

# Jeni Blumenfeld

Jeni Blumenfeld

Botosani

Romania

Interviewer: Major Eموke

Date of interview: September 2006

*Mrs. Jeni Blumenfeld is a talkative person who, to her unhappiness, doesn't have many people to talk too.*

*There is nobody of her family left in the country; she doesn't have any friends either.*

*She has been living alone in a flat apartment since 1990 when her husband died.*

*Her apartment looks rather neglected, another consequence of her loneliness.*

- [My family history](#)
- [Growing up](#)
- [During the War](#)
- [After the War](#)
- [Glossary](#)

- **My family history**

My paternal grandfather's name was Strub Leib Segal, he owned a glass factory in a little town, in Lespezi [*Lespezi, community in the district of Iasi, is at a distance of 62 km south from Botosani*]. According to the communists, I am of bourgeois origins. I was a member of the Communist Party but they kicked me out for that reason.

He co-owned the factory with two other people. But this was all when my grandfather was young. Afterwards, my father's parents lived in Botosani where my grandfather owned a fabric store. I don't know what happened to the factory in Lespezi, only the dead know.

When I grew up I knew the fabric store but my grandfather was old by now, so his sons had taken his place. The shop was in the old centre of Botosani, opposite to the Christian Orthodox Church Uspenia in which Eminescu was baptized [1](#) [*Ed. note: The Christian Orthodox Church in Botosani was founded 1552 by Lady Elena Rares*].

My grandparents' house with its balcony and the shop at the ground level still exists. I did not know these grandparents too well, they died in 1945 and I was young. After my grandparents died, my mother, father and my sister (whom we lost) lived in the house.

In 1948 a decree of nationalization was issued, when the big factories were taken and our house was nationalized as well [2](#).

After 1990 I filled in some documents but I did not get the propriety back. They won't give it back to me because I do not have the document of ownership, I don't even know when my grandfather bought it. And there is nobody alive from that period. But ah well, I have enough.

My grandfather had a sister in Paris who was very rich. My father's cousin lived in Braila. Her father was my grandfather's brother. Her name was Shely and I think her husband's name was Liviu. Their surname was Solomon. They married in 1935.

But we did not really stay in touch because we were not a very close family. War came and we all stayed in our own caves. They did not have children, they lived in Braila and I think they left for Israel after the Second World War.

My paternal grandmother was one of five sisters, so many relatives that you can't even name them all. One of them, Nela, had ten children She died in Dorohoi.

Another cousin of my father was called Mada Filvar. She was from Dorohoi as well. She married in 1926; her husband was Herman Filvar.

After the war they lived in Iasi. In 1980, when my husband had to have surgery in Iasi, I visited her; she lived on Stefan cel Mare Street. Her husband had already died and because she was a rather difficult person to deal with, I stayed at a hotel.

My father had two brothers and two sisters. One of his brothers was Bernard Segal. He was a merchant and owned a small-ware shop on Lipscani Street in Bucharest. He did not stay in touch with us; he and my father weren't close, because my uncle was an arrogant man. My father was more timid, more provincial and they lived in Bucharest, in the capital. His wife's name was Any. She was a lady and my grandmother did not want her as a daughter-in-law, because her reputation wasn't too good.

My uncle Bernard was a handsome man, handsomer than my father, with curly hair, he was her lodger, and she bewitched him, caught him. They had a son – a handsome man as well – Charley was his name, his mother gave him a French name. After the Second World War, in 1945-46, my uncle, his wife and their son left for Venezuela where they had some relatives. Charley lives in Caracas, we lost touch. He is divorced and has two daughters in California, in Miami.

My father's other brother was Jean Segal; he co-owned the shop with my father. He was younger than my father but is not alive anymore. He died in Israel. His wife Zoela died in Israel as well. They did not have any children.

One of my father's sisters was **Clara**; she had the same name as my mother. She lived in Bucharest. Her husband, Jean Chelner, was some kind of accountant at Petrol in Ploiesti. He lost his money through gambling; he was a gambler. They had two sons: Henry, -nicknamed Ricu- and Silviu. Ricu was of the same age as me [born in 1927], and Silviu was younger.

The boys were well educated; they graduated from university. Henry, the older one, became a doctor and died in the end in Israel. Silviu changed his surname to Costin – Silvian Costin- and appeared as an author in communist books. He was a historian and during communism he was a chief editor at the history desk of Casa Scanteii

[Ed. note: The newspaper *Scanteia*, an organ of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, was legally published since 1944]. He was married to Geta, they had two children, Andy and Ina, who first went to Israel and from Israel went to the United States.

And ah well, we were in communism, Ceausescu was ruling and if you had relatives in America – in the country of your enemies – how could you continue working at Casa Scanteii [3](#)? They fired him. And he, out of anger, had a heart attack. This happened during the last years before the Revolution [4](#), I think in 1988. They took revenge; they did not want us to have any connections to the West.

