

A TALE OF SURVIVAL

(or IF STALIN COULD HAVE SWALLOWED HITLER AND CHOKED ON IT)

by Gerhard Bobby Schreiber

To my wife Rodica, for her support and encouragement and to my friend Hardy for giving me the idea to try it

FOREWORD

I did a Shoah video (Oral History of Holocaust survivors) in 1995 in Paris and later when I told some of my friends about it, they suggested to write it all down. Their reasoning was, - you have so many stories, let there be a record-. OK, I asked, who would want to read another narrative about a subject that has been so much dealt with by people with literary talent. There are surely no new facts or a great story to justify it. I also had a feeling of embarrassment, since true enough we, my family and I went through a lot, yet we all returned safely with no major physical disabilities, I kind of felt guilty to write about suffering, so many have endured living hell, lost most of their families, were permanently disabled, but ... here it is.

Anyway, this is just one individual's story, trying to recall before the onset of senility, times and events that now seem almost unreal. And as many say, who will remember two-three generations from now ? It behooves us, those lucky enough to have survived, to tell our story if only to make sure, that those who didn't, are not forgotten. Yes, and I promise, as many young Israelis suggest, if this should ever happen again, I'll have a gun ready and make sure I take some of my would be tormentors with me.

The title, what's the title got to do with my story, well in a way it sort of says it all. This is a story about Jews, Nazis, Communists and the events that affected a part of Eastern European Jewry during the late thirties.

CHAPTER 1 - Prewar Czernowitz

I was born in Czernowitz as it is generally known here in the United States, which at the time of my birth in 1928, was known as Cernăuți (the Romanian spelling) and today is Czernivtsy in Ukraine. The city, located on the southern bank of the Prut river, was typical and in many ways similar to other cities of the now long gone Austro-Hungarian Empire. I hope I have my figures right (within reasonable accuracy); out of a total population of about 110,000, there were close to 60,000 Jews. The remaining 50,000, comprised Romanians, Germans, Ukrainians (Ruthenes), Poles and another Slavic group, akin to Ukrainians called Hutzuls, as well as some Russians. Industry and commerce were almost exclusively owned by Jews and that implied also that there was a significant latent envy among the other nationalities concerning the "rich" Jews. The actual fact was that, while there were certainly many affluent Jews in the city, the majority were what one would call today middle (not upper middle) class with quite a large segment that lived in various degrees of poverty. There was a very active Jewish cultural life in the city. It was somehow split between the more assimilated Jews who were predominantly German-speaking and attached to German culture in their affinities, and a strong Yiddish-speaking segment, which was especially prevalent in the large Jewish community that migrated from neighboring Bessarabia. Bessarabia, as it was known before the war, is today (at least some 70% of its former area), part of the independent Republic of Moldova.

I grew up at the crossroads of these two currents, my father came from Bessarabia (which until the end of World War I belonged to Russia), while my mother was very proud of her Austrian birth. The fact that we were now living in Romania, was felt only when dealing with the various authorities, or obviously, in school. Otherwise the lingua franca among most Jews, was German. Here too, the more educated, spoke a Viennese-accented German, while the vast majority spiced their German with many Yiddish phrases and expressions. Among the Jews, all kind of political currents and ideologies vied for the minds (and pocketbooks) of the people. Zionists (all shades), socialists, communists and also some of the "other", i.e. various philosophical and non traditional currents. Very few Jews belonged to the traditional Romanian political parties of the center-right (National-Peasant or National-Liberal), as for the rightist parties, they were openly antisemitic and advocated if not their physical annihilation, the expulsion of all Jews to Palestine.

I would like to emphasize here that, especially in Eastern Europe, the Jews were not just another religion, but were considered a distinct people with their specific traits (especially physical appearance) such as speech, culinary etc. Later under the communists, when religion was ignored, for the purpose of identity papers, Jews became a nationality. Of course with the advent of nazism, the term of race appeared, followed by the graphic exaggeration of "Jewish" features such as hooked noses, in the antisemitic press. The only national party where Jews were the majority, was the Romanian Communist party. It was generally known, that right after the war, when the Soviets installed the first so-called democratic regime in Romania, there were less than 2,000 ethnic Romanians who could claim to have been members of the Communist party before the war (this in a country with 18 million inhabitants). I got sidetracked, life in Czernowitz was rather what I tried to describe.

My parents were not rich, not even well to do. That did not prevent me from having a nursemaid till age ten. The last two years of primary school, I was so embarrassed that she followed me everywhere that I made her walk about six feet behind me for fear of being ridiculed by my classmates. She blackmailed my parents who tried to dismiss her, by threatening to commit suicide.(she was pushing 60 at the time). However, once I passed my entrance exam into junior high, she reluctantly agreed to leave. She was a simple German peasant woman, uneducated, yet she adored me unconditionally. I always envied some of my friends who had younger maids because when we went to the Public Garden, the younger ones had an array of suitors (usually members of the local garrison) who were objects of my admiration because they had beautiful uniforms. My Maria was always lonesome, so that I didn't always enjoy being with her.

The Jews in Czernowitz lived with a sort of insular mentality, somewhat oblivious of the affairs of state in Romania. Although guaranteed equal rights by the Versailles Peace Treaty that created Greater Romania, openly antisemitic measures became more frequent in the mid-thirties. A "numerus clausus" in universities did exist, even if it was not official. In Czernowitz, Jews who could afford it, wanted their offspring to study in a German language university, so most went to Vienna or Prague. Those that did enter the local university, had to put up with the usual taunts and occasional beatings, but this was considered "normal". The events in Germany, while widely commented and deplored, did not prevent most Jewish businesses to continue dealing with German firms. I remember when our relatives from Philadelphia, visited with us in the summer of 1934, they were shocked by two things. First they were stunned when served ham, (except for my maternal grandparents, nobody in our family worried about dietary laws), and the second shock came when somebody told me to fetch some aspirin from the pharmacy. The owner who was Jewish carried only Bayer (the German brand). My

American uncle couldn't understand that Jews continued to buy German products and, (like their fellow Jews in Germany), regarded the Nazis as a temporary aberration of a "cultured" people, a view which he considered totally wrong. Yet, this was Czernowitz, a different mentality.

During that visit, I heard for the first time, about the miserable conditions in which people lived in the Soviet Union. A lady, a certain Mrs. Ostrow, who came with our relatives from Philadelphia, took a side trip to the Soviet Union, I think it was Kiev, to visit a brother. She told us, upon her return, of the dire poverty the people were living in, and of course about the fear that followed them everywhere. Little did we know at the time, that six years later we would become part of that world.

The multinational character of the city was mirrored in its sports clubs. There was the Romanian club "Dragos Voda", named after the prince who founded the principality of Moldavia, later to be part of Romania. The German club was named after the father of German gymnastics "Jahn", the Ukrainian club "Dovbush" (I forgot who he was), the Polish club "Wawel" after the legendary castle in Krakow. The Jews being more numerous had two principal clubs. The middle class were almost all, members of the "Makkabi" club, while the working class had their own club "Jask" (German initials for Jewish Workers Sports Club). Later, whether it was because they used to parade with red flags, and the authorities forbade it, or some other reasons, they became more Zionist oriented, and the club was renamed after an early Zionist socialist, B. Borochow. Jewish university graduates had their fraternities modelled after the German (Austrian) ones, with all the paraphernalia, including caps, sashes, singing and drinking, but no duelling.

Of course there was antisemitism in sports, sometimes very ugly. One of my uncles, (he later became a dentist), who was a talented middle distance runner, while doing his military service, entered a race. When he was leading (although he ran for his military unit), some local youths threw a brick at his legs. He had to stop and abandon the race. One of his brothers, who was in the stands and was supposed to enter military service the following year, decided then and there that he will not remain in Romania. He subsequently went to South America and settled in Peru. On the other hand, about 10 years later, a third brother who was even more talented, ran in the national championships in Bucharest and was awarded his bronze medal by the King in person, in spite of the fact that he was running for Makkabi. There is a hilarious footnote to that. Because his name sounded very German (Franz Klein), the first edition of a Nazi newspaper in Berlin wrote with nationalistic pride about the success of a "German" runner in the Romanian Track and Field championships.

There was antisemitism, there were incidents, but in general, life for most Jews was tolerable, for many, even very good. A first blow came in the mid-thirties, when the Romanian Government decided that most Jews in Bukowina, (the province of which Czernowitz was the capital of), had to apply for Romanian citizenship. The reasoning being that, having previously been Austrian citizens, and because of their obvious cultural preference for the German language, they should prove their loyalty or show cause why they should be granted citizenship.

It is useless to emphasize that, the Romanian Government after being awarded the territories that were formerly part of the now defunct Austro-Hungarian empire and Russia, was bound by the Peace Treaty to grant citizenship to all inhabitants of those territories including the Jews.

As a matter of fact there was a historic precedent to this attitude. After the Berlin peace conference at the end of the Russian-Turkish war, which created the newly independent Kingdom of Romania in 1878, the Jewish population was supposed to be granted Romanian nationality. Then too, the authorities found all kinds of reasons, to delay and in most instances to flatly refuse to grant Jews, Romanian citizenship. I didn't know it at the time, but the whole thing turned out to be just a nuisance. Jews were anyway not accepted to become officers in the Army (except for a few medical doctors), there were no Jewish judges, except for a few converts, and there were practically no Jews in the public service. Jews (although this was easily circumvented), were not supposed to own forests or large estates, and were barred from certain banks and private clubs. The whole citizenship affair turned into farce, since by bribing the judiciary, most Jews got their citizenship. Those too poor to pay and those who, for some reason or other, did not become citizens, continued their lives, as before. At least I don't recall anybody being deprived of their livelihood because they didn't become citizens.

The Jews in Czernowitz had two "serious" morning newspapers, one afternoon paper and a couple of tabloids. All were locally printed in the German language. In addition there was a paper printed in Yiddish and of course all the national newspapers from Bucharest. Out of those, a few were owned by Jewish interests, written in an impartial, democratic and what could be called pro-Western bent. However the two most important newspapers in Romania, ("Curentul" and "Universul"), were, while not outrightly fascist or nazist, quite outspokenly antisemitic. Apart from these "serious" papers there were a few stridently antisemitic papers ("Porunca Vremii", "Sfarma-Piatra", "Buna Vestire") where Jews were called kikes and where they were depicted graphically in a manner similar to the Nazi sheet "Der Stuermer". These papers and their sponsors, did their best to guide the general population's latent antisemitism into a more brutal (and deadly) form at the

outbreak of the war against the Soviet Union.

Romania, was in this respect different from its older sister France. A great many of its intellectuals, philosophers, writers, actors and musicians were attracted by the ideology of the extreme right. Students, especially those studying theology, law and liberal arts, were quite openly sympathetic to the "Iron Guard", which was a nationalist movement predicated on a nativist, religious philosophy, and whose natural enemy was, who else, the worldwide Jewish plutocracy allied with godless bolshevism.

.. As I said earlier, the fact that most Jews in Czernowitz spoke only German among themselves did not endear them to the Romanian authorities. In 1938, or thereabouts, while consolidating his personal dictatorship, the King reorganized the administrative structure of the country, by dividing it into ten lands, each headed by a Royal Governor.

Our governor, (who would later, during the war, become the governor of Transnistria, the infamous destination where the Jews were deported to), in one of his first actions as governor, issued a ruling making Romanian the only language permitted in public. This obviously meant all offices, businesses, shops, factories etc. Violators, were to be fined. Signs, saying "Romanian only shall be spoken" went up everywhere. As with the citizenship law of a few years earlier, after a few months, it was mostly forgotten. Fines were normally avoided by bribing the policeman who was supposed to write the summons. It was a minor nuisance, yet basically harmless. My father had many ethnic Romanian friends, and when they got together, they would normally converse in either Romanian or German, switching almost unconsciously between the two.

When in public places, most of the people I knew, and this includes my school classmates, spoke only German among themselves. The only exception I remember, was one of my classmates, the son of a poor street peddler, who was an excellent soccer player, he spoke only Yiddish. The poor fellow (I think he died in the camps) had also the rare surname of Hitler, which made him the butt of many jokes. In 1941, when Romania joined Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, the authorities forced them, before they were deported, to change their name to Hutler.

As I said earlier, there was a very active multilingual cultural life in our city. Along with an imposing "Deutsches Haus" where German cultural life was centered, there was also a "Dom Polski" and several Jewish cultural centers.

Since the Romanian population was in the minority, the authorities tried to insure a certain "Romanian Content" in various artistic performances. The local Romanian National Theater was of a very high artistic caliber, since some of the country's best actors were enticed by the authorities to spend some time there. There were many semi-professional or amateur theater groups, (financed by Jewish money) that contributed to the cultural scene. I remember a sort of variety show "Herz Gib Acht" (Heart Be Careful) in German, produced by a couple, who were among my parents' friends. The husband, (a pediatrician, who after the war became a successful psychiatrist in New York), wrote the music, while his wife wrote the text and staged the show. When they continued with a sequel (I think it was called "Doremi"), it was in 1938 or 1939, they had to introduce a few numbers in Romanian, with some patriotic songs.

I am mentioning these facts only to try to explain, that it was still easy to circumvent the "Romanian only" ordinance. And, if everything else went wrong, one could always bribe one's way out. There was a very good Yiddish theater in town, with excellent actors. Unfortunately, due to the snobbish attitude of some of the German-speaking Jewish middle class, it was not considered "cultured" enough because it was not in German.

It was now the turn of the Jews originating from Bessarabia, who spoke badly accented German, to laugh at the sometimes pathetic efforts of the highbrows to speak Romanian in public places.

Our family was astride the two groups. Due to my paternal grandfather (who was a personal friend of the famous Yiddish fabulist, Eliezer Steinberg), and his circle of friends, I had from an early age been exposed to bits of Yiddish literature. At the same time, I was also reading German classics and different adventure stories in both German and Romanian.

Education was a big thing in my childhood. I was enrolled in a private grammar (primary) school, (like most Jewish middle class kids my age), where in addition to Romanian, we also had German, French and Hebrew. Our curriculum was pretty advanced, I finished primary school with top marks. When I took my junior high school entrance exam, I had a sort of rude awakening. In lieu of my usual 10's, I managed only 8.33. It was still above the minimum passing grade of 6, but both my family and I, were really shocked. I remember I was so miserable the day the results were posted, that my father asked a friend of his who owned an automobile, to take me for a ride in order to cheer me up. I mention these seemingly innocuous events, since they might explain my family's later actions regarding my education.

Having entered junior high, (I had a choice among several public high schools and selected one where

most of my former classmates were) and finally rid of my nursemaid, I became a typical teenager (for that place and time). While grammar school was coed, high school was separate for boys or girls. I had no big problems in school, was only occasionally punished (corporal punishment was mild, just a few hits with a ruler over one's outstretched hands), however the perfect marks I had in grammar school were a distant past.

