

Iancu Tucarman

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Though already in his 85, Iancu Tucarman, an energetic retiree, is still passionate about American literature and symphonies. He is one of the few survivors of the summer 1941 pogrom in Iasi when many of his friends and relatives lost their lives. After graduating the Faculty of Agriculture in Iasi, he moved to Bucharest where he has since been living with his wife, Clarisa Tucarman [nee Kaiserman]. His brother-in-law, Pincu Kaiserman, chairs the Iasi Jewish Community which is much smaller today than it used to be during the inter-war period. Currently, Mr. Tucarman is a member of the Association of the Jews in Romania Victims of the Holocaust. In this capacity he gets involved in many projects designed to provide education for the younger generations.

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My family story

I have not met my paternal grandparents. My grandmother's name was Brana Tucarman [nee Herscu], and my grandfather's – Iancu Tucarman. My father had two sisters: Raschela Gruber [nee Tucarman], and Mali Crowen [nee Tucarman], and a brother, Iulius Tucarman. They left the country [crossed the Atlantic]: Raschela to Canada, and Mali to America. I have foggy memories about my aunt Raschela. She had three children: Iancu, Fenny, and Bernice. Fenny lives in Paris.

My father, Iosif Samoil Tucarman was born in 1889, in Iasi. He owned a grocery store, then a ferrous and nonferrous metal shop. He went about his business in the shop and saw to the house as well. He was very good at it. He was the warden of the Haim Hoffman synagogue located behind our house. He kept the Jewish tradition in the sense that he would go to the synagogue every Friday evening, on Saturdays, yearly holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, and Yom-Kippur.

Ever since I turned ten or eleven, after I did my homework, I would help my father many times in the shop, or out shopping, or selling. He couldn't manage it by himself. Many customers thought they could fool me, but I was very well trained, I was good at it. My father was 50 in 1939 when my mother died. He was left alone with four kids and he did not remarry.

I have not met my grandfather from my mother's side. My maternal grandmother, Debora Moise [nee Haufman] was a special woman in point of the way she behaved in the family, towards her children or grandchildren. Especially on Fridays we would go out to visit relatives and friends. She

stayed with the Madrisovicis, at her daughter Betty's. She would tell us fairy tales which we really loved. She came by in the afternoon and many times she would stay the night because the house she lived in was about 2 kilometers away. The carriages stood waiting nearby as the taxis stay today. I would go, take a carriage and go around on it, driving it. Back then in 1936-1937 it was 10 lei per ride. To take my grandmother back home was one of the things I loved. She is the only grandmother I have ever known. We loved her very much and she loved us. She died in 1941.

My mother had a sister, Betty Madrisovici [nee Moise] and four brothers: Carol Moise, Pascal Moise, Moritz Moise, and Strul Moise. Moritz left for London where he had a ready-made clothes shop. At some point he changed his name from Moritz Moise to Moritz Hoffman which meant 'hope-man'. Strul and Pascal remained in the country where they had an alehouse. Betty lost her husband Marcu Madrisovici, and their three sons – Strul, Iancu, and Lupu – in the Iasi pogrom.

My mother, Minta Tucarman [nee Moise], was born in 1889 in Iasi. She would not let a Friday evening go by without her lighting the candles. I can see her right before my eyes: she put her little shawl on her head, she lit the candles. 'I pray for our welfare, your welfare, let us all be healthy and safe from evil!' She would utter these words in Yiddish although my parents spoke Romanian flawlessly. Like in any Jewish house, both they and my maternal grandmother would talk in Yiddish every time they did not want us children to understand what they were talking about. My mother played the most important part in our education.

When my youngest sister was born, the birth was very difficult. They did not use the forceps to help her, she disturbed her heart and she had heart problems ever since, for 15 years. She had an embolism and that was the cause of her death. She used to say: 'Iosef, dear, my children, don't leave me!' I can still hear the words she said when she was aware that she had to leave us. She died in 1939.

We lived on Apelor Street in Iasi [Street in the Targu Cucului quarter. There were several Jewish quarters: Targu Cucului – to the north, Sarariei – to the north, Tatarasi – to the south, or Podul Ros – to the south of the city]. It was a miserable little street, not paved. We had a grocery's there. My father and mother kept it; it is how they provided for us. They bought the house. They even had three tenants back then. When I turned 11 and I started high school, we moved to Sarariei Street where we would live throughout the war. The house had eight apartments, a ground floor and a first floor. We had an old shop selling ferrous and nonferrous metals. The shop had two rooms and a kitchen. The apartment next door was ours too. We built a door: we broke through the wall to have a passage to the next apartment. This is how we lived. We had a small table at the back of the shop. We would sit at that table, study, read. We had a radio that we kept until the time when all radios were seized from the Jews. Very few houses had a second or a third floor. There were very many houses in the courtyard and around 67 families lived there. This quarter was mostly a Jewish one.

I had three sisters: Sofia Segal [nee Tucarman], Betty Laim [nee Tucarman], and Fany Klinger [nee Tucarman]. Since my mother was ill, the girls would always help her around. The youngest, even when she was 8 or 9 years old, did all the chores that she could do at her age. There were women who came by every week to help my mom with the work she could not do by herself. Sofia could play the violin, unlike the others. Fany studied the piano for about one or two years, but my father could no longer pay for her lessons. I remember just one time when I was a child and I went with

my folks in a holiday to Targu Ocna for a fortnight. I think I was not older than 5 or 6. But it was our only time, the rest we couldn't afford it. My father worked very hard and he could barely manage to keep us afloat.

My elder sister Sofia had been married since 1938. Her husband Leon Segal managed to get his way through chief accountant of the Penicilina Factory in Iasi. So, he took care of the others as well. They left for Israel in 1982. He had already retired when they left. She died in 2000.

My sister Betty who was born right after me married in 1946. She left for Israel in 1965. My brother-in-law was a very good mechanic. He worked in precision mechanics all his life.

