

# Sami Fiul

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Brasov

Romania

Date of the interview: January 2004 Interviewer: Paul Tinichigiu

Mr. Fiul is a 78 years old man, who lives alone in a two-room apartment, on the 10th floor of a block of flats, on the outskirts of Brasov - it is the very last block of the town. He is a very gentle and friendly old man, with a rather athletic body for his age, and who wears thick glasses; he speaks in a low, calm voice and he is a born story-teller. His apartment is neat, with ready-made furniture, but he has a brand new TV and music trunk, a gift from his daughter's family, in Israel. He has a teddy bear called Miska, which he always hugs in the evening while watching TV and he always gathers bread crumbs for the pigeons that come to his window sill. He does all the house chores himself, he even helps his neighbor sometimes, a woman whose husband is paralyzed.



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All my family from my father's side came from Fundu Moldovei, from a place close to Campulung Modovenesc. My paternal grandfather, Mendel Fiul, was born in 1866 in Fundu Moldovei; he was an Ashkenazi Jew, just like everybody from my mother's side. He was a farmer, he owned a small piece of land and a few cattle; I remember the cattle were sent in the mountains during summers: my father, Bernard Fiul, used to tell me that he and his brothers had to take salt blocks to the cattle. My grandmother, Roza Fiul (nee Feingold), was born in 1868 in Fundu Moldovei, and she was a housewife; she was in charge of the household. They both spoke Yiddish between themselves, but of course they knew Romanian as well, they used it to talk to neighbors. They had a peasant's household, with a barn for cattle, for the cows, with a little garden around the house, like it is in the countryside. There was no running water or electricity back then. And there was no help, like a servant, heaven forbid, my father's sisters worked, and they worked hard.

Grandfather was a handsome man, and a modern Jew, he didn't wear payes or a suit; however, he wore a beard. I remember he wore the 'stramlah'[streimel], it was a little fur cap that was worn with some kind of cassock. Jews worked the land, and I remember seeing them at the plough, with the laps of the cassocks wrapped around the waist. Grandfather knew Hebrew; he was also a melamed and always found time for the morning and evening prayer. He held the religious classes in his house, usually there was just one child at a time, whom grandfather taught from the Siddur. I myself learnt a little Yiddish and a little Gemara from him, but not much. I remember he had a tallit, which he used during the prayers; he generally prayed at home. There was no synagogue in Fundu Moldovei, just a prayer house: it was in a room of a house owned by a thriftier peasant. Women could come in there as well, but I don't know who led the ceremony. There weren't many Jewish families in that village, but they gathered there on Rosh Hashanah, on Sukkot, on Yom Kippur or when there were family celebrations.

My grandparents weren't bigots, but they observed kashrut, that was a law: they kept separate pots for milk and meat. They also observed Sabbath, they didn't work, it was something holy, and so was the Friday evening dinner. Each Friday dinner had something special, you could feel it was a holiday, not a regular day, from the way it was celebrated;; and when the head of the family sat down to eat, all the others, the wife, the children, were already at the table, and nobody left the table before the head of the family, the eldest, did. And there were always blessings for the two challot we usually had or for wine at dinner. Later on, during 1937-1947, whenever our grandfather came to eat in our house, nobody left the table before he did, not even our father, his son. It was a law.

I remember I was there, in Fundu Moldovei, as a child, when one of my father's brothers, Iosif, got married. The wedding was in a village near Fundu Moldovei, and it was held in a house; it was a typical Jewish wedding, with chuppah in the courtyard, with a rabbi. I still remember how the wedding room was decorated: there were carpets on the walls and on the benches, and there was Jewish music, in Yiddish, played by gypsies; the gipsy bands could always play by ear any song they heard, and of course they could play Jewish songs as well. But what impressed me as a child was that I got to ride a dogcart with two seats. It wasn't a real custom, but somebody rented it for that wedding: it was a little fancy cart, with two wheels and a little bench for the driver, and a large armchair in the back. That was something only that well-off peasants had , and they rode it only on Saturdays and Sundays, to show that they are rich.

My father, Bernard Fiul, was born in Fundu Moldovei in 1899. My father had six siblings: there was David Fiul, born in 1900, who was a glazier and lived in Bucharest. He was married, but I don't know who his wife was; they had three children, Iosef, who lives in Israel now, in Kiryat-Ata; Becca, who also lives in Israel in Haifa and Tauba. David died in Bucharest in 1950. Then there was Iosef Fiul, born in 1906-I think, who was a farmer and lived in Bacau. He was married to Rasela, a Jewish woman, and they had two sons: Cerbu, or Eial, who used to be a professional boxer in Bacau, and who now lives in Israel, in Haifa and is an electrician, and Lupu, or Zeev, who is also in Israel and works as a bus driver. The third brother was Rubin Fiul, born in 1912, who worked as a tinsmith. He was married and had a child, but they both died in Auschwitz; I don't remember their names. He died in 1950. One sister was Reghina, who was married (I don't know her husband's name) and had twins: Iosef, a locksmith, who died in Israel in 2001, and Rubin, who lives in Israel and is a foreman. Reghina died in 1936 in Campulung Moldovenesc. Then there was Mina, who was married and had

a daughter, but that is all I know about her. Fani Fiul (or Feiga in Yiddish) was born in 1905 in Fundu Moldovei, and died in 1937. She never married. All the sisters were housewives.

My grandmother Roza died before I was born, so I only know stories about her: she died in a very strange way; a stranded shell splinter hit her in 1916 [during World War I], while she was milking the cow. After she died, grandfather Mendel moved to Bacau, he came after his children. My father, who was considered one of the most capable of his sons and somewhat a leader, was already in Bacau, his brother, Iosef, was also in Bacau. There were also three of his sisters, Reghina, Nina, and Mari. So grandfather stayed with my uncle Iosef for a while. In those times, accommodation was a problem, more people lived crowded in the same room; that was the case with uncle Iosef: he shared only one room and a small hallway with his wife, two sons, two daughters and his father. Then grandfather moved in a little room on Postei Street in the same neighborhood, all by himself; I think it was his choice. I remember it was very chilly in there, and during winter I went to him to cut wood and make fire, that was all I could do at that age for him. It was only one room, with no kitchen, it wasn't something out of the ordinary. Back then, having more than that would have been something out of the ordinary. Grandfather had a small library with him: he didn't have many books, but the ones he had I think they were valuable: I remember he showed me Hummash, in leather binding, the Gemara. He tried to teach me, but I was stubborn, like all kids. I am sorry now that I didn't have more patience. He supported himself from what he taught children, as a lehrer. There also was usually one child at a time, in his home: he used to teach him from the Siddur.

My father only had four grades of elementary school; he studied in German, under the Austro-Hungarians, in Fundu Moldovei or Campulung Modovenesc, because I am not sure that there was a school in Fundu Moldovei. When he was only 17, the World War I started, and he couldn't go on with his studies. Father did his military service under the Austro-Hungarians, and it was a bit of a problem to get Romanian military papers when he returned to Bukovina; but it was fixed. I don't know if he fought during World War I, but I know he went as far as Czechoslovakia and Poland, and that he fell ill with typhoid fever and had to stay in the hospital. I remember he had a good friend, a Hungarian during World War I, I remember seeing photos of them.

Father worked as a forester in Tazlau, and then he became a factory laborer, he even tried to be a small trader. He worked as a forester in the 1920s, when he was still single, and he was very good at it, he loved nature. My sister and I, and our children, we all inherited I think his love for the mountains, for nature, for excursions. My father's work probably brought him to Bacau. His native tongue was Yiddish or German, but not Romanian. He learnt to write in Romanian later, he always wrote all the Romanian nouns with capital letters, just like in German. He had a beautiful handwriting, but not all correct because of this. He learnt Romanian and spoke it well when he was older, he even forgot most of his German, but mother used to tell us a funny story about father's Romanian, which wasn't so good when they were engaged: they were taking a walk in Bacau, and they stopped in front of a window of a pork-butcher's shop, and father exclaimed: 'Look at all this crap!' [Pun upon words in Romanian, caused by the confusion between the word 'porcarii', which means 'crap', which as the same stem as 'porc', which means 'pork', or 'pork products']. I don't know how my parents met exactly, but when they did, probably at some Purim ball, or other society event organized by the Jewish community in Bacau. It wasn't an arranged marriage; they just liked each other and fell in love.

I know my maternal grandfather David Herscovici's father was named Shimon Dov Herscovici, that he lived in Poland but I don't know where, or when he came to Romania. He worked as a furrier and died in 1890, Everybody from my mother's side were furriers or tanners, it was a tradition passed on from father to son. My grandfather David, was born in Bacau in 1849 and lived there. He was married to Feiga Herscovici grandmother, who came from somewhere in Bessarabia, I don't know the exact place. I remember that grandmother used to smoke, and she explained herself to us by saying that in Bessarabia all the women smoke, with some small clay pipes. Grandfather owned a furrier's shop near the central square of Bacau, and grandmother was a housewife.