I remember in my second year of junior high, when I got a failing grade in mathematics for the second trimester, as a minor catastrophe. My father looked at the report card, gave me a mild spanking (I had measles and had missed three weeks of school) and then he told me that I can fail in any other subject, but not mathematics. He engaged a private tutor and the next trimester I got a reasonable grade.

The story of this private tutor is worth telling, to illustrate the not so subtle antisemitism prevailing in Romania at the time. He was redhaired, with freckles, for the average Eastern European, having typical Jewish features. Although he was a top student, he failed the baccalaureate exam several times, because of the way he looked, they (the examining professors) just hated his looks. It was only after my father found somebody to bribe, that he was able to pass. His mother was my late grandmother's friend, and his father was barely eking out a living, that's why my father considered it his duty to intervene. Many years later, after graduating with honors in math, he became a high school teacher in Israel.

Our math teacher in high school, was an ethnic German, one of the few people in our town to own a car, he also was an excellent teacher, he was happy about my progress and I liked him a lot. He was very helpful, and I soon forgot the whole incident.

We youngsters were otherwise not discriminated in high school, as Jews, except in non-scholastic matters. The King had founded a nationwide youth organization, "Straja Tàrii", ("The Country's Guard", roughly translated), and every high school student was automatically a member. We wore uniforms, and were organized in paramilitary fashion. Every class, was a "century" (based on the name of a Roman military unit) divided into " nests " of six and " little nests " of three (cuib, cuibusor). In our class of about forty plus, there were only six Romanians, three Poles, one Ukrainian, one German, the rest Jews. The century chief had to be an ethnic Romanian, the nest chiefs Christian, only the little nest chiefs could be Jewish. Once, while we were all standing at attention in the school yard for some flag raising ceremony, during the singing of the national anthem, with our right hands raised in a Roman salute (almost like the Nazi variety), I normally sang along with much gusto. A Romanian classmate told me not to exert myself too much, since it wasn't my anthem, - you're Jewish -. I very much wanted to be Romanian, and here I got a cold shower that dampened my patriotic zeal. We tried to soften our century chief, by showering him with anonymous gifts at the annual Christmas celebration, when most students put their little packages under the tree. He usually smiled knowingly and we all (I mean us Jews) were content. I think, I made it to little nest chief, and I was quite proud about it.

Ours, was a typical Jewish middle class family. We lived somewhat above our means, in a very open society, where everybody's life was scrutinized (and discussed) by everybody else, and I had to pretend that things were much better than they really were. My maternal grandparents owned a kosher restaurant the " Splendid " that barely held its own. My paternal grandfather, who with my father at his side, had been doing pretty well in the late twenties, when he owned quite a few businesses, lost almost everything during the big crisis in 1929. I never learned the extent of his holdings, all I remember that he held on to a flower mill, and to some space (an apartment and a slew of rooms) in a hotel, where I was born and where we lived. My father worked as a part time trader on the grain exchange, located just next to our hotel, but there was never any money to move into a decent apartment. Their lifestyle, which today seems totally unreal, was in many ways unique. We lived in a hotel, we ate in a restaurant (it was first located in the hotel basement, and later moved across the street), we had a maid (and of course my nursemaid, who also had her room in the hotel), and yet my father was so strapped for cash that we couldn't afford to go away for vacations. I remember when most of my school buddies were going to the sea shore for a fortnight and then to the mountains for a month, all I had were a couple of days in a summer camp owned by some friends of my parents.

Of course many of my parents' friends were better off, but they also had quite a few that were barely making a living, and who my father helped, sometimes openly, sometimes without my mother's knowledge. What further surprised our American relatives, was the apparently opulent lifestyle, in spite of my family's rather modest income. For example my father who didn't really have an actual job, nevertheless led a life that on the looks of it, was one of constant leisure. He lived in a hotel, was served breakfast by a maid, and left around nine. Every day, around 11.30 he would meet with friends or business associates for a second breakfast. There were special restaurants (similar to New York delis) which catered to this all male crowd. Food consisted of delicious morsels of different appetizers and the drinks were usually a few shots of rye or plum brandy, in the summer cold beer on tap. One of these places " Lucullus " was rather famous all over Romania. Lunch followed at about two o'clock at my grandfather's restaurant.

We sat at the same table with a few of the regulars, I was from an early age exposed to their

conversation. I thus was aware of the local gossip, involving various people I knew. Sexual mores were quite loose, I heard of the different extramarital affairs that existed in my parents' circle and also among relatives. Abortions, which were quite common, was one subject I had to infer only. After lunch, my parents' routine was always the same. My mother would go home across the street for a two hour nap, while my father would go to a cafe "Leopoldstadt", for his card game. He played a game called Tarok (with Tarot cards) for about 2 hours. He would then be "in town" till 8, when we gathered for dinner at the restaurant. After dinner, I would be sent off to bed with my nursemaid, while my parents together with my aunt and uncle would go out. Most times, this would be to the "Russian Club" (a private club catering to Russian speaking Jews coming from Bessarabia), where they were often joined by my paternal grandfather. My mother played rummy, my father and my aunt poker. My uncle, the only one with a university degree, played bridge. He had finished law school at the local university, yet never entered the bar, he worked as an accountant in my grandfather's mill. He was the only one who also belonged to another club, (I think it had some English name) where he hobnobbed with the local highbrows.

My parents also went quite often to nightclubs, and I saw them at night only when I was sick and my mother decided to stay at my bedside. For our American relatives this type of life bordered on the fantastic. This was even more shocking, when my grandfather asked his brother to advance him a sizeable sum of money, to expand his business. I seem to recall the astonishment of our American relatives, when they saw my grandfather's way of running his business. He usually left after breakfast around 9. After spending about an hour at the grain exchange (which was the building next door), he took a horse drawn cab to his mill, where he stayed for a couple of hours. After lunch at the restaurant, the two hour siesta, at five, sometimes another trip to his mill, mostly a walk over to the exchange for some banter, then dinner and at night, the club. And, in spite of all this, I always heard that we have money problems, we can not afford this or the other. Today, in hindsight I realize that this totally unreal lifestyle (in today's world), was somehow not so strange in Central Europe.

Of course it was a lifestyle that existed only for two short decades, but it molded my perceptions of society and the world. Now, almost 60 years later I still wonder how my family lived, where they got the wherewithall to maintain their lifestyle, apparently oblivious of the world around them. I do not have the literary or psychological talents to delve into a deeper analysis of all this. I briefly mentioned it, because it has a bearing on how they reacted to events that happened a few years later, during the war, and that somehow determined our fate.

I resented the fact that we took no summer holidays. During the summer months, our family would sometimes go down to the beach on the shore of the Prut river. Most people went early in the morning, for the day, my mother always waited for my father to finish his cardgame. We would usually take a cab at about 4:30, and I was upset, because by that time all my friends were gone. Sometimes, my parents would allow me to take the bus early, since my young uncle was there to watch me. He usually played volleyball for hours, so that I was free to join my friends. He wasn't worried about me since I didn't know how to swim and thus seldom ventured far into the river. Later I joined my parents and their friends, since most of the kids my age had already left. On rare occasions, we would go on outings to the countryside, to the estate of some of my parents' friends, where I first saw life outside the city.

My father was known especially for his total insouciance about money. He always gave away more than he could afford and was very popular among his many friends, something which would help us a lot later. He did not spend much time with me, neither did my mother for that matter, yet I was not an unhappy child. Of course I sometimes envied other kids who had places of their own, where they could invite their friends, who took extended holidays, who had bicycles, but I had an easygoing nature and as far as I can remember, I have always been a normal, rather portly but happy kid.

Due to the fact that we had our lunch and dinner in my grandfather's restaurant, I was used to listen in to the conversations and contradictory discussions among grown-ups. Politics, where of course the main subject during the late thirties, and I remember the glee that followed the fall of the shortlived and openly antisemitic Government, headed by Octavian Goga, one of Romania's most famous poets. He represented the National-Christian party, led by A.C. Cuza, which sported a swastika on their banner. During that time, my uncle (the one who received a medal from the King), had his head bashed in by a group of nationalist students, who were on a "Down With The Kikes" rampage. Many Jewish businesses were damaged (smashed windows, arson) but fortunately it didn't last more than a few months.

The discussions in my grandfather's restaurant, sometimes mentioned communists. It was always hush-hush, everybody knew who they were, (most, if not all of them Jews), and everybody knew the harshness with which the Political Police (Siguranta) treated them. It was also known that, some of those communists who fled over the Dniester river into the Soviet Union, where either shot on sight, or if they were lucky, sent to Siberia. (It was the time of the infamous show trials in Moscow).

We, in our family had no illusions about the communists. My father who was at boarding school in

Odessa during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, remembered hordes of drunken sailors throwing people into the Black Sea, after they looked at their hands and found that they showed no trace of manual labor. I also remember my first Hebrew teacher, (my paternal grandfather was an agnostic, my father indifferent to religion at the time, yet they both decided, that whether one is a believer or not, one has to know what it was all about) a certain Miss Nudelman, who was arrested for communist activity. She was later released, fled to Soviet Russia, never to be heard of again.

My grandparents' restaurant had a moderate fame for tasty kosher food, thus many of the local notables including Siguranta officials, were sometime patrons. I remember the general stupor when in my youthful innocence, I mentioned a Soviet movie "The Emigrants" that I saw that day. It depicted Stalin's idea of a Jewish ministate (homeland), in Birobidjhan, close to the Chinese border, and the failed attempts, on one Pinia Kopman to become a businessman. Later that night I was told that a senior Siguranta official sat at a neighboring table and that my blabbering could bring us untold problems (nothing happened).

The clouds of war finally erupted in the fall of 1939 and we started seeing endless columns of Polish troops and civilian refugees, fleeing the Nazi onslaught. The Polish border was only a few short miles away, Romania was still nominally neutral, and the Soviets had not yet taken their share, in this last partition of Poland. After the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland and the so called Subcarpathian Ukraine until then, part of Czechoslovakia, Romania's Northern and Eastern border was only with the Soviet Union.

Stories of German atrocities began to circulate, yet our life continued normally. I started my second year in junior high, and during that winter, I even went skiing in the neighboring hills. It was one of the great adventures for me, I remember that I borrowed the skis, and a friend of our family, bought me the boots as a gift. My young uncle the sportsman, agreed to take me along, although I was certainly going to be a nuisance, having no particular talent for sports, and besides he was actively courting a young lady (later to become my aunt), and had little patience for me. Once there I sometimes joined my other uncle the dentist and his wife, but I could never follow them, they were experienced skiers. These trips, were quite unique. On Sunday, we would gather in one of the city squares and board sleds (hired out by the peasants from neighboring villages) for the 5-mile ride to the Tsetsina hills. The ride, in open sleds covered with blankets, was in itself wonderful; I was always sorry when we arrived. The ride back, usually at night, was even merrier. People shared drinks, everybody was singing, a world away from what was happening in the rest of Europe.

We used to listen daily to the BBC newscast (in German) to find out how the war was going, and being used to the flamboyant or rather triumphalist tone of Radio Berlin, we were deeply moved by the somber and truthful reporting, concerning the terrible losses inflicted on the Royal Navy by the German U-boats.

CHAPTER 2 - Soviet Czernowitz

In June 1940, the "funny" war in Western Europe came to an end with the fall of France, and a mere two weeks later, our life changed drastically. Following a secret clause of the infamous 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact, the Soviet Union, in addition to Eastern Poland, was getting a chunk of Hungary, the Eastern tip of Slovakia, and the Romanian provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukowina. While Bessarabia, which for many centuries had been part of the Romanian Principality of Moldavia, had become part of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19-th century, (courtesy of Napoleon's generosity), Bukowina had never belonged to either Russia or Ukraine. It had been all arranged between the two partners in this unlikely alliance, Romania had no other solution, but to submit.

Since the Red Army did not print any detailed map of Romania, and because the tank commander who spearheaded the Soviet advance into Romania might not have been familiar with the territory, or couldn't read latin script, they also occupied the town of Hertza, which was neither in Bessarabia nor Bukowina. Protests by the Romanian Government, were just laughed off by Stalin, who allegedly said, "where our troops entered, they stay", end of argument.

Prior to the arrival of the Soviets, the Romanian Government was awarded a grace period of 48 hours, in which to evacuate its population. Special trains were at the disposal of the evacuees, who obviously had to leave most of their property and belongings behind. Very few Jews tried to leave, since it was pretty obvious that Romania had to join the Axis powers. By that time, the ordeal of the German and Austrian Jews was well known, and besides the Romanian authorities did not encourage the Jews to come along. However some, especially the very rich and those who had relatives in other parts of Romania, left on their own. One of my father's Romanian friends, a judge, offered to take us along, since he had been given a rail boxcar for his family. Yet in spite of that, his son had to leave his bicycle with us.

Notwithstanding my father's entreaties, my mother did not want to leave. She had three brothers, her parents, and all of their friends who stayed, she was just afraid of the unknown.

Sitting with her on the balcony of my grandparent's apartment which overlooked the city's main square, we saw the first Soviet tanks rumble into the city. The city streets were full of people who received the Soviets with shouts of welcome and flowers. My mother, not a politically very astute person, on sheer instinct, uttered the prophetic words, "our life, as we knew it, is gone forever".

One of the first things resulting from us becoming part of the worker's paradise, was the appearance of lines. While not comparable to present day Western Europe, Romania between the wars was a rich country. Shops in our town sold goods imported from all parts of the world, they were well stocked, and maybe with the exception of English woolens, were still in that summer of 1940, what one might characterize opulent.

Within a few days, the shops were empty. The Russians, (as everybody called them, although technically Soviet nationals might be better) both military and civilians, who had not seen this kind of abundance in over two decades, the younger ones, maybe never, literally bought everything in sight. Favored by an artificially high exchange rate for their rubles, they emptied the stores like locusts. Soon, we had to stand in line for some essentials. A favorite admonition of our new "masters" was:-what an uncivilized lot you are, you don't even know how to stand in line properly !

Quite a lot of other aspects of our life started to change. We were evicted from the hotel, (no private citizens can reside in a "public" facility). We moved into the living room in my grandparents' apartment, which was quite large. Fortunately ours was an easy move since they lived just across the street. My uncle and aunt and my paternal grandfather found shelter in the large apartment of some people they knew, who were afraid that otherwise they'll get some unwanted people forced upon them. Naturally all private property, including even the smallest shops and apartments, were confiscated and became the property of the "people".