In 1950, my youngest sister Fany married a dental technician, an exquisitely good chap. They had a wonderful life. She bore two children in Bucharest, and in 1960 they moved to Israel. At first they told me that they had a very hard time there. There are a lot of disagreements between various professions in Israel as well. My brother-in-law, who is a very good technician, headed a dentist's cabinet in a clinic with several sections. They have two sons: Mordehai and Dany. God bless them, they both managed well. One of them has two sons, and the other one two twin girls. A grand-grandson married on the 2nd June last year [2005]. They invited me as well and I answered the invitation and went over to attend the wedding. We talk on the phone all the time. My grandsons are more concerned about their own business, their families. But I talk with my sisters by phone all the time, whenever they call me or I them.

Growing up

As for me, Iancu Tucarmen, I was born in Iasi on the 30th October 1922. When I turned 5 or so my parents sent me over to a melamed [teaching the children the alphabet and prayers] and I studied with him until I was 13. I managed to learn the Talmud and Tanakh. I learned Yiddish that was very important to me. When I turned 7 I started going to the 'Vasile Adamache' Elemental School [public school]. My teacher's name was Pantelimonescu, an extraordinary man whose memory will always stay with me because he took really good care of us. He taught us everything about manners. Two or three years after I graduated elemental school, the poor man died. All his pupils went over to his house and led him to his final resting place in the Eternitatea Cemetery in Iasi. This is how close he had become to us and how much we had come to love him. He was like a real parent throughout the four years of school.

I was an A pupil, I was awarded first prize every year. I tried to study hard. I knew that my parents worked hard to earn a living and that I had to get ready to help them at some point. I liked all the subjects, but I was mostly drawn to music. When I was 6 my father hired a teacher to teach me play the violin.

I attended the 'Stefan cel Mare' Secondary School that was very close to our house. I had extraordinary teachers there. I cared very much about teacher Pausesti who was famous for his knowledge of French. Mr. Glica, the arts [teacher], lived nearby and every time he passed by he would stop and have a chat with us. I remember mostly Mr. Traian Gheorghiu, the Romanian teacher. He cared very much about me. I was hard-working, I learned hard. I would get a 10 at his subject. All these four years that I studied Romanian with him he had a custom. He noted the marks in the catalogue, mentioning the day, month and mark. Every time on the 10th October he would call me in front of the class, ask me questions to put down my mark and say: 'I would like to

have the pleasure of writing three 10 under your name today, on 10th October!' I kept in touch with this teacher even after I finished secondary school. He was a supporter of the Peasants' Party by tradition, through his parents. After the 23rd August [1944], he was arrested and jailed for 11 years [as a political detainee]. After he was released I kept in touch with him, we used to meet. I told him: 'I care about you as a teacher. I know who you were and who you are. It doesn't bother me and I am not afraid either'. After a while, he was rehabilitated and taught Romanian at the faculty. He wrote a play, 'The Honeycombs of Vrancea Mountains' that had its premiere at the National Theater in Iasi. He invited me and I had a box seat right next to the author. He was a special man of extraordinary education and honesty. The thing that impressed me and still hurts today is what happened to all those who were sent to the Channel, where the Romanian intelligentsia was physically destroyed. [In 1949, the construction works on the Channel began. Many workers were actually political detainees from communist prisons. The works were ceased in 1955 only to be resumed in 1975 and completed in 1984. The Channel connects the Danube (south of Cernavoda) to the Black Sea (at Agigea, south of Constanta) and cuts the way to Constanta short by almost 400km.]

I attended the 5th grade at the 'Alexandru cel Bun' High School. But since the 6th had been disbanded I had to sign up with another high school. The two most famous high schools in Iasi were the Boarding High School and the National High School. I joined the latter to attend the 6th grade. I have never had any arguments or disagreements with my classmates.

There is a street in Iasi in the area where we lived that was called just like that: the Synagogues Street. A lot of synagogues were there, separate synagogues according to trade: the Tailors' Synagogue, the Publicans' Synagogues, and the Grand Synagogue that remains today the only synagogue in the area to still be used for prayer and Jewish cultural events. In my childhood and even later, in my 15 or 16, my father would take me with him to Friday and Saturday evening prayers. When others would go outside to play football, I had to go to the synagogue. But this is how I learned everything that it is to know about Judaic tradition. I liked it because I learned all kinds of useful stuff.

More often than not the holidays were about the relationship with God, about going to the synagogue. That was the atmosphere, especially in Iasi. There were a lot of shopkeepers and during the New Year or Kippur holidays, Iasi would be a commercially dead city. All shops were closed, all synagogues were full. Everybody spent the New Year's Eve with the family. Of course we would go visit our relatives. My mother had a few brothers in Iasi. We exchanged visits. Anyone of our friends was so busy earning a living that he would spend all day long in the shop if that was his trade. They didn't have much time to spare but only when they went to the synagogue on Friday or Saturday evening and chatted.

My father used to go to the synagogue even during communism. That regime looked askance at the employees' relationship with religion and tradition. As for myself, because I loved my father, I loved Judaic tradition that I have never denied or went astray from I would go to the synagogue on those days even in Ceausescu's time. He used to go on Fridays and Saturdays but in the evening, especially in winter, I would go and take him home.

For me, although I left Iasi after I graduated faculty, in 1948, even today I can feel some kind of love for my birthplace with its special wonders. It was not a crowded city. It had about 150,000

inhabitants. The atmosphere was very nice by 1938-1939. We didn't even know... there was no difference between Christian, Jew or any other ethnicities. I cannot say that I felt any inappropriate attitude towards myself as a Jew in primary or secondary schools. We were Romanians too. We all had Romanian citizenship. We got along very well in school as well. We had no problems until we started to feel a drift of anti-Semitism due to the Goga-Cuza government [2](#) all the more considering that professor Cuza came from Iasi. I remember that as early as 1939 when I was living on the Sarariei Street and one morning groups of students and of... I would call them citizens for want of a better word... broke the windows of every Jewish shop.