My grandmother Feiga's parents were called Ana and Marcu Margulius. Ana was born in 1819, I don't know exactly where, and she died in 1924, and she was a housewife. Her age was a reason to be optimistic for all the family, because she lived to be 105 years old, and she wasn't the only one from the family to live so long. My mother used to tell me, that when she was 102- 103 years old, she still carried buckets full of water to the house, and I must tell you the house was up a hill, and she had to climb it with the buckets. My great-grandfather, Marcu Margulius, was born in Greece, but I don't know when he moved to Bessarabia; he worked as a translator for the Romanian railway company, because when he was alive there were railways being built all over the country. And there were foreign constructors, Germans, I believe, he knew the language and worked for them as a translator from German into Romanian.

My grandmother Feiga had a brother, Isidor Margulius, born in 1861; he died in 1932. He enjoyed a special position in the family, because he was a doctor, a pediatricist, and there weren't many doctors at that time, especially coming from poor families. So he was respected among us. For a while, in 1900s, he lived in Ploiesti and he was the town's doctor. He was also an officer in the army. After that he became king Carol's 1 private doctor, he was in charge especially of his children. I think he must have been a very good doctor, to be appointed at the Royal House. He was married to a Sephardi Jewish woman, Eleonora; my sister is named after her, according to the Jewish tradition. They had three children: Marcel, who was in the army during World War I, he studied at Belle Arte in Paris and was a captain and a physician at the railway company here in Bucharest, Eugen (or Puiu, as we used to call him), who was an engineer studied engineering at Oxford, and Silvia, who studied at Notre Dame, in Paris. I know Isidor was a soldier during the World War I; but I remember Puiu also fought during World War I, and he was a liaison officer, and during the Marasesti campaign he came on furlough to Bacau with his peaked cap pierced by a bullet. He was lucky to make it! We kept his uniform and pierced cap for a long time.

I don't know what grandfather David looked like, he died in 1903, when my mother, Dorina, was very young and I never saw a photo of him; he died in very original circumstances. One summer morning, grandfather woke up, and told his wife, my grandmother, that he dreamt that two old men with white beards came to him and told him to get ready, because on the next Pesach Eve, he was going to die. He was perfectly fine when he dreamt that, he wasn't sick, and grandmother tried to comfort him, she told him it was just some sort of a dream. He, however, was certain that it was going to happen, and he started preparing for that: he let one worker and a couple of apprentices go, he started selling some of the sewing machines from the shop and so on. Pesach drew near. He was fine, as grandmother later told us. She even told him, 'See, you have tormented yourself over nothing, from a silly idea from a dream!'; and grandfather answered: 'There are ten days left.' And indeed, two or three days before Pesach, he started to feel bad. Grandmother was terribly scared,

and she put him on the train to Bucharest, and she went with him: she wanted to go to her brother, Isidor Margulius, who was a doctor. But grandfather didn't make it, he died on the train, in Focsani. Of course the body was buried in Focsani, but I have lost track of the location of his tomb, unfortunately. But I am sure he was buried in a Jewish cemetery, he was a Jew and Jews were buried in Jewish cemeteries back then, there was no other way. From what grandmother told him about grandfather's pain, her brother, Isidor Margulius, established that grandfather died from an intestinal occlusion, or 'twisting of the guts', as it was called in popular terms.

Mother had five siblings: Berl Herscovici, born in 1886, who was a tanner and was married to Hai-Leea, a Jewish woman. They had lived in Bacau and had six children: David, who also became a tanner and died in Israel in the 1970s, Moritz, who was a printer in Targu Neamt, Max, also a tanner, Estera, who was a housewife, Zela, who worked in a confectionary laboratory and Anna, born in 1922. Berl died in 1966. Then there was Marcu Herscovici, born in 1880, who was a clerk at a brick factory. He was married, but I don't know his wife's name, and had a daughter, Claris Cobar (nee Herscovici). Marcu died in 1965-I think. John Herscovici was born in 1888, and he lived in USA, he was a draughtsman at a ready-made clothes factory; he was married and had a daughter, Fannee. He died in the 1950s. Lupu Hercovici, born in 1877, was a furrier and he was married to a woman named Feiga. He died in 1936. Sofia Dicman (nee Herscovici), born in 1889, was married to Iosef Dicman, a Jew from Cleja, and they lived in Israel. She died there in 1971. My mother was born in Bacau in 1895. Mother graduated elementary school, she could read and write, and she also did three years at a housekeeping school, it was something like a professional school, but I don't know if she finished it. Her native tongue was Yiddish.

However, grandpa David and grandma Feiga were my mother's natural parents, she was adopted later; the story of her adoption is the following: her natural father, David, died when she was very young, 8 years old. They were a poor family, and it was hard to earn a living: there was uncle Bern, my mother's brother, who worked as a tanner, but he was a socialist and he gave money to his fellow workers who needed it, who were unemployed, and he gave the family only what remained. So mother had to earn a living since she was 10, 12 years old. And the family thought of a way: they had some distant relatives in Bacau who kept an inn, and they had to work hard with their household,. They needed somebody to help them with the chores around the house, so my mother's family suggested taking her and adopting her, since they had no children of their own. I think they -Bubola Brana and Schmill - were rather old when they adopted my mother, and she was about 10 years old. This relative had been a postmaster, his inn was the place here every traveler could change his horse. His inn had a stable for horses, with manger and all that. It was for the mail coaches that connected Adjud, Roman and Suceava [approximately 158 km]. I think, Jews were always working with horses. The inn was well located, back then Bacau wasn't a town, it was a borough, and carters were coming from all over the country with merchandise. The house had four rooms, and one of them was used as a bedroom by those who stayed over night to let their horses rest. When the adoptive parents died, they left everything to mother; I was named after this adoptive grandfather, who died two years before I was born.

There was a very interesting incident that took place in 1864 I think, there at the inn, my mother knew it from her adoptive father and told me about it. A group of people came with the mail coach from Roman, and they struck my grandfather as well-brought up people, noblemen. They had money and they gave my grandfather a large purse with money and asked him to change their



horses quickly. Guessing that they were special people, grandfather himself drove the mail coach to Adjud. He later found out that he was [Alexandru Ioan] Cuza [2](#) and his closest supporters, on his way to Ghines-Balanca and then to Germany. [Editor's note: The event must have taken place in 1866, when Alexandru Ioan Cuza was deposed by a coup because of his despotic and corrupt reign ]

I knew grandmother Feiga well, however: she was a tall woman, straight as a fir tree, and judging by the photos and what everybody said about her, she was a beautiful woman, and all her children were like her too, we all brag about it! She didn't wear a wig or a kerchief, but I remember for example that she had a winter coat, called 'cataveica', with fur lining inside and velvet on the outside, it was very popular at the time in Moldavia.

For as long as I knew her, grandmother lived in a house on Precista Street, in Bacau. You had to go up two or three stairs and then go along a hallway with four doors. There were three other families living there, only grandmother lived alone - grandfather had already died. She lived in only one room that served as a bedroom, kitchen and living room. At the end of the hallway here was a little garden, which was terribly muddy when it rained. There was a chicken coop, and some fruit trees; I remember a plum tree we used to climb in and fall from! In her room there was a bed, a table with chairs, and a painting from her wedding, with her and grandfather in wedding clothes, tête-à-tête. The stove was made of bricks, and it had a kitchen range. On the bed there were cushions, one over the other, and I must tell you, they were used to keep the corn mush warm. She used to make it before hand - and it wasn't just grandmother who did this -, wrap it in a clean towel, and put it between cushions, so that it stayed warm until her husband (that is when grandfather was still alive) came back from work. She still did it when we were little and came to visit her; she took it out and cut it with a string.

My father married my mother, Dorina Fiul (nee Herscovici) I think in 1924, in December, mother used to tell me that it was very warm outside for December, and that she had just a bride's dress on, she didn't need a coat. I don't know if they got married in the synagogue. Mother had worked as well for a while, before she married, she was a cashier in a drug store; but after she married, she became a housewife. My parents used to talk Yiddish between themselves, so that we couldn't understand them. They only spoke Romanian to us; of course we caught on Yiddish as well, but I am sorry we didn't speak it also, I would have liked to learn it.

When father got married and moved to Bacau, in 1924,, he tried to find something more stable, so he got a job as a laborer in the corn industry; then he tried to set up a small shop of his own, but it didn't work out, so he went on being a laborer. He worked at a mill in afternoon and night shifts, and at a textile factory, owned by a Jew, Izvoreanu. My father's main characteristic was that he was extremely hardworking. I remember him working hard, from morning until late at night. He eventually opened a retail grain shop, which was the territory of richer Jews; his business was really small. And when my mother inherited the inn her adoptive parents had, they started taking care of that business.