My father, together with some partners including one of his Romanian friends (the judge) had in 1937, started a small business (a rubber products plant). Seeing the handwriting on the wall concerning the Jews, they decided that the nominal owner had to be an ethnic (i.e. Christian) Romanian. The judge's brother in law, a farmer who still dressed in colorful peasant garb, (something not unusual in those days) was chosen. This proved now to have been a providential move, since my father could rightfully claim to have been one of the "exploited" workers. My maternal grandfather had fortunately been forced to close his restaurant a year earlier due to slumping business. Only my paternal grandfather, who had his name conspicuously printed on the letterhead of his mill, was thus expropriated. What we didn't know at the time, was that, all those who the authorities considered to have been a capitalist or otherwise a potential class enemy, had a little mark in their

internal passport (identity paper), it said article 39, my grandfather being one of those. Only a year later would we find out its significance, it meant: to be deported.

Soviet routine implied that everybody, including former housewives better be employed. My aunt, who spoke and wrote Russian, found a job as a secretary, my mother joined a crafts shop making straw sandals. My uncle, stayed on as an accountant in the mill, he also hired his youngest brother (the sportsman) as a miller. My father somehow became a member of a shoemakers cooperative (they used to also make rubber soles in his former plant), and later rose to a management position.

Soon school was about to start. We were given a choice of schools, depending on the language in which we wished to be taught. The options were: Russian, Ukrainian, Moldavian (the Soviet euphemism for Romanian) and Yiddish. Most of my former classmates chose either Russian or Moldavian. I opted for Ukrainian, officially because it was the closest school to walk to (3/4 miles), everybody walked to school. In reality the reason was that since schools were now coed, I hoped to be in the same class with a girl, with whom I was in grammar school together, and who could be considered my first infatuation. My parents although skeptical, since Russian was obviously "the" language to study in, finally agreed. School was not too difficult in spite of the fact that most of our teachers came from various parts of the Soviet Union, and spoke only Russian and Ukrainian. Although nominally a Ukrainian school, it was the same as in the Romanian school, over 60% of the students were Jewish.

Our indoctrination started right away. We were told that all religious activity was forbidden, and we were encouraged to report any effort by our parents to enroll us in any, to our trusted teachers. Life outside school, was becoming more tense. People started to whisper about those who apparently worked for the NKVD (later to become the NKGB), some people we knew, just disappeared. We kept listening to the BBC, and we felt lucky to be spared the miseries of war.

It was also during our first year as Soviet citizens, that we found out how difficult life in the Soviet Union was. My father's family had some relatives, who before World War I moved to Russia from Bessarabia and now lived in Kiev. One of those was a highranking banking executive, I remember the name, Mark Izrailovich Ochsman. He was sent to our town, he somehow knew the address of the hotel we used to live in. He came to inquire, and entered the hotel barbershop. Obviously everybody in the shop knew my grandfather, and they asked him if he looked for the Schreiber who used to own a mill. He froze, and immediately excused himself, he was looking for a different one, he had no capitalist relatives. He somehow found us, he showed us the suit he was wearing (it was 1940) had been bought in Paris in 1914. He had a French wife, and he considered himself lucky to be alive, since every foreigner (and those that associated with them) were considered if not actual, but potential spies. He told us all kind of horror stories, which I could barely comprehend. He came to see us a few times, before he returned to Kiev. He must have been killed by the Germans, since we never heard from him after the war.

My maternal grandmother who used to work in her in the restaurant's kitchen, in order to supplement the family income, took in a couple of Soviet boarders for lunch. One of them, a certain Piskun, was a type straight out of an Ilf and Petrov (famous Soviet humorists) novel. He was a salesman, he sold plaster busts of Lenin and Stalin. I don't know how he managed it, he worked on some kind of commission and was rolling in money. His only problem, he couldn't spend it. He lived in a communal apartment in Kiev, and lived in fear of his neighbors, since they might denounce him as a capitalist. He told us how he would take holidays with his wife surrepticiously, by travelling in different directions and then meeting in some resort as strangers. By using his connections, he had stashed away money under different names, yet he was afraid to bring his wife the fur coat he bought her, for fear of attracting attention. He disappeared just before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, we never heard of him.

The majority of Soviet people we met were all dirt poor by our standards, many claimed that their luggage was delayed, and due to arrive shortly. They did not possess any of the things we considered normal, like raincoats, or overshoes. One told me seeing my rubberized raincoat, that they don't waste rubber on civilian stuff, they use it to make tires. Also upon seeing one of my brass pencil sharpeners, he recoiled at the waste of metal, better used for guns or lathes. Some of them were so backward, that when they first saw lemons, they said : "oh yes, we have a big plant in Kiev , making those things !"

I don't recall when we were made "pioneers" , but, we were submitted to endless perorations about the wonderful life in the Soviet Union, and of course about the "genius of all humanity" our beloved leader, father, the one and only, Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin. I personally don't recall of anyone in our circle being arrested, except for the father of a classmate. While drunk, in a restaurant he tore up a banknote saying he's got money to burn. That was the last anybody has seen of him.

I was only faintly aware of the heroic Battle of Britain, I suppose because that war was barely mentioned in Soviet newscasts, and also just having started school, probably occupied all of my thoughts. In the fall of 1940, we saw one of the results of the Soviet-German alliance. As I have mentioned earlier, there was an important number of ethnic Germans, living in and around the city. In late October, we started seeing many German military vehicles and also quite a number of German officers and civilians, the latter easily identifiable

by their long leather coats. They were billeted in the city's best hotels, and we soon found out the reason of their presence. Germany, was repatriating all "Volksdeutsche", i.e. everybody who could prove to have at least one German grandparent. As a matter of fact, many Poles, Ukrainians and even Romanians who stayed behind for one reason or another, availed themselves of the opportunity, in order to be able to leave. What they did not know was, that once they got to Germany, they would be put in some resettlement camps, and treated like second class citizens. One of my father's Romanian friends, who had a German wife and although as a Romanian civil servant was supposed to have left, found himself stranded after the Soviets arrived. He jumped at the opportunity to leave, and later when he got back to Romania after the war, told us about the shabby treatment they received in Germany.

The irony of it all, knowing what happened only eight months later, was that during the big November 7-th parade, next to the main reviewing stand with all the local party and Government bigwigs, there was an adjacent stand for the visiting Germans, both military and civilians. They saluted cheerfully and winked at the passing columns and were in turn cheered by the marchers (we were told to) with equal fervor. In those days, under Soviet rule, everybody, blue and white collar workers, students, even housewives were forced to participate in these "patriotic" demonstrations. People were given portraits of all the communist saints (both alive and dead), and also sheets of paper with the various slogans to be shouted, one of which was hailing the Soviet-German friendship. I remember my former German classmate, Kurt Baum, parading in Hitlerjugend uniform, as part of the German contingent.

On New Year's day 1941, my youngest uncle, the sportsman married his sweetheart. The marriage festivities took place in our apartment, since there was enough space for the whole family and also their friends. I only remember vaguely that it lasted late, and I must have fallen asleep.

In the spring of 1941, I was about to be Bar Mitzvah. A few days after the Soviets entered our city I had stopped my Hebrew lessons. My teacher, who was a communist, (this one, too) wouldn't continue, since it was dangerous, being considered either religious or Zionist propaganda, both forbidden. Now, I knew enough Hebrew to be able to read the few lines, but young people were strictly forbidden to enter a synagogue. Finally, my father or my grandfather, I don't recall, arranged with a willing rabbi, to have the whole ceremony very early in the morning, before school starts, at 5 a.m. Naturally, there were other people present in order to have a Minyan, I don't think there were any friends of mine, probably just some of the "regulars". I had only to practice how to put on the phylacteries. Everything went well, nobody saw me and I got to school on time. My grandmother baked a delicious honeycake, which we consumed when I got back from school. She promised me a cake for every day I would get up early and put on the phylacteries, but although I was (and still am) very fond of sweets, once was enough for me, besides my father had also never done it.

We were all more or less getting used to life in the worker's paradise, when in June 1941, the deportations started. These occurred only on Sundays. The NKVD used a truck for each family, and since they needed more trucks than they had available, they requisitioned every civilian truck in town.

They also figured that on Sundays people tend to be home, so it was easy to get everybody. The first lot, were mostly people who had had Zionist or other political or social non-communist affiliations. For example prominent members of the club where my parents used to play cards, were taken under the pretext that they were "White Guardists". (This ridiculous accusation especially for Jews, pertained to the White Guards who fought the Reds during the civil war in Russia in the early twenties.)

After the first Sunday, the rumor started that next in line, were those with art. 39 in their identity cards. Somebody told my father, that my grandfather, the capitalist, was on the list for next Sunday. We were living with my maternal grandparents at the time, while my paternal grandfather lived with my aunt and uncle. The following Saturday, he spent the whole night and Sunday hidden in somebody's cellar. They didn't come for him, but in the meantime we were told that, in case they didn't find him, they would surely look for the next of kin going by the same name, namely my father. Thus, the following Saturday, the four of us (my mother included) went to a rubber warehouse, where we spent the ensuing 24 hours. We had food and drink, also reading matter, and we slept on a bed of old rubber tires. This time, they didn't look for my grandfather, because time had run out.

On June 22-nd, 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. We still spent the following Sunday in our hiding place, but the advancing Germans somewhat diminished the NKVD's zeal. Only a few hundred Jews with German passports, among them many of my parent's friends, were taken. These were Jews, who never applied for Romanian citizenship, and continued to live in our city with Austrian passports. In 1938, after the Anschluss, they were given German passports with the ubiquitous "J" stamp, to identify them as Jews. Needless to say, that only a few survived their ordeal. Two of the "White Guardists" who were close friends of our family, managed to reach Israel after some 25 years in Siberia, one of the Austrian Jews, survived and came back in 1947. Thus, we were presumably saved from going to Siberia, by the advancing German troops, and supreme

irony, the first German military unit to enter the city proper, was a Waffen-SS division.

While retreating, the Soviet rearguard destroyed (or tried to) various so called military objectives. In the building we lived in, there were two stores on the ground floor. One of them, was a NKVD "special" store. When I spoke earlier of empty shelves, that did of course not apply to the so called "special" stores, which were open to the communist elite, (the word nomenklatura had not yet been coined) and the NKVD. All the foodstuffs and other items no longer obtainable in regular stores, were abundantly stocked in these stores. The fact was that, almost anybody who had money would finally find a greedy and willing apparatchik, who would resell some of these goodies, at a profit. But to close this parenthesis, while leaving the city, the NKVD troops, set fire to this store. Soon, our whole building was on fire. We lived on the third floor, it was a very old brick building, with a huge stone stairway that had very steep steps. We ran downstairs, sitting dejected in the courtyard, looking at the flames, having taken only a bundle of clothing each.

Fortunately for us, my youngest aunt, who had married my uncle the sportsman, earlier that year, (he had been drafted into the Red Army only a week before and had left with the retreating troops), who lived about half a mile away, somehow heard that our building was on fire. She arrived quickly and only due to her courage and determination (my parents and grandparents had been just sitting there stunned), did we, my parents, my aunt and I, make a few quick forays into our smokefilled apartment and manage to gather some of our belongings. Naturally, all furniture, china, silver, books etc were left behind and also that bicycle that our Romanian friends had left with us a year earlier, and on which I had finally had my first bicycle ride. We somehow managed to find a pushcart, we loaded whatever we had saved on it , and started to walk to my other aunt and uncle's place.

There was shooting in the city, many buidings were on fire, among them the hotel were we used to live, and there also were some marauders out to loot wherever possible. The hotel was not deliberately set on fire, but at the outbreak of the war; one of the first security measures undertaken by the Soviet authorities, was the confiscation of all radio receivers, so that people should not be able to listen to ennemy propaganda. Thousands of these confiscated radios, were stored in the now deserted former grain exchange. When the exchange buiding was blown up, the fire quickly spread to the adjacent hotel.

CHAPTER 3 - German-Romanian Reoccupation, Ghetto

As I said earlier, my aunt and uncle had rented two rooms in a large apartment, and suddenly they saw us, five scared, homeless people knocking at their door, expecting to be sheltered. The owners, wonderful people the Portnois, took us all in, I don't recall the exact sleeping arrangements, but here we were, sheltered. The apartment, originally meant for four people, now housed twelve, the owners and their two children, my aunt, uncle and my paternal grandfather and in addition, the five of us. The building was one of the most modern and elegant in the city, it had been erected by a group of wealthy furriers, all Jews from Bessarabia who spoke only Yiddish or Russian among themselves. Only one family of that group, the richest, had left a year earlier and managed to reach the USA. We settled as best we could, and awaited anxiously the arrival of the Romanian civilian authorities.

Apparently, the German SS who were given a free hand in the city, were not aware, that almost the entire population was Jewish. They surrounded the old Jewish quarter, and after rounding up all the males, they took them to an open field on the banks of the Prut, had them dig their graves and shot them. Among the executed, the Chief Rabbi Mark, and both the father and brother of my young aunt, (she was barely twenty) who only four days earlier had shown so much fortitude. Just in a short few days, she had lost her father, brother and her husband gone, maybe never to return. (Fortunately they were reunited after the war). After their heroic deeds, which included also the burning of the Jewish temple, the German SS, turned the city over to the Romanian administration.

When the Soviets occupied us a year earlier, my father had a certain amount of money in newly minted silver coins. He did not exchange them for rubles, thinking that at the onerous exchange rate that had been set, the silver, would be worth more later (eternal optimism!). The coins were hidden in one of the woodburning stoves in our apartment. After the Germans had left, we went to look, whether there was anything still useful there. Everything was burnt to ashes, yet we could go up to our former apartment, the stone staircase was as solid as ever, and my father recovered the silver coins. Thus, we were lucky to be able to buy food right away, since as soon as the Soviets had left, the peasants came back to the market, and almost overnight, everything was available. I recall the stupefaction of German officers upon seeing butter and eggs freely available, they started buying in huge quantities to send parcels home, to Germany.

Stores started to open, obviously not with their former Jewish owners, but an under the table cooperation, to circumvent the new laws, evolved. Most of the Romanian new owners, were to use an American expression, "carpetbeggars", who came to our city because they knew that, everything was up for grabs.

As a parenthesis I have to add a few words, about the political upheaval that took place in Romania, between June 1940 and July 1941, when it regained the territories lost to the Soviet Union, a year earlier. The personal dictatorship of King Carol II came to an end on September 6, 1940 when he was forced to abdicate in favor of his son Mihai. For the next few months, the extreme right wing Iron Guard, ruled the country together with the Army. This period, culminated in the Iron Guard's "rebellion" in January 1941, when even the Romanian "normal" right wing politicians were under attack, and some killed. The country's "Leader" (a translation of the German Fuehrer), General Ion Antonescu, with the help of the Army put down the rebellion. The most outspoken and compromised leaders, left for Germany, some of the "troops" were jailed, and the great majority of their adherents, just took off their green shirts and were forgiven. The atrocious murders at the Bucharest slaughterhouse (where most victims, were alas, Jews), are amply described by people who were there at the time. I mention it only to explain that the random killing of Jews, that from 1922 to 1940, was very rare in Romania, had now become a fact of life. The beatings, the Iasi (lassy) "death train", (when several thousand innocent people were mercilessly killed, on some phony excuse that they helped the Soviets), that were to follow after the outbreak of war against the Soviet Union and later, the atrocities during the deportations of October 1941 were all a result of the Iron Guard ideology and also the unfortunate equation, communists equal Jews, that was part of the official propaganda.