Iasi Pogrom

The war broke on 22nd June 1941 [Romania entered World War II alongside Nazi Germany]. A week later the pogrom [3](#) took place in Iasi which would not spare me either. One third of Iasi's population was Jewish, that is almost 45,000 people. And we all had a very pleasant life. On 29th June 1941 we found ourselves thrown in trains or killed on the street. It was like a cold shower. It was unexpected. There were frightfully few cases when nice people warned their neighbors and took them in their houses. It was a big question mark as to how this could happen in Iasi where we had lived until the War and till that day that turned into doomsday for many of us.

On the 29th, around half past 8 or 9 in the morning, when they took me out there was a long wall and 20-30 were already standing by that wall waiting for the others to be brought. A military passed by and at some point he drew his gun and wanted to shoot us. A major was passing by at that very moment and asked: 'Soldier, have you been ordered to shoot?' 'No!' 'Get out immediately or you'll be court-martialed!' And he left. I don't know who that was and I'm sorry I didn't ask. We survived then but many of us who were taken to the Section [police headquarters] did not...

On the way there we walked with our hands up. Not a soul was to be seen on the street. The only people I saw were over to the Notre-Dame de Zion School – that is on Cuza-Voda Street. The building now hosts the Philharmonic. Germans stood at the windows and took pictures of us as we walked with our hands up. About 200 meters away, as we went further from our house towards the Section, there I was and my father walked on my left. We walked in lines of 7-8 persons towards the Section. A sergeant came towards me, slapped me twice over the face, took my wristwatch and said: 'Hey, kike, you won't need it anyways!' It was then that both I and my father understood that something really bad was going to happen to us. And my father told me in Yiddish: 'My dear, let this be an offering in exchange for your soul!' And that's exactly what happened. I managed to find myself among the survivors.

They took us to the police section. We spent all day there. Policemen with rubber batons stood on each side of the entrance and they would kick all those who entered. Since both I and my father were shorter we got away untouched. When we entered I saw piles of dead people one over the other and blood from those who had been hit on the head and died. When you came in the police section, in the middle, you could see some steps and two machine guns. One of them was aimed towards the gate, the other one towards the backyard fence. Anyone who tried to jump over the fence would be shot. They couldn't bring in all of us and so they came up with a plan: the elderly and the children, but especially the men were given a 5/5 ticket with a stamp reading 'free'. And they were told: 'Tell the other Jews to come with their ID to receive a ticket like this one. Those who

don't present this ticket upon control will be shot!' Out of fear, a lot of people came on their own. For the majority, the only freedom they got was the eternal one. And this is how they managed to bring everyone to the Section, even those who were not brought by the police or the army. My father got a 'free' ticket and managed to go back.

We spent the 29th at the Section. In the morning we were taken to the station, again walking in lines. On the platform in front of the station we were ordered to lie on the ground and we stayed like that until other people boarded the train. Then we got in the train as well and there was some guy there who kept counting. And I heard – because I didn't know my number – I heard 137 and then: 'Lock the train car!'

At the Iasi station a railroad employee shouted 'Kikes, close the shutters!' He came with a ladder and blocked our windows with some very big nails that were so long that they came out on the other side of the shutter and I had something to hang my raincoat on. I took off my coat inside. Because of the heat most people remained naked. I too took off my coat and my shirt. Inside the car some would go crazy and jump from side to side like at the circus. When there were only 10 or 12 of us left, the entire floor was covered with dead people. It was like a mattress they jumped on. They didn't jump at first; at first everybody was normal. And one more interesting thing, a thing about dreams. I fell asleep in the train. And all these people that were jumping from side to side stepped on me, hurt my leg really bad and I woke up. But while I was asleep I dreamt that I was going to work at a farm. I saw a wheat field, fruit trees. Indeed, one week later I was sent to do forced labor at a farm and then this became my lifelong profession: agricultural engineer.

I believe in destiny and I wonder why I was among those chosen to stay alive. It was then that I noticed a very interesting thing biologically speaking. Namely that those who had least demands from life and the environment, that is the weak ones, were the ones to survive.

The first to die in the train was a sportsman. He died after an hour, an hour or so. I thought he just fainted, but he actually died of heat. And those who were least pretentious survived. All of us who got out were short and thin.

I can still remember as if it were today the moment when the train opened, at Podul Iloaiei. When the gates opened, I stepped back, although I was close to the door. But I just stood like that for about 2-3 minutes until almost everyone got out. I got out the last. Many of us when they breathed the fresh air fell down, fainted. The people got out on a field, there were very many puddles and they threw themselves in them because of thirst. Some wanted to cool down, others to quench their thirst. Many died right there on the ditch, others were taken to the hospital. One thing still haunts me: I was weary but I walked until I found clean grass with no mud in it. How could I refrain from jumping into the water then? I looked for a clean place so that my raincoat wouldn't get dirty!

During the war

The Jewish community there was asked whether it would agree to receive, to host Jewish communists as we were labeled [The official propaganda called the victims of the pogrom Jewish communists to justify the repression.] So, after we spent about half an hour on the field, they lined us up and escorted us towards the synagogues in Podul Ilioarei. Lined up. There were some people from that town on the road that behaved really nasty: 'Why did you come, kikes?' Others even spat on us. The Jews came first to look for their relatives, friends and acquaintances. A former

classmate of mine and relative, one of the Idels, with whom I was to live during my stay in Podul Iloaiei, came before me: 'Are you lancu?' I said: 'Yes'. I looked at him curiously: 'Are you asking me, dear former classmate?' Other three survivors were in his house. And when I entered his house I stared in the mirror: 'What is this?' It was me. I didn't recognize myself. I was haggard, nothing but skin and bones, my lips won't close, my eyes almost popped out and then I suddenly realized why he asked me whether I was lancu or not. If I couldn't recognize myself, how could he then?

When they brought us to the synagogue, I sat down on a stair step and we were given tea. The first thing I thought about was this: until the day before yesterday I used to be a normal person and look at me now: who am I? A nobody! My turn came to receive a cup of tea. And I took the first sip. And it almost killed me. I choked. It took me half an hour to calm down my cough and then I realized how dehydrated I was and I started to sip one drop at a time, like with a dropper, until I managed to swallow it.

