

Mira Tudor

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Bucharest

Romania

Interviewer: Monica Bercovici

Date of the interview: January 2005

Mira Tudor hides with modesty behind her memories, which, unfortunately, seem painful to her today. Hers is a sadness imposed upon her by loneliness. This loneliness is yet a false one, for Mira Tudor lives surrounded by friends who look towards the future and among things filled with countless stories which make up a real personal history. Her interior obstinately strives to preserve an interwar atmosphere. It's because of the furniture ordered from Vienna by an unfortunate member of the Bratasanu family – a stern mahogany dining room set. The pictures on the walls tell countless stories too, such as the one of the refuge from Bessarabia of an unknown Jewish family told by a Gobelin tapestry picturing the bar mitzvah. When evoking the happy times of her childhood, Mira Tudor's face becomes bright, but perhaps no brighter than the face of geologist Mira Tudor when speaking about the practical stages organized for the students in summer. These faces are only darkened by the family-related suffering.

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My family story

I was born in Ramnicu Valcea, in a family of five: my father, my mother, myself, my sister, and my maternal grandmother, the only grandparent that I met. I never met my grandfathers or my father's mother. My maternal grandmother, Miriam Sasson (nee Nahmias) was a Sephardi. The double s in her last name made Grandma so proud! My maternal grandfather's name was Moscu Sasson. The two of them were from Bucharest. All their children were born in Bucharest [in the 1870's and 1880's]. Naturally, my grandmother didn't have a job – this was the custom in those days. My grandfather was a sort of peddler. He caught tuberculosis and died at a relatively young age, in 1899. Grandma was left with six children, three boys and three girls. My mother, the youngest child, was six when her father died. I know very little about my maternal grandfather, because he was away all the time and my mother had few memories about him – I don't think she ever told me anything about him. My grandmother did luxury embroidery and had to sweat in order to raise the six children. She earned her living with her needle, as they say. My grandfather was buried in Bucharest, in 1899. My grandmother died in 1952 and was buried next to her husband, in the Sephardic section of the Bellu cemetery.

At the time when my grandfather died, my grandmother worked for a noble family in Ramnicu Valcea – the Otetelesanus, a famous aristocratic family. In those days, the seamstress or the

embroiderer went to the client's house and stayed there for a few months to get the job done. Their son went to the same high school as my grandmother's eldest son, Lazar Sasson, who was 18 when his father died. Mr. Otetelesanu knew my grandmother was hard-working and honest – she had made countless items of dowry and piles of embroidery for them. So he offered to send Lazar to Paris with his son to study medicine and become dentists. He said he would pay all his expenses if he agreed to act as a sort of undercover servant of the young Otetelesanu. He was supposed to look after him and make sure he didn't do anything stupid – at that time, many of the young men who went abroad got carried away with the flow, started drinking and frequented women with a bad reputation. My uncle performed this job in an exemplary way. However, the ending was [sad] for my grandmother: my uncle fell in love with the laundress who washed his clothes; young Otetelesanu came back and became a doctor here, while my uncle stayed in Paris to work as a dentist. Thus Grandma lost the son on whom she relied the most.

The other children had rather ordinary lives. My grandmother's eldest daughter, Emilia, who was twenty years older than my mother, married an upholsterer and left to Ramnicu Valcea with him. He was a talented man and he made my grandmother and her other two daughters move to Ramnicu Valcea. The girls got married there and stayed there for a while. Eventually, my mother's sisters moved back to Bucharest with their husbands and children. My mother was the only one who remained in Ramnicu Valcea, where she got married in 1913. Grandma lived with her and her husband.

My maternal grandmother was born in 1850 and she saw King Carol I [1](#) entering Bucharest from a window. I don't know where that house was or the way the procession went, but she was 16 at the time and she remembered everything very well. It was unforgettable. There were very few Jews in Ramnicu Valcea – about 10-15 families. But Grandma was very patriotic: 'What do we need a German king for?! Why didn't they pick one from our noblemen?' Dear old her, after having worked in so many aristocratic houses, she could instantly give you three or four men who were suitable to be kings. This is her description of King Carol I: 'A penniless bastard! He had leather patches at the elbows and knees!' As you can imagine, it was a cavalry outfit, it wasn't actually patched. We, the granddaughters, tried to explain this to her when we grew up: 'Grandma, this is how the outfit was supposed to look like!' – 'Shut up! Who else had patches at the elbows?! And he became king and he did this and that...' When the king had the Peles Castle erected [Ed. note: The Peles Castle, located in Sinaia, was the summer residence of the Romanian kings. It is the combined result of the taste of King Carol I (1866-1914) and of the skills of architects Johannes Schultz and Karel Liman, as well as of the decorators J. D. Heymann from Hamburg, August Bembe from Mainz and Bernhard Ludwig from Vienna. The construction works began in 1873.], Grandma was furious: 'That's our money, our work! That bloody German!' I remember my grandmother as a very protective and loving person. My father had had a harsh childhood, with no one to comfort him and say a nice word to him, and he figured out this is how he should raise us too, in a very Spartan way. I have very few memories of my father giving me a kiss. He didn't caress us. Grandma, however, did caress us and pamper us.

At home, we spoke a dialect of Spanish called Ladino, a dead dialect. Since we're at it, I'd like to tell you that, today, Spanish linguists try to track those who still speak Ladino, because they're interested in recreating this dead dialect. In 1492 [in Spain] [2](#), King Ferdinand and Queen Isabelle thought, like so many others did over the centuries: 'What do we need the Jews for? Let's take

everything they've got and kick them out of the country!' The Jews were very rich – they were the bankers of the kings, they were physicians, wealthy tradesmen; they were doing very well. They were given this alternative: either renounce their religion, or leave. And it was on very short notice. Of course, the wretched ones who refused baptism left with nothing more than a bag. But those who accepted it had to suffer too. So my sister, my mother, my grandmother and I spoke Ladino. My father came from a family of Ashkenazim. When the temple was destroyed and the Jews were banished, the Ashkenazic group took another way – through Asia and Russia. Grandma was very upset because she couldn't provide enough dowry for Anicuta so that she could marry a Sephardim. Unfortunately, the Spanish Jews demanded that the bride have a huge dowry. And marrying an Ashkenazi was regarded as a step backwards. Grandma was a very proud woman, but she came to terms with this, because my father was hard-working and wealthy, and he supported her and helped my mother's sisters. My father was a good man. Even though she was supported by her son-in-law, Grandma remained proud. In those days, a girl needed a dowry in order to marry well – like marrying a doctor, for instance. Love matches were very rare back then. My father demanded a dowry too. So my mother's brother, the doctor from Paris, sent money for this. Grandma asked him to. She told him she had found a tradesman with good prospects, a serious, good man, but that he demanded a dowry. A girl without a dowry would marry a craftsman, like a carpenter. The tinsmiths of Ramnicu Valcea were Jewish. They were the Fritz family, uncles and cousins. They were the ones who did the roofs of the houses.

Many years after, when my grandmother was 90, in 1940, I fell in love with a Romanian and I told them I wanted to marry him. My father was against it. My mother was neutral. The one who supported me was my grandmother. So I got married to the man I loved so much. Grandma was very clever. She had a rich life experience. No matter what I told her – as a child, I had my own little problems, and I mean fighting with the other children, not something related to my being Jewish – she always knew what to say: 'Do this, say this, pretend you don't notice', or 'Go tell the class master. Don't fight with her; your parents are friends with her family, and they're customers of our store too, so it would be a pity to ruin this relationship because of your silly things.' Our household was run by Grandma; her and my father.

My father's education consisted of two years in elementary school. But he was very clever and had an extraordinary business sense. He was born in Pitesti. His mother died when he was 9. Since the step-mother had no affection for him, his father, a tinsmith, sent him to Ramnicu Valcea, to work in the store of a Jewish tradesman, called Marcu Adler. What kind of work can a 9-year-old do in a store? He became a sort of servant in the house. But he stayed with this tradesman until he grew up. After he got married, he fought in the Balkan War [on the Romanian side], in 1913. He came back, and then he left to fight for the reunification [3](#). [In World War I] he served as a paramedic. He would go to the battlefield during the fights and pick up the wounded. One of his first missions – of which he was particularly proud – was on the Teleajen Valley [in Prahova County]. He was in a team that had to bury the bell of the Suzana Monastery [10 kilometers away from the Cheia resort, on the Teleajen Valley], to hide it from the Germans, who melted these things and turned them into weapons. The mission was not a big deal, but my father was so proud of it. Then he went to the Moldavian front [3](#). He was a soldier at first, and he finished as a corporal. He was decorated too. He caught the typhoid fever and nearly died. He kept his decoration on a piece of cardboard in a frame. In 1940, a group of Legionaries [4](#) came to our place; they were wearing green shirts with baldrics. I was 14 at the time. The group was led by a Legionary district attorney named Stoenescu.

They rang the bell and entered. They started to search the house. They were infuriated by the sight of my father's decoration. They threw it on the floor and broke it in half. As soon as they left, my father picked it up and hid it. It survived to this day – I have it –, although it went through so many things. It was his pride.