Now, with a crusade against godless bolshevism in full swing, the argument that the Jews are a foreign, noxious element, within the pure Romanian peasant nation, gained even more credence, because of the new slogans that equated the Allied-Soviet partnership, to a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. The moneygrabbing "plutocratic" Jewish bankers, were suddenly allies of atheist Jewish revolutionaries, who together preyed on the pure godfearing Romanian nation.

In this poisoned atmosphere, and after their military victories alongside the German Army, followed by mass killings of Jews who had lived in the newly occupied territories in Ukraine, it was not to be expected that

the Romanian authorities would be willing to tolerate the presence of so many Jews in our town, who I think, even after the return of many Romanians, were still in the majority, at the time.

I recall my father's Romanian friends returning, the factory that they owned before the war, had been destroyed, but a new business with my father and two of his Jewish associates as silent partners, was soon started. This time there was no doubt who the nominal owner ought to be, the same farmer as a few years ago. My father started to earn enough money, and except for the rather cramped quarters, life was bearable. Schools opened, but Jews were not accepted. Because the authorities had not yet made up their mind about our fate, Jewish schools that were now opened by the local communities in other parts of Romania, were not permitted in our city. My grandfather's mill was "romanized" (as were all former Jewish businesses), but to the credit of many of the new Romanian owners, I wish to state here, that they took in the former Jewish owners as silent partners, although they exposed themselves to severe penalties. Both my grandfather and my uncle got jobs at the mill, the new owner Liviu Bratosin, consulted with them in most decisions involving the running of the mill, and spoke openly about a future partnership, after the war.

New rules and regulations concerning the Jews, were put into force. The wearing of the yellow star, curfews, and as I said earlier, no acceptance in public or private schools. Cinemas were not supposed to accept Jews, but if we managed to somehow hide our stars of David, the owners would not object. Problems arose sometimes when we left the movies. In Romania every high school student was supposed to wear an arm patch on his or her left coat or jacket sleeve, where the initials of the high school and a matriculation number were displayed. Obviously, we Jews, no longer had patches, and local young hooligans, seeing relatively well dressed youngsters who had no patches, would greet us with shouts of "Dirty Jews", and sometimes even get in a few blows. Of course I never told my parents about it, for fear of not being allowed to go to the movies.

In

Czernowitz, aside from the massacre in early July, (which was entirely a German "operation") there were only a few instances of physical violence against Jews, that I can remember. One of the victims, an elderly man, a certain Karl Gold, who was a regular at our table in my grandfather's restaurant, was attacked on the street, and died soon thereafter.

Everything suddenly changed on October 11, 1941. The entire Jewish population of over 45,000 people (less than before the war, some had left with the retreating Soviets, many had been deported, many young men had been drafted into the Red Army), were required to move into a "ghetto" that was centered around the old Jewish quarter. This time, the eight of us moved in with my young aunt and her mother. Of course we slept on the floor in their living room, but we were happy to have shelter and a warm hearth. Right away the authorities (through the Jewish Community Board) advised us that we were all going to be resettled in Transnistria, a territory located between the Dniester and Bug rivers.

This was a part of Ukraine that the Germans "gave" Romania, to compensate for the territory they had forced Romania to give up in September 1940 (following the Vienna "diktat"), i.e. Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern Dobrogea to Bulgaria. Only a small number of Jews, vital to the economy, would be allowed to remain. The deportations started soon.

Some of the people, a cousin of my mother's among them, not having any hopes of getting a permit to stay, didn't wait for the soldiers to come and take them to the railroad station, they went there by themselves. This was because, they thought that by getting there first, they will be given "the best" housing. Unfortunately, whether this rumor was started by the authorities or not, whether the Jewish Board could have done anything, will never be known. Little did they know, that the "housing" awaiting them were empty shacks, some without windows.

While we were anxiously awaiting our permit, the (in)famous Filderman letter was published in all newspapers, on October 26, 1941. This was an open letter written by the "Leader" of the country General Ion Antonescu, to the president of the Board of Jewish Communities, Dr. W. Filderman, in which Antonescu explained his reasons for ordering the deportation of all Jews from Bessarabia and Bukowina. He spoke of Romanian troops being spat at and humiliated when they had to leave in June 1940, and the enthusiastic welcome received by the Soviet Army. While there probably might have been a few incidents relating to the former, unfortunately, the latter was quite true, since I witnessed it myself. Yet, even if all those welcoming the Red Army, were Jews, which was not the case, that does not excuse the beatings and killings that were committed by "decent" Romanian soldiers during the deportations, especially in Bessarabia and rural Bukowina.

Since my father, uncle and grandfather had jobs, we were assured to get the required permits to remain. However the days passed, whole streets had been emptied, and our permit still didn't arrive. Finally, through some of my father's Romanian friends and some money to grease the necessary conduits, our permit was found, torn in some secretary's drawer. Again some more money, and General Ionescu's signature ascertaining that the permit was torn by mistake (why, and by whom we were never to find out). My young aunt was also given a permit, I think because her father (who had been slain by the Germans) had been an employee of the State Railroad. Most people that were issued permits, had somehow managed to get them

through bribery or connections, in reality very few were actually indispensable. When the Governor decided to stop the issuing of permits, there were another roughly 5,000 people left, who were saved by the city's mayor, Traian Popovici.

Whereas General Calotescu the Governor and General Ionescu his deputy, were indifferent if not hostile to the Jewish population, the mayor, Traian Popovici on the other hand, who had many Jewish friends, was a true humanist, or as we say a "Mensch". He personally vouched for the five thousand and withstood pressure from the authorities in Bucharest to rescind the permits of "his" five thousand.

Now, sometime in November, that the deportations had stopped, we were allowed back into our apartments, (which had been sealed by the police, and stayed empty during the duration of the ghetto and deportations). We came back to our elegant building, however not for long. The authorities decided that it was too fancy a building for Jews, so we were forced to move out. All of us were placed in a building across the street, that stood empty, because all its former inhabitants had been deported. Of course, we were not given much choice, but the eight of us plus an elderly aunt of my mother's (who's son volunteered to be in of the first deportation trains and who perished in that terrible winter of 1941-1942, together with his wife) who just escaped deportation as one of the Popovici five thousand, got a three-room apartment. My father, uncle and grandfather all had armbands with the initials RPL (the Romanian initials that stood for "Requisitioned For Work"), food was no problem, we only dreaded the future.

The Romanian troops, after very heavy fighting, had occupied the port city of Odessa, home of a large and vibrant Jewish community. Through various returning Romanian military personnel, the mass killings of Jews, by German and Romanian troops became known. This and the continuing success of the German Army, made us aware of the precariousness of our situation.

As we had to obey a curfew, I spent many hours at home, reading. Encouraged by my uncle, who had a very large library, I read many German classics, also a lot of 20-th century authors, some in Romanian, most in German. We youngsters kept sneaking out to the movies, by hiding our yellow stars. The police were really not out to "get" us, and we knew that getting caught meant only a more or less substantial bribe. The grownups played cards most evenings, even we youngsters had a poker game going once a week. Since there were a few of us who lived close by to one another, we generally ignored the curfew, given that we lived on a quiet street in an area seldom visited by police, notwithstanding that we were only about half a mile from the city center.

We had no radios, they had all burned in July 1941, and besides Jews were forbidden to own radios. Thanks to my father's Romanian friends, he could listen to the BBC, and we were sadly aware that the fortunes of war were against us. The Germans were advancing deeper into Russia and alas, also in North Africa. We had heard of the atrocities in Odessa earlier, now news of the terrible fate of those deported from our city began to filter back, there was no reason to be hopeful. And yet, at that very time, Jewish communities in all other parts of Romania, were permitted to open schools, in Bucharest, even private universities, albeit on a primitive scale. In our city, because of the curfew, and also because the Government considered our stay as temporary, no schools were permitted (later in 1942, things improved, but alas, we were already far away).

I don't recall any significant events during that winter of 1941-1942, except daily rumors of impending deportations, some arrests of grownups who broke the curfew, or otherwise ran afoul of the authorities. There was a very active black market, I will never understand where those that traded on it got their information in order to establish their prices, but dollars, pounds, Swiss francs and gold coins were traded, there was also a market in false dollars which were printed by the Germans.

Speaking of the different rules for Jews in various parts of Romania, I have never understood why the Romanian authorities deported practically all the Jews in Southern Bukowina, which had never been "infected" by Soviet occupation, where unlike Czernowitz, there were not many communists, and on the other hand permitted about 25,000 Jews to remain in Czernowitz. It is only very recently (The New Yorker, November 23, 1998, "Buried Homeland" by Aharon Appelfeld) that I found out about the atrocities committed by the local population and the Romanian troops during the deportations in the fall of 1941, we had heard about pogroms in Bessarabia at the time, but again in Czernowitz, we were spared so far.

For Christmas 1941, we were invited to one of my father's Romanian friends (the judge's son in law), a wonderful person one Dragos Holca. They were given an apartment in the building we were evicted from, he played no part in our misfortune. Having served as a reserve officer in the first few months of the war, he was given this apartment, apparently at random.

I wonder whether they knew his family's background. Holca's uncle, Teofil Sidorovici, had been one of the principal aides to King Carol II (he was the head of the national youth movement "The Country's Guard"). The King was, after his ouster, made a scapegoat for all evil that befell Romania. The fact that the King's mistress was half-Jewish, and that he was corrupt to the bone, had actually contributed to his downfall.

The departed King's former wife, who was now Queen Mother Elena, the mother of the reigning

sovereign King Mihai, contributed considerably through her influence to alleviate the persecution of the Jews, a fact that is well documented.

To get back to that Christmas, it was just across the street, we didn't care about the curfew. I remember that night, it was a marvelous feast, they had slaughtered a pig according to tradition, and the table was laden with delicacies. The toasts, by both Romanians and Jews, for Peace and for some utopian future, where both the Germans and the Russians will somehow vanish, and we will be liberated by the Anglo-Americans. It was a beautiful evening, everybody received little presents, and my parents and I, forgot all about the curfew, the yellow star and the year 1942, which could bring us nothing good.

I can not recall anything happening that winter, except for endless card games, and rumors about impending deportations. Also during that winter, my parents insisted that I take private German lessons, to, as they put it, be able to write like an educated person.

It was during that winter that quite a few Jews got baptismal certificates, and affixed them on their doors, to ward off police or military deportation teams. It was not known when, but everybody dreaded the restart of the deportation, or as the Romanian authorities euphemistically named it, evacuation. The baptismal certificates, which later did indeed save their owners, were sold by a harddrinking Protestant German pastor named Schnapp, who liked Jews, and had many Jewish drinking pals. My father refused, although he was non-observant, he just did not think that it was the right thing to do, little did he know ! In the adjoining building , there lived a very observant Mr. Klier who prayed daily with his philacteries. Schnapp made him a Lutheran, he escaped any further problems, left Czernowitz, and after the war, finished his life somewhere in the USA.

Come Easter we were again invited to our friends across the street. This time, my mother didn't come along, since it coincided with Passover, and she did not want to offend her parents by eating bread. My father and the rest of our family went, the festivities took the whole night, I remember falling asleep and then waking up, for more food.

The flour mill where my grandfather and uncle worked, was prosperous, the new owner even bought some new machinery, which made my grandfather very happy. He was 62 years old, so he decided that he did not need to work any longer since my father was making enough money to feed us. He really did not do much there, he trusted the new owner, convinced that he will not do anything prejudicial to "his" mill, on the contrary. Thus he applied to the authorities and was permitted to stop (I think there was also a fake medical certificate involved).

This grandfather of mine, never really liked to work. He was smart, very well read in Yiddish literature, a great storyteller, a ladies man and a monumental egotist. He liked to tell the story, how he escaped military service in the Tsar's Army during World War I. At first, he had a dentist remove 16 healthy teeth from his mouth (Russian military regulations exempted all those with more than 16 teeth missing). After the heavy losses suffered in 1916, the Russian Army suspended this exemption. My grandfather went to a private clinic, and had a surgeon create a hernia that, made him unfit for military service. In his defense, I could add that he had a wife and two young children to support, and service in the Russian Army for Jews, was not very pleasant. He was actually convinced that he would be sent into the first lines and not survive the war.

My other grandfather, gladly joined the Austrian Army at 44, and when a son was born in 1915, he named him after the emperor Franz-Joseph. As a matter of fact, his faith in Austria was amply rewarded. When the Russian Army threatened Czernowitz in 1915, (they actually occupied it for some time), my grandmother and her five children were evacuated to Austria by the Government, housed and fed in a resort in Styria, and brought back after the Russian collapse in 1917, all at Government expense. My grandfather was always close to tears, when he talked about life in Austria, he finished the war, with a medal for bravery.

In late spring of 1942, in anticipation of deportations we were sure would come, all the Jews started to make knapsacks (ours were made by a seamstress, from some flowery fabric, that was supposed to be very sturdy) and to stock all kind of drugs that were ment to help in the treatment of typhoid fever, which we knew had decimated tens of thousands in Transnistria.. The rumors of impending deportations were getting more persistent, because the success of the German (and Romanian) armies in Russia, emboldened the powers to be in their belief that, they had sided with the winner, and our future seemed more and more hopeless. Stories of the terrible epidemics that ravaged the deportees in Transnistria added to the overall feeling of total impotence regarding our future.

And yet, people lived, children were born, some people even got married, and we youngsters tried to occupy our time , as best we could. During these months, some Jews, managed to leave for the "Old Kingdom" as the Romania of 1914 was called, thus increasing their chances to escape deportation. My father, through his numerous Romanian friends, could have probably managed our departure, but not for the whole extended family, that would have been impossible. I have also to emphasize here the very strong bond that tied my father to his sister, their mutual devotion went beyond the ordinary affection between siblings, the depth of which I would only get to know later. The fact that my uncle was my mother's brother, only increased this bond.

