoner of war in Isonzo [3](#). During this time he had quite a good life. He could move freely around the town, but couldn't leave. He could occasionally send letters to my mother through the Red Cross. When he was caught my mother got a telegram through the Red Cross saying, 'I am healthy, but in captivity.'

He was a prisoner of war for two and a half or three years, and I was three when he came home. He returned with a doctor colleague of his through Pest [Budapest], where the Hungarian Soviet Republic [4](#) had just been declared. My father had known Bela Kun [5](#) well, as he had been one year his senior at the Unitarian Gymnasium in Kolozsvár. One could only leave Pest with the permission of the authorities, but that wouldn't be granted. My father managed to reach Bela Kun, the leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and asked him to give him the necessary permit. There was only one train leaving for Romania.

Bela Kun wanted to persuade my father to stay there at any cost and he was offered a good position at the Health Ministry, but my father didn't want to stay. He said that he had a family and he wanted to get home. In the end he got the permission and along with a doctor colleague, he set out.

They couldn't come through Varad so they came via Temesvár. The Romanian- Hungarian border was at Deva by then. The Romanians detained them. They said that they were coming from captivity and they might even have had some papers too. My father somehow knew they shouldn't say they were coming through Pest and so he said they were coming through Trieste. But his colleague maintained that they were coming through Pest. The Romanians interpreted this as if they had spent time in Pest in order to study communism and they were arrested.

My father had an ex-schoolmate in Deva, a lawyer called Dr. Szego. Each day he wrote a few lines to him and gave this note, along with some chocolate or a tin, to a warden or a member of the cleaning staff to give to Dr. Szego. He wanted Dr. Szego to let my father's family know that he was imprisoned. Nobody ever gave those letters to the lawyer. One day, however, Dr. Szego saw a piece of paper in the street with his name on it, which was one of those letters. So he let the family know and my mother and her father went to Deva and got my father out of prison. My father brought home from Italy a backpack full of chocolate and tinned food.

It was a miracle that my father survived World War II. He was taken from Auschwitz to Dachau [6](#) and there he was liberated by American troops. He was so weak after his release, that he was taken to an American army hospital and kept there for six months. He was allowed to come home only after that.

Two or three years later he was summoned to the Securitate [7](#). They said that during the six months [while he had been in hospital] he had been trained to be a spy. For about six weeks my poor father had to go to the Securitate for questioning nearly every day. Then they finally left him alone. It was the irony of fate that two weeks after his constant interrogation ended, he was appointed doctor-in-chief of the hospital in Kolozsvár. Probably the two authorities didn't know about each other's activities.

Samson Wertheimer, my mother's father, was a Jew. His wife, Ida, was a Sabbatarian [8](#) of Szekler origin from Bozodujfalu. Ida's father was Gergely Farkas. She died young in 1902. Her father moved from Marosvasarhely to Kolozsvár. His two brothers, Vilmos and Miksa, also came to Kolozsvár.

Vilmos was a grocer and a very religious man. They lived on Szechenyi Square, in an apartment above their ground-floor shop. It was a big shop, one of the biggest food shops in Kolozsvár. It was closed on Saturday and on Sunday too, officially. The Jewish shops where they observed religion were closed two days a week.

Miksa had a spirit factory. He had a one-storied house with a garden and the house was separated from the distillery by a fence. He was the owner of the distillery and he also managed the work. There were a lot of leftovers from the factory and he had a shed with six or eight cows in it, which were fed from the factory leftovers.

My grandfather had a flour shop which sold both wholesale and retail. It was on Deák Ferenc Street number 38. He lived there with his second wife, Pepka Hausmann. They sold nothing but flour. On the ground floor was the shop with the different kinds of flour and above it was the big apartment. Beside the room of my mother and Aunt Mina [the children from the first marriage] there was another room where the other three children [from the second marriage] lived. After the death of my grandfather the shop was managed by my grandmother Pepka. She was a very clever, skillful woman with a lot of common sense.

My mother's sister, Aunt Mina, lived in Ilonda, where she married Ignac Jeremias. There were eighteen children in her husband's family. They lived in a small village, Kapjon near Des. The eighteen children later spread to all the corners of the world.

Erzsebet, one of the other three children got married to a lawyer in Torda. Her husband died before the war. After the war and the deportation she moved to Kolozsvár, where her parents lived. She wasn't deported as she lived in Torda and Torda belonged to Romania in those times. She had a son, who got married and moved to Pest.