My mother was a beautiful woman, she took after her mother, who was tall and well-built. She was also very hard working; she worked side by side with my father, and their greatest achievement wasn't that they got richer, but that they gave us a good example and taught us the value of hard work and study. She dressed modestly, there was money for luxury. I remember that when she went to the synagogue on the high holidays, she was always well-dressed, she wore a hat with a

veil, and had her own prayer book, with Romanian translation, which I still have, and she had her own seat in the synagogue.

## Growing up

My parents had a son, a boy who died at birth in 1925, and then me, on June 25th 1926. My sister, Eleonora, was born in 1930. My parents were busy with their work, and didn't have much time for education, but I think they had some pedagogical insight: my father never spoiled us when we were small, he was severe, stern, and unflinching when it came to working in the garden or the stables. Only later, when I grew up, he told me that he used to watch us sleep, and pet my hair and caress me. He did beat me, usually for pranks, not something worse than that, I was always taking uncle Bern on, because he was the funniest character in the family, and when mother found out, she always called for father to punish me: father had huge hands, the size of shovels, he would just spank me, then dust his hands and go back to work, without a word to me. Although mother was fair, and she always called for father to punish me when I did something wrong, she was the one to take care that he wouldn't hit my head or hit me too hard. Father taught us the value of hard work; when my sister and I were 11, or 12, my father told us: 'Don't expect me to support you like you were a pair of blind horses, you have to learn hard work and make a living!' Even our life at home was closely related to horses. My parents never had a holiday or a day off, for as long as they lived, and I regret it deeply; all they knew was work and more work.

The house we lived in was old, it had about 100 years back then. It had a porch, four rooms and no hallway. The roof was made of chap board, and I remember that I had to go in the attic with my father during the night sometimes, because it was raining and the chap board was old and pierced; we had to put old olives cans to collect the water and stop it from dripping in the house. By the time I was born, Bacau already had running water and electricity, but only downtown. Our house was rather central, so we had electricity and running water too. I still remember that the electric lamps were set on the old gas lamps: they took out the wick and put a fuss instead.

When I was about 7 years old, my parents wanted to build a [new] house, but they had no money for it, so they had to put a mortgage on the old house. And the custom was then, that you went to ask the rabbi for advice. And the closest [approximately 20 km] and most renowned rabbi was the one in Buhusi. He was an Orthodox rabbi, but I don't remember his name. So my parents went to see him, took my sister with them, and left me home, although I wanted to go as well. So after they got the advice they wanted, my mother, who was rather religious, asked the rabbi: 'Rabbi, this little girl always screams without any reason. What shall I do with her?' 'I shall say a prayer for her and she will be rid of this trouble!', the rabbi said. So he laid his hand on her head, said his prayer, and then the meeting was over. My parents were on the porch of that house with my sister, and all of a sudden she starts screaming as loud as she could! And my parents asked her, 'Girlie, why are you screaming, nobody did anything to you?!' 'Yes, but I just wanted to see if I can still scream after the rabbi's prayer!!'

After a while, father pawned the house and built another one, after the advice of the rabbi from Buhusi. One room was the kitchen, with a stove and a range; that was grandma's empire, I can still see her blowing in the noodles dough, which was spread as thin as cigarette paper. Then there was the parents' bedroom, where we kids also slept, and then the larger room, the inn, where travelers slept overnight, when they came for fairs with carts. Grandmother lived in the same house with us

in her last years; she moved with us in 1932 or 1933 and stayed there until she died. Grandma Feiga took care of the household while my parents were at work, made all sorts of special dishes; the house specialty was 'studentbrot', as it was called in Yiddish, 'the student's bread'. It was delicious, something with nut and Turkish delight filling, all wrapped in French dough. I remember grandmother used to tell us stories, when we were small and sick, in bed, in Yiddish: I can still see her leant against the terracotta stove we had in our house - and which back then was a plain luxury- and telling us stories! I even have a memory about the day she died: she passed away in spring, it was March, in 1937, and I remember I was taking violin lessons. She was on her deathbed, and she asked for me, to come and play for her Jewish songs. I was very impressed.

There were no carpets in the house, just a wooden floor, which my father used to wash with a scrubbing brush. The kitchen had as furniture only a table with chairs, made with the ax. It is interesting, that the kitchen wall functioned as a chimney, the entire flue from the kitchen range went through the wall and then outside. Grandmother and us, kids, used to lean against that wall, because during winter it was always warm! We also had a deep cellar, built in rock, where we used to store the supplies for winter, the cabbage kegs, the pickles. As a matter of fact, father was an expert in pickles and the cellar was always full. Mother raised poultry, hens and geese: those geese were a wonder, some of them weighed as much as 10 to 14 kilos, mother used to say that they were of royal origins! At one point, we had two beautiful wolfhounds, which were our joy, my sister's and mine.

We didn't have any servants; my father, my mother and I took care of the horses, but mother had a woman who helped her in the kitchen: she had a lot to do because she was also cooking for the guests, so we had a girl from Transylvania, from Diviciorii Mici, who helped her with the chores and us, the children. We loved her like a second mother, Jeni Mustea was her name, but we called her Jenica. Jenica and her parents had left Diviciorii Mici and settled in Bacau. I think she was 15 years older than I, and she stayed in our house until she got married, My parents found her a husband named Dodu, a man from Bacau. Her father, a bony, huge man we all called old Ion, worked at factory called Letea, he was in charge of the oxen.

We had books in the house, especially after my sister and I went to school. Mother used to read Romanian literature, she liked reading and she did it until she was old, but father didn't read so much. And mother didn't have time to go to the library, but she asked others who went to get books for her. She read novels written by classics, mainly, and she was a huge fan of Dostoevsky [3](#). And we had religious books as well, in Yiddish and Hebrew, for prayers. Mother also used to read us kids loud, that was when we were still young and couldn't read; I remember a novel about the horrors of Siberia, we were very impressed by it. It wasn't something unbearable for children to hear, however, we found it exciting. Mother didn't advise me what to read, but she told me what not to read, and she punished me once for reading a book I shouldn't have: it was a book from 'Colectia de 15 lei' [Collection for 15 lei], by Petre Belu, and the action took place in Crucea de Piatra. [Editor's note: Crucea de Piatra was a famous brothel during the interbelic period in Romania, and a book about it must have been too explicit for a child.] I don't remember how that book fell into my hands, but she cut all my pretzel money, money she used to give to me weekly, I wasn't allowed to go to the cinema for two weeks! Reading in our house was severely checked. My parents read newspapers, but seldom, because there wasn't much time to idle.



Each Thursday, there were mashed beans for dinner, with fried onion over it, served with a bowl of sauerkraut brine and corn mush. Of course, the corn mush was served on a wooden platter, and cut with a string. It was a real feast! And one day in 1936/7, one of my mother's sisters came from Bucharest, and brought bananas, which weren't common in our little town. Apparently, paternal grandfather Mendel Fiul, who came to visit us rather often even if he lived alone, had never seen bananas before, because he was looking a bit curiously at them, from the head of the table where he was seated. So mother peeled a banana for him at the end of the table and gave it to him to eat. Grandfather Mendel had to or three small bites, then gulped it all quickly, and then grabbed the spoon and had two or three spoonfuls of sauerkraut brine. And mom, bewildered, said: 'Father, what are you doing? Why are you drinking sauerkraut brine after a banana?' -they spoke in Yiddish, but we understood that much-. And grandfather said: 'I'm just clearing my taste!' he wasn't used to bananas, in the countryside. This happened in Bacau, when I was about 8 years old.

Kashrut laws were observed in the house, Jeni didn't cook, grandmother and then mother were in charge of cooking. Speaking of kosher food, I remember that we had a wattle basket, where we let the salted meat for a while, to let all the blood come out of it. Mother and father didn't go to the synagogue on Sabbath, but we observed Friday evenings: mother lit the candles, and said the blessing. We always had that golden soup, it was called that because of all the fat, and home made bread - we had a large challah for dinner and other dishes. That challah was so good, I remember that people in Bacau used to say in Yiddish when they were happy: 'my heart is growing like a 'Piram colic', that means that their hearts were overflowing with joy like the Purim challah is growing! They had to work on Sabbath, but they did only that kind of work which was absolutely necessary, mother didn't wash, didn't clean the house.

My parents strictly observed all high holidays, however. Every holiday, that is before the war [World War II], we were happy that we could celebrate it properly - we had money for food, challah, and the like, and all the family was together-; that wasn't the case, however, after the war. My parents worked hard day after day all year round, from morning until evening. But even so, they observed the high holidays, like Purim, Chanukkah, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah. We would go to the synagogue, or the 'schil' as we used to call it, in clean holiday clothes. The meals were special, of course, and we, the Jewish kids who studied in laic schools, were free as well, so that was one more reason to be happy about holidays. My parents always fasted on Yom Kippur, and I also fasted as a child, all day long: I remember I never longed more after apples or grapes than on that day.