He went back to Ramnicu Valcea after the war. The tradesman for whom he had worked, who hadn't paid him a dime, but had lodged and fed him, gave him a certain sum – I couldn't tell how much – which he used to open his own store. He became one of the richest tradesmen in Ramnicu Valcea, between 1920 and 1940. He had an interesting sign, 'The Country Hora'. [Ed. note: Hora is a Romanian folk dance with a slow rhythm in which the dancers hold hands to form a closed circle.] It was what we call today a general store: clothes, footwear, linen, notions. People would come from the countryside – people in Valcea County were very hard-working and very wealthy –, buy everything they needed from my father's, and fill their carts. They only paid later, in fall. They never paid for the merchandise on the spot. My father would put them on the credit list. After they had harvested their crops or sold their animals, they came back to pay their debt. This is how things went year after year. What I mean is that my father was a great businessman. It's true, he had to take some chances, and he might have had some disappointments too, but I never heard him complain about unpaid debts. Even the townspeople used this system. The clerks bought on credit and paid when they got their salary. Clerks and teachers have always been poorly paid – even before the war [World War II]. We never owned any land in the countryside. All we had was our house. My father wasn't into farming. He didn't want to buy another house and rent it either. He was only into trade.

My mother was a housewife. Grandma began to take less and less work, because my father had got rich and she didn't need to earn money anymore, plus she had got old. So the period between my birth and 1940 was the happiest time of my entire life! The peace and quiet, the abundant home, the great relationships with the neighbors – I never found all these things all at once again.

My father was rather stingy. This was a natural thing, given the fact that he had been so poor and had worked so hard to become rich. He sometimes argued with my mother because of that. My mother went shopping. Linen was not sold by the meter, but by the bundle. How meters were there? 10, 20, 30 meters. My mother picked whatever she wanted and had everything delivered at home: holland, holland lawn – a very delicate fabric –, damask, linen. At the end of the year, when tradesmen closed their books, my poor father would find out that his wife had emptied the store. He would come home yelling: 'What need did you have for all those things?' My mother always told him: 'Relax, Maere, we have two daughters and they both need good dowry.' – 'Are they going to leave in a cart? Because all these things will only fit in a cart, you know.' But my mother kept buying and Grandma kept sewing.

Growing up

My parents were very austere. No kissing, no saying 'I love you', no hugging. I'm not sure I ever saw them kissing. They didn't kiss us too often either. Grandma sometimes called me Caralinda, which means 'my dear' in Ladino or something like that. I was Caralinda.

We never had a nurse. We were raised by our mother and Grandma, who didn't have jobs. They also looked after the house. My grandmother cooked for ten people: the five of us (our grandmother, our parents and us, the girls), three shop boys who shared a room in our house, and

two maids – one for the kitchen and a cleaning woman. Come to think of it, we used to buy industrial amounts of food. But it was easy back then. Peasants we knew came to our house with vegetables. Do you think my mother went to the marketplace to buy carrots? No way, everything was delivered at home! Grandma cooked Romanian dishes. We weren't a devout family. The hakham came from time to time to slaughter poultry. But my mother did it herself too, secretly. My father went to the store on Saturday. We had to go to school, and no one had a problem with that. Such things only happen in Israel, where they have special devices to turn on the lights [on Sabbath], because you're not allowed to do it yourself, or to light the fire, or to drive a car, and many other things. But we weren't like that at all.

There was a small synagogue called shul, with a very large garden, and we had a rabbi. He was a man that even the Romanian community in Ramnicu Valcea respected. He had a family – three daughters – and he lived from the salary paid to him by the Jewish tradesmen. So the Jewish life was rather poor compared to the one in Moldavia, where they had yeshivot where children studied from a young age. My father regularly went to the shul on Friday evening, as he had learnt from his former master, who used to take my father with him. He had even learnt to read those Hebrew letters in the prayer books. On major holidays – New Year's Eve (Rosh Hashanah), Yom Kippur, Pesach, Sukkot (when the tents with fruit are built) –, our entire family would go to the shul. The children would play in the courtyard. This was about all the religious life we had. I became familiar with some of the Jewish rituals. We had a rabbi who tried hard to preserve the Jewish way of life; otherwise, we would have dissolved among all those Romanians. For instance, I remember when they gave us wine and the prayer we had to say. 'Melech' means 'king', 'Adonai' means 'God', so it's God, the king of the universe. I can't say it by heart though. We all went to the synagogue for the large holidays. On Sukkot we built a tent. Ramnicu Valcea is an area rich in fruit. Grapes were wreathed in the walls of the huts. I can't remember what we ate in those huts. I think Sukkot lasted for 8 days.

My sister is 6 years older than me. The two of us were the only Jewish girls in our high school. After my sister left, I was the only one. She got the school's first prize for eight years in a row. I only got the second or third prize in my class, never the first. I got the highest average at the admission exam, 9.66, and I graduated in the spring of 1940, with the highest average again, 8.80 – only a classmate of mine, Olguta Popescu, and I had it. [Ed. note: In the Romanian grades system, the maximum grade is 10, while the minimum grade for succeeding at an exam is 5.] The other children didn't study well, they weren't good at it. They all went through elementary school, but stumbled over high school. There's one exception though, Rozeta Saraga, who finished high school and went to college – the Faculty of Geography, I think. She now lives in Israel. There aren't any Jews left in Ramnicu Valcea today, of course. There was a vocational school for boys. But the girls who were older than 15-16 stayed at home. I remember this family... God, what was their name? Not Adler, but Taubman! Lazar Taubman. My father worked as a shop boy for his father-in-law, Marcu Adler. Then they both became tradesmen. Taubman had two daughters. The elder didn't even go to high school; she stayed at home with her mother and helped her around the house. They got her married at 17-18. The same thing with the younger. She went to a 'housekeeping school'; this is how it was called – not apprentices' school, not vocational school. It was a 'housekeeping school' where they taught girls to sew and cook. Because we got all those prizes in school, my sister and I had earned some esteem that had nothing to do with who our father was. For instance, I was in the same class with the daughter of the National Bank's governor, Iliescu. In a

town of 10.000 people, this man was like a king. He lived upstairs from the bank. Once a year I was invited to Irina Iliescu's birthday party. This made my poor father very proud, because he had never set foot in the house of a dignitary. 'My girl is going to the governor of the National Bank to visit his daughter! Imagine that!' I would greet Mr. Iliescu with 'Saru-mana' [Ed. note: Old, contracted greeting meaning 'I kiss your hand'. Its use today may vary with the age, the education, the geographical area and even the gender of the interlocutors, but it is mainly reserved for informal interactions between a man and an older, less educated woman, in which only the man uses it.] At that time, 'Saru-mana' was used when addressing men too. What I'm trying to say is that my sister and I became rather famous in Ramnicu Valcea by ourselves.

We took piano lessons from a Russian refugee, Madame Verbinskaia. Her husband had been a colonel. She fled when the Russians came and she ended up in Ramnicu Valcea with her son, while her husband died. She never left our town again. I wasn't talented and I wasn't diligent either. Our father also hired a French teacher and a German one - 'pope' Mangesius, the protestant minister of Ramnicu Valcea. My sister speaks German beautifully. As for me, they had to catch me first before making me take those lessons. So my German is rather poor. But I speak French well. Then I learnt Russian, because I went to Leningrad. I also learnt English by myself and I can read it - it almost has no grammar and the phrase structure is easy, unlike German, with the subject at the top of the page and the predicate on the following page.

On vacations we didn't go to the seaside like, for instance, Dr. Zeana, our neighbor. Zeana was arrested by the Legionaries and died in prison. My father would rent a carriage and take us to Calimanesti, or Olanesti, or Ocnele Mari. We left in the morning and came back in the evening. He took the carriage from a cabman's post, drove it home and took us wherever we wanted. We took the train to Calimanesti, because it was farther away, at about 18 kilometers. There was no station in Calimanesti. We crossed the river on a small ferry. It was very beautiful! My father also sent Grandma, who had rheumatism, to Ocnele Mari for 2-3 weeks every summer. A carriage came and took her there, then brought her back. She took baths there. It was primitive - some wooden cabins with wooden tubs. Grandma took me with her a couple of times.

I read a lot. Our father gave us money to buy books to read, and I read a lot. I acquired this taste for reading in my childhood and I still like to read. My eyes now get tired very fast, but I did read a lot. My father had only attended two years of elementary school, so what could he have possibly read? He could barely write. After finishing the elementary school, my mother went to a private school for four years, and she spoke some French. Her brother from France helped her with her studies as much as he could. But she stopped after they moved to Ramnicu Valcea. At that time, studying was practically impossible for a girl. Come to think of it, I realize they didn't leave the house for weeks. One of our neighbors was a Turkish landowner, Romulu. There's a hill in Ramnicu Valcea, Capela, which stretches down to the very center of the town. It's covered with fir trees and it's magnificent! Romulu owned a part of this forest, so our house felt like a park. Our courtyard was beautiful - with flowers and trees. From time to time, my mother went to visit other ladies - but she did it quite seldom. She also had them come over. They were both Romanian and Jewish.

I wasn't allowed to go to the cinema. I shed bitter tears and begged my father to take me, but he was always tired after having spent the entire day at the store. He only came home to eat. He worked hard and he liked to keep the place clean. If the boys didn't sweep the floors well, he did it himself, so that the customers would be pleased. On Sunday, he was dead beat and felt like

sleeping. And I cried: 'Let's go to the cinema, father!' I remember this film called 'In Old Chicago' [1937], starring Alice Faye. I bought the 'Cinema' magazine and had read about it. Ramnicu Valcea had one of the first cinemas in the country. It was build by an Italian, in 1920 or maybe even earlier. As far as I'm concerned, it had been there for as long as I could remember. It had a hall, a row of ground-floor boxes, and a row of boxes at the upper floor. My father would take me by the hand and we would enter a box. He would hide in a corner and doze. And he even snored sometimes. 'Father, you are embarrassing me! Stop snoring!' – 'I'll never come here with you again if I'm not even allowed to snore!' So I let him snore, hoping we would come again.