## Growing up

I lived quite a lot in Ilonda, I spent every holiday till the age of sixteen or seventeen there, and these are the best memories of my life. In the so-called built up part of the village there were Romanians, Hungarians and Jews in roughly equal numbers, and upstream there were the Romanian peasant houses. The village was about four to five kilometers long. There were brick

houses in the center. The village had a small synagogue that could hold about seventy to ninety people so there had to be about twenty- five or thirty Jewish families, roughly the same number of Hungarian families and a little fewer Romanians. The people from Ilonda were my second parents.

My uncle was a well-to-do merchant, he had a wholesale business. Once a week on Thursday in Ilonda there was a market and once a month there was the great market, when people came from neighboring counties too. My uncle's house had a huge yard, which was the store for the timber, tiles and bricks. Then the big gate was open and the peasants came with their carts and bought timber, tiles, whatever they needed. This was my uncle's trade. He had a good reputation in the village, and was well respected. He was religious, kept the holidays, but he could create a lively atmosphere around himself.

My Neufeld grandfather, when he had dinner at our house in Kolozsvar on Fridays, there was a small prayer which he said in a monotonous voice in Hebrew and then everybody sat down for dinner. This was quite different in Ilonda, where my uncle used to sing. He was a good-looking, pleasant man and had a beautiful baritone voice. He was singing the prayer and we, the children, had to sing with him and he used to say, 'You are singing false, better keep quiet.' He was a lively, bohemian person. He cared about the children.

At Tabernacles, when the nuts were ripe and the children were playing with them, he joined us. The game went like this: the nuts were lined up and from a given distance, one had to aim at the line with a rounder, bigger, less wrinkled nut and gain as many nuts as one could knock out of the line. It was quite normal for Uncle Naci to have three or four children around his neck. His eighteen siblings had thirty-six children and out of those ten or fifteen were always in Ilonda on holidays.

On Saturdays, when Sabbath was coming to an end we, the children, watched the sky and the one who saw the first three stars rushed into the house. There were small rows: 'It wasn't you, but I who saw them first!' we would argue, but those weren't serious rows. My uncle created a great atmosphere among the children, pacified them and at the end they got candies or chocolate.

When the children announced that the three stars appeared there was always a small ceremony. They lit a flat, colored and plated candle, my uncle sang a prayer and holding the lit candle, he walked, singing, in a serpentine route around the house with the children lined up behind him. Even then he made it fun, for instance he would turn around and bump the line or as he was walking he would cut across the line.

I can remember two very interesting scenes from seder. They had a huge room [where the table was laid] and there were always six to seven grown ups around the table and ten to fifteen children, if not more. The one leading the seder has to have two pillows at his left side. At the beginning a prayer is said, which took half an hour for my grandfather Neufeld, but which lasted for two or three hours with my uncle Naci, because he sang it and joked while doing so.

Before dinner a piece of matzah was wrapped in a napkin and my uncle put the napkin between the two pillows; this was called in Hebrew afikoman. At the end of the dinner a short prayer was said and he took the afikoman and gave everybody a piece of it. It had to be eaten while saying a short prayer and blessing.

With my grandfather the seder lasted for one hour and a half or two hours, with uncle Naci it lasted till morning. It was a custom that the afikoman was stolen by one of the children. After dinner Uncle Naci started looking for the afikoman and then they started the bargaining, because without the afikoman the seder couldn't go on. When it was stolen my uncle pretended not to notice it. From the first child it was stolen by a second, and from that one by a third, then the fourth child made a fake afikoman wrapped in a similar napkin. At the end there were four or five afikomans, but my uncle knew which was the original one. The bargaining with the children and all the afikomans lasted for at least an hour because of the jokes, but in the end there was only one real afikoman.

After the dinner there is a prayer: they fill up a glass with wine and the door is opened for the prophet Elijah so he could come in, taste the wine and then go again. A small blessing had to be said for that. I can remember one Pesach clearly. I was about nine or ten years old. There was a heavy rain, a real downpour, and when the doors were opened a bearded man with a hat was standing there, completely bedraggled. The women started screaming and the children became scared. He was a Jewish traveling beggar. My uncle instantly realized who that man must be; he rose from the table, went to him and addressed him in Yiddish asking him if he was a beggar. He led the man to the table, had him brought plates, dry clothes, and made him sit down and have dinner with us.

Between the two wars there were a lot of Jewish traveling beggars. There was a village named Borsa in Maramaros. It was a big, entirely Jewish village. It really was 100 percent Jewish, there wasn't one single Hungarian or Romanian in that village. I couldn't tell you which year it was; it might have been 1934 or 1936, when members of the Iron Guard [9](#) set fire to the village. The fire was set in about ten places at the same time. The houses in Maramaros were all made of wood. The Jews from Borsa were left with nothing but what they were wearing when they ran out of the burning houses. They begged all over Transylvania.