In Bacau, when it was Purim, all the children were delighted in what is called in Yiddish 'solhamunas' [shelakhmones]: it meant that every Jew sent out to his neighbors, Jews or Christians, cookies or a platter, sometimes even a bottle of wine, or a sweet drink. We, the children, were thrilled to be sent to the neighbors with the cookie platter, covered with a nice hand embroidered towel, because wherever we went, we would get other specialties in return; every Jewish house had its own specialties, and it was a real celebration for us kids. And there was Jewish singing on Purim in our house, and grandfather read Megillat Ester; and we kids dressed up, in whatever costumes we could think of.

When I was a child, the Purim balls were truly Jewish, something to remember. Not only Jews participated, but Christians as well. They were held at the community, or in somebody's home. And we always had gipsy bands, who played Jewish music perfectly. We had a band in the first room, and another one in the last room, and father came with cups full with drinks. I remember it was at

one of these Purim balls mother made for me for the first time long trousers, and I was so proud; but I danced to the music of the gipsy bands until I managed to tear them, I was so upset that time! And I remember uncle Bern, my mother's brother, who was a real party man, he was always up to some pranks: one time, he came with the masks, and he unbuttoned his trousers and started to take them off. I was stunned with shock, but he had another pair under them, and then another, and another, he was the delight of the audience, you can imagine! Or another time he came with frankfurters, which he served from a bedpan, and his wife held mustard near him; uncle Bern also had some sort of device, he kept a bottle under his coat, where nobody could see it, and he had a little hose that came out of his sleeve, and that is how he served the wine! He was quite a joker.

In our family, the Seder Eve was a real holiday, we had an Essebett, it is in Yiddish meaning 'bed for the meal': father sat on the bed, he had a pillow, and near him a little basin with water; he washed his hands from time to time, he observed all the ritual, recited mah nishtanah and we kids were usually impatient, because we were hungry and we wanted to find the afikoman, and get our presents: we always thought the ceremony was too long! I was the prank master, I think I took after uncle Bern; you cannot imagine what I thought of doing one Seder Eve! There is this custom among Jews on Seder Eve, that the youngest of the children opens the door, so that Elianuvi [Mr. Fiul refers to Elijah ha-nevi] can come in. And we always had candles on the table, and in the draft that would form in April or March, the flames would flicker, and we kids used to say: 'Look, Elianuvi came in!' We kids also joked about Elianuvi, we said: 'True, look at the wine in the glasses, it's less than before!' So, for the fun of it, I thought of something: I looked for two sticks, one longer and one shorter, I made some sort of a cross with them; then I searched for a bed sheet and I put it over the cross that was as high as a man. Then I took a big clay pot and put it on the dummy's 'head', then leant it against the door. I was outside, on the entrance of the cellar, and I was waiting for the moment when one of the guests would open the door. One girl who was invited opened it, and the dummy fell into the room, the pot broke in a thousand pieces, the women started yelling! In that panic, I started to realize that my joke hadn't been so good, because I could have hurt someone. Father rushed outside, and I started to run down the hill as fast as I could; I was a teenager by that time, but father ran after me and caught me by the collar, and dragged me up the hill again. It is true, he didn't beat me that time, but he lectured me about responsibility and making fun of the holy holiday, and I kissed my present good bye.

Our neighbors were more like family to us; a big part of our childhood was spent in their company, in their homes: we knew what dainties they made, they knew what dainties we made, each family had specific recipes and everybody enjoyed them. Most of our neighbors were Jewish. Our neighbors were on one side uncle Iosef, and on the other the Marcovicis -he was a house painter-, and we were all like family: we played with their children, in their courtyard, in their house, and they came in our courtyard and house; uncle Iosef had some great pear trees, and we kids were always 'stealing' pears from his garden. Of course he knew and didn't mind, but we liked to think that nobody knew we took them!

We had non-Jewish friends as well, mother was very sociable, but there wasn't much time for visiting or coffee breaks, we just helped each other when someone was in trouble. We lived near the hospital, and many of the staff there were our friends. Father helped the hospital administrator with the pickles for the hospital, and then there were the so-called 'sub surgeons' (something more than nurses today), who came in our house as friends or as doctors. Medicine was something else

back then, I remember they used leeches for high blood pressure. One time, when grandmother fractured or sprained her leg, they called for the 'ursari', gipsy bear leaders [who are walking with a bear and make it play or dance]: grandmother put her leg on a threshold, and the bear sat on it once or twice. She stopped wailing after that, I believe the gypsies had some skills with the bear, because grandmother didn't have to wear a plaster or anything else. [It was a simple superstition of the peasants which wasn't forbidden for the Jews to practice.] Father was also a good friend with the Orthodox priest from the hospital's chapel, they were often chatting over a glass of wine.

I don't know much about my parents' political views, but I remember one scene in 1936 when there were national elections: father was going to vote and as he was heading for the door, mother told him (and we kids found it very strange): 'Take your hat, even if it's not that cold, maybe wind will broke out and you won't be cold! 'Mother cared more about the weather than she did about what father was going to do at the voting point! They weren't members in any political organization. Back then, women weren't allowed to go to vote. I remember, father later told us, that he voted for the liberals.

My parents didn't discuss politics, they knew nothing of it, they were simple people with no schooling; we didn't even have a radio in our house. Right before the [legionary] rebellion [4](#) , we bought one, which was immediately confiscated, so we were left without it. My parents didn't read newspapers, there was no time for that, and they worked from morning until evening. I only heard talks about the war when uncle Bern came to visit, because he was involved in socialist politics. He came with the so-called news and we listened. He didn't talk much about what was going on abroad, he was more interested in Cuzists [5](#), legionaries [6](#), anti-Semitism; I imagine he didn't read much either, and he definitely didn't have a radio, he couldn't afford it, he had children to support. He was poor and often unemployed. But I remember the terror, the fear that was in the air all the time, not the talks. There was terror of what was going on, and of what people thought was going to happen.

## The Jewish community in Bacau

My parents were members in the Jewish community, they were paying their dues, and they were contributing whenever it was necessary for works at the synagogue, for example, and things like that. I wasn't a Zionist, and I am sorry now, although I participated in meetings and the like; my sister, on the other hand, was a member of Hashomer Hatzair [7](#).

The town I grew up in, Bacau, had a large Jewish community - all of Bacau's population was 35,000 and half of it was Jewish -, and very active: there were several synagogues. It is interesting, the synagogues were named after the guilds that went there: so we had the printers' synagogue, the shoemakers' synagogue, the corn dealers' synagogue - which was very large - and so on. I believe that on only one Jewish street, Leca Street it was called, there were eight or ten prayer houses, and the Rebe Strul synagogue, where my parents and we children went. Bacau had two large synagogues, and two smaller, aside from the prayer houses. One of them was the one of the corn dealers', which I think is the only one that still exists in Bacau nowadays. I remember there was a chazzan at the synagogue where we went, and a choir of children, aged between 6 and 14, who sang divinely. I didn't understand the lines, but I could hear the music, one of the most beautiful and touching songs for me is Kol Nidre. Even during communism, when I drifted away from religion, I still went on Yom Kippur Eve to the synagogue, just to hear Kol Nidre.

I remember with a lot of joy and respect about one of the rabbis in Bacau, Alexandru Safran [8](#). He was my religion teacher, and I went to his and his father's schil, which was not very big, every Friday evening, as a pupil. He was a very handsome man, thin, elastic, he must have been in his 30s when I knew him, and he had a beautiful well-trimmed red beard. He was a model among rabbis, and we were very proud of him, especially because of his rhetoric. He spoke such a beautiful Romanian, like few native Romanians did or do, you felt like pearls were coming out of his mouth when he talked. We, the children, always thought of him as a prophet. I remember him holding a speech in Yiddish at the schil where my parents went, Rebe Strul, two or three years before World War II and the Holocaust. I can still see him shaking as he said these words, words I will never forget: 'Alh sein blut!', that is 'I see blood!'

I know there was a cheder on Leca Street, which was one hundred percent Jewish, it was like a ghetto. The street was called Dr. Herscu Aroneanu during communism, until 1990, after a socialist Jew [who lived between 1881- 1920], who died under terrible torture in the basements of Bacau garrison, under the orders of a certain colonel Polzer, may God not rest his soul for what he did; I knew him, he lived near my high school. All this happened around 1923. [Editor's note: it is very probable that it happened in 1920.]. I know I heard talks in our house, uncle Bern, my mother's brother, and others, wanted to assassinate Polzer, to avenge doctor Aroneanu, who apparently died after his testicles were crushed. The politicians nowadays changed the name of the street again, which is a shame; it deserved that name. There wasn't a single house in that street that wasn't owned or rented by Jews, but not just well-off Jews: there were porters, ironsmiths, house painters, small traders, carters. But Jews lived scattered around the city as well: there was the commercial street, called Strada Mare [Main Street], where Jews owned most of the shops.