Then there were the theater tours. A great actor of the National Theater [in Bucharest] Ion Iancovescu was from Ramnicu Valcea. [Ed. note: Ion Iancovescu (1889-1966), actor who became famous in the interwar period, a time when a new conception on art was formed, and when tradition and modernism were combined.]. He came from a noble family who had renounced him because he had become an actor. Much later, when he came on tour with the theater in Ramnicu Valcea, they invited him to dinner, because they had partially forgiven him. Fintesteanu came too [Ed. note: Ion Fintesteanu (1899-1984), actor who became famous in the interwar period.]. We weren't allowed to go to the theater – this would have got us expelled. If we had been caught at the cinema, we would have got expelled too or banned for a week. But if my father took me, it was okay. We weren't allowed to go there by ourselves. There was the officers' ball, and all the youth was there. But we didn't go, because we weren't old enough at the time.

Our house had belonged to a nobleman named Bratasanu. He was a widower and agreed to sell us the house if we agreed to look after him. The place had about seven rooms. Three of them or so measured about 36 [square] meters each, and the others measured about 24 [square] meters each. We had a bathroom, which was quite an extraordinary thing at that time. The toilets were inside the house, not at the back of the courtyard. We had plumbing, electricity, and terracotta stoves. Peasants would come and pile firewood in our large courtyard. Then some woodchoppers would spend about two months with us. They would saw the wood and stack it in the basement. We also had a shed, and some of the wood was kept in the courtyard. We burnt enormous amounts of wood and I can't remember to have ever suffered from cold. Opposite from us lived the daughter of a captain, Ciofaca. The man had three daughters. Two of them were not good at school, but the third became a doctor. She was very clever and determined, and her name was Victoria. We called her Vintu, Vintu Ciofaca. And the captain built this house, which was very beautiful, but didn't have a bathroom; and the toilet was outside. I don't know what he was thinking. But the house itself was beautiful. And all the furniture had been made by local carpenters.

During the war

We all came to Bucharest because of the Legionaries, just like King Ferdinand in 1492, were after our fortune. They had no business with us: 'Go to hell!' They took over the store with all the merchandise and a safe as large as a bookshelf, only thicker and deeper, where my father kept the money and the papers. So they took everything. Fortunately, my father had saved some money somewhere else, and this is what kept us going during the war. My father had connections with rich tradesmen in Bucharest. They were Jewish, of course. He came here and told them what had happened to him, how he had lost everything. And they told him 'Come to Bucharest and we'll find some work for you'. He came back to Ramnicu Valcea and packed everything. Would you believe that we even took our cats with us? We were afraid they would poison them. We filled two or three

freight cars with our things. We took everything there was to take, or most of it, anyway. The station master in Ramnicu Valcea was a man named Nitescu. His daughter was my classmate. [The Legionaries came to the station.] 'These cars don't belong to Maer Simovici anymore', Nitescu told them. 'They are the property of the CFR [The National Railroad Transport Company]. If one single chair is missing, I'll have to pay for it.' The poor man spent a day and a night sitting on a chair in front of the cars, guarding us against the rage of the Legionaries. Then, as soon as he could, he routed them to Bucharest. They waited for us there, until my father found the house on Labirint St., and we moved in.

So we moved to Bucharest in 1940. We had our own house, but it was relatively small and had a big shortcoming: the rooms were in a row. The good part is that it had a garden of 1.000 square meters. When my father bought it, he saw that courtyard with fruit trees, the garden, and the roses, and he lost his head. He always remained a country boy. He came to us and told us: 'I bought a house on Labirint St., and it's got roses, and apple trees, and quince trees, and...' But my mother asked: 'What about the house, Maere? We're not going to live in the quince trees, you know!' - 'Oh, the house is beautiful.' - 'How is it?' The women were disappointed. In order to get to the kitchen, they had to cross the entire place. The ground floor had three rooms, a hallway, and a vestibule, and there were three more rooms in the attic. This was it. When I got married, I lived in one of the rooms upstairs. Apart from that, the house had a bathroom, and terracotta stoves, and all the comfort. Someone in Ramnicu Valcea must have been very kind, because my father even received a compensation for the lost store - I don't know who did that. I heard this is not the way things happened everywhere.

During the war, my father did forced labor in an economat [Ed. note: (outdated) store within an enterprise or institution whose purpose was to secure basic commodities for the employees and their families], in a ministry. A neighbor of ours got him that position, knowing he had been a tradesman. Back then, all the ministries had economate, small internal stores which supplied the clerks. I don't know where they got the merchandise from, who delivered it and how they paid for it. My father didn't get paid for this job - it was forced labor. All the Jews went through this. But at least we didn't wear the star [5](#). My sister did forced labor at the Statistics Institute. Did you know that those who were able to submit papers proving they did forced labor - the boys, for instance, had forced labor written in their soldier's record instead of military service - got a compensation for it? There aren't many of them still alive, but I personally know two people who got this money. My father worked during the entire war. The Jews from Ramnicu Valcea left [the country]. They all left between 1950 and 1960 [6](#). It's true, there weren't many of them. Ten families at the most - maybe twelve, but I wouldn't bet on it.

Between 1940 and 1944, the Jews were deprived not only of their stores, factories etc., but also of their houses - the beautiful ones, of course. Ours was seized by a colonel, Paraschivescu by his name. He kicked us out of it in a few hours, with all our things. My father went to find another place and came across an apartment on Panduri Dr. It was twice as small. This is how most of our things got scattered. It was only in 1945 that a law was passed while Lucretiu Patrascanu [7](#) was still a minister in the government. According to this law, Jews could move back to their houses if they offered those who had seized them an apartment to their liking. Luckily for us, col. Paraschivescu had died on the front, and his wife lived alone in our house on Labirint St., which had many rooms and an enormous garden. So she had to accept to move on Panduri Dr., where we had lived after

we had been kicked out.

Under the communist regime, my father didn't have any pension. My sister and I supported him. He lived with my sister. She paid for the utilities – firewood, electricity, gas, all these things –, and I paid for the food. There was no assistance system back then – or it was only at its beginnings. But he died in 1972, before things had got organized. Today, he would have lived like a baron. I would have put him in a home, but he was over 100. This is my father's story. This is what he did for a living. And this is how we supported him after the war. A cousin of ours – his niece – left to America and sent him parcels from time to time. He got them by mail and sold what was inside. The neighbors knew he got parcels. He would spread the word and they would come to buy things. This is how he survived. Both my parents were buried next to each other at the Sephardic cemetery. My father died in November 1972, and my mother died in December that same year. She passed away weeping for him. A year later, they would have celebrated 60 years of marriage. After he died, my mother said 'I don't want to live anymore.' She wept, and wept, and, one night, she died.

My sister and I started to give lessons during the war. I taught French and German from the age of 16, starting from 1942. My sister gave piano lessons and thus we provided for ourselves. Yes, we stopped asking money from our father. Of course, we still lived at home, and ate what our father brought, but you know very well how many other things a girl needs. I once asked him for money to go to the opera, and that made him mad: 'If I could live to be 50 without going to the opera, why would you need to go?' During the war, all our friends were Jews. After the war, we also had Romanian friends. The houses had courtyards and 10-12 of us would gather there to chat and laugh – we were kids. After the war, the Jewish children didn't keep in touch, because we all went to different colleges and met new people. We didn't visit one another anymore. During the war, we saw one another very often. We weren't allowed to go to the pool. Tineretului Park had a big sign: 'Jidanii [offensive word for Jews] and dogs not allowed to the pool'. We couldn't even go to the pool during the war. We didn't go anywhere, and I think we wouldn't have been allowed to anyway. We spent most of our time at home. Sometimes we went to the Herastrau Lake and took a boat. No one there asked us if we were Jews. But there was no way they would have let us to the pool. Then, after the war, a whole different life began. But we had fun before the war too. We danced and all. We had big houses and we all came from families that had had a good situation before.

We had two pianos. Here, in Bucharest, my father bought the second one using money from our dowry. It was a Bluthner, an extraordinary piano, a renowned brand. Our house was visited by Sergiu Comissiona [Sergiu Comissiona (1928-2005): Jewish conductor active in Romania, founder and conductor of the chamber orchestra of Ramat Gan (Israel). He settled in the US. After conducting numerous orchestras in America and Europe, he returned to Romania after 1989, where he conducted the 'George Enescu' Philharmonic Orchestra and the Symphonic Orchestra of the Radio Broadcasting Company in Bucharest.], who was a 13-year-old boy studying at the '[Alberto] della Pergola' Jewish Conservatoire, and by many others who also went to the Conservatoire, like Julien Musafia. Watching them, I acquired my musical education. This is what they did. When concerts were held at the Baraseum theater [the building of the Jewish State Theater] [8](#), the soloist had his piano, while the part of the orchestra was played by a second pianist, using the other piano. This thing is done. Sergiu Comissiona, who is now a world class conductor, was the boy of a very rich banker. Although we were in a war, he wore lacquer shoes. Dan Mizrahy [Dan Mizrahy (n. 1926): concert pianist with a refined perception of the musical styles (Bach, Gershwin etc.). He was

also interviewed by Centropa.] came too. He is now very old, but he was a great concert pianist specialized in Gershwin. He is the best Gershwin performer of all times in Romania. Mizrahi is a Spanish Jew too. Julien Musafia is a Spanish Jew too. Then there was Mandru Katz [Ed. note: Mandru Katz (1928-1978): He became well known after the war. He is the representative of a Romanian piano school led by Florica Musicescu. He continued his career in Israel, after he emigrated.]. I think Katz died. He was a Moldavian boy as poor as a church mouse and a great teacher from the Romanian Conservatoire heard him play. Her name was Musicescu; she bought him a piano. He placed a piano in the middle of their cottage. It was unbelievable! He had a great career, but he died at a relatively young age. I don't know what happened to him. His name was Mandru Katz. He later got himself another name, but this is the only one I can remember.