My father's other sister was Berta; she was married to the other shareholder of the store, Adolf Moscovici. So my father, his brother Jean Segal, and Adolf Moscovici were co-owners of the store. But oh, did that brother-in-law of my father cheat us.

He guarded the store's money because my grandmother wanted him to do so. So he kept the Napoleons. They were gold Napoleons and he safe kept the coins. And in those years after the Second World War, there was a huge inflation; today you would sell one coin for 2 million, tomorrow for four.

And when my father went to Adolf and asked for the money because he had a daughter whom he wanted to continue her studies, he told him that he had sold a coin for 3 million. And the next day he sold one for 7 million. Adolf betrayed my father and uncle Jean.

They had children, a boy and a girl, both of whom are not alive anymore. They had a beautiful girl, Estera, who married and eventually died in Israel. Her wedding was here in Botosani but we did not go. They are to blame for the way they treated their relatives...

Estera had a brother, but I don't know what was wrong with that boy, he suffered from depressions and he was committed to an asylum. He died there. His parent did not treat him very well. Both, aunt Berta and her husband died here in Botosani, I don't remember when. They were buried at the Jewish cemetery but I never go to their graves, with them... [I have nothing to do].

My father's name was **Samuel Segal**. He was born in Botosani [somewhere in the 1890s], I don't exactly remember when but he was bit older than my mother. My father did not have a lot of schooling, I think he only went to primary school. I don't know exactly how many classes he finished but less than my mother anyway, who graduated high school.

My mother's parents lived also in Botosani. Her father's name was **Iosef Raisher**, who was also a merchant. Many Jews were merchants. My grandfather owned a grocery store. My grandmother died when I was four years old [in 1931] so I only knew my mother's father. My grandfather died before the beginning of the Second World War [somewhere in the 1930s], I don't remember exactly when, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Botosani.

My mother had three brothers: David Raisher, Isac Raisher and Leon Raisher. David Raisher lived in Bucharest; he was an accountant at a bookstore. He had two girls who went to Israel [Palestine] before 1945; one of them has died by now. After the war, my uncle went to Israel as well. He has died since then. He was older than my mother [he was born in the 1890s].

Isac Raisher was also from Bucharest, he was a merchant of colognes, he had a shop, but when the communists came to power they confiscated that shop [2](#). He went to Israel as well, died there of

old age. He did not have any children. **Leon Raisher** was a food trader here in Botosani.

He had the same line of work as my grandfather but opened a separate shop. He was married to Pauline, and they did not have children. I don't want to talk badly about him because he is dead, but he was very greedy. He was buried here in Botosani; he died at the age of 85 years.

My mother came from Botosani; her maiden name was Clara Raisher. I think she was born in the year 1900. My mother had a degree. She finished high school, graduated in 1917. But at that time women did not continue their higher studies. There is a German riddle that perfectly describes a woman's life at that time "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" – children, kitchen and church. That was the mentality of that time.

### • Growing up

My parents married in 1926 and I, **Jeni Segal**, was born in 1927. When I was nine years old [in 1936], my mother gave birth to another girl – **Bianca**, her Jewish name being Braha. We had a happy and abundant childhood. The house, in which we lived, on the Transilvania Street, wasn't our own but a rented house. The houses from that zone do not exist anymore, they were demolished and apartments were built instead of them.

We had maids; my mother did not have to work because my father was a merchant. I am a merchant's daughter; my father was a merchant of traditional fabrics. He had a store in the old center of Botosani together with his brother, Jean Segal, and a brother-in-law, the husband of his sister Clara.

My father was a quiet man; my paternal grandmother was very talkative. I probably inherited this from my grandmother because I am talkative as well. Maybe I even talk too much. But my father and my mother were both very quiet.

When I was 13, my mother would be quiet, my father would be quiet and I would say: "You bore me. I am leaving" And then I went to the Kling family, they were also Jews, who lived on a street nearby. He was a baker and had two boys and two girls, one of them, Neti, being of my age and my friend. We would meet, talk, and joke.

My parents were very strict about keeping traditions. My father was religious; he was a Jew who kept the Law. He did not wear a beard – he was not quite that extreme – the beard was for the rabbis and the extreme religious people. He only went to the synagogue on Saturdays but every morning he would put on the Tales, the Tefillin – in Hebrew Shel Rosh and Shel Yad because those two items contain the Law

[Ed. note: Tefillin are worn in a prescribed manner so as to represent the letters shin, dalet, and yod, which taken together form the divine name Shaddai. The hand phylactery (tefillin shel yad) has one compartment with the texts written on a single parchment; the head phylactery (tefillin shel rosh) has four compartments, each with one text], and he would do all the prayers at home, he would pray alone and read from religious books. We had many prayer books at home. On Friday evenings my mother would light the candles and before we ate, my father would say the prayers.