Most of the Jews were traders, but only some of them were worthy of the title, that is had larger shops in Strada Mare; but there were many who were just petty traders or door-to-door salesmen. Jews were very good with horses, therefore many were carters, there were also porters at cereal shops, a backbreaking job, there were Jewish servants. The textile, tanner and furrier industry in town was more or less sustained by Jews, be it that they owned textile factories, or that they were just small laborers, like my uncle Bern and all his sons. They worked in a kerchief -'casanga' in Moldavian talk- factory. Then many Jews were pretzel sellers, or bakers, and, from all I have seen, they were very good handicraftsmen. All the town's industry was based on textile factories, tanner and furrier factories; the factory owned by Filderman, another Jew, was renown in all the country.

There were cheders, mikves, yeshivot in Bacau, but I didn't go, we weren't Orthodox Jews. We, the kids, didn't go to cheder, but we had a lehrer, or a melamed, who came to our house to teach us how to read. I remember we ran from him sometimes, but I don't know why. But education had no pedagogical features back then: for example, we learnt how to read, but we had no idea what we were reading from the prayer book; I think it would have been normal, for a kid, to have some pictures near the text, a translation, something to incite him. Poor lehrer Moise, that was his name, was a kind man, and warm-hearted, he would have liked to teach us more, but we didn't want to learn. When he found us playing together, he would start teaching each of us separately. When we climbed in a tree, he came looking for us. We had a garden near our house, and we climbed in the one of the trees there, and giggled as softly as we could, so that he wouldn't hear us. One time I remember we hid in straws, around the household; and he came looking for us, and even stepped on us - that is on the straws that covered us, but we didn't say a word, we were that desperate to

get away from the lesson. Another funny memory is from my first grade, when we had a vaccine shot. It had a crust that itched, and we weren't allowed to scratch it. So poor lehrer Moise had a rush straw with him, and he tickled the crust, he was that kind, he did everything so that we would read. Of course he got tired after a while, and when he stopped, we stopped reading as well! He started tickling us, we started reading, and that was the way the lesson was held! I suppose that's also the reason why we didn't learn much.

## My school years

I went to kindergarten before I was 6, and then I started school. I went to a state elementary school, and I had two great teachers I will never forget, husband and wife, the Carjas. We studied two grades with him and then two grades with her. They were an elderly couple, in their fifties I believe; we addressed them with 'Mr. or Mrs. Teacher'. He was a very kind man, and she was a bit quick-tempered. I remember I was punished only once during elementary school, I had to stay on my knees, that was the standard punishment back then. I was in the fourth grade, and the teacher, Mr. Carja, caught me reading under my desk 'Doxes'. I was a collection, 'The adventures of Dox submarine', which came out weekly, and all the kids were dying to get their hands on them. Very popular were also the 'Bill Gazon' or 'Al Capone' collections. My parents gave me money to buy the leaflets, and I used to run to meet the postman five minutes earlier. In school I was usually the prank master, but I was a bit afraid of the teacher. One of my colleagues was Dolfi Drimmer, he is now the dean of the American-Romanian university. His parents had a ribbon factory near the school, and he was the best pupil in our classroom. He was a chubby boy, quiet and obedient, while we were more into football and running around.

I was faced with anti-Semitism as a child, in school; although most of us were good friends, one or two boys from a class of 30 happened to be anti-Semites. But I must tell you, one third of the class was Jewish. And these two colleagues were picking on the Jewish classmates, hitting them, usually the weak ones, because many Jews fought back. So they just picked on the weak ones, like Gold, I still remember him, he was a little slow and chubby, and they were usually after him, tormenting him, insulting him, and beating him if he replied. But everybody stood up for Gold and defended him, not just Jewish boys, but the others as well.

I was in trouble myself: when the Cuzists came to power, in 1936/7, they had their own headquarters in Bacau, a house painted in blue, the Cuzists' house, which we always went around in fear. I remember a newspaper seller, a man without an arm, who sold 'Porunca vremii' ['The command of the times'], the Cuzist newspaper, anti-Semite from the first to the last page. He was a scoundrel, a vagabond: whenever he met a Jewish kid, he kicked the kid in the back as hard as he could with his foot, and he was a grown-up - grown-up in matters of the body, not of the head, God forgive me!. But when the legionaries came to power, it got worse.

After I finished four years of high school and took my diploma, I was kicked out of the state schools because of numerus clausus [in Romania] [9](#), so I went to Bucharest. All this happened right before the legionary rebellion. In Bucharest there were famous trade schools, like Coicanul, where I studied: it was a Jewish industrial high school. I went there in 1939, and I remember that during the first year everybody studied locksmith's trade. And I remember that not only Jews came during the night classes, but also intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, who were also affected by the political situation. It was a boarding school as well, with high fortress walls, and a strong janitor guarded us



during the night, we couldn't go where we wanted. I did sneak out, however, I was passionate about music and I went to operas and operettas. In 1940, in January, right after the rebellion, I remember machine guns being set up on the corners of the high walls, but I don't know what for. And that year, we went home for the Christmas holiday, and we never returned.

### During the war

In Bacau, we lived the terrible fear, when armed groups of legionaries marched in the street, singing legionary songs and kneeling in the street. We hid in a garden, in a pit, so that they wouldn't see us. That fear didn't last for long, and some peace followed after that, but not for long: soon after that the fascists came to power. After the legionary rebellion I saw legionaries being shot dead in Florescu Square, it was near our schil, in 1937/8, and I saw them lying on the ground, in the rain, among candles that someone lit, a sign that even the governing party of the time didn't agree with their terrible ideas. I don't know much about the politics of the time; I was just a kid. All we kids knew was that they were to be feared and that we had to stay as far away from them as possible.

During Holocaust, in 1942, we were evicted and we had to live in a house on the outskirts of the town, in a suburb of Bacau, called Campul Postei; it was a house with a chiler, that's what we called in Moldavia a very low and tilted roof that almost touched the ground. We had to use gas lamps and to bring water from the well in buckets. Mother, who was a housewife, had to use clay to fix the cracks of the house, we used an oil lamp, and the fountain was in the street; and it wasn't one with a sweep, it was just a pole with a nail fixed on it, and there we put our bucket, let it fall in the fountain and then drag it all the way up until we could grab it again. The water was sometimes scarce, because the fountain would sometimes dry out, or it was muddy, but back then nobody worried about that.

Also, my father was taken to forced labor, from 1940 until 1944. I remember that in the beginning of World War II, when Jews could still be in the army and wear a uniform, father had to go at call-ups near the front line, at Bretcu. But soon after that Jews weren't allowed to be in the army, and my father was drafted for forced labor, but he sometimes came home during the night to sleep. He worked at a mill as a porter, and sometimes, when I didn't have any work, I could go in his stead, that was allowed, and that way my father could rest a bit. The first two years of war I had to earn a living for those who were home, my mother and my sister. I was 14 years old when I started working, when I got a job, but I didn't have a written contract or official papers. I worked in constructions. The contractor, Alexandru Foit was his name, was good and lenient towards me, I hadn't turned 14 yet, and he let me work around an old mason, who was also kind. But work was work, there were no elevators for materials, pulleys: we carried the lime with stretchers and the bricks with the roof-batten. This was my first task, for the first construction I worked for, a two-storied house, to go up the scaffold with the roof-batten on my back. Then I worked in a little factory, and I was happy that I could be in charge of my own time. But working in constructions was possible only during summers; I was unemployed in winters. So I found a job in a small factory -there were only 6 or 8 workers-, which produced candles and grease for carts. We worked during summer only in our underwear, and we were full of fuel oil and tar from the head to toes. We had to wash ourselves after that with kerosene, otherwise the oil wouldn't go off, and our skin was full of blisters. I don't regret it, I earned my bread, I had some money to take home to mother. Every penny I earned I gave to mother, and she would give me what she thought she could spare, some

money to go to the cinema on Sunday, or for a 'somera' ['somera' means 'unemployed' in Romanian], that was the name of a very small and cheap cake at the confectionary's.

I worked both shifts, night and day at the factory. We were only two during the night, and I worked with a woman, she was 20, or 30, a grown up, and she was pregnant during that time. We had to work together, to spin two wooden kegs with a crank; and from all the hard work, she went in the throes of childbirth. It was 10 o'clock in the evening, it was winter and dark outside, and I, as a child, was dead scared. The woman started to moan, and I went in the street to look for help, I couldn't help her in any way; I was lucky that it was just the time when people came out from the cinema, from the last movie, and seeing me that desperate, a man and a woman, probably husband and wife, came with me. I took them to the plant, they asked me for water and bandages, and the woman had her baby right then.