After the first days in Podul Iloaiei passed, we were given a postcard to write on. And the first thing I wrote was this: 'My dears, you cannot imagine the things I had to go through until...' and I stopped and thought 'Man, what are you writing about?!' I took another postcard and I wrote: 'My dears, I have arrived safely to Podul Iloaiei. All the best, lancu'. Both I and my brother-in-law Leon Segal wrote the same. My sister got the postcard a few days later and learned that he was alive. My father had heard how many people had died there and counted me among the dead, delivered all the payers that should be delivered for the dead and got my postcard only a week later.

We returned to Iasi and one week later we came to the Deployment Center to be sent to do forced labor to various places. All these 4 years I was never sent outside Iasi. In Iasi I worked at the Electrical Power Station, at a textile factory, all winter cleaning the snow. My father too cleaned the streets in winter. In 1941, my father was 52. People were taken to forced labor until their 50s, but he did not show his age and was taken for 2-3 months. He worked somewhere at Repedea, at a stone quarry. The work would usually start at 7am and lasted until 6 o'clock in the evening. I worked for a time at the Railroad Company [CFR] in Socola. It was very hard; some of those who supervised our work were tougher, they would insult us: 'Hey, kikes, faster! Don't linger! Mind your work!' They would even hit us. And this thing lasted for a while. At 1 o'clock we had a half-an-hour break when everyone brought something over if they could do so ... Many had nothing and I would share my meal with them, but I too didn't have all the time. I shared a sandwich or so. And all this until 6 in the evening depending on the season. It was very hard for us. Because we were working together we could talk about how happy we could have been if we had had a weapon and knew that we were at war. Why were we subjected to these degrading situations regardless of education? Some of us were doctors, engineers, lawyers and worked side by side with everybody else. And this was not humiliating for them; the thing that was humiliating was that we could not be considered true citizens of our country like everybody else. In wintertime we were especially sent to the tramway company to clear the snow off the tracks. In Iasi sometimes it was as cold as -20. Your eyelids and nostrils froze together. We had to work from 7 in the morning until dark under very harsh conditions. Various people would pass by; some of them, indeed, you could see some kind of compassion in their eyes because they knew us. They were neighbors, acquaintances. Others behaved terribly: 'Kikes! It serves you right!' Why - I couldn't understand. And this situation lasted until the end of the War: various labors in summer and cleaning the snow in winter.

After the pogrom we had to obey several restrictions. You could really feel that you were different from all the people that you had very well lived with until that day. You were not allowed to go to the market by 10 o'clock in the morning. That was the time when we wore the yellow star [4](#). I was out at work doing forced labor; my sisters were still too young. The shop was given to a Christian, a certain Maftai Constantin, and my father was able to work with him. He got a certain percentage of the profit. He was a special man, an understanding man. There were some who took the shops altogether and drove the real owners away [5](#). This one was a wise man. I don't remember how much he received, but anyway this is how we managed to survive.

I lived in Iasi all this time. As the front line drew nearer I could even see how the shells were launched towards Iasi. I could see the flames from the cannons. Considering the place they were firing from I did the math and thought that a shell could not reach us. But a shell did reach us and hit the other side and the second floor of the house nearby. It made a pretty big hole and broke all the windows. The Russians entered Iasi on the 20th August [1944]. We were standing in front of our shop and could see 2-horse carriages that were pulled by just one horse and led by Asian-looking narrow-set eyed military coming from Copou towards Sararie. I didn't realize. Nobody met them. They were the first, the first brigades to enter the city. Half an hour later, they were followed by the Soviet Army.

After the war

Of course we were happy and many wonder why the Jews met the Soviet Army with flowers. Why? Because, unless the Soviet Army had come to chase the Germans away and the Romanian Army switched sides and turned against them a few days later, instead of us greeting the Soviet Army with flowers, they would have laid the flowers on our graves. And I am certain that we wouldn't have had this interview today. So, many judge wrongly. They were our saviors. 12 of my family died. 7-8 of my colleagues, my friends died. They were all exterminated in the trains [death trains].

My father had long wished to move to Bucharest. And now he thought that the time came as he could still do it. In October [1944], he and my sister Fany left to Bucharest. I don't know how they could have the courage to do so, especially my sister who was 17, a real young lady. They left by truck under very harsh conditions. They reached Bucharest 2-3 days later. My father started working for his cousin Oscar Froimovici who worked at the men's lingerie shop. When he was younger my father too had worked at the lingerie shop. With much trouble they managed to find a room to rent. It was very hard to find a place to stay in Bucharest. They settled there. I stayed in Iasi with my other two sisters. One of them had been married since 1938, the other one married in 1946.

All these years when I had some time to spare I would study: I wouldn't let one spare hour or two to pass by without studying according to the curriculum. I hoped then that I would live to come to study. And indeed there was a law [6](#) for all those who could not study because of the anti-Jewish regime. This law stated that these people could graduate school and the Baccalaureate in private. Of course I had pretty low marks but I graduated nevertheless and I was very happy when I became a student of the Faculty of Agronomy in Iasi on the 5th May 1948. I attended 6 months of training until I could give the national exam. In the summer of 1949, I passed the state exam and graduated as agricultural engineer.

I believed that my student years were the best in my life. I was never sick, so I did not miss classes due to illness. I attended absolutely all classes. I was well aware that I was a city-born and city-educated Jew that had very few ties to what we call agronomy. I was in love with music, with nature. During the 4 years in faculty we had to spend one or two months a year working at a farm. I did all this training at the Targu Frumos experimental station where I met engineers whom I still have beautiful memories about. The Dalas engineers, husband and wife, that took great care of me and saw that I was lending all my attention to the trade. I attended all training sessions, even though some of my mates skipped classes; they would go out in Targu Frumos to wander around, to meet girls or I don't know what. I never skipped a class during my training because I wanted to learn everything that was to be learned.