My mother kept a kosher kitchen and had separate dishes for Passover – she was very religious as well. For Passover we had separate dishes, which weren't used during the rest of the year. She kept them in the loft, in a separate case. Before Passover all the bread and yeast were taken out of the house and a big cleaning had to be done in order to remove all the breadcrumbs, traces of yeast, the wheat flour would be put away and matzos were brought into the house. Eight days long we would eat matzos, we weren't allowed to eat bread.

At that time the matzos were still made in Romania, now they sent us those dry matzos from Israel. Before the war there was a matzos factory in Botosani, that is where we used to buy them from. At that time there were many Jews, there were 14 thousand in Botosani.

The evening of Seder was celebrated in the family – my mother, father and us two girls. It was how they do it now at the Community, with the same ritual. My father would read the Haggadah in Hebrew and one child would ask the four questions, the Mah Nishtanah, when you ask why we eat every night yeast and matzos, except for this night when we eat only matzos... I would say the Mah Nishtanah, for I was the oldest – the oldest child asks the four questions.

[Ed. note: Hebrew Mah Nishtanah, or four questions. Traditionally recited by the youngest at Seder during Passover, when reading from the Haggadah begins.] If I still know them? „„Manishtana... haila zeh huloh maṭṭa.” [Ed. note: Mrs. Blumenfeld remembers only parts of the questions. Ma nishtanah... halailah hazeh, kuloh matzah. Why is this night... on this night only matzah.]”

We didn't hide the matzos. Nowadays they do it here at the Community. Afterwards, you had to open the door so the prophet Elijah could enter the house. At home we would not quite do it like this. My father would do two Seder evenings, as it is supposed to be.

Nowadays only the first evening is celebrated at the Community. There are only few of us and we do it together, Finkel reads the Haggadah [Ed. note: Gustav Finkel, son of Mrs. Berta Finkel who was interviewed by Centropa].

When I was a child, we did the kappara for Yom Kippur. This was done with a living bird, the women would take a chick or a chicken and the men would take a rooster, it would be swung around above the head three times and a prayer had to be said: „Zia tanuva, zia capura, zia...”,

[Ed. note: The phrase Mrs. Blumenfeld recites is actually this: “Zot tenuvati, zot halifati, zot kapparati. This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement.” She forgot the second word, which is for the substitute] and then it had to be slaughtered by a shocheit.

And this was a kappara, a sacrifice for you so God would lengthen your life. [Ed. note: The kappara ('atonement') is a Jewish folk custom during the days prior to Yom Kippur to transfer one's sins to a hen (women) or a cock (men). The woman recites the text in feminine gender: "Zot halifati, zot tmurati, zot kapparati.

Zot hatarnegolet telekh lemita, vaani elekh veekkanes lehayyim tovim arukhim uleshalom." 'This is my substitute. This is my commutation. This hen goes forth to death, but may I be gathered and enter into a long and happy life, and into peace.'] I don't do this anymore. Who would slaughter the bird for me? It needs to be ritually slaughtered.

I did not dress up for **Purim**. For when I was a child, I lived during those hard time, it was war, we wore the yellow star we did not think about dressing up [5](#). My mother would make those pastries with the three corners, filled with nut, Hamatashen, they were very tasty – you can make them as well with bee honey.

There is also the story with Estera Meghila, which is read at the synagogue and when the name of Haman is mentioned, a gragger is used and you have to make noise [symbolic] because we curse Haman. All those who wanted to kill the Jews had a name starting with H: Haman, Hitler, Hussein, Hamas, and Hezbollah – I wonder if this is a coincidence?

Eight candles were lit for **Hanukkah** and put in front of the window. We did not have a Hanukkiah, my father would put the candles in a block of wood,; there was one candle [shamesh] which was used to light the all the other candles. Every evening the children would light an additional candle.

This is also a holiday on which we celebrate that we were not extinguished as a nation [*Editor' note: Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish holiday, which also commemorates the Macabbees' uprising and the re-consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is observed for eight nights, starting on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar.*]

There was a ritual bath in Botosani, but I did not go to the ritual bath, I never even entered it. We weren't that religious. I don't know who used to go there because my mother wouldn't go either. We had a bath at home; we had a bathtub in the house in which we lived.

To be more exact, my uncle Jean Segal had an apartment with a bathtub. He had a nicer apartment and every once in a while I would take a bath there. We were neighbors. The bath was in a separate room, with a tub, wash-hand basin and a toilet. They had a kind of long oven, heated by wood, which would warm the water.