The plant had three owners: the one with the money was a lawyer, Cristian, who was very nice to me - after August 23rd 1944 [10](#), he even helped me finish my studies; there was another one, also not Jewish, who owned the plant on paper, and a Jew, Weismann, who was some sort of a technical manager. He was very skilled, and he knew some chemistry as well, he needed some formulae for the candles, for the grease. One of my neighbors, a girl who worked there, was attacked by one of them, I don't want to say whom, and I felt I had to intervene, I broke the door and came in, I couldn't leave her like that; I was only 14 or 15 years old. After that, the girl didn't show up, but I needed bread, so I went on working there. da. During winter, when work was scarce, I also taught violin classes for some kids, in private. One Jewish boy I tutored, Leibovici, I met years later, after August 23rd, in Galati, where he was a doctor. His father had been an accountant and he could afford to pay me something for his son's lessons; I was happy with whatever they paid me. Another family, the Kleins, who were related with this family, had a son, Avram, I also tutored for violin lessons; I was so pleased to hear that he is now a plane pilot in Israel.

My sister had a rather hard life because of the war; she was thrown out of school in the fourth grade, so she didn't even finish elementary school. I helped her study at home, but because of the family's material situation, she had to be bound as an apprentice at a dressmaker and then at a photographer. Being an apprentice back then didn't mean that you learnt the job, but that for 3 or 4 years, you were nothing but a servant for the master. She was a kid, only 12 years old, but she had to scrub floors, walk around with her boots tied with a string because the sole was falling off. Whatever she gained she gave to my mother, we needed it for food. And during the war, Jews were not allowed to go and buy bread before 10 o'clock am; of course that after 10 you didn't find any bread. So one day we were too hungry, and she went to stand in line for bread before 10, and somebody recognized her and started beating her, a 10 years old girl, in front of everybody, because she wanted to buy bread. The baker, a Mrs. Teodoru, had to help her, and she came home crying, with no bread.

My sister's ambition was to become a doctor. However, the school was too expensive back then, so in 1946 until 1948 she entered a leather school, where she was the first. But after that she managed to go to a nurse school in Bucharest, and she became a nurse. She worked as one for a while, but she still wanted more. So she studied two more grades of high school, it was necessary in order to go to university, and because all her grades were 10 plus [10 was the highest grade in the Romanian teaching system], she entered university of medicine in Iasi without any exam. She made many sacrifices for her dream, and that is why she married late, when she was 29, with

Robert Horovitz, a Jew from Cernauti, and in 1960 she had a son, Emilian.

## Post-war

After the war we could return in our house, in the spring of 1944,, some Germans had lived there. Our neighbors were happy to see us, not all of them had been evicted. My father had managed to build another house, next to the one that was left to us as a heritage, with three rooms and a kitchen. After the war, no one used the old house, it almost collapsed by itself, it was ramshackle and the roof with chap board had holes in it. And father worked at 'Izvoreanu ' textile factory, as renowned in Bacau as Fildermann's leather factory -Fildermann was famous on the political stage as a defender of Jews -. But there were several smaller leather factories, also owned by Jews like Davdovici, Abramovici. They gave work to a lot of people, including my mother's brother, Bern, who was a tanner and worked in Abramovici's factory.

After the war was over, I was in some sort of a crossroad; nobody had known when the war would end and how it would end. My sister had her fix idea with medicine, but I had no idea what I wanted to do; I liked music, and for a while I dreamt of making a career as an officer in the military music. With that dream in my head, I left for Bucharest, only God knows with what, because my parents had no money, and I joined the De La Pergola Conservatory -it was some sort of a university- , in the clarinet class. I got my idea with the clarinet before the war, when the Jewish high school was in big need of wind instrumentalists: they had piano, violin players, but no wind instrumentalists. And some of us guys said: 'Let's be wind instrumentalists'. One of my colleagues was Sergiu Comisioner, now Comisiona, who, back then, used to play the trumpet; I am happy to say he is a famous conductor in Spain now, and he often comes to the philharmonic orchestra in Romania to conduct. However, I haven't had the chance to meet him again. So I left for the Conservatory, but I had to come home: I needed money to pay taxes, I didn't have food, I didn't have a winter coat, and the winter was harsh, it was mostly because of the winter that I came home, I was too cold! So I returned home, and Cristian, the lawyer I mentioned before, who had a good heart and who was well-off, helped me finish my last two years of high school and then get into university. I finished the grades eleven and twelve in Bacau and I took the school leaving examination in 1945 in Botosani, at 'Laurian' high school, and Cristian helped me get into a faculty in Bucharest, subsidized by the Ministry of Transportation, the former railway company. But I was obliged that upon graduation I would have to work in the railway company.

I did think of making aliyah, but I was too caught up in the political whirl back then, and I was naive enough to think the Jewish problem can be solved through communism. The theory of socialism was excellent, but what came out of it wasn't what I expected. I was deeply mistaken. After I realized that, it was already too late for me.

After I graduated from university, I went in the army, in the 2nd regiment of the Railways, in Chitila. I liked the life in the army, but I did not like the lack of freedom, I was used to live a free life., I was the founder of the regiment's orchestra, I couldn't live in the army without music. So first I needed instrumentalists; there was one who played the violin, another who played the guitar, but they were not enough. So I asked the commander to let me pick the ones I needed one night, and I did so, no offense, after their color: whoever had the darkest complexion [here Mr. Fiul refers to gypsies] I would ask them: 'What do you really play?' 'Clarinet, Sir!'; 'what do you play?' 'Kobsa, or dulcimer!' But I still had no instruments; the sergeant told me that in one of the barracks' attics

there were old instruments, because the regiment once had a fanfare. I went and I chose what we needed, a clarinet, a trumpet, then we sent them to be reconditioned, they had no luster. We found the drums, but there was no more leather on them, the rats had eaten it. So the company commander had a calf cut, and I found some tanners in the company, we tanned the skin and fixed the drums. We had a real orchestra in the end, and the company gave us uniforms, boots, like the officers had; we played for different balls and events. After I finished the army, I came back to Bucharest, a bit sorry to do so, because in the army I didn't have to give up music. I had to give up music eventually, I couldn't work and go on with the music, there was no time for that.

I was in the civil army after that between 1948-1949, it was called the National Guard: we had uniforms, we carried guns, but not real ones, just for the parade, and we always marched on November 7th [also known as October Revolution Day] [11](#) Meanwhile Grandfather Mendel died in 1949 in Bacau, and he was buried in the Jewish cemetery there; I believe it was my father who recited the kaddish, but I don't remember if it was a rabbi or just a chazzan at the funeral.

I met my wife when I was in the army, in the regiment of the Railways; we met in Bucharest in 1949, when I had furlough, at a cousin of mine, where she was also invited. I remember I was wearing my uniform then. Neti was from Galati, born there in 1928. She came from a Jewish family as well, and she had two brothers, Izu and Misu Marcus. I don't know what her father worked when he was young, when I knew him he was already retired. We fell in love, but we had to have an engagement first, those were the times. But the engagement took place without me, because I was in Chitila, with the regiment, and the winter was so hard, that I couldn't get to Bucharest. So the engagement was made in my absence, they only had a photo of me, and said: 'This is the fiancée, but he cannot come'. The engagement was held in her home, in Galati, and it was a religious one, a rabbi came to do it. We got married 3 or 4 months after that.

It was my second engagement, actually. I had been engaged once before, to another woman: Rifka (I called her Rifkuta) Brucker, a Jewish woman from Buhusi, one of the most beautiful women there. It was in 1946 when she died in my arms, because of a terrible tuberculosis: she worked in the Buhusi cloth factory, and the conditions there were terrible, there were no windows, so she caught a cold to her lungs and she didn't survive. I was only 24. I was deeply and madly in love with her, and still suffering when I got married. My wife, Neti, understood me very well: I used to have nightmares about my lost love, and I suffered. Neti was a true life companion, she helped the pain fade away. I think she suffered in her own way, but she understood me and comforted me. Even now, after 55 years have passed since Rifka died, I still go to her tomb in Buhusi.

## Married life

In order to marry my wife in 1949, I had to be released from the army. The wedding was in June, and it was a real Jewish wedding, like you don't see very often today. It took place in Galati, in my father-in-law's house. My parents and her parents met, they established how to help us start a new life. There was a big party in the garden, all my relatives from Bacau, Bucharest, Moldavia came, and all her relatives from Galati. There were two schils in Galati, in the same courtyard, on Bernard Andrei street. One was the one of the handicraftsmen, and the other was a beautiful temple. We had our wedding in the schil of the handicraftsmen, which today is the canteen of the Jewish community in Galati. We were called out to Torah, then the ketubbah was written: we were at the table, my father was on one side, her father on the other, I felt like a prisoner, there was no way

out! This is a joke, of course, I wanted desperately to be with that woman, who understood me so well... [he starts crying].

After returning to Bucharest, I sent my applications to some places; I did not care much where I would go, I just wanted to work and be able to earn a living. After 10 days, I was accepted at the Electric Energy Plant, and I was sent to the offices. I worked in the offices for a while, but I could not fit in there, I was used to real work, scribbling on a piece of paper wasn't work for me back then, although I realize now that it has its importance. So I requested to be sent to the plant in Grozavesti, where I was engineer on probation. At first, I wanted to get acquainted with the installations, to learn some blueprints, but there weren't any, so I started doing them myself. I drew the water circuit blueprint, the gaseous or liquid fuel circuit; in order to do them, I actually had to crawl through the canals, I knew the plant better than anyone. I had gained a certain reputation, anyone who wanted to know where a certain fitting was asked me for that information.