Most of these beggars were from Borsa. They went from village to village, and were taken care of in each place for two or three days before going on to other places. Each Friday evening, when my uncle came from the synagogue, he would bring home two or three beggars for dinner. He sat at the head of the table, the adults around him and then there were the children at the other end of the table. The men were on one side there and the women on the other. The beggars were always seated among the men. They were together only at the meals on Saturday, and in the morning the beggars went to the synagogue.

My uncle Naci always spoke to them with great respect. I cannot remember any female beggars. My uncle had another house, a small village inn with a small room above it, and he hosted the beggars there. He rented the inn to a widowed sister of his, Aunt Ibi, who had two daughters.

My uncle was on friendly terms with everybody in the village: with the police, the mayor, with simply everybody. Everybody respected and appreciated him. Jews aren't allowed to travel on holidays neither by car nor by cart. Once during seder there came to the house a Jew from Ilonda, to say that his brother in the next village had been taken by the police and asked Uncle Naci to try to have him released. At that time the police were extremely corrupt, and arrested people just to get money from them.



My uncle stopped the seder and announced that it was a much bigger mitzvah [good deed], to release someone from the police than to go on with the seder, so he was therefore excused, and would be back in an hour's time. He got on the cart, which was forbidden, went to the next village, paid the police, had the man released, came back and went on with the seder as if nothing had happened.

My mother's parents didn't let them get married before my father had done his army service. He finished university, did his service in the army and right after that, in 1913, they got married. After about half a year my father was called up again. He was at home by chance on leave when I was born. Then he went back to the war and was taken prisoner. When he finally got home I was already three years old and asked, 'Who is this man?'

My mother didn't go to the mikveh. My parents had a bedroom with two separate beds next to each other; that was the fashion at the time. It was like that in every Jewish house. She wore a headscarf only when she went to the synagogue and she never wore a wig. I remember she wore a bun when I was a child, but later she cut her hair short. Unlike my father, she was sociable, talkative and generally good-humored. She was a housewife.

My mother took part in a lot of social, charitable work. There was a Jewish orphanage in Kolozsvár, or rather a day center with about one hundred and fifty or two hundred children. There were few real orphans there, they were mostly poor children. For years my mother was the deputy president of the women's organization that ran the center.

I can still remember when they built the Jewish hospital in Kolozsvár and started furnishing it. They put sewing machines in ten or twelve rooms and the ladies sewed the pillows, pillowcases and sheets. My mother supervised and shared out the work there.

My mother also organized the Kolozsvár branch of the WIZO, the Women's International Zionist Organization [10](#). She often met [Moshe Weinberger] Carmilly [11](#) who also dealt with these Jewish organizations as the chief rabbi. The orphanage was supported by the women's organization. They assured the finances from donations. They organized tea-parties [as a game of balls to get everybody into the game] where the guests had to pay. For instance my mother invited five of her acquaintances and they had to pay a rather insignificant sum agreed upon in advance and they talked for about one or two hours. The five guests in turn, had to invite five other guests. Each of them and their guests also paid. It was made a principle that they couldn't invite those who had previously organized such parties, as they wanted to involve all the Jews from the town. Those who were really very poor and were left out, were helped from the money gathered.

The men paid the religious community taxes that was why they didn't have a men's organization. Most of the women didn't go to the synagogue often, like my mother, they went there only on holidays. Only the most devout ladies went there on Saturdays.

There were four synagogues and ten to twelve prayer houses in Kolozsvár. Some of the Jews of the town were poor and we couldn't talk about culture there. But in every middle-class house there was a library and the books were read, not just kept as decoration. The Jews went to the theater too. Only rarely were there Yiddish plays, but traveling Yiddish companies did exist. Rarely, once or twice a year, they came to Kolozsvár. They had one, two or three performances and then they moved on. There was always a full house.

I remember a Jewish company, of Dutch origin which was famous and had high- class programs. They performed small plays, funny musical burlesque scenes. Blue Bird was their name. They brought to Kolozsvár fashionable, lively songs of that time. There were serious scenes too, very serious ones. As a child I was taken there, but I didn't understand much of them [the serious scenes].