My sister, **Julietta**, was a pianist. She went to the Conservatoire, but she didn't do concerts. She was the pianist of the gymnastics team – this is what she did for a living. She was with them at the Munich Olympics, when the terrorists killed the Israeli delegation [Ed. note: On 5th September 1972, in the Olympic Village in Munich, 5 Arabian terrorists killed 11 Israeli athletes and a German policeman.] Panic spread to our delegation and they told her not to go out anymore. But they couldn't have known that the pianist of the Romanian gymnastics team was Jewish, so she came back home safe and sound. She went to the Rome Olympics, to a competition in [North] Korea, to Poland many times, to Bulgaria – in all the socialist countries. She followed the team everywhere. She was also a corepetitor [Ed. note: Person who accompanies at the piano, at rehearsals or during concerts, recitals and performances, an instrumentalist, a dancer etc.]. In 1944 she married a doctor, Iosif Rosman. They had a wedding at the temple, a beautiful wedding. Then there was a party at the 'Cismigiu' restaurant, on the avenue. I don't know if that restaurant is still there – it was near 'Gambrinus'. My sister remained in the house on Labirint St. Our parents died, and, of course, so did our grandmother. My sister lived with her husband. He died in 1976, one year before the earthquake. Her daughter got married and gave birth to a boy in 1977. So my sister now lived with her daughter, her son-in-law, and her grandson. They submitted papers to leave for Israel and, after a while, they got the approval. Things moved slowly. Meanwhile, their house was demolished. But they were given a new place, although they had already applied for emigration. They didn't leave them in the middle of the street. They demolished them, and gave them an apartment in the Distor area. They were assigned a three-room apartment near the Izvorul Nou cemetery. Their street, Complexului St., bordered the cemetery's wall. It was a nice place, at the third floor. They lived there for two more years, until they got their papers. They sold half of what there was to sell, and gave the other half to the neighbors. In January 1989, my sister, her daughter, her son-in-law, and her grandson left for Israel. At the end of that same year, the revolution [9](#) came. 16 years have passed since she left. She adapted herself to the new place; she lives in the capital of the Neghev desert. The temperature there can reach 39 degrees Centigrade in the blink of an eye during the day; but the nights are much cooler than in Bucharest. I asked her to stay here. She couldn't part with her grandson and her daughter – naturally, this love beats the love for a sister. We write to each other twice a week. It takes about a week for a letter to get from here to there or vice-versa. If I don't write for more than three or four days, she calls me to make sure I'm not dead.

My life continued in a beautiful manner. I went to the Jewish school in Bucharest, where I studied for four years, from the age of 15 to the age of 18. I got a prize – it's on a nice piece of parchment and I still have it. So I first studied for four years in Ramnicu Valcea, I graduated there, then I went to secondary school at the Jewish High School in Bucharest [called 'Cultura'] [10](#), between 1940 and

1944. Our graduation certificate was worthless, as the State didn't recognize it. But the high school was approved by the State, and you can imagine the kind of money contributed by the [Jewish] Community to the Legionary State for all those children. Romania had almost one million Jews. There are only a few thousand left today. A very sad thing goes on here at the Club too: from September until now, five people died. We are dying. We're old, sick, and worn out. My chance came in 1944, when I finished high school and I passed the graduation exam. It was during the bombings. [Ed. note: As a result of the events of 23rd August 1944 – when Romania left the war against the Allies and joined them against Hitler – the Germans unleashed a general attack against Bucharest, on Hitler's order. Between 24th and 28th August 1944, Bucharest, Prahova Valley and many other places in the country saw fierce fighting. By 28th August, the German resistance in Bucharest had been defeated.] I was always a good student. My father said that a bombing would catch me on my way from home to school. 'To hell with the graduation exam, it's no use to you anyway!' – 'Oh, come on, let me pass it!' My results weren't too bright – my average was 7.76 or so. To be honest, I hadn't studied too hard, because I knew that certificate didn't mean much. But I thought I'd pass the exam anyway. Shortly after, the truce of 23rd August [11](#) came, and Jews were once again admitted to public schools.

Another misfortune which occurred at the beginning of the war was the fact that Jews were confiscated their radio sets. We shed bitter tears for ours. They only returned them to us after the war. I joined the Party because, in the fall of 1944, I had become a citizen with equal rights again. I was admitted to college. After I had been kicked out of my home and of the Romanian public schools, my education and my certificate were finally recognized. I passed the graduation exam in the summer of 1944. It started at 6 p.m., because the city was bombed during the day. There were many tests. But I was determined, and I got my certificate. When I took it to the University, at the Science Faculty, the clerk examined it and signed me up. It was then that I said to myself that a new regime had begun; a regime where all the citizens were equal. I didn't want to be above the others, I just wanted things to be the way they were before the war, when we were seen as human beings. This is why I joined the Party, because I thought we owed them this. I did it out of conviction. I didn't know they would send me to the USSR with a scholarship, and I had no idea there would be certain advantages for members.

After the war

Right after the war, we joined a progressive organization and went to a camp in Cristian, near Sibiu. This is where I met Vasile. We spent a month there. We met and we stayed together for good. We waited for two years, because I was still underage, and I needed my parents' approval to get married. So we waited. Since I married a Romanian, there was no religious ceremony. Most of the Jewish youths joined the Party while it was still underground. We persuaded one another. A classmate would disappear and come back after two weeks! I had been married for a year when my father finally realized Vasile was a good boy and that we loved each other. His greatest fear was that I would quit college and nothing good would come out of me. And he felt sorry for all my years spent in school, with brilliant results. So he bought me an apartment on Colentina Dr., very close to the Club [Ed. note: the Jewish Club in the Colentina neighborhood, on Ripiceni St., where members meet in order to spend their spare time together.], where I have been living since 1948 and where I hope I'll die.

I entered college. I went to the Natural Sciences Faculty. There was no Geology Faculty in the beginning. When I got to the 3rd year, the Geology department was opened by a number of Natural Sciences graduates who had specialized in geology at oil companies abroad. We had an extraordinary corps of geologists; our oil geologists were even world class experts, like Gheorghe Paliuc, chief-geologist at Astra Romana. The Russians took oil from us by the tank – no arguing about that! The German war machine ran on Romanian oil. When we broke the alliance with the Germans, on 23rd August, we left them without oil, because none of their other allies had any. And it is absolutely true that this shortened the war with 6 months. And poor Paliuc launched the theory that the oil deposits were exhausted. He drew up a report to make the Russians stop stealing – stealing is what they were doing, because they demanded almost the entire oil production of the country! Someone denounced him and he was sentenced to hard years in prison because he had been a patriot and had tried to protect the country's oil. This is how things went back then.

Then there was the Geology Institute. I was in the first graduating class that also had girls. There were three of us. We studied well, of course. One of our professors was Ion Athanasiu. He looked at us as if we were little more than bugs! He was interested in the boys. When I entered college, exams were not on fixed dates. We could go to classes for years without passing one single exam; or we could pass as many as we felt like, whenever we felt like. When I got to the 3rd year, an order came to block the exams. If you hadn't succeeded at 75% of the exams, you had to repeat the 1st or 2nd year. Thus, out of the 300 students admitted in the 1st year, only 9 reached the 4th year. So I finished college. What were they to do with us now? The boys were immediately assigned based on the professor's recommendation. There was no committee in charge with this. Those who had studied well and had earned the professor's trust were sent to the Geology Institute. As for us, the girls, he told every one of us: 'What am I supposed to do with you, Miss? How will you go on the field?' And we looked like three frightened chickens.

He sent one of the girls, Bebe Carnaru – may God rest her soul – to the Micropaleontology Department. There was only laboratory work to do, not field trips. As I was more energetic, he told me: 'Go to Professor Macovei.' He was the dean of the Romanian geologists and a member of the Academy. He could go to Gheorghiu-Dej [12](#) unannounced, and Gheorghiu-Dej stood up when he entered his office. This is the kind of prestige this man enjoyed! He wrote the first treatise on the geology of the oil deposits, published in France: 'Les gisements de petrole (geologie, statistique, economie)' ['The oil deposits (geology, statistics, economics)']. He was a great professor of an extreme severeness – all the students dreaded him! 'Go to Mr. Macovei and tell him I sent you.' So I went. The others were amazed: 'Who do you think you are to go to Macovei?' I was already married. But I called Professor Macovei and told him Mrs. Mira Tudor would come to ask him whether he could find her some position, wherever he wanted, doing whatever he wanted; I told him I had been a good student and all. I knocked on his door; they didn't have secretaries back then, so he answered himself: 'Enter.' He was short, but had a very strong torso. When he sat, he looked like a colossus. I stopped between the door jambs and didn't make another step into the room. 'Good afternoon, Professor.' He looked at me. 'What do you want?' – 'I am Mira Tudor. Professor Athanasiu told me to come to you.' – 'What? You're Mrs. Mira Tudor? What, you're married?' – 'Yes, Professor.' – 'And how old are you?' – 'Well, I'm 22; I finished college. I studied for four years.' Then I thought he found me unappealing – I wasn't too noticeable, I wasn't pretty, and I hadn't dressed up or anything. 'What am I to do with you? I feel sorry for Jenica, who recommended you. What to do?' He took the phone and talked to a professor, Pauca; he taught paleontology at

the Institute of Geology and Mining Technology, and he also had a part-time job as the chief-geologist of the 'Grigore Antipa' Museum – this was possible back then. 'Listen, Pauca, I'm sending you Mrs. Mira Tudor – but his voice showed that he was making fun of me – to work with you.' The man asked him where. Macovei said 'Put her at the collection, at Antipa.'