My parents spoke Romanian and Yiddish with each other – all the Jews in East Europe spoke Yiddish. I can speak Yiddish as well because it is similar to German. I studied German for three years at school. I never went to the cheder, neither did I go to private Hebrew studies. I learnt Hebrew and the history of the Jews at the Jewish high school with a professor, Lorlich, he taught at the Jewish High School during those war years.

After the four years at primary school, high school with the classes one to eight followed. That was the educational system at that time and at that time studies would still be taken seriously. I was a good student – if I may boast a little about myself.

After the four years at primary school at a Romanian school, I went three years to a Romanian high school. I was in the third grade of the high school in 1940, when they kicked us Jews out of the schools [6](#). They did not only kick the Jews out of schools; lawyers were banned from the Bar, doctors weren't allowed to profess their skills, pharmacists weren't allowed to be in pharmacies.

After the decrees of Hitler, the Nazi's and the legionnaires, the Jews were considered outcast [7](#) – the legionnaires did not only kill Jews but also Nicolae Iorga, Virgil Magiaru, Ilie Duca and Armand Calinescu [Armand Calinescu (1893 – 1939); president of the Council of Ministers, anti-Nazi and anti-legionnaire, partisan of the Alliance with France and England, who had the courage to tell king Carol the Second, in 1939 that “the Germans are a danger, and alliance with them means being a protectorate”. He was killed by the legionnaires in Bucharest on September 21st 1939].

## • During the War

It's interesting that on the street where we lived, Transilvania Street, we had a German officer as a neighbor, who lived there during wartime. The German officer was a polite man: "Kuss die Hand" [Kiss your hand – traditional greeting in Romania reserved for women and elderly]. That is how he always greeted us and he knew we were Jews. The German army, the Wehrmacht was not on Hitler's side, only the SS was.

There were only a few legionnaires in Botosani. Most of them were in Iasi, there was the pogrom as well, another pogrom took place in Bucharest [8](#). Here in Botosani I do not know of any incidents. Jews were only allowed on the streets until six o'clock in the evening and my husband told me once that he was late and got caught on the street after six, they warned him or they took him to the Police Station but they did not beat him up or anything like that. No, they weren't that ... [inhuman].

Although, I met one with a green shirt as well – the legionnaires wore green shirts and diagonal ones – I knew one by face. His name was Iacovlov, a handsome boy, but he was a legionnaire. There was an incident afterwards, in 1945 in Iasi, a scuffle between the young non-communists – the old legionnaires – and the young communists.

I was a student in Iasi at that time, in my first year and I know that this Iacovlov, who was a legionnaire, was shot and died in that incident. But this wasn't connected to the Jews but to communism. There were also the liberal ones Saratescu, Oltescu, there were the historic parties until the communists started their rule with Gheorghiu-Dej [9](#), Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca – of whom it was said that he was a Hungarian, Laszlo I think he was called [10](#) [Ed. note: Laszlo is the Hungarian version of the name Vasile].

I was 13 years old in 1940 and I had to wear the yellow star [5](#). The Magen David, our star, was on a black cloth of some sort and then it had to be sewn onto our coats. And we were only allowed on the streets until 6 o'clock. We were lucky, they did not deport us, they took only the north – Câmpulungul, Gura Humorului, Suceava, Vatra Dornei, Dorohoi, only they were sent to Transnistria [11](#).

In the autumn of 1940, I started studying at a private high school so I would not get behind with my studies.

*[Ed. note: In October 1940, Jewish pupils and students were denied access to public education of all degrees. The Jewish people were free to organize private primary and secondary schools. The Jewish schools were allowed to function but they weren't allowed to be advertised. The graduation diplomas were not recognized by the state and had no practical validity regarding the graduate's admission into a profession.]*

They opened a private high school for Jews in the house of a rich Jewish guy, Iosipovici was his name – he was a landowner. There is a building on Unirea Street and behind it, there was that building on an alley, on Verde Street, I think. The house had a few rooms, which contained different classes.

Jewish teachers taught at the school: a lawyer taught us law, a pharmacist taught us botanic studies. We weren't that many in one class, maybe four girls and four boys. I only went to that

school for the fourth and fifth grade of high school after which this school was closed down because those were the bad years, the years of the Nazism horror, the years under Antonescu [11](#). And afterwards, year six and seven of high school I studied at home. My mother would buy the study books and I would study alone. I was a good student.

My exams would be only twice a year: in February and in the summer, also with the teachers of the Jewish high school. After the war all the studies were recognized, because everything had ended badly and they had to recognize the studies. And after the war we were free, free to go wherever we wanted, to study wherever we wanted to study.

## **After the War**

In 1944, when war was over, I finished the eighth grade of high school and wrote my final exams. During that eighth grade I went to the Jewish high school Focsaneanu in Bucharest, on the Colonel Oroianu or Oroieru Street. I don't remember many details from that time, I was there only for one year and many years have passed since then. We were only Jews.