CHAPTER 4 - Deportation to Transnistria

As the victories of the German and Romanian Armies, (this is not a mistake, Romania had the second largest number of troops on the Eastern front, after Germany), multiplied, the Government decided to tackle the Jews of Czernowitz again. On June 7-th 1942, all those who had "Popovici" permits were to be deported. We shuddered that Sunday morning, when we heard the heavy boots and the ominous knock at the door. They came for my mother's poor old aunt, and, sad as it was, we thought we had escaped. The operation (they must have heard how the Soviets had done it, exactly a year earlier) took place on a Sunday, when they could use all available civilian trucks to transfer the people to the Makkabi sports stadium. There, a "commission" was supposed to check the eligibility of those with valid reasons to be spared. From the stadium they were herded to a neighboring railroad station, where boxcars were waiting.

Monday, the rumors started again. Some said, this had been a one shot affair, the remaining Jews will be spared, others were sure this was only the beginning, and we'll all have to go. A few people went into hiding, knowing that the Romanian authorities were not that efficient, hoping against hope that things will change, the fortunes of war will turn in favor of the Allies. Some of those who had escaped from the very lightly guarded stadium, just walked back to their apartments, again, betting on the somewhat lackadaisical efficiency of the Romanian authorities.

A week passed and then, another round took place on June 14-th. This time, they took people who had somehow gotten a police file, either as alleged communist sympathizers or having held important jobs during the Soviet occupation. Some, like my mother's brother who was an innocuous dentist, were taken because of mistaken identity. They had a certain Dr. Gustav Klein, a known communist on their list, not finding him, they settled for my uncle, Norbert Klein. He protested, but to no avail, they took both him and his wife. Come Monday, there was a false feeling of relief throughout, they had taken the "Popovici" people first, then the communists, now there are only people with valid permits and no political problems left, well maybe they'll stop.

My father's Romanian friends, who by the way, never, never ceased their friendly relations with us, kept saying that a lot of business leaders were telling the Governor that further deportations will harm the economy and thus the war effort. I suppose the Governor might have listened, next Sunday was peaceful. But the following Sunday, June 28-th (exactly two years to the day, from when the Soviets had marched in), came the third round. This time, they took all those who had lost their employment, by either being dismissed or for medical reasons and thus, were no longer essential for the economy. My grandfather, having successfully managed to quit his job, was on the list. When they came to take him, we fell into a trap, which we could easily have avoided. My grandfather was widowed, and he had no dependents. The deportation order said: "B. Schreiber and family". When they asked, whether he has any family, my father answered affirmatively. "So, you come too", the officer said. All the protests, the showing of the work permit, nothing could sway the police officer. His argument was that, at the sports stadium, there was a commission reviewing all cases where there is any doubt, thus if my father's job was so "vital" he would have no problem to persuade them. So the four of us, after a tearful farewell with my uncle, aunt and maternal grandparents, took our prepared knapsacks and some food, as much as we could carry on our shoulders and in our hands, and were taken by truck to the Makkabi stadium.

There were hundreds of people already there, there was no particular concern to isolate us, a fence barely a couple of feet high, was all that separated us from the "free world" outside. Not far from us, stood some of my parents' friends, he used to own the Ford dealership in town, but due to the fact that he also belonged to some hunting club, whatever, he had very influential friends, and under our eyes one of his Romanian friends managed to reach the commission and get him and his family released. They bade us a sad farewell and gave us some of their food. I have to add that right after we were taken away, my aunt defying curfew regulations, had alerted two or three of my father's Romanian friends who promptly showed up at the stadium to take up our cause. Holca, in order to impress them, put on his officer's uniform with his recently awarded battle medals. They took my father's papers and, every so often came back to reassure us, that in a little while we'll be free.

Next to us stood a lady who had been my mother's beautician, Mrs. Pohne, a widow who had fled Germany a few years ago with her two sons, and had been through a lot. She, then and there, decided to leave. Her younger son had somehow not been taken, she was going to join him, she just left her older son there, saying that she is going to risk it, lept over the fence, and was gone. Incidentally, her son would many years later become a "celebrity". After the war, he returned to Bucharest, where he worked for a British press organization, as their local correspondent. In the fifties he was convicted as a British spy in one of the communist show trials, and spent many years in prison. After he was freed, he moved to Germany, where he became a respected journalist.

The hours were passing, and our friends still didn't reach the commission. Only years later, did we find out that by bribing a representative of the Jewish Community Board, who actually were there only to witness the "fairness" of the commission's work, one could have gotten to the commission. Our Romanian friends unfortunately did not catch on, how could they have known ?

In the meantime, more people were brought in, some were freed. My mother ventured the idea, maybe we should imitate Mrs. Pohne and just leave, if our friends succeed, there would be no loss, except for our belongings. My father hesitated, still believing that his friends will save us. My grandfather, who's fault it really was that we had gotten there, decided for us, he would not leave, unless we had the permission to do so. My father, not wanting to leave him alone, settled the matter, we stay. It got late, the sun was going down, when my father's friend Mihai Gorbanescu, who together with Holca had tried in vain to reach the commission, appeared in tears, saying that the commission had gone home. Another farewell, we were now aware that our fate was sealed.

Sometimes later, we were led to a small railroad station, where we climbed into a dark boxcar.

After a while we got used to the darkness and realized that there were already many people inside, I think when the car was full, we were about 60 people. We sat on our knapsacks, mostly silent at first, waiting for the train's departure towards the unknown.

This was to have been the last deportation. The Romanian authorities decided after that, to let the remaining, over twenty thousand Jews, stay in Czernowitz. Later that year, the curfew was lifted, the Jewish Community was allowed to open schools, and the threat of deportation disappeared completely in 1943, after the Allied cause started to improve on the battlefronts (Stalingrad and El Alamein). Needless to say, that those who went into hiding during those fateful weeks, in June 1942, and also those that, like Mrs. Pohne just walked away, returned to their homes after a short while, and were not bothered.

Our journey, started sometime around midnight. I remember vividly that the first part of our trip was extremely unpleasant, at least for me. The car was padlocked, and although we stopped frequently, we couldn't sway our jailers to open the doors so that we could respond to the call of nature. I was among those who didn't sleep, standing by the door in the hope that the gendarmes would finally yield to our demands. Finally, sometimes early next morning the doors were opened, and after paying some money (the amount varied according to people's needs) we were allowed to run up a wooded knoll to relieve ourselves. This was the first instance we were forced to let all prudishness aside, there wasn't much room for privacy. We also found a water fountain, people drew water, and after a short while our journey continued.

During my somewhat agitated sleepless night, we started to meet our fellow deportees. That's when I first met Hardy Mayer, a youngster about my age, we were later to become close friends, a friendship that lasts to this very day. It was his idea that I write this.

At one of the later stops, a group of gendarmes came looking for a young woman, a certain Miss Meerbaum, who was rescued in extremis, by her boyfriend, a Romanian officer. My father, who knew her, gave her a message to deliver to my aunt, others crowded around the officer, trying to give reasons why they too, should be released. This episode, which illustrates the arbitrariness of it all, gave us, as it turned out soon, some unfounded hope.

After what seemed like an endless day, we reached the banks of the Dniester river, at a place called Volcineti. The bridge having been blown up a year ago, the train had to stop there. Upon disembarking, we and our luggage were searched rather severely. I recall one of the gendarmes, squeezing the toothpaste out of its container to look for jewels or other valuables. Any jewels other than wedding bands or very simple rings, were confiscated. Whether this was done "legally" or it was at the initiative of the local gendarmes, we did not dare to ask, but I recall how humiliating the search was, and our meager belongings were mishandled. Any amount of Romanian currency, in excess of a certain, (I don't recall the figure) not very large amount, and of course any foreign currency, (such as dollars or the like, which was normally forbidden), was also confiscated. The "legal" amount of Romanian currency was then exchanged at an arbitrarily high rate, for the currency in use in all occupied Soviet territory, the so-called "Rentenmark". This was an artificial currency, which could not be changed back into Romanian lei or German marks, its backing, the strength of the Wehrmacht.

After the search and the money exchange was completed, we were told to camp down for the night, right there on the river bank. I might add that for me a 14 year old, it was quite an experience to sleep in the open, and not that unpleasant. Early the next morning, (whatever food we had, was by now being cautiously rationed), after some morsels and some water, we were put on boats to cross the Dniester. Once on the other side, close to Moghilev, we were led to a railroad siding. Later that afternoon we were put on another train, again in boxcars. This was supposed to be the last leg of our journey. The boxcars were not padlocked, the Romanian gendarmes were not afraid that we'll try to wander off into Ukrainian occupied territory. I remember we stopped for a while in Zhmerinka, which at the time was an important railroad junction, we could have left I suppose, but where to ? Although the distance to our final destination, was less than 200 miles, it took almost 12 hours, until we arrived , early the following morning.

CHAPTER 5 - The Stone Quarry (Cariera de Piatra)

During the night, I heard that one of the people in the boxcar was being attended to. In the morning I found out that Dr. Mayer, the father of my new friend, had suffered a heart attack. The doors were opened, we descended with our belongings, and found ourselves at a railroad siding, sitting as it were, in the middle of nowhere. There was no indication of any village or town. We were met by a Romanian medical officer, (2-nd lieutenant Vasilescu, a pharmacist in civilian life) who told us where we were and what to expect. We were now in a transit camp, called "Cariera De Piatra" (Romanian for "Stone Quarry"), the previous two transports had also passed through the camp.

At this point I would like to add the following parenthesis. A description of our ordeal has been published by Literaturhaus Berlin in 1995, under the title "Steinbruch am Bug" ("Stone Quarry on the Bug") by Isak Weissglas. Some of the author's recollections don't necessarily coincide with mine. I was only a teenager at the time, whereas I remember him, always a pipe between his teeth, as a very somber gentleman. Judging from his rather pompous insistence on his status as an "intellectual", I had to chuckle at his narrative. When he was talking about events and personalities in our camp, he was always the one taking the high road, never renouncing his principles, while others Be that as it may, maybe his recollections are more exact than mine, judging by the fact that his book contains copies of some typed sheets of paper, which could have been done at the time of our return. I will relate the facts as I remember them, since at any rate, the differences are not important.

The function of this transit camp, Lt. Vasilescu continued, was to make sure that we are properly "disinfected" (as if we were coming from some wilderness), and screened, before we are sent to places where we could work. Most of the people from the previous two transports, had already been moved to a neighboring village, called Ladyzhin, as well as other places. We were all supposed to be housed in the existing barracks, which could not be seen from where we were, yet for some reason we were told that we'll have to spend another night there in the open, by the railroad siding.

In the previous transport, the authorities had included all the Jewish inmates of the Czernowitz insane asylum, together with some of the staff that cared for them. One of the orderlies, a certain Lederman, was now in charge of sanitation that included delousing. Dr. Mayer had been one of the neurologists at the Mental Hospital. Seeing him laying prostrate on the ground, Lederman arranged that he be transported right away into a sheltered area, since the sun was already very strong, although it was early in the morning.

During the journey, people had started talking to one another and small groups were formed, which decided to somehow stay together if possible. The Mayers, asked Lederman to help the whole group and so we were allowed to move in a day before all the others. From the railroad siding we could see the river Bug and a few miserable shacks. The road to the camp proper, which was on a slightly higher elevation, passed by a fountain (later to be our only source of water), and some broken stonecutting equipment. There was also a small gauge rail line with many empty cars. The jagged peaks of some large boulders, similar to a small mountain range, were probably formed when the Soviets blew up some of the heavy equipment. On our way up to the camp, we saw that the shacks were occupied by the insane. Their wailing followed us for a while, we heard their cries for bread.

Once arrived in the camp, Lederman, who was in charge of the "delousing", put all our belongings in his contraption, which was a steamheated metal container. Since we were in Dr Mayer's group, we had the luck of his benevolence, i.e. he watched the temperature gage, thus our clothes came out wrinkled, but not singed. Apparently others had to grease his palm to get this service.

The camp consisted of a number of barracks, with large rooms the size of gyms, and a few smaller houses, with individual rooms, presumably the place where the camp administration used to be. No windows existed, very few doors. Lederman, our protector, arranged for Dr. Mayer's group to get into one of the smaller houses, where we occupied the only room in the whole camp, that had a closed window. Presumably, the previous occupants had managed to do this by filling the windowframe with shards of glass and brick held together with dung and straw, primitive, but it worked. Naturally, there was no way to open or close it. Originally there was no door, but somehow, later we managed to have one. The room, was about 12 by 16 ft with a small entrance of about 6 by 6 ft and contained a curious piece of furniture, a heavy metal safe. We assumed that it was the cashier's office, anyway we used it as a washstand, and as a place to put various cooking utensils.

At first we were 14 in the room, later my mother's aunt, who was staying alone, somewhere in the camp, joined us. Fortunately some in our group had brought a bucket, thus we could fetch water from the fountain and start to have some warm food. Naturally, there was nothing fresh to eat, only a day or two later did we get to buy food. Our first "meal" was cooked on two bricks, with some twigs collected in nearby fields providing the

fuel. I don't recall whether it was herbal tea, or somebody had gotten some potatoes, I remember only my father being the one who kept the fire going, by creating a draft with a piece of cardboard. Later, once we could buy some food, when we boiled potatoes, there were two lines of people waiting. Some for the potato skins, which they would boil for themselves, and others who were too weak to do anything, they were just happy to get the water in which the potatoes were boiled. Those were some of the benign "insanes" and also some elderly people, who belonged to a Jewish Old Age Home, which was emptied, and included in the previous transport.

Naturally, we slept on the floor, there were no bathrooms or toilets. The latter, was an open ditch some 200 ft away. Since there was only one ditch for the whole camp, one had upon getting closer identify the person or persons already there, i.e. guess whether they were male or female, before approaching. With some of my young friends, we devised a sort of game, being able to recognize people from a distance of about 100 ft. Prudishness disappeared, we were slowly getting closer to our prehistoric ancestors.

The "market", which consisted of a few dozen peasants, with their wares spread on the ground, was held twice a week at the camp outskirts, with the one on Sunday being the more important. Ukrainian peasants traded their products for "Rentenmarks", at highly inflated prices, theirs being a monopoly. In spite of their communist upbringing they had grasped the principles of a free market economy, quite rapidly. They would, if people didn't have money trade for clothing, watches, anything of value.

It was the custom in Czernowitz, for young boys to wear only short pants, and during the height of winter, plus fours. A few months before, I think it might have been a birthday present, my father had bought me, my first suit with long pants. It was also the first garment I had, made of manmade fabric, an Italian cellulose fiber, aptly named celofibra.

Since my father had been so sure that we will be able to return home from the sports stadium, he took only a small amount of money with him, and later did not ask his friends for some. The result, we soon run out of money and, one of the first things to go on the market, was my new, yet unworn suit, which made me very proud.