I went to a Jewish elementary school for the first four classes. The Jewish gymnasium [secondary school] was closed down by the Romanian authorities in 1927 and it was stated by law that Jewish children couldn't attend a Hungarian school, only a Romanian one. So, after that time I went to a Romanian school from the 3rd grade of the gymnasium. Later I went to the so- called Seminarul Pedagogic Universitar, which was also a teacher training school. I was the only Jew there. There were twenty one of us all together, there was a Hungarian boy as well and all the rest were Romanians. It was an elite school and the elite of the Romanian society attended it.

I was in the third year of university, in the medical department, when I met my future wife. It was on 25th December 1936. She was in the first year in the English department. Her name was Agnes, or Agi, Raab and she was from Arad. There was a dance-café named Pallas Crystal at the beginning of Szent Egyház Street [today Iuliu Maniu Street] on the right side, where exhibitions are held now. We met there one Saturday afternoon at a dance party. The owner was a Jew and some of the Jewish students gathered there on Saturday afternoons. We, the Jewish students, belonged to two big groups that were almost each other's enemies. There was the communist sympathetic group and the Zionist group.

In the communist group there were two or three people who were serious underground communists, and the rest were just fake communists. With Zionism it was more serious: there were four or five youth organizations with different political colors. There was the Hashomer Hatzair [12](#) that was completely left wing. Then there was the Hanoah Hatzioni [13](#) and the Baricia, sort of central, and there was a completely right wing, revisionist group [see Revisionist Zionism] [14](#). Part of the Jewish youth of Kolozsvár, the Zionist part, belonged to these four groups. I didn't belong to any of them.

The Zionists held meetings, seminars, where they dealt with the history of Zionism, and according to their political convictions the Hashomer Hatzair for example dealt with leftwing literature. I thought of myself as being a Zionist, but that was more a sentimental link to Palestine as our homeland, and I didn't read Zionist or other such literature. There was a theoretical tendency to emigrate, but there was nearly none in practice. There were Halutz communities - Halutz is a person who wants to emigrate. They applied for a place in such a community, moved there, learned farming and after a time were moved to Israel. There was no such community in the area of Kolozsvár. There were in the Kingdom [the Southern part of Romania] and in Bessarabia [15](#). I don't know if there were any in Transylvania.

## During the War

We medical students were called up in our third year of study. This was outside of the normal national service. Before the Second Vienna Dictate [16](#) there was a mobilization, I had to join the army. My unit was in a village named Horod, situated between Varad and Arad, and every Saturday and Sunday I went to Arad to visit Agi. Exactly when the Vienna Dictate was declared I was on a two-week leave at home in Kolozsvár and later I didn't go back.



We didn't realize that in fact the Dictate separated us by a border. We planned that I would satisfy my military duty of nine months beginning from fall, and after that we would get married. Then we found out that there was a law in Hungary, which said that no Jew could immigrate to Hungary by marriage [Kolozsvar belonged to Hungary then] so we couldn't get married.

Even correspondence was very difficult. Though both countries were on Germany's side during the war, the relationship between them was very tense. Four out of five letters were lost, there was censorship and letters were thrown away at the slightest suspicion. They might not even have read the letters, as we were extremely careful not to write anything that might make the censors suspicious.

Even through letters, communicating was difficult for about two years. The border was four or five kilometers south of the Kolozsvar-Varad road. Half of the Feleki Teto was already Romanian. We couldn't go to the Bukk [a wood near the town] on outings because it was a border zone. The border was right there near Kolozsvar. We could hardly send letters to each other. In 1942 I was taken to Ukraine and then my mother tried to keep up the correspondence; they exchanged four or five letters. [Editor's note: In January 1942 the force labor unit no. 110/24 was grouped in Ukraine. There were about twelve-fourteen Hungarian soldiers to guard them. By September the laborers had lost a lot of weight, until 1943 many among them died. The shrunken battalion was completed with other such battalions. Later Gyorgy ran away to the Russian front and was put in a prisoner of war camp. Throughout his captivity he worked as a doctor.]

My parents were deported in 1944. Agi came to Kolozsvar right at the end of the war to make enquiries about me. My father wasn't yet back home, my mother wasn't at home, and nobody knew anything about me. No letter ever arrived, though we were permitted to write once a month [from Ukraine]. She inquired officially with the authorities and found out that I had been declared missing. Then I ran to the Russians, from where we were also permitted to write a card once a month. None arrived and Agi went home to Arad thinking that I was missing, that I was no longer alive.

The war ended and she didn't have any signs of life from me. She was twenty- five by then. She was teaching at a school and one of her colleagues, a mathematics teacher courted her and in a desperate moment she said yes to him and they got married. They went to Bucharest, as the boy was there and both got jobs right away.