And as was the system at time, there were only girls in my class. I don't know why I went to Bucharest... maybe I wanted to? I had an uncle in Bucharest, David Raisher, and my mother took me to them. My uncle and my aunt were living alone, their daughters had already left for Israel, and I lived with them from the autumn until the spring when my final exams took place.

In Bucharest I prepared for the exams with a Romanian teacher, if I remember correctly. The exams themselves took place at a Romanian high school, the Iulia Hasdeu High School – named after Iulia, the daughter of Iuliu Hasdeu – which was on the Obor Square.

After my exams, in 1945, I went back to Botosani and applied to university in Iasi. At that time there were no exams of admittance. I don't remember how many people graduated from high school. From 1945 until 1949 I studied French – Romanian at the Faculty of Philology at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iasi.

My father died of heart problems in his sleep during a night in 1948. I only had my mother and sister left. Poor them, they did not call me for the funeral so I wouldn't have to spend my money – I was in Iasi. All because of that Adolf. What can I say ...

My mother was a widow and she didn't work, the shop was co-owned by the two uncles and the things were not properly divided, the uncles kind of left us with nothing. Afterwards the shop was nationalized and everybody became poor. Ah well and that uncle – Adolf Moscovici – was a terrible man.

He told my mother: „If you don't have the money, let her drop out from university”. But my mother wouldn't let me. She said: „She needs to learn a profession.” And I studied; I was a good student in Iasi.

I spoke my French so well, that once I met a French woman on the streets in France who asked me: „Are you a teacher here in town?” „No, not here in France.” And because of that, because I was spreading the French culture she served me with cakes and pastries. I speak fluently French. And I really love it. I finished university in 1949 and became a teacher.

I started working in 1949 and I was a teacher until 1985, I think. In the first years I taught chemistry and history, I couldn't teach French until Stalin died. I went to middle school, grades 5, 6, 7. Fortunately Stalin died in 1953 and things got a little bit better. Until then we weren't allowed to talk about France or England. Stalin's death was a moment of great joy for us. I taught French at the Pedagogic High School but in the last 15 years I taught at the Economic High School Bucovina.

The Stalinist period was a very difficult one; Jews weren't allowed to leave the country during that time. It was a very difficult era, the dictatorship was horrible, and you wouldn't hear a thing about Western Europe. After Stalin's death, things got a bit better. When Stalin died, everybody breathed easier, it was a great relief.

I did not submit any acts to leave for Israel, they would have fired me from work and I couldn't afford that. But my mother did not have a job and she left in 1953 with my 17-year old sister. And my sister married a young man from a Kibbutz there, she stayed in the Kibbutz and my mother stayed with them – Kibbutz Bar-Am at the boarder with Lebanon, close to the city of Naharia. My mother suffered in Israel, she couldn't adapt and died at the age of 58-59 [in 1958-59].

My sister had three children who only speak Hebrew because their father was Polish. There, in Israel, you aren't called an Israeli. They call you a Romanian, Hungarian – according to the country from which you come. Hungarian Jews buy things in Hungarian stores. Polish Jews buy from Polish Jews.

There are Moroccans as well, people from all over the world. Unfortunately my sister died at the age of 37 [in 1973], she had vertebral cancer. Her destiny was tragic. And she was so beautiful ... I wasn't ugly either but my sister was really gorgeous. And she died young. My only sister... I still mourn deeply.

The children lived, they are big now, have married and have their own children. She had a boy, whose name is Nimrod Benish. Nimrod has a Christian wife, Lena. She is from Finland, she like the Kibbutz-live and moved to Israel. She gave birth to three children.

But her little girl died at the age of 4 – gorgeous, with black eyes – she died of a virus. They have two other children: Mary and Or – Or meaning 'light' in Hebrew. And Nimrod had another son, Gay, with the wife he had before Lena. He is in the army. Nimrod has a sister, Noa Breemhaar, who is in the Netherlands and has three children as well: Sivan, Jonathan and Elrom. I have to congratulate her; the day after tomorrow is our New Year. And Karmel Benish, the youngest one, is still at university in Tel Aviv, where she studies design.

After my mother and my sister went to Israel, I was alone, a teacher. I married in 1953. We didn't have a religious ceremony, there was nobody to officiate it. We had the legal ceremony and a meal at a restaurant.

My husband's name was **Leon Blumenfeld**, born 1919. He was from Botosani, he had a sister and brother-in-law here, his mother lived here as well.

My husband worked in labor camps during the war; he spent two years in Transnistria. That is the reason the Romanian State pays me a million a month [*Ed. note: 100 new lei*], I don't pay taxes for the house, I do not have to pay my phone bill, I do have some advantages. We met here in Botosani.

His wife had died – he had a young wife – also of cancer and he was left alone with his little daughter, whom afterwards we raised together. And I lived many years together with my husband, 37 years.