One night, I wanted to finish my blueprints, so after I finished my shift, from 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening, I stayed longer, until 9 or so. I had a huge paper on the floor, because it didn't fit on the desk, for the general blueprint. I had my shoes off, so that I could walk on the paper, I had rulers, pencils, a T-square. And it happened that the Minister of Energy at the time, Gheorghe Gaston Marin, came to inspect the plant; it was the largest in the country back then. And from the offices where he was, he saw light in the turbine room and someone there. He was curious who it was, and he came over with his men and found me walking in socks on that blueprint. I was stunned; he was a very imposing man, tall, handsome. He asked me: 'Who asked you to do this?' 'No one, I just wanted to know the plumbing, there are always problems in the plant with the orientation, someone has to do it.' 'Are there?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Alright, lad!', he said and he patted me on the shoulder. By the way, I found out later that he was a Jew as well.

After that I was assigned to Targoviste, at Doicesti plant, I was in charge of the fuel - back then it was coal- division. By that time I was already married, I was happy that I got promoted, but sad that I had to leave my wife in Bucharest. But after three months of staying there, one of my colleagues, the chief engineer, comes to me and tells me: 'Fiule, get dressed, tomorrow morning you're on the first train to Bucharest to see the minister.' I was stunned, I had no idea why I had been summoned. So I went to see him, and he told me: 'You were the one doing all the blueprints of the plant, right?' Yes, comrade minister! 'You know what? I trust you, I've seen you work. You will be in charge of the plant!' I was perplexed, I was only 26 years old, and I knew what a huge responsibility Doicesti was. I tried to refuse, but he wouldn't have any other way, so I ended up running the Doicesti plant, which back then was the largest electric plant in the country. My wife stayed behind in Bucharest, but she came to Targoviste as often as she could to see me. It was a lot of hard work, with a lot of responsibility. I had to join the Communist party, there was no other way. I was in charge of Grozavesti plant for 17 years.

Back then, there was a great need for specialized staff, the schools couldn't keep up with the rate, the industry, especially the electric energy industry, was developing. So we, the Grozavesti staff, had to train all other newcomers. We were usually assigned to the plants that were about to open. There were three departments in working with electric plants, exploitation, maintenance, and repairs. I was working in exploitation. So I was sent from Grozavesti to Constanta, at Ovidiu 2 plant. There I was in charge of the boilers repairing department. The director was Popa Stoica, a very capable man, and he was reassigned to Bacau, at the Energo-Combinat 3, that was the name of



the plant there, and he took me with him. I was happy, I could return to the places where I spent my childhood. I was in charge of the energy distribution department for Bacau, but again I couldn't put up with the work in an office, so I ended up running the Buhusi electrical plant -back then the largest electrical plant in Moldova- for the next three years. But then larger plants appeared, Comanesti, Borzesti, Sipoteni, the one in Buhusi had become rather unimportant, and the Ministry wanted me to go to Braila. I tried to refuse, because I didn't want to leave my family, but I couldn't, an order from the ministry was an order, it was like in the army. When I was transferred to Bacau, my wife came with me and stayed with my parents, and when I moved to Braila she came with me. I didn't regret going to Braila, it was the best part of my professional life, I had independence and the staff was the best. I say independence because we had autonomy from the Galati plant, we had the liberty to fix what we thought needed fixing, take the financial measures without asking for approval, and so on.

My wife only had a housekeeping school, which she did after primary school, girls didn't study much back then, religion or something like that, they just had to know how to read and write in Romanian. We had our child four years after we got married; back then, I was looking for work, I had to be the man in the house, provide, and my wife was a housewife. Rodica was born in 1953 in Bacau, I remember it was a harsh winter, the snow was up to my knees. I was proud, there was another Fiul member in our family! Back then I was still working in Bacau.

I can give you another example of how strong my father felt about hard work: I went with my wife on a vacation in Ceahlau mountains, and I left my daughter with my parents, she was 5 or 6 years old. When we came back for her, my father frowned at me and snapped: 'The girl is already 5 years old and she can't sweep, how did you raise her?!' He respected and loved hard work.

I raised my daughter to be a Jew, and her mother observed all traditions at home, she lit the candles on Friday evenings and said the blessing, and we had a traditional Friday and Saturday dinner. I had little or no time for properly observing the Sabbath, for example, I observed only the high holidays, but I enjoyed them. At home, I tried to lead the Seder Eve, but I don't think I measured up to the one my father used to lead. When I worked in Bacau, I spent Pesach with my parents, of course, and my father led the Seder Eve, like he did when I was a child, but after I moved to Braila, it wasn't the same: we had afikoman, and matzah bread, but a part from the charm of the holiday was gone for me. We also had a Christmas tree, more for Rodica, who loved this custom. Rodica didn't have bat mitzvah, I think that's something more modern, I saw it done only in Israel.

During communism, my friends were my coworkers; I spent with them 14, 16 hours per day, sometimes even 24 hours out of 24. I had big professional satisfactions, but I neglected my family, which now I regret, but it is too late to remedy things. I think I was selfish in a way. For me the family was my refuge, the place where I ate and where I slept, so that I could go back to my work in the morning. And one time, when my daughter was 5 or 6 years old, I bought tickets for the theater, and of course we had a certain hour. I was at the plant, ready to run home; I did come home, but I was late. My wife was very understanding, but my daughter was very upset, and she told me: 'Daddy, you should have married a turbine and have a little boiler as a child, not a family like us!'

My daughter studied at the faculty of Electrotechnics in Iasi, she wanted to complete me, because I worked as an electro-mechanic. I used to take her to the plant on Sundays, she was very amused

by the sound of the diesel engines, it caught on her. After she graduated, she started working at the iron and steel combined works in Galati. My daughter never had problems at work because she was Jewish. She met her husband, David (we call him Toni) Horning in Galati, in 1977, he is also a Jew and he worked as an engineer at Galati shipyard. My father introduced them to each other: I don't know how he met Toni, but probably he got to know the Jews in Galati when he came over there for my wedding, or on some other occasion, when he came to visit his in-laws., He was very concerned to see her married, with children, at her home! They married in the same synagogue where I married my wife. I have two grandchildren, a boy, Doron, who is now 23, and a girl, Anat, who is 24. My daughter decided to make aliyah in 1986; they decided it and I supported them, although the separation from them and especially from my grandchildren was very painful. But every real Jew has to live in Israel. They live in Haifa now, Toni is an engineer at Haifa shipyard, and Rodica works as an electrician at Haifa city hall.

In my own personal way, I tried to find a solution to the Jewish problem: I couldn't forget the four years of anti-Semitism only because of August 23rd, and the Socialist Party seemed like an answer, that was before it was gulped up by the Communist party in 1945. Later I realized that communism wasn't at all what I hoped for, but I can't say exactly when, because I was so absorbed in my work: I had a huge responsibility, the energy deficit was immense, some people had to study with an oil lamp sometimes. My involvement in politics was that I had some courses to attend, some compulsory Marxist education. And I confess that I was and still am a believer in socialism, if not communist principles, that is I believe that the people who work hard are the ones that push the society forward. Socialism says that all people give what they can to the state, and what they get back is proportional with what they gave; in communism, all must give everything they can, but they get back a fixed amount, like all others, no matter if they gave up more. I didn't have problems from the government because I was a Jew, not under Gheorghiu-Dej [12](#) or Ceausescu [13](#) but under Ceausescu I first felt the problems with food and heat. And I must tell you, capitalism scares me a bit, it is too savage, and socialism still seems more just to me. I personally didn't feel many restrictions under communism, simply because I didn't care about anything except my work: I knew nothing about politics. But I remember that I had to stand in a queue for a bottle of milk, my grandchildren were small, and it was hard to have something to put on the table. I never listened to Free Europe [14](#), or other radio stations, I was too busy with work.

I don't think communism had anything to do with my growing apart from religion, and, I am sorry now to say it, from my family: it was my job. Fate wanted me to have all these responsibilities in the energy plants, when the energetic system was just being built in Romania. We were solicited day and night, we forgot about holidays and religion. We took our jobs so seriously, we considered it a sacred duty to our country, and we were passionate about what we did.

My mother died in 1971 in Bacau. At my mother's funeral, there was a rabbi, a minyan, and I recited the kaddish; my mother used to tell me when she was alive: 'I love you because you are my kaddish!' She meant that she was grateful that I would be the one to cherish her memory after she passed away. My wife died in November 1973, rather unexpectedly. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Galati. There was a minyan, and I recited the kaddish, but we had no rabbi. [the memory upsets him and he doesn't want to linger on the topic] After that, I remained in Galati, I loved my wife's relatives as much as I loved my parents. Today almost all her relatives are in Israel. After my mother died, my father moved to Iasi and lived with my sister for a while, and then,

because of his health problems, went to a home for the elderly. He died there in 1986; he was also buried in the Jewish cemetery. There were just 5 or 6 men at my father's funeral, we couldn't form a minyan, because it all happened very quickly. I could only sit shivah for two or three days after my parents and my wife, but I observed another custom: I had dust in my socks for a week.