## After the War

I arrived in Kolozsvar in September 1946 after the Russians released me. I had a torn German uniform on me and a pair of boots that had holes in them. I met an acquaintance at the railway station who told me just, 'Your father is at home, he lives in the old apartment.' So I went to the old apartment. My father wasn't at home then, so I was received by an old servant of ours whom my father had brought back; I don't know where from. She made me welcome.

My father came home around one o'clock, we hugged each other and we both wept. All of it came in one blast: I had no mother anymore, the ones from Ilonda were no more, my two best friends were no more, my father's siblings were no more, my mother's siblings were no more, my distant relatives were no more, my distant friends were no more.

Then I asked my father if he knew anything about Agi. I didn't notice then, but when I thought back later on, my father was a bit confused. I suppose, though we never spoke about it, that my father knew that she had gotten married, but he didn't want to tell me at the time.

My father had arrived home shortly before and we had literally nothing to eat. My father had no job yet. At noon we didn't know what we might have for dinner or if we could even have dinner at all. I believe that my father got some kind of help from the religious community and we both lived on that.

The next day I met Agi's former room-mate, Kati. We hugged each other and I asked, 'What do you know of Agi?' She was a bit embarrassed as she replied, 'She got married.' At that moment I didn't realize what she was saying. I had just found out that I had no mother anymore, that our apartment had been completely looted, and that my father was sleeping on a broken sofa. We got another one, but without any bed linen.

I started thinking, 'How come that Agnes got married? What happened? What could have happened?' I got her address and found out that she was at home for another couple of days with her parents in Arad at that time, because of the holidays. She lived in Bucharest with her husband, where she had her job. It would have been impossible for me not to visit her. We hadn't seen each other for six years, and she had had no letters from me for four years, and I had had no news about her for two years. I found out from my father that I had been declared as missing. In the distance of those six years I might have been only a memory to her. I sat down to write her a letter. I wrote five attempts, and tore them up, but sent the sixth, as there was nothing much in it. [Editor's note: Months passed before the situation was clarified. Agnes divorced her husband amiably and married Gyorgy.]

Both our children knew that we were Jews, and that they were Jews. By this time we were both working in education: my wife was a teacher in Apaczai Csere [Janos] school and I was an adjutant at the X-ray clinic. If the smallest religious thing had been found out about us, both of us would have been sacked. We didn't want to educate our children to be two-faced - to pretend in school that they were pioneers and to give them Jewish education at home. I didn't want to teach them to lie. I didn't want them to say in school that we went to the synagogue, nor did I want to go there and then order them, 'Don't you dare talking about this in school!'

Religious life became non-existent after the war. It was completely formal, like now, even though then we were about 1500-1600. The religious things faded away, but we insisted with our children that they were Jews. We didn't circumcise them because even that was monitored in the hospitals then. We couldn't keep the bar mitzvah because had anyone found out about it, both Agi and I would have been sacked.

My elder son, Andris, was a fighter. He was respected on one hand because he was very strong, on the other hand because he was very clever. He always helped the weaker ones and his classmates liked him. Once he came home beaten up. When I asked him what had happened, he told me that a classmate of his had called him a 'Jidan puturos!' - 'Stinking Jew' in Romanian - and that I had to come to the school. I didn't say a thing, but went there the next day.

The head of the class was a bit embarrassed and told me, in Romanian, of course, 'Please, I'm in a difficult situation. Andris was fighting with one of the boys whose father is a colonel in the

Securitate. He beat the boy so badly that his nose was bleeding and we had to call for an ambulance, and his father, the colonel of the Securitate, made a scene and we have to expel Andris from the school.'

I was thinking for a while what to say, but then the head said, 'Perhaps you should meet the boy's father here in my office and try to make peace between the two of you.' I replied, 'I have nothing to talk about with the boy's father. Andris beat his son, and you should act according to the law, but I would like to ask a question.' 'Certainly', she responded, so I asked, 'Do you happen to know why they fought?' 'No, no, he was so badly beaten that we didn't think of looking into the reason behind it. Usually it is something childish.'

I said, 'It is not exactly childish. Listen to me: my parents were deported, because they were Jews, my friends were deported, because they were Jews, I was taken to forced labor, because I'm a Jew. They fought because that boy called my son a stinking Jew. He hit that boy and I haven't the moral ground to punish my son for this fight. The school should punish him according to the laws of the country; I can't even scold him for it.'