He was a good man even though he had not had a very high education. He was an accountant but never went to university. At the beginning he worked at the District Council but they fired him because of his lack of education, so he worked at a depot.

My husband wasn't religious. He was a sort of communist. He ate matzos for Passover because I made him eat them, but he wouldn't fast for Yom Kippur. And I forbade him to eat in front of me on Yom Kippur. „Eat where you want but not in front of me”.

I did not light the candles on Friday evening. Neither did I have separate dishes for dairy or meat. Those were the times of the communist ideas, we young ones, did not give traditions the same importance our parents had given them.

My husband and I were both members of the Party. During university I already became a member of the U.T.M. or U.T.C. – first it was the U.T.M., Uniunea Tineretului Muncitoresc [*Ed. Note: Union of the Working Youth*] and afterwards it became the U.T.C., Uniunea Tineretului Comunist [*Ed. Note: Union of the Communist Youth*].

And at the end of the meeting, we sang The Internationale. My husband believed in the communist ideals and a cousin of his, who did not really believe, became the secretary of the Party and received higher benefits. My husband was an idealistic person. And afterwards he saw that he didn't make money. But when they gave him the job at the depot, he got some bonuses and we had the money to buy this apartment, in which I still live. My husband died in 1990, I have been alone ever since.

Unfortunately, I never had children – I didn't want them at that time. If I would have had a son or ... Well, everybody has a destiny, I can't change it.

I have a daughter, Solange – my husband's daughter from his first marriage, born in 1947 –who went to university in Bucharest and studied French studies as well. She and her husband –a non-Jew- went to Israel in the 1970s, they lived in Nazareth, where her daughter Kathrin Blumenfeld Pavlov was born.

After a few years they went to America, got divorced and Solange remarried in New York. Her current husband, Eliot Lievermann, is a Jew and a professor – he is retired now. She still works as a translator for some lawyers.

She came to Romania in 1983 with her husband Eliot and her little girl who was 8 years old. They came with a group of Americans, who organized excursions to Poiana Brasov and Valea Prahovei, after which they spent six days at the sea [Black Sea]. But there was a person from SRI who guarded us [Securitate] – a woman accompanied us everywhere.

There was a Securitate person because they were American tourists [13](#). She joined them at the airport, traveled in the same bus but didn't explain a thing [she was not a guide]. Those people were stupid.... We, parents, weren't allowed to travel in the same bus from the airport to the North Station.

There was only one train at the train station so we could travel together to Sinaia. We went with them to Poiana Brasov, where they stayed at a beautiful hotel, Hotel Alpin, built especially for foreigners. There were some terrible hotels, built under Ceausescu's regime, where only those with cash could go [3](#).

We saw some rajahs, Arabs with burnus – that white robe. But because they were Americans - they had dollars -, we weren't allow to sleep in the same room. At Poiana Brasov, where we dined as well, we would sit at a table with Solange and her family, and that woman would sit at the table next to us and listen to what we say.

But they left the group and came to Botosani so Solange could show her husband her hometown, to visit their relatives in the cemetery. We did not get into trouble because of that. Afterwards we went with them to the sea [Black Sea], to Neptun, where the rest of the group was gathered. At that time all those elegant and big hotels –Panoramic- used to be in Neptun, now I don't know what is left.

I did not have any problems during communism despite the fact that Solange was in America. My husband had a friend who was a colonel at the Securitate. He would ask me on the street: "Have you been to America, to France?" I had been to Paris. „And how is it?" I said: „How is it? It is a capitalist state. There are beggars, rich people and poor people." What should I have said? He smiled and said: „All right, Mrs."

I had the luck that I could travel when I was younger. My daughter and I – my husband didn't come – went on a group trip, the ones they used to organize by the U.T.C. through the party, with BTT [Bureau of Tourism and Transport], very cheap, I think 2500 lei: a day in Budapest and six days in Czechoslovakia – the Czech Republic and Slovakia were still united at that time.

I like Hungarians; I think they are more civilized than Romanians. Hungarians are generally speaking more educated. In Budapest we admired the Island of St. Margaret, the bridge over the Danube, between Buda and Pesta, and a square with statues of riding kings – if I'm not mistaken it was Arpad or something like that [Note: Mrs. Blumenfeld is probably to the Hero's Square]. And we were in the Church of St. Stephan as well and also at Corvin's grave.

We spent only a day in Budapest and from Budapest we went to Bratislava – they told me that it's only 5 km to Vienna, but we weren't the big adventurers-, we stayed two days in Bratislava after which we went to Brno and Prague. Prague was beautiful. Prague is superb, wonderful.

The cathedral of St. Vitru, the Valtava River.... We were also in Pilsen, where the famous beer is made; we were in Karlovy Vary, in German Carlsbad because the Austro-Hungarian Empire once ruled there. That was the first excursion. It was the year in which the Soviets entered Prague, when there was a try for rebellion in Prague, that summer [summer of the year 1968] [14](#).