Mr. Pauca put a duster in my hand, and this is how I became a tutor, starting my career in higher education. I wiped the dust off those rocks for a long time. The geology section is in the basement; it's very nice and very neatly organized. Eventually, Mr. Macovei remembered me: 'How's that girl?' Pauca said: 'Dusting the collection.' – 'Take her with you at the practical classes. Have her carry the trays,' – the practical classes used samples of rocks – 'maybe she got to know the rocks during all this time. Tell her to make you a collection for the Triassic, to see how she handles it.' I was horrified the first time I entered the auditorium carrying the tray behind the professor. But he began to see that I was serious, that I worked well, I was interested and I liked it, so the next fall, after several geologists had refused to go to the Soviet Union for further specialization, I was the one who said yes. The offer had been turned down by two people before it reached me. I wasn't sent to the USSR because I was a Party member. Those who had refused, Dragos Vasile and Ionel Motas, weren't Party members. My husband and I were the only Party members [in my family].

I studied for 3 years in the Soviet Union. The University of Leningrad is called Twelve United Colleges. A very long corridor with auditoriums, labs, collections. It was very nice. I lived in a hostel, in a room of five. They put me amidst Russian girls. I couldn't speak Russian at all. There were other Romanian girls there too, but in other colleges. One of them was Eva Ban, a student in History. Lili – I forgot her last name – was in History too, I think. We would have liked to live together and speak Romanian among us. But they didn't let us. The Russian girls kept talking in Russian until they got the language in my head. I happen to have a certain degree of talent when it comes to foreign languages. And, out of despair, I had to learn it. I wrote a thesis in Russian. The Romanian State paid us – we had a good scholarship, we lived well, and the food at the canteen was all right. I got along well with the teaching staff. They appreciated the basic training I had acquired in college. I didn't just go there like a total idiot. They helped me a lot. The professor who coordinated my thesis was very demanding. When I introduced myself I asked him if he spoke French. 'Njet!', he said. 'German?' – 'Njet!' I couldn't speak any other language. I came back to my room and chatted with the Romanian girls: 'Who has ever heard of such a nitwit? He's a university professor, but he doesn't speak any foreign language.' This could not be said about our former professors in Romania, who did speak foreign languages. I later found out he spoke German better than I did. Russian is a language with a rather difficult grammar and tremendously rich. Its nuances can confuse you; add a prefix and the meaning of the word changes completely.

My first winter there happened to be a very harsh one. The cold was so intense that it made me cry, and the tears formed a small icicle. When I first tried to remove it, I pulled it together with my eyelashes and the pain was excruciating. There was a Siberian man, a lad as big as a bear, who said: 'Now that's a real Russian winter!' I swore in my mind. This is where I had to put on some real clothes. I wore valenki, felt boots, with overshoes. It was after the war. We hadn't taken many clothes with us. I bought an overcoat with money from my scholarship. I could afford it. I also wore two shawls sewn together.

But those were nice years. Some of my fellow-students became great personalities after they came back. Many of them were ministers: Bujor Almasan (Ministry of Mines), Marinescu (Healthcare),

Popescu (Forests or something like that). Some of them were rectors. They got very good positions when they returned.

[In Russia] we weren't allowed to leave the city. It was under Stalin's regime. I finished before he died. Stalin died on 5th March 1953, and I came home in January 1953. All we were allowed to do was take the bus and go to a resort situated to the north of the city, similar to Baneasa [Ed. note: The Baneasa forest, located 10 kilometers away from Bucharest, is a recreation area in the vicinity of the capital. A special attraction is the zoo, with several hundreds species of animals.] We would ride the Finnish sleigh there. There was a chair on which one would sit. It had a back. The soles of the sleigh were long enough to make room for a second person to stand behind the chair. This person would push the sleigh, and then jump on it. I fell so many times! Back in Ramnicu Valcea, we used to call the sleigh 'tarlie'. We rode it on the Capela hill.

It was nice in Russia, and going there was a good thing to do. After they invaded Romania [Ed. note: On 30th August 1944 the first Soviet units entered Bucharest. German resistance was eliminated on Prahova Valley, in Brasov, and in Dobrogea. Measures were taken to protect the western frontiers and to prevent possible Nazi advancements in Banat and southern Transylvania.], Romanians developed a fierce hatred for them, because of how they behaved... From my point of view, Russians brought us freedom of education, so I had nothing against them. A lot of Jews left the country at that time. But we belonged to the second echelon [as candidates for a scholarship to the USSR]. The people in Leningrad asked for two new names, because they still had two places to fill, according to the agreement [the other geologists had refused to go]. They had reserved two places for Geology, and they expected two people. This is how this girl, who was Jewish too, and I got to Leningrad. We lived in the same hostel with Paul Popescu Neveanu, a psychologist. The teacher of Russian made us study grammar a little bit, so that we could utter intelligible phrases. We understood each other very well, but the Russians had no idea what we said. She made us study with a teacher who was a nitwit. We read phrases from the abridged history of the Russian Communist Party. Popescu was a lady's man, he was nice and full of energy: 'How am I supposed to pick up a lady using words from the Party's history?!' He was so nice! He did a very good job after he returned to Romania. Milan Popovic was there too. He became the manager of CEC [The National Savings Bank] and changed his name to Mircea Popovici. He was a Serbian and I don't know why he made that change. I remember many others. Saragea was the first manager of the Jewish home for the elderly. If she were still alive, I would have moved there. She would have given me my own room, that's for sure. 'Don't worry,' she told me, 'your old days are secured.' But Saragea died.

I came back with a post-graduate degree in Sciences. I studied very well there and got 10 at all the exams. They made me a lecturer right away. It was a terrible mistake, just terrible! I had no teaching experience whatsoever. Imagine showing up in front of an auditorium full of nasty students to lecture them... In fact, this is not that hard, because you do all the talking; but, during the practical classes, they ask you all sorts of questions and try to catch you off-guard. But I did like my father did: I didn't pretend to know more than I knew. If I didn't know the answer to a question, I told them honestly: 'Look, I don't know, but I'll look it up, I'll do some research, and I'll tell you next time.' They appreciated that. And I really told them things like 'Dear, I never heard about this in my entire life.' Frankly. They got to love me because we went on field trips. We spent a whole month on hills, valleys, under the rain, in the mud, under the sun. I was a communicative,

optimistic, and cheerful nature, and I admit they became very fond of me. This spring I was invited to the 50th anniversary of a graduation class – I had just returned from the USSR when they were still in school. My point is that, after all these years, they could pretend they don't know me when crossing me in the street. But they stop me and they are happy to see me. And this brings me an enormous satisfaction. Enormous!

I could tell you many stories about my student days. God, so many things happened in Russia! My life was filled with events. Mr. Macovei ended up loving me. After I came back, he started calling me 'Russian girl!' Not Mira, not Tudor, not anything else. Even if we were in the corridor and there were students watching, he still called me 'Russian girl'. I adored him too. He set the direction, to say so. When I came back from the USSR, I possessed three great disadvantages: I was a Party member, I was Jewish, and I had studied in Russia. I had to overcome these three handicaps. It took me more than one year or two. After four or five years, my colleagues finally realized what kind of person I was; and I started to enjoy some appreciation from the students too. Then my life continued in a nice way.

I spent 35 years in the same department, between 1948 and 1983. I think this says a lot. I didn't have to change my workplace, I didn't have any conflicts. I was the only Jew in the entire faculty. I didn't try to hide it. It would have been foolish to pretend I was Romanian just because my husband was. They knew I was Jewish, but didn't mind. Mr. Macovei was followed by another Academy member, Murgeanu, who loved me too. Then came the third head of the department, Theodor Joja; he also loved me. They were all fond of me, they protected me, and they prevented any tendency of anti-Semitic manifestations towards me. I couldn't say they all loved Jews, because I would be lying. But if some of them were anti-Semites, I never felt it. I only had a problem once. The Romanian Geology lecture was free, and Mr. Joja said 'Let's give it to Mira Tudor'. It was a very difficult and rather boring lecture. In general, geology is not a fun subject. A lecturer – God forgive him, for I did – rose against this suggestion: 'Why would she of all people hold the lecture on Romanian Geology?' He meant that a Jew didn't fit the profile. Poor Dragos had it coming – they all were against him. Ionel Motas, who was my assistant, told me about it: 'Dragos had better swallowed his tongue than speak his mind.' I held the lecture in honorable conditions.