The head bit her lip and told me, that she hadn't known this, and they would have to have an enquiry, to ask the boys themselves too and it had to be talked over. She asked me to return after two days and before which time she would get in contact. I told her, 'I'm not coming. I have nothing to come for. My opinion is clear about what happened, things should proceed.' The thing was smoothed over, nothing happened, and that boy was taken away from the school the next year. I don't know why he was taken away, and I never asked. Not much later [at the age of sixteen] Andris died [of some illness].

My son, Gabor or Gabi, was the exact opposite. Gabi had in himself a very serious Jewish feeling, I thought. This wasn't about religious things, but the fact that he had to accept his Jewishness. He graduated from the polytechnic institute in Bucharest and he never complained that he suffered any disadvantage due to being a Jew.

Then my son repatriated to Israel. He worked in Haifa. After finishing the language course he was called for a four-month army training. There was no problem with that. He had been a soldier here in Kolozsvar before he went to university. At that time the youth had to go to the army before university. In Israel he had to choose what kind of training he would like to have: sanitary or sapper, he chose the former. He had a one-month sanitary training and after that he went back to his job; he worked in a factory.

There, every man is mobilized for six weeks a year until the age of forty five. Somehow it worked out that my son's unit was close to his home. I remember that once I was there in Israel with my wife exactly when he had this six weeks mobilization, and each evening he came home outraged, very upset, even though he was of a very, very calm nature. He said, 'I was ordered to enter an Arab house, where some action was committed against the Jews, to look for terrorists. I kick in the door, see a person there, I shoot. That person might be a woman and might be a child. I haven't got the time to ponder who it is, whether it's a woman or a child, as it might be a terrorist. If I don't shoot, they can shoot me. I don't want this.' He was so very depressed during those six weeks that I could hardly keep his spirits up. He didn't stay in Israel, he moved to Canada and is living in Toronto now.

There was emigration fever here in 1952. The Romanian government not only permitted emigration and pocketed the large sums of money from Israel for this, but also wanted to get rid of the Jews, so most of the Jewish population of the country went away. Those who didn't leave had very serious reasons for doing so, like ourselves.

Anti-Semitism went dormant after the war. At the beginning we believed in communism. When I was captured [by the Russians] there was a serious ideological library in the camp: Marx, Lenin [17](#), Stalin, Mayakovsky [18](#), Gorky [19](#) not only in Russian, but in Hungarian, Romanian, French and German too. I worked in the mornings as a doctor and had my afternoons and evenings free, so I read.

There is nothing more beautiful in this world than the communist ideology. Brotherhood, equality, what can be more beautiful than these? When I was taken away I didn't know about politics, I wasn't interested. But in the camp I was bored in the afternoon and started reading. When I got back after two years I was a fully convinced communist. I was convinced that it was the best thing in the world and it had to be the way for the world.

I needed two or three years to wake up to the reality that what I had gathered there was a dream and the reality was the opposite of it. The same happened to my wife. She became part of a drawing room communist group in Arad and was a convinced communist. We needed five or six years to get our eyes completely opened, but already after two or three years we had started thinking about things.

There was complete 'application fever' in Kolozsvár and everybody without any further problems got it [the permission and the passport], but there were cases when a year or two passed until they got it. Our apartment was completely looted during the war, so I no longer had my diploma. I tried to get a copy of it and went two or three times to the ministry in Bucharest, but I was unable to get a certificate to prove the fact that I was a doctor.

In 1957 I got, with great difficulty, a copy and until then I worked without any certificate, meanwhile I had my specialist examination for head physician, but I still had no diploma. If I had left the country, who would have believed that I was a doctor without a diploma? This was one of the serious reasons.

The second reason was that my wife had been an English teacher in one of the most elite schools of Kolozsvár, the ex-Protestant Gymnasium for Girls, today Apaczai Csere János Lyceum. The third was that I was the youngest adjutant at the university, and there was only one professor above me who seemed likely to retire within four or five years' time, in which case I would be appointed lecturing professor.

If we had applied for emigration both my wife and I would have been sacked within twenty-four hours. We had two children to provide for, my in-laws had moved to us from Arad, and we had to support them too, my mother-in-law didn't work, she had no pension, the pension of my father-in-law wasn't even enough for cigarettes. If we were sacked all six of us would have died of starvation.

Those who were in a similar position to ours were tormented by not being given passports. They would have transferred us as they did with a friend of mine who is in Canada now. He was an

assistant, he applied and after a week he was appointed to a place called Hunyad [in Romanian: Huedin] and he had to travel to and fro between Kolozsvár and Hunyad each day.