Life in the camp was beginning to follow certain routines. The women, would take the laundry down to the river and, what must have been a first for all of them wash them in cold water without soap, since the little soap we had left, we kept for our personal needs. The laundry washing in the river was soon followed by a lot of people bathing (needless to say, that nobody worried about bathing attire) in the river. We were very happy to have this opportunity, to get relief from the heat, since if I remember correctly, camp regulations were that we had to be outside our dwelling during the day. It was there, in the Bug river, that my friends taught me to swim. However, this pleasant diversion, was to be shortlived. After a few weeks, the camp commander, a gendarme lieutenant named Dan Enachita, forbade the bathing and swimming. His reasoning, since the Germans were on the opposite (eastern) riverbank, they might see us, and it would create the impression that the Romanians are not strict enough with us.

There was also the beginning of some sort of cultural activity. Especially us youngsters, who had been out of school for more than a year, were given lectures by people, who had been teachers, or who had the knowledge and patience, to do it. I recall a certain prof. Sternberg and also Dr. Mayer who spent time with us, there were others too. At night, sometimes my grandfather, who had a wonderful baggage of Sholem Alejchem stories, would delight us, by reciting from memory. The people in our room, all had different backgrounds, one lady used to be my German teacher, in the Ukrainian middle school. Sometimes people from other barracks would visit with us. Seating was normally on our knapsacks set against the walls, and on the wooden floor. Many of those who visited, had studied and travelled abroad, there were wonderful stories of faraway places and events, that I soaked in with great pleasure.

Life in the camp had also its uglier sides. I am not even talking about the terrible fate of the insane, who were close to starving, and were kept in the most abject filth, not being allowed to approach our barracks. Lt. Vasilescu, had issued some very strict regulations, concerning hygiene and cleanliness, for example we had to scrub the floor of our room daily, the space around the barracks had to be kept clean of debris and so on. One of my father's cousins and his family, wife, son and father who was my father's uncle, were also in our camp, they were "Popovici" people. The old man didn't take the regulations too seriously, and thinking nobody sees him, relieved himself against a wall. To his misfortune, Lt. Vasilescu just happened to pass by. He was arrested, and one of Lederman's men had to apply 25 blows to his lower back, with a rubber truncheon. He cried a lot, but we realized later, that the man did not hit too hard, he recovered in a few days.

The camp was organized in groups, with a leader for each group, in our group my father was selected for the job. At inspection time, which was I think once a week, everybody had to gather on the camp's central assembly area, early in the morning, each group leader had to present a list of all its members, we were counted to ascertain that nobody had escaped.

The camp was lightly guarded. There a few Romanian gendarmes led by a corporal Costica Poenaru, who when not drunk, was chasing girls. He was actually treated, by one of the Jewish doctors in the camp for

some worldly disease, fortunately he did not infect any of the females who associated with him. He supervised also a group of Ukrainian policemen, who were always ready to distribute blows with their rifle butts, they had rifles, but I doubt that they were also given ammunition. The camp, which had been a Soviet penal colony, was so isolated, that it would have been foolish to try to escape, since the Ukrainian peasants would have gleefully turned in any potential escapee.

Lt. Vasilescu found out that among the camp inmates, there was a well known classical violinist named Flohr. He requested that the Flohrs, (his wife Gertie, was a good piano and accordeon player, she also had a very pleasant voice) visit him and Lt. Enachita, and provide musical entertainment. The Flohrs, had no instruments, so he borrowed a violin, (from the earlier mentioned Weissglas narrative, it was his son's, who reluctantly agreed to lend his violin, thus ingratiating his family and himself to Lt. Vasilescu). Persuaded by Dr. Mayer, a certain Mr. Lemisch, a professional musician, also reluctantly agreed to lend his accordeon, but his good deed, did somehow not reach Lt. Vasilescu's attention. Some evenings, the Flohrs, would concertize for the camp inmates. It was an eerie feeling, here we were practically at the end of the rope, with an uncertain, dark future awaiting us, yet for a couple of hours, we would be like in a different world. . He, Flohr would play light classical pieces on the violin, she would delight us by singing popular tunes in Romanian, French and German, accompanying herself on the accordeon. These were brief moments that seemed both incredible and unreal, the darkened camp, people standing or sitting on the grass, only the moon shining over the hushed audience, I recall those evenings, vividly.

In the meantime there were intense rumors about our impending transfer to Ladyzhin, where my uncle, the dentist was. He was working in the local hospital, he received very good treatment, and the overall situation of the other people was apparently better than ours, if only the fact that they lived in a populated center, also some were working, and they had ways to communicate with those left behind, in Czernowitz. Not that we were completely cut off. Quite often, some Romanian officer would appear out of nowhere. Some came to buy jewelry or hard currency, which people had managed to hide, on the cheap, knowing our predicament. Others came as couriers, bringing mail and money from relatives in Romania. This was against existing regulations, naturally those that took the risk, were handsomely rewarded. I remember when the Mayers got a package delivered by a full colonel, named Grosu. Some came out of simple curiosity, just to look at us.

I'll never forget, one afternoon sitting with some of my former high school classmates, (there were four of us in the camp), we saw a figure approaching, dressed in a rather elegant walking attire. As he got closer, we couldn't believe our eyes, it was prof. Topa, our botanics teacher. He was on a walking tour of the "new territories" to identify and study the to him, yet unknown flora. He recognized us, and after a few condescending remarks about our sad fate, rose and continued his trek. He made no attempts to ask us whether he might be able to do something for us, we never saw him again.

Apparently, when the Soviets retreated, they blew up all the heavy equipment associated with the quarry. This created a huge crater which was now full with rainwater. Now that I had learned to swim, I joined some other youngsters in starting to explore the area. It turned out to be quite deep, the water was very clean, and we used it as a swimming pool. I started to dive, once I nearly tore my left palm when I landed on a rock (I still have the scar).

Life in the camp, was now more organized. Food was collected for the totally destitute, the insane had one of theirs, a very strong young man, named Itzkovich, who terrorized the peasants on market days, and managed to extract some food from them. New attachments were born, some family feuds erupted, and of course there was always some bickering about the camp leadership. Some young women had formed relationships with the Romanian officers, and the rumor mills were working full time. Finally, after a short visit by two members of the Jewish Board from Ladyzhin, Lt. Enachita entrusted some people to collect money, so that those those who contributed will be assured to be transferred to Ladyzhin. I seem to recall that the amount was \$40 a head (to no one's surprise all fees were always in US dollars). Obviously nobody was supposed to possess any foreign currency, yet all "financial arrangements" deep in German occupied Ukraine, were done in US dollars.

I forgot to add at the beginning of this chapter that, among the deportees in our transport was also a contingent that came from Dorohoi. This was a city that was not in Bukowina, had not been occupied by the Soviets, yet for some reason the Romanian authorities, maybe because the Jews were to numerous there, deported a part of the Jewish population. One of them, a certain Meyer Argintaru, was the camp foreign exchange broker. Each day he would set exchange rates for US dollars, British pounds, gold coins and, most surprisingly "long" US dollars (of the type no longer in current use), which somehow made their appearance. My grandfather who had visited his brother in the US, back in 1936, had a novel idea. He remembered that, in the US, the Federal Banks exchanged these banknotes, no questions asked, at least that's what he told us at the time. He suggested that, when we'll have some money, (wishful thinking) we should buy these "long" dollars, since they were selling at a heavy discount and, after the war he'll send them to his brother to be exchanged. I am telling this, only to illustrate the genius of Shalom Alejchem and other Yiddish writers , who would have their characters concoct such harebrained schemes.

Fortunately enough, although we had no dollars whatsoever, a friend of my father's, Herman Horowitz, (who's son Friedel was a classmate and friend of mine), offered to lend us the money, so we were put on Lt. Enachita's list of so-called specialists who were to be relocated to Ladyzhin.

One afternoon in early August, if I remember correctly, an ominous event took place. We were ordered to assemble and after being counted, even the sick and disabled were dragged out, a few German military vehicles appeared. They carried a group of SS officers, our two lieutenants and a civilian, the "pretor" (county executive) from the nearby Trostianetz. The Germans inspected our ranks, and then asked in German "Do you want to work ?" The resounding answer was, yes. They all left after a short while. Some of the people, who were standing close to the lieutenants, and overheard their conversation, later warned us that this probably meant certain annihilation, yet the large majority dismissed this as unfounded rumors, and looked forward to being able to work for the Germans.

A few days later, the fateful date arrived. I recall it as August 17-th, 1942. Early in the morning, we heard the arrival of the Germans. Then we saw many military trucks, and a few small cars with officers. The officers set up some sort of table, in the center of the assembly ground, where they were supposedly going to register those that will be working for them. The trucks were parked at the camp outskirts.

Those of us who were on Lt. Enachita's list, were told to take our belongings and to go into one of the barracks, close to the camp edge. I think, it was the same list that earlier contained those who were slated to move to Ladyzhin. I could be wrong, maybe this was a second time money was collected, yet I think not. In any case, what he did then, although in part for his own benefit, was still theoretically, an act of insubordination. The prefect (chief executive) of the Tulchin region, (a gendarme colonel, named Loghin, who was executed after the war, as a war criminal), had arranged with the Germans to "take charge " of all his idle Jews. There were to be very few exceptions, for skilled craftsmen and some medical personnel. Thus, this Romanian junior officer , was taking a big chance, in interpreting the term of "skilled craftsman" . As far as I am concerned, the man saved my life, money or no money, alas I never ran into him after the war to thank him.

We were told to keep completely quiet, not to show our faces outside, and to wait for the Romanians to give us, the "all clear". Since the general order was for everybody to assemble with their luggage before the German "commission" , we understood clearly that should the Germans see us, we would be facing a dangerous situation. My father's cousin had come by earlier that morning, they had no money, they were desperate, they had a small child and asked my father what to do. He advised them, correctly as it turned out later, to flee and hide in the surrounding cornfields, since the worst that could happen to them, would be to get caught and turned over to the Germans, which was what would have happened anyway, had they stayed. They took his advice, escaped and many years later, the little boy became a colonel in the Israeli Air Force.

Quite a few others did the same thing, I should say under the benign neglect of the Romanian gendarmes, who now probably realized that they were sending people to their certain death.

Our group had gathered in the assigned barrack, and since we had been forewarned not to venture outside, we were munching on raw carrots to quench our thirst, it was an extremely hot day. The Germans (all SS officers), meantime had started their "selection". We heard their contemptuous barking , as they tore the papers of those passing by, to be registered. We did not know it at the time, but people had all their belongings taken from them, all personal mementos, everything. From somebody, who had escaped, we heard later about this poor pharmacist, Dauber (his daughter was a classmate of mine in grammar school), who upon arriving in front of the Germans, showed them that he wrote German poetry. They tore his writings and told him something derogatory about Jews defiling the German language. We also found out later, that they had shot the elderly, shortly after they left the camp.

We sat there, sort of holding our breath, when suddenly, at about 4 p.m. (we were there since 8 a.m.), a little baby, started to cry. Right away, the door opened, a German SS noncom, gun at the ready, ordered us in no uncertain terms ("Juden 'raus"), to get out. And as fate sometimes ordains it, a small miracle happened. One of our group (a Dr. A. Weinberg, who had studied medicine in Bologna before the war), rose and told the German that we were specialists, retained by the Romanian authorities. "I'll check", the German said and left. Fortunately for us, the German high ranking officers had already departed, and he went to ask the Romanian lieutenants. They realized, that he was only a noncom, thus outranked by them, and they told him that we were indeed allowed to stay. He came back, to tell us that, saluted and left. I think that those were some of the longest 5 minutes of my life.

After a while, we heard the last German trucks leave, our lieutenant came and beckoned us to come out. As we were slowly gathering our belongings, and walking to the assembling ground, another group of people appeared. This group was saved by Lt. Vasilescu out of sheer humanity. Among them, the Weissglas family I had mentioned earlier, and who attributed their salvation to the fact that young Weissglas had lent his violin to Flohr, when asked by Vasilescu. Slowly, the people who had been hiding in the cornfields started to make their way back to the camp. Finally, when we were all standing there, on the assembling ground, there were about 450 to 500 people. After a while the lieutenants appeared, there was a heartfelt round of applause, and then they told us to sing the Romanian National Anthem ("Traiasca Regele" i .e. "Long Live The King"). I

think, if anybody would have had a recording device, it would have shown one of the most moving renderings ever of this song (by Haydn ?). Tears were streaming out of many eyes, we had no idea what lay ahead, but we all knew that we had escaped certain death.

We went back to our previous room, and life returned to "normal". Now, the thing that was upmost in everybody's thoughts, was the move to Ladyzhin, or other villages in the area. The Germans, had also taken a large contingent from there, logically there was plenty of room for us. A few days later, the order finally came. All those who had paid in before, were to assemble at the railroad siding, and be led to Ladyzhin. We gathered our belongings, there were some oxdriven carts waiting (naturally we had to pay the peasants for them), and we started our trek, some 7-8 miles or maybe a little bit more. After a little while, something happened, we never found out what, and we were told to go back. I don't recall the exact circumstances of our return to the camp, or what happened that day. However, after a few days, the Jews from Ladyzhin, among them my uncle the dentist (who enjoyed a privileged position there, since he worked at the local hospital), were letting us know that, we will be coming after all. A few days later it happened. One group (those that have been on the original list plus a few others who paid in later), was to go to Ladyzhin, the remaining inmates to various places such as: Kirnasovka, Obodovka, etc.

It was I think, early September, when the move finally came. The journey took; about six hours, we arrived in Ladyzhin, after sundown. There were about 200 of us. There we were received with food and drink by the local Jews. They seemed quite well organized, and satisfied with their existence there, after having escaped the Germans. We had barely spent a night there, when the order came that all Jews, those freshly arrived and those that had been there earlier, had to move back to the camp on the Bug. My uncle, because of his work at the hospital and only a few others were allowed to stay. The long walk back, ended at night, I recall that we were attacked by some marauding peasants, who were after our belongings. A very corpulent fellow a certain Horniker, an attorney, tried to stop them, but he couldn't move fast enough to chase his predators away, and lost all his clothing.

Back from our short trip to Ladyzhin, we settled in our old routine. The next day, we realized, that the insane and the very old, who had been left behind, were no longer there. The Ukrainian policemen, on orders from the Romanian authorities, had killed them. It appears, that they did possess ammunition, after all. There was the sudden awakening, our lives, though saved from the Germans, were still at the whim of the Romanian authorities, and in that early fall of 1942, the success of the German Army approaching the Caucasus, did not bode well for our future.

In addition to the former Ladyzhin people, the authorities brought another lot (I'm quoting here the figures mentioned by I. Weissglas, I don't recall them), of about 600 people from Yampol and 300 from various other locations, so that by the end of September, there were about 1300 people in the camp.