There were 10 of us Jews that joined the faculty of agronomy at the university in the first year. There were about 56 students enlisted in 1945. Imagine this: 10 Jews! The other 46 were Christians and one of them, a certain Rapeanu, used to be a Legionary [7](#). He couldn't help himself: 'What are these kikes doing among us?' He was finally expelled during the second year. All the others were good colleagues. I didn't feel absolutely nothing embarrassing about the fact that I was Jewish. Our ancestors have originally been peasants, cattle breeders. The Bible shows this very clearly.

I lived in our old house in Iasi all the time. I kept the shop. When I had some spare time I took care of the business and it is with this money that I managed to pay all my expenses during university years. My father could barely make a living from the job he had at his cousin's in Bucharest. He had hoped for something better. He was an enterprising and very honest person which many time cost him in business after the war. Some people cheated him. He lived on the verge of poverty.

I chose where I was to go for the practice before the final exam. I chose Buftea [20km of Bucharest] because I wanted to be closer to my father. During the 6 month training I lived at the farm. On Saturdays and Sundays I would come and visit my father and my little sister. The other two sisters remained in Iasi all the time until they left for Israel. From time to time they used to come to Bucharest to visit my father and me. Since 1948, because I was appointed chief engineer, I lived at the farm. On the 1st March 1949 the kolkhozes were set up and Buftea became a state-run farm. 7-8 months later, it was merged with the state-run farm in Peris and I remained the chief engineer at Peris-Buftea. I would come to Bucharest in my free time, especially on Sundays, because I lived close by. Peris was about 35 kilometers from the city. The train station was right in front of the farm. The first thing that impressed me in Bucharest was the automated tramway doors that opened and closed by themselves. The tramways we had in Iasi were old, small and worn-out. Of course the buildings in Bucharest impressed me compared to those in Iasi. The roaring life here had somehow bothered me; I was used to a certain kind of tranquility, not with the booming post-war Bucharest.

Since the very moment they appointed me chief engineer at the Buftea and Peris state-run farms [one of the largest farms in Bucharest, 3000ha, Buftea was the land of Prince Stirbey, while the former Royal Lands were at Peris], I realized that incompetence was at the highest levels and I told myself that I could never be part of such a regime, no matter what the risks. Back then only those with a clean, 'healthy' file could be in leading positions [healthy social origin, hailing from the working class, or members of the Communist Party] and so a smith, a blacksmith was appointed director, and a Gypsy musician as deputy director. He played the clarinet. They were the head and deputy head of the largest farm in Bucharest. As for me, the chief engineer, I was not a member of

the Communist Party. The master head had a very inappropriate behavior towards me. He didn't respect me and kept on going about the fact that he was the one in charge, that he was the one giving the orders. You can imagine: he had suddenly found himself in the shoes of the head of a farm with a very good salary. On the other hand, his deputy respected me. I played the violin since I was 6-7 years old and I played it even at the farm. I would play it mostly in the evening. I have played the violin for 40 years.

The creation of the State of Israel was one of the greatest joys in my life. Don't get me wrong, I have my Romanian State. But the fact that Israel exists is a shield without which we don't know what could have happened in various times.

I worked at Buftea since 1948 until 15th July 1950 when I came to the ministry. Then I was deputy editor in chief for several science magazines published by the ministry. All agricultural methods and equipment were discussed there. The ministry had 8 magazines for various branches and areas of agriculture: agriculture, stockbreeding, fruit farming, horticulture, beekeeping, etc. The Party organization secretary who had a BA in philosophy had no interest in turning me into a Party member because I would have then automatically got the editor-in-chief job. When the state-run Agrosilvica Publishing House was established in 1953 and the agricultural magazine department within it, I was the editor-in-chief because they had no one else to appoint. And 6 months later they created the deputy editor-in-chief job for me. The head of the computing center was not a Party member either: a certain Mr. Constantinescu, economist, but not specialized in agriculture issues, as neither was the Party organization secretary. So, nobody had any interest in telling me out that I was not a Party member. Neither he nor the director.

In 1962, when collectivization was over [8](#), 3,000 agronomists, mostly from Bucharest, were deployed to the collective farms. All the directors of the institutions where you could find them, even outside the Ministry of Agriculture, had to make up a list of engineers they could spare and send them over to the Ministry of Agriculture for deployment. My director told me: 'Don't worry! Carry on; you shall not be on the list'. The then Minister was Ion Cosma. The minister of agriculture was also the chairman of the editorial board for one of the magazines. Many columns had to be written and signed by ministers. But naturally, they did not have the time for these things. I wrote a lot of stuff. When they came with the lists during a big meeting and the State Agricultural Publishing House's turn came, where the agricultural magazine department was, my name didn't show up on the list. Some colleagues of mine that knew me asked: 'But what about engineer Tucarmen? Why isn't he deployed?' And the head of the publishing house told me that Minister Cosma said: 'Tucarmen shall not leave! I cannot find someone overnight to appoint as deputy editor in chief of the Ministry's magazines!' And that was that. Cosma was replaced and Mihai Dalea was appointed in his stead. Lists were made: 'Why isn't Tucarmen going?' And one week later I would be sent to Suceava where I spent half a year. And another minister brought me back. Half a year later again they asked why I was brought back and I stayed for 4 years and a half. Origin had nothing to do with all this. That is a categorical no! It was envy.

In 1962-1967, when I was working as chief engineer at Costana, though I was a Jew and representative of the state as chief engineer at the state-owned agricultural farm, the C.A.P. [Agricultural Production Cooperation], all these five years I never heard anyone saying the word 'kike' or winking each other in the tavern or displaying any kind of anti-Semitic attitude. This has impressed me a lot.