There was another problem between us. My wife had an elder sister in North- America, actually Cuba. She and her husband were doctors and they had a small daughter. When Cuba turned to communism under Fidel Castro, they ran to the United States with one suitcase. So they were beginners there. The question arose naturally. My wife wanted to go to America to be with her sister, I wanted - if we went anywhere - to go only to Israel where my friends were. 'Then let's not go anywhere, we won't argue about this, we'll just stay,' she said. So we stayed.

We had a wonderful marriage, there never was a cross word between us. She died suddenly. We were preparing to go for a walk, she went to the kitchen, suddenly I heard something fall. She had died standing. I gave her dresses to the Jewish community to be distributed among the poor.

I don't say that I'm an atheist, but even through my profession - I am an X- ray specialist - everything that is there on the X-ray image, is really there, what cannot be seen doesn't exist, there's no question about this. My way of thinking is very pragmatic. I don't say that there is no God and I won't state to anybody either that there is no God, but I don't believe in one God.

I can't put it into words. I couldn't even keep a kosher household until now. I could keep it only as far as going to have lunch at the Jewish canteen on Parizs Street. [Editor's note: There only kosher food is served to the members of the community. Those who have got a smaller pension pay less for their lunch, than those who are well off. The Jews visiting from Israel or other continents have their meals here.]

## Glossary

### **1 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.

### **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 Italian front, 1915-1918**

Also known as Isonzo front. Isonzo (Soca) is an alpine river today in Slovenia, which ran parallel with the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian and Italian border. During World War I Italy was primarily interested in capturing the ethnic Italian parts of Austria-Hungary (Trieste, Fiume, Istria and some of the islands) as well as the Adriatic littoral. The Italian army tried to enter Austria-Hungary via the Isonzo River, but the Austro-Hungarian army was dug in alongside the river. After 18 months of continuous fighting without any territorial gain, the Austro-Hungarian army finally succeeded to enter Italian territory in October 1917.

### **4 Hungarian Soviet Republic**

The Hungarian Soviet Republic was the political regime in Hungary from 21st March 1919 until the beginning of August of the same year. It was also the second Soviet government in history, the first one being the one in Russia in 1917. The communist government nationalized industrial and commercial enterprises, and socialized housing, transport, banking, medicine, cultural institutions, and large landholdings. In an effort to secure its rule the government used arbitrary violence. Almost 600 executions were ordered by revolutionary tribunals and the government also resorted to violence to expropriate grain from peasants. Only the Red Guard, commonly referred to as "Lenin-boys," was organized to support the power by means of terror. The Republic eliminated old institutions and the administration, but due to the lack of resources the new structure prevailed only on paper. Mounting external pressure, along with growing discontent and resistance of the people, resulted in a loss of communist power. Budapest was occupied by the Romanian army on 6th August, putting an end to the Hungarian Soviet Republic.



## **5 Kun, Bela (1886-1938)**

Hungarian communist politician of Jewish origin. He became a member of the Social Democratic Party in 1902 as a secondary school student, after which he worked as a journalist. He was drafted in 1914 and two years later fell into Russian captivity. In 1917 he joined the Bolshevik Party in the prison camp of Tomsk and after his release he was acquainted with the communist leaders (Lenin, Buharin) of Russia. In November 1918 together with Ernő Por, Tibor Szamuely and others, he formed the Hungarian branch of the Bolshevik Party. After returning to Hungary he organized the statutory meeting of the HCP. When Count Karolyi resigned in March 1919, he headed the new Hungarian Soviet Republic, the world's second communist government. After the regime collapsed he fled to Vienna and then Russia. In 1921 he became a leader of the Comintern. In 1936 he was removed from his post as a result of a show trial, then arrested and later probably executed, though the circumstances and the exact date of his death remain unclear.

## **6 Dachau**

The first Nazi concentration camp, created in March 1933 in Dachau near Munich. Until the outbreak of the war, prisoners were mostly social democrats and German communists along with clergy and Jews: a total of ca. 5000 people. The guidelines of the camp were prepared by Theodor Eicke and prescribed cruel treatment of the prisoners: hunger, beatings, exhausting labor. This was treated as a model for other concentration camps. Dachau also had a training center for concentration camp staff. In 1939 Dachau became a place of terror and extermination, mostly for the social elites of the defeated countries. Some 250,000 inmates from 27 countries passed through Dachau, and 148,000 of them died there. Their labor was exploited for the arms industry and in quarries. The commanders of the camp during the war were: Alexander Piorkowski, Martin Weiss and Eduard Weiter. The camp was liberated on 29th April 1945 by the American army.