The weather was getting cooler, and with the benevolent acquiescence of the civilian authorities, (the Romanian "pretor" from Trostianetz), the camp leadership started to organize life in the camp. Some old unused barracks were dismantled, and firewood became available. Some people, who could afford it, even built wooden sleeping cots. These were quite expensive, since the acquisition of wooden planks and sheet metal, available from the dismantled barracks was regulated, only firewood, (some of it gathered from an adjoining wooded area), was free.

The camp leadership had by now established regular connections with the Central Jewish Board in Bucharest, and help started to trickle in. Clothing for the more destitute, and moneys were received, people like ourselves could receive remittances from their relatives, which were exchanged at the official rate. People built little heating stoves, indoor cooking in hallways, also started. Lighting at night was provided by little lamps fashioned out of empty aluminium medicine bottles. These were filled with kerosene, and had a primitive cotton wick. The lighting was adequate, yet in the morning we all awoke with our nostrils filled with black soot. Washing, both ourselves and clothing, was now done indoors, rather primitive, each family, had the room for themselves for a certain period of time.

The worst thing, was the absence of outhouses, there was still only the uncovered ditch, common for both sexes. As I said before, prudery was long gone, we wanted only one thing, survive. People sometimes had to wait to use it, in rain and later snow, finally nobody mentioned it anymore, it was just part of our daily routine.

The rainy season and the lack of proper hygiene, as well as the fact that among the transferees from Yampol, there were many poor elderly and sick people, facilitated the appearance of diseases. Cases of the dreaded typhus (propagated by lice) and typhoid fever appeared. We had quite a few doctors in our camp, and medical care, within the limitations of the place and the meager amount of drugs available, was nothing short of miraculous. We were required to boil our water, (fetched in buckets from the only existing fountain, at the bottom of the hill) and the mortality rate was pretty low.

Sometime in November, my father contracted typhoid fever. At the time, we in our room were still all sleeping on the floor, since the people in our room realized that it was small and crowded as it was, wooden cots would occupy all available space. However now, with my father running a high fever, and to prevent him catching pneumonia as well, the three of us got a wooden platform, to sleep on. It was very uncomfortable for

the others, especially at night, yet everybody agreed to it right away. He recovered, and for the remaining months that we stayed in the camp, the three of us were allowed to maintain our "elevated" station.

It was maybe youthful bravado, or sheer stupidity, but since I was the designated water carrier for our family, I tried to show my whatever it was, by drinking directly from the pail, before the others saw me. Fortunately I didn't get sick, now 59 years later, I still shudder at the immaturity of this empty gesture.

CHAPTER 6 - Tulchin

The rumor mills in the camp were running in high gear. Every now and then, a new rumor about our impending transfer to a town or village would surface. The most coveted place, was the regional capital, Tulchin. Again lists were drawn, I don't recall what criteria were used to assign people to different localities, possibly some money exchanged hands. At any rate, three families from our room, the Mayers, the Steinbocks, and our family were on that coveted list. Sometime in late December or early January, I don't remember the exact date, it finally happened. I don't remember anything about the journey, however we probably didn't have to walk, since we covered the distance of about 25 miles, during one single day.

The shock, when we reached Tulchin, was enormous. It was a city allright, paved streets, houses, we couldn't believe our eyes. And, to our great surprise, there were a few local Jewish families who received us. The Jewish ghetto, as it was called, comprised one street with small individual houses, about 250-300 yards long. Our group, about 100-120 people, found shelter in either empty houses, which had windows and doors, or with the local Jewish families. These were the few remnants of a larger Jewish community, who had survived the mass killings, which occurred when the Germans occupied the city. They were retained by the Romanian authorities, because of their skills, since most skilled craftsmen had left with the retreating Soviet troops. There was a dentist, a dyer, a watchmaker, a capmaker and a few others. The dyer, was the most prosperous of them, his business extended over two houses, one could see the colored fabric being hanged out to dry from afar.

Some of our group moved in with the locals, the Mayers, with the watchmaker. Our family and the Steinbocks, all told eight people, settled in a two room apartment, one room having a sink with running water. The house had two apartments, on the ground floor, the other apartment was taken by a tailor and his family. Our life improved daily. We soon had wooden platforms to sleep on, and a woodburning stove. The Steinbocks, my parents and myself occupied the larger room, while the smaller, where both the sink and the stove were, located was called the kitchen. Both my grandfather and my mother's aunt had their cots there. We also had a table and chairs, it was almost unbelievable. My uncle the dentist, had also been brought there, to work at the local hospital. He got a small apartment for himself and his wife, on the second floor of an empty house. In our house, there were of course no indoor toilets, but a new wooden enclosed outhouse was built in the back of the house, a very far cry from our ditch in the camp.

The prefect, Col. Loghin, wasn't too happy with the influx of more Jews into "his" city, after all it was on his orders that most of our fellow deportees were sent to their death, yet his subordinates somehow managed to convince him, that it was necessary, for the development of the city's economy. Of course not all of our people had marketable skills, yet with the tacit approval of the local Gendarmerie commander, a Capt. Fetecau, the ghetto started to organize. A council, headed by a lawyer, Shulim Fichman who was a good friend of my father's, was formed. My father was coopted into the council as its deputy head and he convinced Moritz Steinbock, who shared the apartment with us to join. Harry Wittner an attorney, who was one of my father's old friends, and another of his friends, Markus Weschler were the other members. I think Dr. Mayer was at the beginning also a member of the council, but he either resigned or was dropped because he had left Tulchin.

Help from the Central Jewish Board in Bucharest started to arrive, and even though we were still leading a very precarious existence, and our food intake was slightly above subsistence, yet our life was bearable.

With some help from the authorities, an empty schoolhouse, located at the end of the street the ghetto was located on, was transformed into a crafts center. There were workshops for various trades, such as locksmith and metalworking, tailor, watchmaker, capmaker, dyer, housepainter, carpenter, and a few others. When the center was officially opened, the Romanian civilian authorities brought along all the German and Romanian military brass, who apparently were quite impressed. Many of them later patronized these shops.

Our prospects improved considerably, when in the spring of 1943, the prefect of our region, Col. Loghin, changed places with Col. Nasturas who had been prefect of the Moghilev region. The latter, was a sensible man, who had worked well with the Jewish Board there, especially with the foundry head, S. Jagendorf. (A book describing that period in Moghilev, "Jagendorf's Foundry", was published in 1991 by Harper-Collins.)

Col. Nasturas was, like many Romanians of his class, was not a rabid Jew-hater. Also, since the authorities in Bucharest, (with the inbred Romanian survival instinct) sensing the reversal in the fortunes of war, (it was after Stalingrad), had somehow become more willing to listen to the plight of the Jewish deportees, he could openly be more helpful in making our life easier.

Sometimes later that summer, my mother's aunt died, after a short illness. Then, being assigned as one of the pallbearers, came my first occasion to walk outside the confines of the ghetto, the cemetery, was about a mile away. I started to regret that I couldn't go with my father, when he left the ghetto on official business. My uncle, the dentist worked at the local hospital, and when my mother (his sister), needed minor

surgery, it was done at the hospital, under almost normal conditions, yet I wasn't told till she returned from the hospital. Many years later, I learned that it was an abortion. For her recovery, she stayed at my uncle's, since our quarters were too cramped. We still slept, six adults on one wooden platform, it was only after that poor old aunt had died, that I got a separate cot, it had been hers.

The Jewish Community, was required by the local authorities, to provide now and then, a group of men do do community work in town. A man in our ghetto, a certain Resnick was put in charge of manpower. All cleaning work within the ghetto confines came also under his jurisdiction. That type of work was performed by all ablebodied youngsters, above age 15. I was many times included in those work details, later after she turned 15, Ruthi the daughter of the family that shared our apartment, also came along. Many times in the morning, I remember Resnick's voice clearly, he would come close to the window, and call out our names, we both had a tendency to oversleep. I tried in vain to be included in of the work details that left the ghetto, but my father opposed it, saying I am too young.

We were kept informed of the goings on of the war, through ties established with the local partisans. Among the locals, we found in the ghetto on our arrival, was a statuesque young woman Rosa Burban, an ardent communist, who somehow managed to survive, although for no apparent reason. She had no trade, before the war she had studied literature. She brought my father in contact with a local partisan, (he had a leading role in the resistance movement) named Mitya Prostakov, where my father would listen to the BBC in German. Mind you, even the partisan knew that Radio Moscow was not always telling the whole truth, and he waited for my father to translate for him. We thus were more or less up to date on the situation both on the Russian front as well as in North Africa, I remember distinctly hearing for the first time the names of Pantelleria and Lampedusa in June 1943.

On the other side of the fence, because of his work for the Board, my father also established a good relationship with the Gendarmerie commander, Capt. Fetecau. When the latter was arrested after the war by the communists, and put on trial for war crimes, my father's testimony, as well as those of other Jews from our ghetto, helped in his acquittal.

The constant advances by the Red Army, forced the Germans to move their infrastructure westward. Sometime, in the spring of 1943, a German Military Hospital (Kriegslazarett 1/683), was moved to Tulchin. They needed manpower in the hospital, and soon enough, the Romanian authorities, asked for a group of people from the ghetto, to perform various tasks. The people who went to work there, rather fearful at the beginning, soon started to bring back bits of "exotic" food, like cans of sardines, chocolate, things we forgot, existed. I was very envious of the young people, only slightly older than myself, who were sent to work there. It wasn't so much for the food, although that too, it was mostly for the opportunity to walk through the city, and see other sites. I managed to convince Resnick, to put me on the list, I was only 15, and the others were all above 16. My father was furious, but once my name had been put on the list of a work detail, it would have seemed like blatant nepotism, if he took me out.

Thus, I finally got to be considered a grownup person, or so I thought. The work at the Hospital, was not defined, tasks varied. One of my first assignments was, with one of my workmates, to empty the full barrels from the latrines, (the hospital, located in the building of a former high school, had no indoor plumbing). The barrels were quite heavy, we had to carry them suspended on a wooden pole, for about 50 yards to an open ditch. A few German soldiers were standing there looking at us. One of them, came close, and gave us some cigars, to smoke. I nearly fainted, whether it was from the stench or the cigar (it was the first time I smoked a cigar), I wouldn't know.

The work changed, we were given different tasks, each day. Once I had to help a German soldier, chop some firewood. He was a lumberjack by profession, and couldn't understand why the stupid Jewboy was so clumsy, he would hit me (not too hard though), every time I didn't split the log right.

One of the main benefactors for the Jews at the hospital, was the warehouse keeper, a noncom named Hermann von Salzen. He was a staunch Hitler adversary, and hated the war. We heard that he came from an aristocratic family in Hamburg, and had refused to attend officer school. First he started to hand out small items of clothing to those of us, who were poorly dressed, and cigarettes. Then he just invited some of us into the storeroom, and encouraged us to take heavy stuff, like blankets, boots, sweaters etc. It was risky for him to do it, for us it was sheer madness. However we couldn't resist the temptation. The blankets were dyed in the ghetto, and then used to make overcoats. When I came home with a pair of German army boots, my father nearly killed me. They were an easy giveaway with their metal spikes. The shoemaker in the ghetto, removed the spikes, died them brown, (the regulation color was black), and I was happy. Naturally I never wore them to work. The work detail, was under the orders of an Unteroffizier Ramstaetter. He was severe, but he never mistreated any of us, in spite of his quite obvious dislike of Jews. To our consolation his was equally dismissive of the locals (Russians and Ukrainians), who worked there.

Early in the fall of 1943, we got a reminder of the terrible fate we escaped a year ago. A kind and human German officer by the name of Elsaesser, who worked for the "Todt Organization" (the engineering auxiliary of the Wehrmacht), was in charge of the work to be performed by our former campmates taken by the

Germans, in August 1942. He brought with him, the Jewish elder of the work camp, located on the Eastern shore of the Bug, Nathan Segall. They both came to the ghetto, I think to Dr. Mayer's place, and then Segall told us about what had happened so far. Those who were still alive, were building a road, close to a place called Gaisin. Each section of the road had a detachment of workers assigned to it. Once that section was finished, the workers were shot. The elderly, the sick and small children had been killed right away. Segall was travelling to Moghilev, to talk to the Jewish leaders there. He was hoping that they will alert the Central Jewish Board in Bucharest, who in turn could possibly persuade the Romanian authorities, to ask for the return of the still living Jews, to the Romanian administered territory, before it was too late. I don't recall the exact circumstances, I think he travelled in a German car with Elsaesser who was to lend credence to his plight. Unfortunately, after a few days, they returned, their entreaties had been in vain. Elsaesser tried to convince Segall to stay in Tulchin, he promised to bring his wife, Segall declined and returned to die with all the others. Only a very small number of people, managed to escape from there. One, a certain Nehama, who had been a nurse at the Jewish Hospital, swam across the Bug, walked (only at night) for a few days, and reached a Jewish camp somewhere. She told us of her escape, after the war.

While working at the hospital, I got to talk to some German soldiers, who were assigned to watch us. One of them, was a young Berliner, who had been a busboy in a restaurant. He knew a lot about Jews, and Jewish customs. When I told him, that we all hope the war will end soon, (he was not in a fighting unit, because he had some disability), he said, yes, but the two of us had different endings in mind, he understood mine, yet as a German soldier, he was rooting for his country. Then, not to make me feel too bad, he shared his lunch with me.

The hospital had different wards. The most privileged were obviously the German Waffen-SS, then came the other nationalities, who fought on their side. At one time, I was assigned to prepare the beds for new arrivals. Ramstaetter told us (I worked in a group with some local Ukrainian girls, one of them I admired silently), that for the "German" beds we should use 5 blankets, for the "Hiwis" (Hilfswillige, i.e. volunteer helpers), only 3. And most of these Hiwis, were really badly hurt, the Germans used them as cannonfodder, missing limbs, or other very serious injuries. They were mostly Ukrainians, Lithuanians and a few Poles, all in Waffen-SS uniforms. I knew that they had not only fought alongside the Germans against the Soviets, but that they also had been particularly eager to participate in all Sonderaktionen (the German euphemism for killing expedition), involving Jews. My day came when a German general arrived to decorate those who had shown bravery in battle. The local translator was absent, so the chief ward physician (Stabsarzt) drafted me to do the translating. When the wounded Hiwis started telling about their individual acts of heroism, I did my best to diminish their feats, by explaining that they either stepped on a mine, or were hit by incoming artillery fire. The lonely Romanian patient, was a gendarme sergeant, who while drunk, had fallen off a cart and somehow, broken a leg. I had already risked punishment, by giving him a "German" bed, i.e. 5 blankets. Now I invented some heroics, against nonexistent partisans for him, and he was awarded a German decoration.