But the time when things got really nice was during the practical stages. It wasn't just because of me; it was the entire staff who took part in this. We would take the students on a field trip for an entire month and I can tell you stories for hours and hours. In July we went to Maneciu Ungureni, on Teleajen Valley. We first took larger groups, of 15 students, and examined the area; then we took smaller groups, of 6-7 students, and drew the geological map of the region. So we started for zero and ended up sketching the geology of that area. When the month was over, the students had learnt what geology was all about. This technique had been conceived by professors Macovei and Murgeanu – we only learnt from them and passed it on to the students. I have no merit in this – I only did well what they taught me to do. 19 years after I retired, I was awarded an honorary diploma for my contribution to the development of geology and geological education in Romania. It was very nice of them to remember me. At that time, I wasn't doing very well financially, so I said: 'What do I need a diploma for? They could have given me some money instead.' But I admit that I was delighted to get it.

Let's get back to my family life. We adopted a little boy, because I couldn't bear children. We had a nice marriage – we loved each other and we lived well – so we adopted this little boy from 'Sfanta

Ecaterina' orphanage on Kiseleff Dr., near the Triumphal Arch [Ed. note: Bucharest's Triumphal Arch was initially made of wood in 1922. In 1935-1936 it was rebuilt from concrete and granite on the same spot. The 27-meter-high monument is dedicated to the victory of the Romanian armies in World War I.]. We picked a dark-haired boy, because Vasile was also dark-haired, and we wanted the boy to resemble us a little. We raised him and gave him all our love, as you can imagine. But the child was an alcoholic's offspring. His mother had died in childbirth, and his father hadn't shown any interest in him. It was only much later that I found out his natural father was a drunkard. We were stupid communists: education is everything, heredity is crap. That's a communist theory! We raised him as well as we could, but he started drinking at 14. He was 9 when we got divorced. Vasile continued to care about the boy, then about the grandson, until he died. So, at about the age of 14, he went 'Mother, give me five lei to have a brandy.' He went to the Caragiale High School. 'We'll just have a brandy.' I thought that was odd, and I told my husband that Marcel had started to drink. 'Well, all the boys drink at his age.' So neither of us paid any attention to this. He died as an alcoholic with a lung disease, before he turned 51.

Vasile's parents had joined the Party in its underground days. They believed in communism. His father was a worker. There were nine children in their house – six girls and three boys. They adopted me with love. They were simple people who lived in a house whose floor was the ground itself. They didn't have any problem with the fact that I was a Jew, no way. We adopted Marcel. The Party gave them an apartment. They took them out of that poor house on Gherase Dr. – here, in Colentina –, and gave them a place in Dorobanti, in a house that wasn't even nationalized, but simply seized. The owner was kicked out and Vasile's parents got to move in. Marcel was very cute. Being adopted and not having a natural mother, they all treated him with extra sympathy and love. In photos, my mother-in-law is surrounded by a pack of grandchildren, but it's my boy that she holds on her knees. He was everyone's favorite when he was little. My mother-in-law, who was illiterate, had a sparkle of genius. They came from a village on Ialomita Valley. She told me: 'Look, you'll send him to school this year, and I can tell he won't study well, and you'll beat him because he'll upset you, and all the neighbors will tell him «She's beating you because you were adopted».' – 'So what am I supposed to do?' – 'We'll give you our house in Dorobanti,' – which had gas – 'and you'll give us your place in Colentina' – which my father had bought me with the money from the compensation, and which had stoves. They made this sacrifice for us and for that child. After living for 10 years in Colentina, I moved on Naum Ramniceanu St., where I stayed from 1958 until 1974, when the initial owner rightfully claimed his house back. I didn't argue with him. Vasile's parents were dead, so it was no problem for me to move back.

Vasile was born in the commune of Mihai Viteazu, on Ialomita Valley. His family moved to Bucharest when he was a child. There were nine children. They all got married and they were all Party activists. Their father had been with the Party since its underground period. He had been involved in a lot of trials; he had been arrested and released. The older children had also been involved in communist underground activities. After 23rd August, they were not among those who were given important positions, mainly because they were uneducated – they had only been to elementary school. One of the girls was luckier though. In the underground period, she was the Party secretary for the entire Dobrogea region. She later worked for the Central Committee [of the Romanian Communist Party] – I don't know what she did there. The other girls got small clerk jobs: one worked for the Presidency, one was a hairdresser. One of them spent most of her time at home because her husband had a nice career and became a general. The youngest boy went to the

military school. There were three boys in my husband's family. Vasile was the oldest boy. Before him, four girls had been born. Then came two more girls, and then the second boy, Nicu. He died on 8th November, fighting in Palace Sq. In 1945, on the King's name day [King Michael] [13](#), many people had gathered to support him. The communist workers came in trucks, there was fighting, and Nicu was badly beat. He could barely crawl back home, where he died. [Ed. note: On King Michael's name day on 8th November 1945, a large pro-monarchist and anticommunist rally took place. On the order of the procommunist government, soldiers opened fire and many arrests were conducted.] He was buried in a heroes' plot, at the Ghencea cemetery, the military section. The youngest boy, Ion, is now 70-71. He went to the military school, then they sent him to Leningrad, at about the same time when I was there. He attended a Communications Academy, as he was an officer. He married a Russian woman and brought her to Romania. He got promoted all the way to colonel. He was already a colonel when his son was born. An order then came: all the officers who were married to Russian women had to divorce them and send them back home. I believe it was still during the regime of Gheorghiu-Dej [12](#), but I can't remember the year. He went to the general and said: 'I will not divorce her. I have a child with this woman, and we love each other. I'll give up the army and find a civilian job, because I'm an engineer.' Many of them were cowardly enough to yield: they divorced and sent their women back to the USSR. That was a horrible thing to ask, but they did it because they were afraid. Iancu wasn't afraid - we called him Iancu. It's true, he relied on the fact that he came from a powerful family of communists and that they couldn't touch him with anything else. He told them: 'I am not getting a divorce, because I have a closely united family and no one in our family has ever got divorced. Why should I do it?' Well, this was Vasile's family. The only ones still living are a sister who is 89 years old or so, and this Iancu. All the others are dead. Their children got married and have children of their own. Many of these grandchildren are abroad - mostly Canada. Some of them are in America, and one got to Mexico. They spread in many places - they were a very large family. They all went to college and became engineers and doctors.

Vasile's brothers distributed communist leaflets. This was no big deal, but they organized youth balls which attracted other people to the movement. They were workers' balls, neighborhood balls, nothing fancy. But, in any case, they were under surveillance. Their house was watched. They kept going in and out of prison. My mother-in-law was a very reliable and courageous woman. Sure, she wasn't happy about her husband being a communist and about the fact that they often had nothing to eat, but she didn't say a word. She didn't oppose the idea that her sons get involved in politics either. Four Jews became members of their family: myself, the husbands of two of Vasile's sisters, and the husband of one of Vasile's nieces. But no one treated us any differently from the rest. I don't have recent news about them. Vasile used to come here and tell me about them. I would ask him how this or that member of the family was. People didn't go to the theater or the cinema back then. We went to his mother's, to Dorina's, to Aurica's, and the whole pack met there to spend an entire Sunday. Or they came here. This extendable table for 24 people was hardly enough. I had to add a bench on this side. These reunions were very pleasant. My father-in-law - God rest his soul - used to bring one or two demijohns of good wine, and we would party. A very united family. Today, when the fourth generation awakes, cousins barely know one another.

Our marriage didn't last for too long - only 15 years. But those 15 years were very happy years for me. He fell in love with someone else, I couldn't put up with him having relationships here and there, and I filed for divorce. Maybe that was a mistake. Today, at the age of 80, I'm not sure

anymore. However, the last person he called one hour before he died was me. We stayed friends and he took care of me all his life and this says a lot. He was a quality man. The fact that he fell in love with someone else is something that just happened; you can't control that – you either love or you don't.

In 1974 I moved back to this place. Vasile used his Party connections to get me gas. This happened in 1974. The house has all the comfort you need, but it's too much for my retirement pension. Marcel evolved thanks to Vasile's determination and attention. He came here almost every day; he made him finish high school, get his certificate, and sent him to the Physical Culture Institute, because he had a talent for sports. He lived with me until he finished college. He went to the army, then he was assigned to a sports school on Avrig St. He was a hockey and swimming coach. In 1976, because of the heavy drinking, he had degraded himself, so I told Vasile: 'I can't take it anymore. I'll quit my job, I'll become a maid and I'll leave for Israel. I can no longer live with Marcel.' Vasile used his connections again to find him an apartment on Ilie Pintilie St., today Ianca de Hunedoara, near the Presidency of the Council. He got married. We made him a beautiful wedding. The girl came from Ploiesti, from a family of nice, hard-working people. She only stayed with him from June till September. She went back to her parents' without a bag, without a sack, without anything. She told me: 'I'm not going back to him.' He used to come home drunk. After a few years he married again. This time, it wasn't a quality woman: her father was a drunkard too. Since they were planning to get married, I told her: 'Mariana, beware: Marcel is a drunkard.' She moved in with him. 'Don't marry him, because it will do you no good. He's a drunkard and he gets violent when he drinks.' – 'But he doesn't come home drunk every night.' She saw Vasile and I had good material situations, so she thought 'So what if he drinks?', and she made him a baby. She left him after 10 years, when the boy was 6. Marcel told me: 'Mother, will you take Valentin? Mariana left and I don't know what to do with him.' So I took him. I have a very nice grandson and the two of us make a funny couple: an 80-year-old and a 20-year-old just don't fit together. But, of course, there are feelings between us. His mother wasn't a very good mother from the beginning, so he spent most of his time at my place. He loved this house and he still does.