I married quite late, in 1965. I had a lot of friends, most of them married and I realized that it involves a lot of hypocrisy when you do not want to break a relationship for various reasons: that you have a child or two children or whatever. A lot of lies and other unpleasant things can be there between two partners, things that I didn't like. I saw a lot of things that weighed more than the beautiful ones and then I realized that marriage is a very serious institution for those who want to take it seriously. Who doesn't – well, it's his business. My father was very concerned with the fact that his only son wouldn't marry. And he would go to the synagogue and asked among his friends: 'Don't you know a girl that could be suitable?' 'Here!' Since 1953, Clarisa had been sent to Bucharest and took another 12 years until we met. In the meantime, both my father and friends were busy looking for a suitable girl for me. How many persons do you think I met over these 10 years? 124. And she is the 125th.

The moment we saw each other she liked me very much or so she says and I would like to believe this is the truth. I liked her too, but I couldn't make up my mind. I let almost a year pass by. I was working at Costana and I had the right to come back once every 30 days for 5 days. When I came back, we would see each other. I recall it was a Thursday and one of her colleagues and very close friends of mine calls me and says: 'Hey, Iancu! Have you seen Clarisa?' 'Not yet.' 'Why don't you go and see her? I believe that you should go and see her'. 'Alright'. I called her and I told her that I would come by at around 6pm. She made some sandwiches, put out a glass of wine. She had a very large room: 2/2 meters back then. And after we chitchatted for a while, we talked and before I left I stood up. She also stood up to see me to the door and I told her very simply: 'Clarisa, would you like to share the rest of your life with me?' She embraced me: 'Why are you even asking?' it was a quarter to 11 in the evening. We went downstairs and I called my father: 'Father, it is a quarter to 11 in the evening, but I'll come by to share happy news! I won't tell you what news yet...' We took a cab and left. 'Father, I've just proposed to Clarisa and we are engaged. This is your future daughter-in-law. Whether you like her or not doesn't matter!' He embraced her, kissed her and ever since, God be praised, we are together.

In a later talk we had I realized that she cared more about me and I told her frankly: 'Look, we are engaged, we are going to be married, but I'll tell you something that won't probably suit you very well. I prefer starting from zero and go as far as 100 to starting from 100 and going to zero'. And, indeed, thank God, she cannot bore me for one second. Do you know how important this is?

We had little time to spare after we married. Apart from the work as such for which I was employed, what bothered me greatly were the meetings. I'm not referring to party meetings because this was my luck: I needn't attend party meeting too, but there were trade union meetings, all kinds of meetings. Whenever we were on holiday we would go together. I had bought a car. It is still in front of my block. We still have it. I haven't replaced it. It has a French engine, thank God! Because we had a car, we would go to Iasi to see my sisters. So, for two or three days we would be in Iasi on a regular basis. And during holidays we used to take the car and tour Romania. We went via Ardeal and came back via Iasi. Many times I would invite my wife's sister too.

The Ministry of Agriculture had a small symphonic orchestra, a chamber orchestra so to say of about 30 people. Apart from the employees who could play an instrument, others that played the bass, the clarinet and the flute could get a job in the orchestra. Others played the violin, the cello, piano, accordion and so on. They could get employed as doormen but you should know that they

didn't work as one. We had 2-hour orchestra rehearsals every week. And we had our shows! The Ministry of Agriculture had a theatre team that was very good. We were even awarded the trade union prize. We had a traditional folk dance group and the orchestra and we staged shows. Even the television recorded one of our shows back then.

My youngest sister applied for emigration in 1958 and left in 1960. Because she was a housewife she had no problems to face. On the other hand, some friends of ours that had applied in 1958 were demoted and their salary got as low as a janitor's. On 30th December 1970 we saw them to the airport. 12 years since they had applied for emigration! It was very hard. You couldn't take more than 70 kilos of luggage and part of the furniture could be taken away. My brother-in-law that had left Iasi had a 2-room apartment with a kitchen and a bathroom that cost him about 80,000 lei. He gave it to the state and received 46,000 lei. I remember it as if it were yesterday the day I went with them at the CEC... [Savings and Loan Bank]

My sisters left for Israel, one in 1960, the second in 1965 and the third in 1982. In 1972 they came to Romania to see our father. And indeed they managed to come while he was still alive, because in 1974 my poor father died. My father had lived with us. He didn't feel quite well exactly by the time we had applied for emigration. In autumn I sent him over to my sister in Iasi and so it happened that he died there. He died the same day as my mother: 29th April. During the last month of his life, every Saturday afternoon I used to go to Iasi by an evening train and Sunday evening I would come back because I had to go to work. I would spend with him these 24 hours. And I remember once I got up to leave and he said: 'Iancu, stay a little longer! You know I have prayed for all these years. If God really loves me, let Him take me sooner and get me to your mother!' On Sunday evening I said goodbye to him and on Monday morning at 11 o'clock I got a phone call saying that my father had died.

One day we were suddenly visited by two citizens, both well dressed as if right out of the box. They introduced themselves: major X and colonel Y. My wife was with me. They asked her to go to the other room and they talked to me. 'You are going to leave for Israel. Be careful what you say about the Romanian state'. I told them: 'I would never denigrate the country I live in. I'm going to see my sisters there'. And these two citizens told me: 'We would like to ask you if you go there to try and find some things that might be of interest to us. When you go there and meet people, have a chat or two...' In other others, elicit information from one or the other... And I told him the same thing. 'I want to be honest with you. I cannot do what you are asking me to do as I would not say a bad thing about Romania when I go there, it is not my nature'. I was weighing in my mind: 'My God, will I see my relatives?' I didn't do what they asked me to, but when I think today about that I cannot fathom the situation each person found himself/herself in.

I thought about emigrating but I thought the consequences through. I am very sensitive to heat and I realized we could not get accustomed to the climate there. Secondly; the language is quite difficult. Thirdly: since I was born and grew up here, the age when I could have left, was, let's say 55 in my case. This is not an age to start a new life. Fatherland is not just the country where you were born. Fatherland is the language as well and I do care very much for both of them. So I have gone on visits 6 times so far. The first time I was allowed to leave was in 1977.