## **7 Securitate**

(in Romanian: DGSP - Direcția generală a Securității 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.

## **8 Sabbatarians**

A Judaist sect. It was founded in the Principality of Transylvania in the late 16th century by András Eössi, a Székler aristocrat. The doctrine of Sabbatarianism was worked out mainly by his adopted son, Simon Pechi. Sabbatarians were persecuted in the late 16th to early 17th century when the earlier practice of religious freedom was abandoned in Transylvania, yet nevertheless the sect increased in popularity. Sabbatarian preachers limited their preaching to the five books of Moses and followed a strict observance of Sabbath. They wrote their theology in Hungarian and made the

first complete Hungarian translation of the Psalms. Their last community in Bozodujfalu (Bezidu Nou in Romanian) was destroyed in the 1980s when a water reservoir was built in its place and the remnants of the Sabbatarians were moved to block apartments. The Bozodujfalu community was founded in 1869 by 105 Szekler-Sabbatarian converts, who built their synagogue in 1874. By 1930 the community merged with Orthodox Jews; they maintained strictly Jewish households, had payes and tzitzit, while much of their clothing was identical to that of the Hungarian peasants. In 1944 they were deported with the rest of the Hungarian Jews to death camps.

## **9 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.

## **10 WIZO**

Women's International Zionist Organization, founded in London in 1920 with humanitarian purposes aiming at supporting Jewish women all over the world in the field of education, economics, science and culture. A network of health, social and educational institutions was created in Palestine between 1921 and 1933, along with numerous local groups worldwide. After WWII its office was moved to Tel Aviv. WIZO became an advisory organ to the UN after WWII (similar to UNICEF or ECOSOC). Today it operates on a voluntary basis, as a party-neutral, non-profit organization, with about 250,000 members in 50 countries (2003).

## **11 Carmilly-Weinberger, Moshe (b**

1908): Neolog chief-rabbi of Cluj Napoca between 1934 and 1944. Opinions about his historical appreciation differ. On the one hand every source admits that a great number of Jews escaped the deportation thanks to his efforts. On the other hand he is criticized because he did not warn the Jewish community about the danger of deportation after the German invasion (19th March 1944), although he knew about it. He was also criticized because of his contacts with Romanian extreme nationalists (as Raoul Sorban) in the 1980s.

## **12 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.

### **13 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.

### **14 Revisionist Zionism**

The movement founded in 1925 and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky advocated the revision of the principles of Political Zionism developed by Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. The main goals of the Revisionists was to put pressure on Great Britain for a Jewish statehood on both banks of the Jordan River, a Jewish majority in Palestine, the reestablishment of the Jewish regiments, and military training for the youth. The Revisionist Zionists formed the core of what became the Herut (Freedom) Party after the Israeli independence. This party subsequently became the central component of the Likud Party, the largest right-wing Israeli party since the 1970s.

### **15 Bessarabia**

Historical area between the Prut and Dnestr rivers, in the southern part of Odessa region. Bessarabia was part of Russia until the Revolution of 1917. In 1918 it declared itself an independent republic, and later it united with Romania. The Treaty of Paris (1920) recognized the union but the Soviet Union never accepted this. In 1940 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the USSR. The two provinces had almost 4 million inhabitants, mostly Romanians. Although Romania reoccupied part of the territory during World War II the Romanian peace treaty of 1947 confirmed their belonging to the Soviet Union. Today it is part of Moldavia.

### **16 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.

### **17 Lenin (1870-1924)**

Pseudonym of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, the Russian Communist leader. A profound student of Marxism, and a revolutionary in the 1890s. He became the leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Party, whom he led to power in the coup d'état of 25th October 1917. Lenin became head of the Soviet state and retained this post until his death.

### **18 Mayakovsky, Vladimir Vladimirovich (1893-1930)**

Russian poet and dramatist. Mayakovsky joined the Social Democratic Party in 1908 and spent much time in prison for his political activities for the next two years. Mayakovsky triumphantly greeted the Revolution of 1917 and later he composed propaganda verse and read it before crowds of workers throughout the country. He became gradually disillusioned with Soviet life after the Revolution and grew more critical of it. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1924) ranks among Mayakovsky's best-known longer poems. However, his struggle with literary opponents and unhappy romantic experiences resulted in him committing suicide in 1930.

### **19 Gorky, Maxim (born Alexei Peshkov) (1868-1936)**

Russian writer, publicist and revolutionary.