After I retired, I worked for ONT [The National Travel Office], between 1983 and 1991, for Russian-speaking groups exclusively. For 8 years I ate at restaurants and I went to every corner of this country. I don't mean to brag, but I was better than the other guides because I had been throughout the country as a geologist and I knew things that the others couldn't have known. I was also requested for French groups, because they saw I was a good guide. But I preferred the Russians. They were more disciplined. They sorted them very well before letting them leave the country.

In 1969 a wind of freedom started to blow in Romania. Ceausescu [14](#) began to let us go abroad. Well, it was easier for those with a clean past. I had a clean past, because I wasn't a former landowner and no member of my family was a political prisoner. I applied for a passport and, with some help from my former husband, who was a Party activist, I got it. Thus I could see the entire Europe. I left in 1969, in 1971, and in 1973. We were only allowed to leave every other year. In 1969 I went to Hungary, Austria, West Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. In 1971 I saw Hungary, Austria, France, Belgium, and Holland. The third time I went to Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. We were lucky. You needed money in order to go abroad, hard currency that is, and we didn't have any. We didn't have relatives abroad to send us money, or to lodge us. But we took the tent and we

camped. In 1969, one camping night cost \$1 and \$2 in the most expensive place. I filed a request, after having received the approval of the University Party Committee. Vasile sped up the process of getting the visa. There was this family, the Ionescus, and Vasile told them: 'I'll help you too, but you'll have to take Mira with you.' So I went with them by car. We stopped wherever we wanted and visited whatever we wanted. At that time, you couldn't get more than \$50 per person from ONT for a trip abroad; so the three of us had a total of \$150. But this money meant something. We had enough to pay for gas. I had a certificate proving I was a member of the teaching body. This allowed me to enter all the public museums in Italy for free. I had to pay the fee at the Vatican though. I also paid the funicular ticket to climb the Vesuvius, and I paid in some other places too. But I got admitted for free in most of the museums. These were my trips with this family abroad.

In the last trip – Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey – I went with the Soare family. They were both professors at our institute. He got involved in Party work and became our London ambassador between 1976 and 1979. She died this Christmas. First of all, let me tell you that places that looked to me like resorts were mere villages. But do you know what villas and gardens they had? Where were our fences made of planks? In Austria and Germany they don't have fences between properties and dogs barking at you at the gate. I didn't see one single cow in all Switzerland. I mean, their roads make detours, these are tourist countries. The Carpathians are not less beautiful than the Alps, only less tall – but the roads in the Alps are a dream! We went to Austria, to Tyrol, and took the funicular at Innsbruck, at over 3,000 meters. I thought I would die because it was moving so fast along a steep wall, and I said: 'Titi, where is our funicular in Poiana Brasov? I think I won't make it to the top in this one!' It was very beautiful. The villas, the restaurants, everything was embellished. We mostly have wild nature here in Romania. You walk for hours in the Retezat Mt. without seeing one single villa with flowers, or a restaurant, or a bar – not to get drunk, but to have something refreshing. I don't know how things look today, because I haven't climbed the mountains for 25-30 years. I went to Crucea, to Caraiman, to Pietrele Doamnei, in Rarau. I didn't go there with my students because we studied sedimentary rocks. And, at those altitudes, one can only find eruptive or metamorphic rocks. We worked in the hills and we were interested in oil and coal. These are not to be found in the mountains, but in the hills.

We couldn't have missed the 1st May and the 23rd August events. Those who say they didn't go lie. Do you know how nice it was? There were kiosks selling sausages and fruit that were hard to find the rest of the year. We took our sacks with us. We were summoned at 6 a.m. only to get in front of the platform at 11 a.m. But it was fun. I played with the students and it was enjoyable. I went because I wanted to. It was hard for me to wake up, but then I came home, boiled the sausages, and laid the table – two sausages per person on that occasion.

I went to patriotic labor. I went with my students to husk corn at Baia, in Dobrogea, and we stayed for a whole month – the month of October, which was a month of school. The cold had begun. It was a collective farm and they offered us rooms with mice, bugs and everything. We had to adapt. We, the geologists, were used to field conditions: we often stayed in country houses, with the toilet at the back of the courtyard, so I didn't mind. The students had fun, played games, threw corn at one another, made dolls out of corn; they were in a very good mood.

The creation of the State of Israel made me glad. There was a reunion in the hall of the 'Savoi' Variety Theater, on Victoriei Ave. Vasile got us an invitation for two and we went. Speeches were held and the Israeli anthem, 'Hatikvah' [15](#), was played. It was exciting. I was very happy. But I

never considered emigrating. I didn't have any relatives there [during the communist regime]; my entire family was here, including my parents.

Romania never broke the diplomatic relations with Israel. When all the socialist countries did it, Ceausescu didn't. There was no conflict. Ceausescu wanted to act as a mediator between the Arabs and Israel. Of course, he wasn't too successful, because both sides were too stubborn. He only did it to attract attention. But he didn't break the relations. Under his regime, armies of Romanian artists went to Israel: Stela Popescu, Arsinel, Piersic, orchestras. They were very well received, halls were crowded, and the Romanians wept at their shows. [Ed. note: Stela Popescu (b. 1938 in Bessarabia), actress; Alexandru Arsinel (b. 1939 in Dolhasca, Suceava County), actor; Florin Piersic (b. 1939 in Cluj-Napoca), actor. The three of them went on tours abroad with comic plays, sketches and variety shows for the Romanian diaspora.] They took them shopping, they dressed them, they gave them presents. We had very good relations with Israel.

I only went to Israel once, in 1993. It's nice. I met some of the people from Ramnicu Valcea. Those were very exciting encounters, for we hadn't seen one another since 1940, the year when we left Ramnic. They sometimes send me \$20 or \$50. I am very deeply rooted here. I have my lifelong friends whom I have known for 60 or for 40 years. What can I do at this age? Whom can I make friends with in Israel? And I don't speak the language either. I never considered moving there. But I enjoyed going there and I liked the place. Israel is something built on sand and sandstone, with no rivers. Jerusalem has a very nice hilly landscape – you go up and down, up and down. I think it's located at 700 meters of altitude, with a climate resembling that of Breaza [town on Prahova Valley]. The temperature inside didn't exceed 25 degrees Centigrade, and we didn't have air conditioning. I had to cover myself at night. Here I would take my skin off me at night.

In the beginning, the 1989 revolution made me very happy. For us, the intellectuals, the lack of communication with the Western world had been a major issue. We didn't get specialized books or magazines. We did have some tacit agreements with magazines coming from America, but we didn't get enough. And the Ceausescu family was against the translations from the universal literature. I started to get books in English from abroad and this is how I learnt English. It was because of them. I now have a very nice library of English books. So I was happy. I thought we would be able to buy books travel abroad without fearing they wouldn't let us. But the result was that we're so poor that we can't even get to Ploiesti [There are 59 kilometers between Bucharest and Ploiesti.] At the present time, I personally live far worse than during Ceausescu's regime – I'm stating this openly. My pension of 3,685 lei was enough to pay all the utilities, to eat, dress, and go to Eforie [resort at the Black Sea] in summer. I stayed at 'Europa' Hotel, which was the fanciest at the time, with my friend the doctor. We were both retirees and the pensions could buy us all that.

Nowadays, I have many ways to entertain myself! My best friends are two Romanian doctors. We help one another. If one of us sneezes, the other two are on the run: we cook for her, shop for her, and watch upon her. The three of us broke our arms in a row. One of them broke it like this. Then it was my turn. I broke my shoulder – well, it wasn't really a fracture, but the bone seemed to have taken off somehow. I had to wear a plaster dressing. My friends came, washed my hair, and cooked for me. My birthday came in that period, and they got themselves organized: 'You bring the pound cake, you bring the steak, you bring the meat balls, you bring the olives.' There was a great meal on my birthday. The third of us fell and had the same kind of fracture like I had. So my other friend and I had to carry her food. My friend also gave her medical assistance, like checking the blood

pressure and other things. These are my best friends; it doesn't get any better than this. There's also a former fellow-student, Doina Negulescu, a Romanian too, but I see her more seldom. I have more things in common with the other two. Doina and I have known each other for 61 years, since 1944, when I entered college. We kept on seeing each other. There was a time when I helped her a lot, because Vasile and I had a good financial situation.

These pictures aroused many memories. I am now alone, almost everyone who used to be around me is dead. I became very fond of the women who come to the Club and there's hardly anyone else in my life. When I went through the pictures and I saw how many of us there used to be and how surrounded by friends I was, I felt bad. I remembered a former Auschwitz inmate who came home. Her grandchildren kept bugging her: 'Tell us how it was!' She said: 'I don't want to, because it will do me harm.' Still, one day, she decided to talk about it. She talked for a couple of hours, had a heart attack and died – this is how much the memories affected her. Of course, I wouldn't die from looking at these pictures, but it didn't make me feel good. I saw my parents again, I saw all the hopes that we put in the boy we adopted, who turned out to be a great disappointment for both of us.

I don't have any clear political views anymore... But I still feel attracted to the left, because look at what the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank or hell knows who else are doing to me: they make us pay 20% more for gas, 20% more for electricity, in order to align ourselves to the costs in the West, where pensions and salaries are ten times higher than here. This will turn into a masked genocide. People won't have money for food or for utilities anymore. From a pension of 5 million, I pay more than 3 million for the gas. The rest? The phone, the electricity, the water, the food, the pet food [Mrs. Tudor has a cat and a dog.]. Would my pension be enough if the Community didn't help me? Under the Ceausescu regime, we all lived in an equalizing poverty.