I spent two weeks in Paris. I went alone with Solange's dollars. When she visited me, I said: „Solange, I want to go to Paris". So she wired me the money. I paid for the road but I had to stay at a hotel and the money wasn't enough so I had to sell two rings.

I saw everything you have to see in Paris: the Louvre, Notre Dame, Sorbonne, Pantheon, the bank of the Seine, 30 bridges ... The Louvre is wonderful, with all those paintings ... The Rubens Room, the Rembrandt Room, the French painters, Goya, Velasquez, The wedding in Kana. In the evening,

the guide told me: „You can't see the whole Louvre in one day". It is huge; you cannot visit it one day. I was in Versailles as well – beautiful, superb.

In 1985, my husband and I went to America. We only stayed in New York but there we visited the Metropolitan [Ed. note: *Metropolitan Museum of Art, art museum in New York City, one of the largest and most comprehensive art museums in the world, founded in 1870.*], we saw the Jewish Museum, we saw the house of Bashevis Singer [Ed. note: *Singer, Isaac Bashevis (1904-1991), Polish-born American writer in Yiddish language.*

*In 1978 he won the Nobel Prize in literature for an "impassioned narrative art" that is rooted in Polish-Jewish culture.*], Solange took me to Fifth Avenue, where there is a Museum of Modern Art [Ed. note: *Museum of Modern Art, institution founded in 1929 in New York City.*] with a sculpture of Brâncuși. [Ed. note: *Constantin Brancusi was an internationally renowned Romanian sculptor whose sculptures, which blend simplicity and sophistication, led the way for modernist sculptors.*] I liked Paris better; you can't compare the two cities. Paris is more cultured.

I was in the Netherlands as well, in 1990 from October 17th until November 17th. At that time the dollar was worth 20 lei. Afterwards the dollar grew a lot. I am content with what I saw.

I was three times in Israel – when my sister was still alive. I was in 1973 as well, after my sister died, to visit her grave. I only was in Israel when Ceausescu was still alive. A passport cost 1000 lei at that time, a lot of money. But I had 4000 lei salary a month and 4000 were thousands.

Now you need millions. I liked Israel – it is our country after all. I visited all the holy places, Jerusalem, Nazareth. And although I am not a Christian, when I arrived in Jerusalem and saw that mountain from where they say that the wood for his cross was taken, I was terrified.

When I saw the Mountain of Olives, Via Dolorosa, where he walked with his cross, I trembled as well. Some things are just myths, but Jesus did really exist. He was a Jew at the beginning, his mother being a great-granddaughter of king David. My nephews live on Kibbutz' in the north of the country – the kibbutz is an agricultural farm where everybody is equal.

I was in Nahariyya, I was in Netanya, I was in the south in Beer Sheva, of course in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and the big Rishon LeZiyyon, Herzliyya – I visited all the big cities. My brother-in-law drove me to the places of which everybody talks, the Westbank etc. – I was there and I saw.

I received some money from a Mrs. Erica Goldner from Bnei Ibrit, an organization that helps Jews in Eastern Europe. First they sent some acts to the Jewish Community in Botosani – to those who lived during the Nazi period – which we filled in by saying that we were persecuted [during WWII], that we had to wear the yellow star etc.

They sent me three times every six months 180 euros. Now they don't send anything. Maybe they will start again. The Community gives me food and I have a pension. Unfortunately. I am alone because I am a widow. My husband died 16 years ago, a year after the revolution and ... C'est difficile. [It's difficult]. But ... God will keep me.

Sometimes – for example tomorrow morning – I go to the market, cook some food, wash some things, sometimes I read and the rest of the time I stare at the TV. What should I do? I love movies. Every day I watch soap operas. I watch Grey's Anatomy. Desperate Housewives – American, nice –

those romantic movies with the Widow Bianco who looks for children ... I keep in touch with the Jewish Community in Botosani.

When they organize a Seder or a meal for Hanukkah, they usually invite us and I go. Now they sent us a card for Rosh Hashanah. Yesterday I was at the synagogue, on the first day of the New Year and I will go again on Yom Kippur, for if I'll stay at home, I'll eat. And I can't eat on Yom Kippur; I keep the complete fast.

Yom Kippur will be on a Saturday this year. I will cook, eat Friday afternoon, Friday evening and Saturday evening. Saturday I will fast. I will drink a little bit of water so that I can take my medicine,; that is allowed by Law. Afterwards Simchat Torah follows, when the reading of the Torah is finished and they walk circles through the synagogue with the Torahs – then I will go to the synagogue as well.