Israel is a jewel and I'm not saying it because I'm a Jew... The agronomist in me was deeply impressed because I saw a lot of green in a country that was built in the desert. You couldn't find a

house without a garden, without flowers or trees. You look and wonder. Everyone has a drip irrigation system because water is very expensive there. I analyzed more this beautiful part that I saw in 1977 and 1980. I visited a city called Arad [Modern city located in southern Israel, founded in 1962.] You can see the Dead Sea from there. An astonishing view. It had 15,000 people living there, mostly intellectuals. A city built from scratch, on the sand. Today it counts about 30-40,000 inhabitants. I saw Karmiel when it had only a few thousand people and years later when it had several tens of thousands. [Karmiel, a city located in northern Israel, founded in 1964 in Galilee.] So, it's possible!

When people start blaming all the bad things that this regime had one by one by 1989 I would like them all to remember the good things as well. That is that houses were built, the people had a place to live. We should also remember those who built all these things because it was the work of my peers and we did not live our lives by doing nothing. On the contrary, we did not have Saturdays or Sundays. Of course, sometimes we were indeed working, other times we were attending meetings. During communism those who were really exploited were the peasants. They said that: 'we are fighting against the exploitation of man by man'. No other man was more exploited than the Romanian peasant. In a collective farm the norm was 7 lei per working day according to the plan. And what did this mean? That they wouldn't get even 200 lei a month! Less than a janitor! Why wouldn't they then work 8-9 hours in the open field? They were really exploited. The SMTs [Machine and Tractor Units] would skin them alive. Weeding, plowing, threshing and so on was done by tractors. We have suffered a lot because we were deprived of food between 1980 and 1989 [due to exporting goods to pay the foreign debt]. After 1989 [9](#), one of the first measures taken was to disband the collective farms. Today I consider it the greatest mistake ever. They were already there, ready to use! You should have found the formula of a new regime that would leave them untouched from an organizational point of view and let them yield millions of tons of agricultural products. What are we going to do now about production? These units have been disbanded, while Federal Germany is busy creating agricultural units of 1,000 – 1,200ha. We already had them: ranging from the smallest of 600ha to the largest of 3,000 – 4,000ha. And not to mention the state-owned farms! Why have we neglected them? We did them away. This is what I cannot understand.

In general they would not talk about the Holocaust during communism. They talked about it at annual commemorations organized by former Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen [10](#) within the community. But never publicly! People say that Rabbi Moses Rosen was once asked by a good friend of his that was not Jewish: 'Why do you need to hold this commemoration every year for the Iasi pogrom, for the Holocaust of the 6 million Jews? Why every year?' And he answered: 'Look, I'll answer this. First of all, we have this custom to annually commemorate the dead, those who have died just because they were Jews. Secondly, we want to keep the attention of the world alive so that nothing like this could happen anywhere. And thirdly, mind my words, if a Holocaust happens, then it will not concern the Jews alone any longer'.

I am a member of the Romanian Jewish Holocaust Survivors' Association and I have been the chairman of this association for a while. Because I am a survivor, I went to schools to tell about what happened to us. The students asked really interesting questions and proved to be interested to learn and surprised that something like this could happen. Some of them are shocked and wonder how come that something like this could happen. I wonder how come that I am still alive.

Religion-wise, we keep the traditions. I, for instance, appreciate a whole series of commands that should be followed. According to the principles of today, at least my principles of today, most commands concern hygiene, education and so on. They do not have a quasi-religious explanation alone. I go to the synagogue especially on autumn holidays. This is for me a tradition and a vow that I made to my father who used to go to the synagogue almost every day. I go on the eve of Yom Kippur, in the evening, which is the fasting time. So, on this evening and the second evening I attend the final prayer of Yom Kippur. And I mostly like to hear the shofar on that evening.

I get reparations because I spent 5 months at the labor camp in Podul Iloaiei which was under Romanian and German military supervision. I get a lifetime pension from Claims Conference. This one I started getting much later than others because their provisions are German provisions, very strict, and they provided for a minimum of 6 months. I had but 5. And it took years before they changed to a minimum of 5 months. It was then that I entered the category of those who get this lifetime pensions which comes four times a year, every three months. I must say that this has significantly improved our life because I couldn't have led a decent life only on the pension that I get for a 35-year work. I am a great admirer of cultural life, of anything that has to do with music, literature, trips, things that I could easily do before 1989. I would like to point out one detail here: I used to have a 4,000 lei pension and the expenditures were just like today. No matter what hotel I would choose I would pay 70 lei for a two-bed room at the most. Nowadays I need my whole pension to pay for 5 days at a hotel in Sinaia. I consider myself to be privileged compared to other retired people who get 300 or 400 ron. Our purchase power is 25% of the one we had before 1989.

I spend my spare time reading, going to concerts. I have all the books by Philip Roth, the great American writer. Truman Capote's books again, because he is a writer that I love. And many more. I have been having a subscription at Sala Radio and there are so many concerts that you cannot attend them all. That is every Wednesday the chamber orchestra has a very good program; on Friday evenings the national orchestra and once in a fortnight again chamber music. A recital or the voice quartet from Iasi which is one of the best in the world.

I don't have a subscription to any newspaper. I have a neighbor that brings me Romania libera [daily] once in a few days and Libertatea [tabloid] every Sunday, Evenimentul Zilei [daily], Jurnalul National [daily] once in a few days. I give him books, you know, like between friends. But I do buy Universul Radio, the weekly radio program, I buy TvMania [TV program] for the TV. I watch mostly Mezzo [classical music channel] that I never miss, depending on the program. I buy Lumea Magazin [monthly magazine of global politics and foreign affairs]. There you have all kinds of analyses - political, economic, social, and so on. I love this magazine very much. May articles about Israel, about the Jews are presented with much objectivity, sometimes with a somehow ambiguous note, but anyway.