Much to my shame, I did almost everything in my life, except going to the Community. I didn't have any connection with it. After I finished the Jewish school, I entered a Romanian environment again; and I was already used to the Romanian environment from Ramnicu Valcea. I felt good and I didn't go to the Community. Let me tell you how I eventually got there. Three years ago, in 2001, I was at the marketplace, after I had collected my pension. I kept bumping into a former colleague from Drilling, Cornel Popescu, who was still an active professor. I was carrying my shopping bags. 'Mira, why don't you register with the Community? They'll send you food.' – 'Send me food, Cornele? I get 2,5 million.' This was already a good pension. 'I'm ashamed.' We met again. Cornel had a Jewish neighbor and he knew what he was getting from the Community. One day, he stopped with his legs apart and an arm on his hip, and told me: 'Miro, what are they going to do to you? Slap you? Throw you down the stairs? They'll say «Madam, you don't meet the requirements». What are you, a princess? So what if they turn you down?' – 'I'm not afraid they'll turn me down; I'm ashamed to ask.' But, to humor Cornel, I gathered a few papers and I went. After two days they informed me that the Community had accepted to assist me. Ever since then, I have been living much better. The pension is just enough to pay for the utilities. This wretched weather caught me with heaters in 7 rooms. I have four rooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and a hall. And only the gas costs me millions. If it hadn't been for the food from the Community... They also give me some money. I should sell the house and go to the home. It's a very good home – I have all the respect for it. But, since I'm still able to move by myself, I hesitate...

When I said I wanted to go to the [Jewish] Club, they told me: 'Don't go to the Club, there are only old, sick people there, and all they talk about is death and illness.' Hell no! They're in a good mood and have plans for the future. Many of them have children abroad and go to visit them. They make comments on the political and artistic events, they watch shows on TV, many of them – the ones who live downtown – still go to the theater. It's a very pleasant atmosphere. I go to two clubs: here, on Ripiceni St., on Mondays, and at the Choral Temple on Thursdays. The latter has a more intellectual atmosphere: we comment events, we read magazine articles. Last time I was there we talked about Auschwitz. At 11 they give us food, lest we should pass away: sandwiches, tea, coffee, and sometimes there's also cream with the coffee. When one of us has her birthday she gives us a treat, while we gather money and buy her a present. It's very nice. Last Monday they ran a film with Rome and Paris. I was in both places and you can imagine how delighted I was. And I said something which I thought everyone knew: in Napoleon's tomb there are 7 caskets one inside another. I just looked it up – I have a Paris guidebook and I want to show it to them. One of the caskets is made of lead, one is made of zinc, one is made of wood, the one at the top is red granite, and the other three I forgot. But I know what I'm saying, because I was there. I enjoyed it very much. They play rummy, chess, canasta. We chat, they exchange recipes, while I gaze at them in amazement, because I'm not much of a cook. They can prepare elaborate things. One of them in particular seems to be a mistress of cooking. But I can never remember more than half of what she says. It is with pleasure that I go to the club. It feels like family, and everyone knows everything about everyone else. 'How's your daughter?' I have never seen her in my entire life, but I know everything about her. 'How's your grandson?' They all know how he's doing. So we chat. I don't go to the synagogue. I sometimes go to the Club on Popa Soare St., where they hold conferences or performances on Sundays at 11 a.m. But I only go if the weather is nice. I feel more like going to the Club and I dress warmly if I have to. I don't go to the synagogue because all the services are in the evening. I can't be out at night. I might step in a bump on the sidewalk, fall and break into pieces. Do you think it would make any difference to God that I was coming from the synagogue?

Glossary:

1 Carol I

1839-1914, Ruler of Romania (1866-1881) and King of Romania (1881-1914). He signed a political-military treaty with Austria-Hungary (1883), to which adhered Germany and Italy, thus linking Romania to The Central Powers. Under his kingship the Independence War of Romania (1877) took place. He insisted on Romania joining World War I on Germany and Austria-Hungary's side.

2 The expulsion of the Jews (Sephardim) from Spain

In the 13th century, after a period of stimulating spiritual and cultural life, the economic development and wide-range internal autonomy obtained by the Jewish communities in the previous centuries was curtailed by anti-Jewish repression emerging from under the aegis of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders. Following the pogrom of Seville in 1391, thousands of Jews were massacred throughout Spain, women and children were sold as slaves, and synagogues were transformed into churches. About 100,000 Jews were forcibly converted between 1391 and 1412. The Spanish Inquisition began to operate in 1481 with the aim of exterminating the supposed heresy of new Christians. In 1492 a royal order was issued to expel resisting Jews in the hope that if

old co-religionists would be removed new Christians would be strengthened in their faith. The number of the displaced is estimated to lie between 100,000-150,000. (not reviewed by Andrea yet)

3 The reunification war (1916-1918)

On 14/27 August 1916, following the closing of a political agreement with the Entente, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary, with an army of 833,000 people. As Bucharest was occupied by the armies of Germany and Austria-Hungary, the Romanian authorities and the army withdrew in the Romanian province of Moldavia. The refuge was a harsh experience because of the cold, the diseases etc. The year 1918 represents for Romania the year of the great unification of the Romanian provinces, ratified on 1st December 1918 in Alba Iulia, by the Great National Assembly. During World War I several great changes were put on board, such as the new electoral system, the land reform and the extension of civil rights. They formed the main axis of the new Constitution of 1923, which allowed the Jewish community of Romania to receive Romanian citizenship. (not reviewed by Andrea yet)

4 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, peasants. The movement was banned by King Carol II in 1938.

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 Bukovina and Bessarabia, and Jews there were forced to wear the yellow star.

6 Emigration from Romania after WWII

The proportion of Jewish emigration to Palestine was much higher after WWII than before. The establishment of Israel in 1948, which created a national home of their own, was one contributing factor, while disappointment with the attitude exhibited by the Romanian state and nation was another. 41,100 Romanian Jews emigrated to Israel (Palestine) between 1919 and 1948, while this number increased to 272,300 from after May 1948 to 1995. After WWII Jewish emigration was

greatly influenced by the actual reaction of the communist regime to the aliyah, and by the direction Romania's diplomatic relationship with Israel was taking. The larger waves of emigration took place as follows: 1948-1951 (116,500 people), 1958-1966 (106,200) and 1969-1974 (17,800).

7 Patrascanu, Lucretiu (1900-1954)

Veteran communist and appreciated intellectual, who successfully conducted an underground communist activity before the Communist Party came to power in Romania in 1944. Following this he was in charge of the Ministry of Justice. He was arrested in 1948 and tried in 1954. He was allegedly accused by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the leader of the Romanian Communist Party, of helping Antonescu in his war against the USSR and of being a spy for the British secret service. In fact, he was the only rival from an intellectual background Dej had. His patriotism, which he openly expressed, was interpreted by the communists as chauvinism.

8 Jewish State Theater in Bucharest

It was founded in 1948 as a result of the nationalization of all performing institutions, including the Jewish theater. It staged classic plays of the Yiddish repertoire, but also traditional Jewish dance performances. Nowadays, because of emigration and the increasing diminishment of the aging Jewish population, there is only a small audience and most of the actors are non-Jews. Great personalities of the theater: Israil Bercovici (poet, playwright and literary secretary), Iso Schapira (stage director and prose writer with a vast Yiddish and universal culture), Mauriciu Sekler (actor from the German school), Haim Schwartzmann (composer and conductor of the theater's orchestra). Famous actors: Sevilla Pastor, Dina Konig, Isac Havis, Sara Ettinger, Lya Konig, Tricy Abramovici, Bebe Bercovici, Rudy Rosenfeld, Maia Morgenstern.

9 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.

10 Cultura Jewish High School in Bucharest

The Cultura School was founded in Bucharest in 1898, with the support of philanthropist Max Azriel. It operated until 1948, when education reform dissolved all Jewish schools and forced the Jewish students to attend public schools. It was originally an elementary school that taught the national curriculum plus some classes in Hebrew and German. Around 1910, the Cultura Commercial High School and Intermediate School were founded. They ranked among the best educational institutions in Bucharest. Apart from Jewish children from the quarters Dudesti, Vacaresti, Mosilor or Grivita, non-Jewish students also attended these schools because of the institutions' good reputation.

11 23 August 1944

On that day the Romanian Army switched sides and changed its World War II alliances, which resulted in the state of war against the German Third Reich. The Royal head of the Romanian state, King Michael I, arrested the head of government, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was unwilling to accept an unconditional surrender to the Allies.

12 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 1952-1955 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 Khrushchevian reforms.

13 King Michael (b

1921): Son of King Carol II, King of Romania from 1927-1930 under regency and from 1940-1947. When Carol II abdicated in 1940 Michael became king again but he only had a formal role in state affairs during Antonescu's dictatorial regime, which he overthrew in 1944. Michael turned Romania against fascist Germany and concluded an armistice with the Allied Powers. King Michael opposed the "sovietization" of Romania after World War II. When a communist regime was established in Romania in 1947, he was overthrown and exiled, and he was stripped from his Romanian citizenship a year later. Since the collapse of the communist rule in Romania in 1989, he has visited the country several times and his citizenship was restored in 1997.

14 Ceaușescu, 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.

15 Hatikvah

Anthem of the Zionist movement, and national anthem of the State of Israel. The word 'ha-tikvah' means 'the hope'. The anthem was written by Naftali Herz Imber (1856-1909), who moved to Palestine from Galicia in 1882. The melody was arranged by Samuel Cohen, an immigrant from Moldavia, from a musical theme of Smetana's Moldau (Vltava).