The situation concerning the connections with the West or with Israel where the following: of course the Securitate [15](#) had its eye on you if you received letters from abroad, nothing else; and I had a managerial position in an industry that was a strategic objective for the economy. The problem was that all those who had relatives abroad were dismissed from managerial positions, army or administration. I wasn't afraid to write, but I was a bit reluctant, I didn't want to have problems with my work, I was too fond of it. I had family in Israel, my mother's sister with her husband, my brothers-in-law Misu and Izu Marcus, then friends, like Usher Klein, we knew each other since we were kids and we are still good friends. There are my cousins, Iosef, Eial and Zev Fiul, who live in Kiryat-Ata. Zev and Iosef left in 1946 I think, but Eial left later, in the 1970s. And all my family from my wife's side left for Israel, the only ones left behind are my sister and my niece, Gabriela Marcovici, from Tecuci.

When the wars in Israel started, I was very affected: I already had friends and family there, and my heart was there as well; the wars were for me real traumas, and I believe they are the same for all the Jews in diaspora. The war in 1967 kept me tensed for only 6 days; I celebrated when it ended with my family, I remember.

I was in Israel several times; the first time I went was in 1970, at Lud, but I visited Haifa, Nazaret, Knesset and Jerusalem. One of the things that impressed me was to hear in the street somebody cry out: 'hei sa bei iune'. In Yiddish that means warm pretzels. I was so touched to hear Romanians from back home; it melted my heart! And after my daughter left, I went to visit them every two years. I still believe that Israel is wonder country.

When the [Romanian] revolution broke out in 1989 [16](#), I was already retired, and I lived in Tecuci. By that time I lived alone in Galati, and I went over to Tecuci to my niece Gabriela Marcovici, (Manase's daughter) who needed my help, she was alone with her mother. My niece worked in a school in a nearby commune, Movileni; I went to take her home, because it was winter, and when I went inside the school, we heard the news about Ceausescu going down at the radio. When we got home, we didn't go away from the TV for three days! It didn't mean as much as August 23rd meant for Jews: that was the relief that death wouldn't come the very next day, it was a liberation, even if the communists did it. But of course we felt in 1989 the possibility that we could finally get rid of queues, that we could make it day by day, that the society would change in its structure, which it did.

Immediately after I retired in 1986, I knew I had to find some activity, I couldn't deal with all that freedom all at once, after being solicited at the maximum all those years. So I became involved in the Jewish community in Galati: I was in charge of administration and of the canteen; the times were rough then, the food was scarce, it was still under communism. It gave me satisfaction, helping those in need, but I couldn't find the work I was used to, the technical part at least. But I also had a dream, that after all the work, I would go back to living like I did when I was a child, have a house in the countryside, a garden. So with everything I had saved, and something I even borrowed, I bought a little house and a garden of 1500 square meters in 1991 in Tecuci. I

developed a real passion for gardening, I could grow everything I needed for me and my relatives in my garden. After three years, I had even wine from the vine I had planted. I made my own wine, I even had a still, I made plum brandy, I got along well with my neighbors, I was rewarding. But when I approached the age of 70, I realized that I won't be able to keep up with the work a neat house and garden requires, so I had to find something else. So I became passionate about hiking, I had friends in Brasov, and I took up hiking. But I couldn't do it like I once could, I got tired easily at climbing, because the descent was easy. So I said to myself, I have to find something else. And I found it here, at the Jewish community in Brasov. So I sold my house in Tecuci in 1996, and I got an apartment in Brasov, with which I am very pleased, I can see the mountains, I have fresh air, I can see the sky. But when I moved here, I didn't know that I would find something to do at the community, I came for the mountains and my friends. But in the community I found a new home, it is a refuge from loneliness. I am in charge of writing a monograph of the Jews in Brasov; I also work as a librarian. But it would be nice if I had more coworkers, because it takes a lot of work and I don't know if I will be able to finish it.

The religious life in the community here is not very good, there are no more kids, no cheder, the old people just meet one day in the week to pray, on Saturdays. I would like to see that we do more to preserve the old synagogues, I would like a Jewish museum here in Brasov. What we have is also good, but I cannot help not to be sad because of all the traditions that will be lost, because the old people die eventually, it is in the nature of things.

## Glossary

### **1 Carol I**

1839-1914, Ruler of Romania (1866-1881) and King of Romania (1881-1914). He signed with Austro-Hungary a political-military treaty (1883), to which adhered Germany and Italy, linking this way 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 Austro-Hungary's side.

### **2 Cuza, Alexandru Ioan**

The election in 1859 of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as prince of both Moldavia and Walachia prepared the way for the official union (1861-62) of the two principalities as Romania. Cuza freed in 1864 the peasants from certain servile obligations and distributed some land - confiscated from religious orders - to them. However, he was despotic and corrupt and was deposed by a coup in 1866. Carol I of the house of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was chosen as his successor.

### **3 Dostoevsky, Fyodor (1821-1881)**

Russian novelist, journalist and short-story writer whose psychological penetration into the human soul had a profound influence on the 20th century novel. His novels anticipated many of the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud. Dostoevsky's novels contain many autobiographical elements, but ultimately they deal with moral and philosophical issues. He presented interacting characters with contrasting views or ideas about freedom of choice, socialism, atheisms, good and evil, happiness and so forth.

#### **4 Legionary rebellion**

failed coup d'etat intended by the legionaries in January 20-27 1941, which culminated with the pogrom of the Jews in Bucharest; after its defeat, Ion Antonescu established military dictatorship.

#### **5 Cuzist**

Member of the Romanian fascist organization named after Alexandru C. Cuza, one of the most fervent fascist leaders in Romania, who was known for his ruthless chauvinism and anti-Semitism. Cuza founded the National Christian Defense League, the LANC (Liga Apararii National Crestine), in 1923. The paramilitary troops of the league, called lancierii, wore blue uniforms. The organization published a newspaper entitled Apararea Nationala. In 1935 the LANC merged with the National Agrarian Party, and turned into the National Christian Party, which had a pronounced anti-Semitic program.

#### **6 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.

#### **7 Hashomer Hatzair**

Zionist youth movement founded in Eastern Europe shortly before World War I; its members were among the first to set up kibbutzim in Palestine in 1919. During World War II, members of Hashomer Hatzair were leading active resistance against German forces, in ghettos and concentration camps.

#### **8 Safran, Alexandru**

born in Bacau, Romania, at 1910. Son and Disciple of Rabbi . Bezael Ze'ev Safran, whom he followed as a rabbi in his native city. At 29 years of age, Alexandru Safran is elected to be the Chief Rabbi of Romania. Senator of law, he lives in Bucharest. During World War II, though he was a hostage under the fascists, he is the president of the Jewish Clandestine Salvation Committee. In 1948 he is designated as Chief Rabbi of Geneva, and since then he teaches Talmudic thinking patterns at a local university. His writings, in Hebrew and not only, engulf all assets of Jewish spirituality, being considered very complex and comprehensive. Thinker of great originality, serious and bright scholar, Alexandru Safran is one of the most important rabbinical figures of modern



times.

## **9 Numerus clausus in Romania**

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

## **10 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.

## **11 October Revolution Day**

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

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

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

Communist head of Romania between 1965 and 1989. He followed a policy of nationalism and non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries. The internal political, economic and social situation was marked by the cult of his personality, as well as by terror, institutionalized by the Securitate, the Romanian political police. The Ceausescu regime was marked by disastrous economic schemes and became increasingly repressive and corrupt. There were frequent food shortages, lack of electricity and heating, which made everyday life unbearable. In December 1989

a popular uprising, joined by the army, led to the arrest and execution of both Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, who had been deputy Prime Minister since 1980.

#### **14 Radio Free Europe**

The radio station was set up by the National Committee for a Free Europe, an American organization, funded by Congress through the CIA, in 1950 with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features from Munich to countries behind the Iron Curtain. The programs were produced by Central and Eastern European émigré editors, journalists and moderators. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in communist countries behind the Iron Curtain and thus it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of Central and Eastern Europe.

#### **15 Securitate (in Romanian)**

DGSP - Directia generala a Securitatii Poporului): General Board of the People's Security. Its structure was established in 1948 with direct participation of Soviet advisors named by the NKVD. The primary purpose was to 'defend all democratic accomplishments and to ensure the security of the Romanian Popular Republic against plots of both domestic and foreign enemies'. Its leader was Pantelimon Bondarenko, later known as Gheorghe Pintilie, a former NKVD agent. It carried out the arrests, physical torture and brutal imprisonment of people who became undesirable for the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party, and also kept the life of ordinary civilians under strict observation.

#### **16 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.