As you can very well see on TV as well, one of the greatest Romanians in history [Great Romanians, TV show on national television about national heroes] is Antonescu [11](#). And during the talks, Mr. [Adrian] Cioroianu [Romanian historian and politician from the new generation] had a fair and unbiased approach, but I am sorry that he didn't insist more. While showing the suffering of the Jews during Antonescu's regime, he did not highlight more the suffering of the Romanian people who had 600-700,000 dead, not to mention the wounded. He should have highlighted why Antonescu was deemed a war criminal, not just because the Jewish people had to suffer. 270,000 Jews were killed just because they were Jewish, but the entire Romanian people had to suffer

because of this leadership.

I spoke about the pogrom in Iasi because I wanted people to know that something like this could happen and that we, first of all as Jews, would want that something like this would never happen again. I welcomed the 'Elie Wiesel' committee on the study of the Holocaust that gave the President a document [Final Report, International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania; chairman: Elie Wiesel; authors: Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihail E. Ionescu; Iasi, Polirom Publishing House, 2005, 423 p.]. These are efforts that prove one thing: looking at what happened during the War, all the measures that were taken against the Jews came from the state leadership. Today, all the measures that protect the Jews come from the state as well. So, quite the opposite, institutions are established, commissions are created, laws are adopted, laws that provide what the justice system should do in situations that fall within its scope.

As for my political conviction it is, so to say... I don't know if I would assign a determiner: it is socialist. But I believe that there should be balance between each man's contribution to the prosperity of the nation within which he/she lives and each man's living standard. I would have never anticipated what is happening today. I don't agree to what is happening today when you watch the TV and see that 17 out of 56 customs officers were arrested. It's not fair! But on the other hand to accept bribes so that the state is deprived of a series of income that should go to the state budget and that affects all of us - this is unforgivable. And I am sorry. As you can see today, upon joining the European Union, one of the benchmarks that is still under monitoring is and will be the justice system.

After 1989, I have hoped more and I have the same unrelenting hope today. Considering my age, I would like to see some of this hope coming true. There is a crucial principle that says 'Fight for the good of the country you live in, because your good depends on your country's!' This has always been one of the basic principles of my life.

Glossary:

1 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.

2 Goga-Cuza government

Anti-Jewish and chauvinist government established in 1937, led by Octavian Goga, poet and Romanian nationalist, and Alexandru C. Cuza, professor of the University of Iasi, and well known for its radical anti-Semitic view. Goga and Cuza were the leaders of the National Christian Party, an extremist right-wing organization founded in 1935. After the elections of 1937 the Romanian king, Carol II, appointed the National Christian Party to form a minority government. The Goga-Cuza government had radically limited the rights of the Jewish population during their short rule; they barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. In February 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the

Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system.

3 Pogrom in Iasi and the Death Train

during the pogrom in Iasi (29th-30th June 1941) an estimated 4,000-8,000 people were killed on the grounds that Jews kept hidden weapons and had fired at Romanian and German soldiers. Thousands of people were boarded into two freight trains 100-150 people were crowded in each one of the sealed carriages. For several days, they were transported towards Podul Iloaiei and Calarasi and 65% of them died from asphyxiation and dehydration.

4 Yellow star in Romania

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

5 Strohmenn system

sometimes called the Aladar system; Jewish business owners were forced to take on Christian partners in their companies, giving them a stake in the business. Sometimes Christians would take on this role out of friendship and not for profits. This system came into being because of the anti-Jewish laws, which strongly restricted the economic options of Jewish entrepreneurs. In accordance with this law, a number of Jewish business licenses were revoked and no new licenses were issued. The Strohmenn system insured a degree of survival for some Jewish businesses for varying lengths of time.

6 Voitec-law

named after communist minister of education Stefan Voitec, and adopted in 1946. According to this law all those (regardless of their nationality) who had to interrupt their studies during World War II could take exams and apply for high-school or university following an accelerated procedure.

7 Legionary

Member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions. The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland) that

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

8 Collectivization in Romania: The Romanian collectivization, in other words the nationalization of private real estates was carried out in the first years of Romanian communism. The industry, medical institutions, the entertainment industry and banks were nationalized in 1948. A year later, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the general-secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, announced the socialistic transformation of agriculture. The collectivization process came to an end in 1962: by then more than 90% of the agricultural territories had been turned into public ownership and became cooperatives (Cooperativa Agricola de Productie). One of the concomitant phenomena of this process was the exclusion from public life of peasants, known as kulaks, who owned 10-50 hectares of land.

9 Romanian Revolution of 1989

In December 1989, a revolt in Romania deposed the communist dictator Ceausescu. Anti-government violence started in Timisoara and spread to other cities. When army units joined the uprising, Ceausescu fled, but he was captured and executed on 25th December along with his wife. A provisional government was established, with Ion Iliescu, a former Communist Party official, as president. In the elections of May 1990 Iliescu won the presidency and his party, the Democratic National Salvation Front, obtained an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

10 Rosen, Moses (1912-1994)

Chief Rabbi of Romania and president of the Association of Jewish Religious Communities during communism. A controversial figure of the postwar Romanian Jewish public life. On the one hand he was criticized because of his connections with several leaders of the Romanian communist regime, on the other hand even his critics recognized his great efforts in the interest of Romanian Jews. He was elected chief rabbi of Romania in 1948 and fulfilled this function till his death in 1994. During this period he organized the religious and cultural education of Jewish youth and facilitated the emigration to Israel by using his influence. His efforts made possible the launch of the only Romanian Jewish newspaper, Revista Cultului Mozaic (Realitatea Evreiască after 1995) in 1956. As the leader of Romanian Israelites he was a permanent member of the Romanian Parliament from 1957-1989. He was member of the Executive Board of the Jewish World Congress. His works on Judaist issues were published in Romanian, Hebrew and English.

11 Antonescu, Ion (1882-1946)

Political and military leader of the Romanian state, president of the Ministers' Council from 1940 to 1944. In 1940 he formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders. From 1941 he introduced a dictatorial regime that continued to pursue the depreciation of the Romanian political system started by King Carol II. His strong anti-Semitic beliefs led to the persecution, deportation and killing of many Jews in Romania. He was arrested on 23rd August 1944 and sent into prison in the USSR until he was put on trial in the election year of 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and shot in the same year.