## • Glossary

### **1 Eminescu, Mihai (1850-1889)**

considered the foremost Romanian poet of his century. His poems, lyrical, passionate, and revolutionary, were published in periodicals and had a profound influence on Romanian letters. He worked in a traveling company of actors, and also acquired a broad university education. His poetry reflected the influence of the French romantics. Eminescu suffered from periodic attacks of insanity and died shortly after his final attack.

### **2 Nationalization in Romania**

The nationalization of industry and natural resources in Romania was laid down by the law of 11th June 1948. It was correlated with the forced collectivization of agriculture and the introduction of planned economy.

### **3 Ceausescu, Nicolae (1918-1989)**

Communist head of Romania between 1965 and 1989. He followed a policy of nationalism and non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries. The internal political, economic and social situation was marked by the cult of his personality, as well as by terror, institutionalized by the Securitate, the Romanian political police. The Ceausescu regime was marked by disastrous economic schemes and became increasingly repressive and corrupt.

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

### **4 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.

## **5 Yellow star in Romania**

On 8th July 1941, Hitler decided that all Jews from the age of 6 from the Eastern territories had to wear the Star of David, made of yellow cloth and sewed onto the left side of their clothes. The Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs introduced this 'law' on 10th September 1941. Strangely enough, Marshal Antonescu made a decision on that very day ordering Jews not to wear the yellow star. Because of these contradicting orders, this 'law' was only implemented in a few counties in Bucovina and Bessarabia, and Jews there were forced to wear the yellow star.

## **6 Anti-Jewish laws in Romania**

The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime. According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, and Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery. More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish properties, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city were confiscated by the state, as part of the 'Romanization campaign'.

Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc. Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

## **7 Legionary**

Member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions.

The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland) that represented the movement in parliamentary elections.

The followers of the Legionary Movement were recruited from young intellectuals, students, Orthodox clericals, and peasants. King Carol II banned the movement in 1938.

## **8 Pogrom in Iasi and the Death Train**

during the pogrom in Iasi (29th-30th June 1941) an estimated 4,000-8,000 people were killed on the grounds that Jews kept hidden weapons and had fired at Romanian and German soldiers. Thousands of people were boarded into two freight trains 100-150 people were crowded in each one of the sealed carriages.

For several days, they were transported towards Podul Iloaiei and Calarasi and 65% of them died from asphyxiation and dehydration.

## **9 Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe (1901-1965)**

Leader of the Romanian Communist Party between 1952 and 1965. Originally an electrician and railway worker, he was imprisoned in 1933 and became the underground leader of all imprisoned communists.

He was prime minister between 1952-55 and first secretary of the Communist Party between 1945-1953 and from 1955 until his death. In his later years, he led a policy that drifted away from the directive in Moscow, keeping the Stalinist system untouched by the Krushchevian reforms.

## **10 Ana Pauker-Vasile Luca-Teohari Georgescu group**

After 1945 there were two major groupings in the Romanian communist leadership: the Muscovites led by Ana Pauker, and the former illegal communists led by Gheorghiu - Dej.

Ana Pauker arrived in Romania the day after the entry of the Soviet army as the leader of the group of communists returning from Moscow; the Muscovites were the major political rivals of Gheorghiu -Dej.

As a result of their rivalry, three out of the four members of the Political Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party were convicted on trumped-up charges in show trials in 1952.

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

## **11 Transnistria**

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941.

In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bucovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities.

Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation.

The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

## **12 Antonescu, Ion (1882-1946)**

Political and military leader of the Romanian state, president of the Ministers' Council from 1940 to 1944. In 1940 he formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders. From 1941 he introduced a dictatorial regime that continued to pursue the depreciation of the Romanian political system started by King Carol II.

His strong anti-Semitic beliefs led to the persecution, deportation and killing of many Jews in Romania. He was arrested on 23rd August 1944 and sent into prison in the USSR until he was put on trial in the election year of 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and shot in the same year.

## **13 Securitate (in Romanian)**

DGSP - Directia generala a Securitatii Poporului): General Board of the People's Security. Its structure was established in 1948 with direct participation of Soviet advisors named by the NKVD. The primary purpose was to 'defend all democratic accomplishments and to ensure the security of the Romanian Popular Republic against plots of both domestic and foreign enemies'.

Its leader was Pantelimon Bondarenko, later known as Gheorghe Pintilie, a former NKVD agent. It carried out the arrests, physical torture and brutal imprisonment of people who became undesirable for the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party, and also kept the life of ordinary civilians under strict observation.

## **14 Prague Spring**

The term Prague Spring designates the liberalization period in communist-ruled Czechoslovakia between 1967-1969.

In 1967 Alexander Dubcek became the head of the Czech Communist Party and promoted ideas of 'socialism with a human face', i.e. with more personal freedom and freedom of the press, and the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism. In August 1968 Soviet troops, along with contingents from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria, occupied Prague and put an end to the reforms.