The apotheosis of my career at the hospital, came when I was assigned to the kitchen. Aside from the fact that I could eat things, of which we could only dream, like chocolate, sardines, all kind of cold cuts and other delicacies, I had the satisfaction of having Waffen-SS officers trying (and succeeding) to bribe me to get second helpings. This was the beginning of my smoking habit, since they never offered me money, only cigarettes. Of course I brought some back to the ghetto, to give to fellow smokers. Although they wanted me to help them, the Germans never addressed me other than "Du Jude", (Hey you Jew), maybe it wasn't outright hate, but they never had to deal with Jews before, and that was their creed, we were just inferior beings.

1944 rolled in, we knew that the end was near, but we also knew that the German rearguard, usually diehard Waffen-SS, were bent on destruction, and Jews were certainly not going to be spared. This was also confirmed by the Ukrainian girls I worked with at the hospital. They talked a lot about how galant the Romanian officers were, and how well they treated the local girls, as opposed to the Germans who were arrogant, and treated them like a disposable commodity, as for the Jews, they were sure that we're doomed. These girls only dreamt to be taken to Romania, since they were afraid of retribution, once the Soviets returned.

CHAPTER 7 - The Orphan

After

the German Army's big defeat at Uman, the Soviet Army was on a roll, towns were being recaptured almost daily. The hospital was moving further West, closer to the German heartland, we in the ghetto were afraid of the moment the Romanians will leave, and the German rearguard would take over. One day, in late January, Capt. Fetecau came to the ghetto, called my father and the other members of the board and told them of an order received from Bucharest. All the Jews, who are in Transnistria would in the end, be repatriated, however at first only orphaned children. As a parenthesis, I should add that a couple of months ago, the Mayers, thanks to some lobbying (and/or bribing) by their relatives in Bucharest, had been transferred to Tiraspol, the capital city of Transnistria, and later allowed to return home.

We had known, about this order through the grapevine, apparently money from the AJDC (American Joint Distribution Committee), which reached the Central Board through Switzerland, was made available to resettle these orphans. Only, there were no orphans in our ghetto. However, at Fetecau's suggestion, all children under 18, were declared orphans. Whether there was any monetary reward, I don't know for sure, all Romanian officials, were regularly given a "subsidy" anyway. He would provide transportation to Moghilev, where all the orphans from Transnistria were to be gathered, then repatriated to Romania, and entrusted to different Jewish communities. Capt. Fetecau also expressed the opinion that there is little hope of survival for the ghetto, and that at least the children should be saved. At first, many of the parents were reluctant to part with their children, but in the end, all agreed.

There is no need to describe our departure, the anguish, the tears etc. We were all of us, put on a truck with a tarp cover, it was February and pretty cold, and we started our journey to Moghilev. The only restriction Capt. Fetecau had insisted upon was, that since my father was the deputy to the head of the ghetto, and his name well known throughout the various Jewish communities in Transnistria, I should travel on an assumed name. I took the name of a poor boy who had been killed by the Germans, Norbert Ebner. We had nametags sewn on our garments and our knapsacks, I was only hoping nobody would call me by my real name, once we reach Moghilev. We arrived in Moghilev, and were housed at different locations. I myself, stayed with some distant relatives, a couple named Breuer, she was the sister of my uncle's (the dentist) wife.

Before, I had spoken briefly about the Ukrainian girls I worked with. There were also a few girls, about my age in the ghetto. Since sexual relations were somewhat less formal than in a normal society, we youngsters became aware of the various licit and illicit attachments formed. And being sixteen myself, I developed a crush for a girl in the ghetto. She was a year older, well aware of my sentiments, yet she had a boyfriend who was already an adult, and didn't pay much attention to me. The young girl that shared our dwelling, was a year younger than myself, and although physically rather pretty, somehow I don't feel attracted to her at all. I don't know exactly why, but I think it could have been that because I saw her all the time, (we slept in the same room), and she being still very childish, totally ignored my manliness.

Anyway, once in Moghilev my hosts tried to console me, in view of the fact, that although my parents were still alive, their fate was, by general consensus, very much in doubt, and I might soon be a real orphan. We were free to roam around Moghilev, the girl that I had a crush on, came to visit me one day. My hosts, assuming that I was more of an adult, than I really was, left, telling me that they'll be back after two hours. During that time, all I did was, plant a chaste kiss on my visitor's cheek. Only much later, did it dawn on me, that I had missed my first sexual encounter. The girl left, and when she said goodbye, I thought I saw a slightly ironic smile, and I felt rather foolish.

The atmosphere in Moghilev, was much livelier than in our ghetto. They were a much larger community, they also had the advantage of being the first place visited by the representatives from the Central

Board in Bucharest, they were always better informed. Theirs was also the focal point through which all help coming from Romania was channelled through. They went through a terrible first winter (1941-1942), but the survivors, were more optimistic now. This February 1944, there was an overwhelming feeling that we might make it, we might actually survive.

And it behooves me to repeat that, it was only thanks to the important military victories of the Red Army, that the Germans didn't have the time to destroy us all, there can be no doubt about that. The German "Sonderkommandos" and "Einsatzgruppen" (special units which had the task to physically annihilate large groups, especially Jews) just didn't have the time to fulfill their deadly mission. And last but not least, the Romanians, had they really wanted, had plenty of time to finish us all off. Call it self preservation or shrewdness, or due to the fact that their antisemitism was maybe not that "methodical", they're Latins after all, as in some other places, and also maybe because the Iron Guard was a thing of years gone by, their attitude had changed somewhat. They still didn't like Jews, but they didn't feel they should kill them.

After a week or so, we were assembled and brought to the railroad station (the bridge over the Dniester, had in the meantime been rebuilt). All boys had their heads shaved (for sanitary reasons), and before boarding the train while we were all standing, more or less at attention, a Romanian major approached us. Addressing the whole group, he asked whether there is a boy named Schreiber, among us. Naturally, I froze in horror, somebody, especially the smaller children from our group might let out something, those were a few very terse seconds. Finally, after what seemed a very long time, another officer called the major away, he shrugged and left.

Soon thereafter we started our journey home. Obviously, also in boxcars, but very different conditions from those, barely two years ago. The cars were open, there were no gendarmes accompanying us, and we were all, if not happy, somewhat excited, and those of us, who had parents, more optimistic than we left Tulchin.

The train travelled at low speed, we stopped frequently, there were many military trains in both directions, that had priority. We were in a few boxcars, attached to a regular freight train. Early the next morning, we arrived at our first stop, Iasi (Iassy), the capital city of Moldavia. After the train had stopped, we were met by representatives of the local Jewish Community. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw them. Men and women, dressed (to our eyes) like in the movies, both men and women wore hats, some had fur-trimmed overcoats, it was unbelievable. We were given warm food, and a first group of children was taken off, to be sheltered there. After a couple of hours, the train stopped in another town, called Pascani, a railroad hub, in that part of Romania. Another group of children, myself included, were to be sheltered here.

We were brought to a room in the Jewish Community Center, and different couples, or families, started to pick their wards. Some were small and cute, especially the girls, I myself, tallish, rather gaunt with a shaven head, and dressed in a sweater that had belonged to my father and was way too big, I failed to attract any volunteers. Finally, a young couple, that came late, were left with no choice, but to take me, since I was the only one left.

They took me to their home, the man was a physician from Czernowitz, a Dr. Walter Kiesler who had married a local girl, and had settled in Pascani. At first, my name didn't ring a bell with him, but no sooner had we entered their house I told them my real name, and suddenly everything clicked. He knew my youngest uncle well, he had often eaten in my grandfather's restaurant as a youngster, and in no time I was like with family. The next day, they started to introduce me to their friends, I soon had a very active social life. I had to constantly sort of pinch myself, to believe what was happening to me. Only a few short weeks ago, I was in the ghetto, haunted by the menace that the Germans are going to liquidate us, and here people had dinner parties for me, it was not to be believed.

I don't recall exactly how, (Jews were not allowed to have, or use telephones) but I managed to let my uncle and aunt in Czernowitz know, that I am safe in Pascani. In a couple of days I received some money, a new overcoat (it was February), and various small items like a pocketknife, toothbrush, and a marriage photograph of my parents. We, there were a few boys from Tulchin, about my age, in Pascani, were now faced with another decision. The news from the Russian front, spoke of German strategic repositioning, which everybody understood to mean that they were on the run. Nobody had any idea, where the front will, (if at all) be stabilized.

My aunt and uncle decided that, we better face the future together, since it was clear that the Soviet Army would soon enter Romania. While the other boys decided to stay in Pascani, I was slated to travel to Czernowitz. Jews, were theoretically not allowed to use the train, a restriction frequently ignored, especially towards the end of the war. My folks send a young man to accompany me, he being an ethnic Romanian, would see to it that I don't attract undue attention, anyway the trip was supposed to take only 3-4 hours. When he arrived, I was taken by surprise, I had no idea that it was to happen that soon, they had no way of forewarning me. To my great dismay, I had just left my new overcoat at the tailor, to be taken in, it was too big. I left word and money with one of my fellow ex-orphans, to retrieve it, and hopefully to bring it with him, if and when, he gets to Czernowitz. I would not have mentioned this, if not for a recent encounter.

It so happened that, after a few weeks, we met in Czernowitz, he claimed that he had to leave the coat behind, since it was too heavy to carry along, and he had to walk a lot on foot. None of us had much luggage when we came from Transnistria, but the local Jewish Community, provided us with clothing and shoes, so that we would start to look "normal". I was, I remember quite incredulous that he would leave my new coat behind, and never saw him after that, being convinced that he left his own coat and took mine instead. A couple of years ago, at a wedding in Israel, we met again after 55 years (he had left Romania right after the war, and settled in Germany, where he became very prosperous). His first words, after we shook hands, -- it looks like I still owe you an overcoat--.

Anyway to get back to my story, the young man bought us tickets, and we boarded the train. What none of us knew, maybe he should have, was that starting that very day, because the battlefront was getting closer, the whole Northeastern part of Romania, came under military rule. This meant, that identity checks in all intercity transportation became mandatory. Only a short while elapsed, and a group of gendarmes accompanied by a police officer in mufti, entered our compartment., and asked for identity papers. The young man, my "protector" made believe that he didn't know me, he couldn't be blamed, since under military rule, his helping me, was a very serious offense. I now had to fend for myself, so I confessed that I was an orphan who had been repatriated from Transnistria, (all true so far). I had begged for some money, and bought a rail ticket to Czernowitz, to join my family, was the rest of my story. Of course the first reaction was one of amazement on seeing a Jew, and then a few derogatory remarks, with the order not leave the compartment. After the gendarmes left, I was taunted by some of the passengers, with the usual epithets of kike, bolshevik spy etc.

One passenger a military man, a master sergeant if I recall, was especially nasty. First he asked me to shine his boots with my handkerchief, then to tie his laces, since they had become undone. One of the laces was frayed at the end, so, stupidly, I took out my penknife to cut it. This resulted in an outbreak of rage, "look our boys are dying fighting the Bolsheviks, and the Jewboy here, has a new knife" and so on. I froze, he naturally "romanized" the knife, and predicted that the gendarmes will know how to deal with me, once we get to Czernowitz. Suddenly the police officer reappeared, told me to take my bag, and said loudly,-- I'm going to turn him over to the Germans, they know what to do with kikes !-

The train a supposedly normal passenger train, had also a few extra cars filled with Germans, and at the very end, two flatbed cars with anti-aircraft guns. The Soviet Air Force had started bombing runs in the area, and whenever enemy planes were sighted, the train stopped.

The police officer left me in a compartment with some young German officers, mostly in their early twenties. The first thing they did, was to search me. They found my parents' photograph, which had a German inscription on the back, something about their marriage."How many languages do you speak ? ", asked one of the Germans. Vaingloriously, I told them, also including Russian. That, obviously did it, "a Bolshevik spy" was the unanimous conclusion. Then I was asked to strip, and the Germans in the compartment, asked their comrades in other compartments to come and have a look at the Jew, they had never seen a circumcised male before. They told me that they are going to take me to Lemberg (in occupied Poland, today Lviv in Ukraine), where I will be judged by a German Military Court. My prospects, bleak as they were already, took a turn for the worse, when one of the Germans opened the window and holding me by my belt , let the upper half of my body dangle outside the window, pretending (or not) to try to see whether this hardened Soviet spy, can take it.

Fortunately, an air raid, brought the train to a halt, everybody left the train, hiding in the surrounding cornfields. A lone Soviet plane, threw some bombs that missed the train, and failed to explode. I don't recall, whether I had anything to eat, or drink, the journey with all the stops was now over 7 hours long. We boarded the train, and after a while, I suddenly recognized one of the Czernowitz suburbs, Adâncata.

My spirits were rather low, thinking of my fate at the hands of the Germans, when suddenly the Romanian police officer appeared. He asked me my uncle's occupation, when I answered bookkeeper, he sort of grimaced, and suddenly sensing what he was interested in, I quickly added that, before the war our family owned a mill. He smiled, and told me to follow him. We arrived in Czernowitz in a short while, he took me in a police car to Police Headquarters. There I was left in a room with a policeman to guard me. I was still quite apprehensive, the German menace was gone alright, but it looked like maybe jail, or even worse, back to Transnistria, if I were to believe the policeman. Finally, after what to me seemed like hours, the police officer came back, took me aside and said: "I hope your people will realize that I saved your life ?" "Sure", I replied "don't worry, they will". And so, after another short ride in his car, I was in my aunt's arms, while my uncle paid the amount, the officer asked, (I recall it was moderate). It had been quite a day !

The Romanians had already begun to evacuate the city, after 3 or 4 days they were gone. We awaited anxiously the fierce fight between the Soviet and German armies, since we didn't know that the Germans had decided not to defend the city, and had fallen back further south.

CHAPTER 8 - Return to Czernowitz

Then

one morning in, sometime in late March, we heard unusual noise in the street. I went down and saw them, the first Soviet soldiers, on foot, arms at the ready, cautiously looking at the throngs of people around them. We must have looked unusually well nourished and well dressed, because they kept asking who we were and where we came from. Upon hearing that we were Jews, they shook their heads in disbelief. They had been marching since Stalingrad, and had not encountered any Jews, and now here this group of (appearing to them) well dressed and not emaciated or in rags, it was beyond comprehension. They didn't say it, but they surely assumed that we were some kind of traitors. This incredulous kind of attitude, continued for a while, even after the military, were replaced by civilian authorities.

As in 1940, the stores were soon empty, this time a bit of looting, (quite understandable), helped. However, even if some soldiers helped themselves to whatever, or got dead drunk in a ditch, hugging a barrel of beer, this was their first encounter with a city that has been relatively untouched by war, and where people appeared (to them) rather elegant, and the stores unusually rich. Theirs was a long and arduous battle, and no matter what might happen later, they liberated us from the Germans, who would have made short shrift of us, had they had enough time. And so at last, I thought, for us the war was over.

My uncle, went back to his job at the mill, it obviously became state property again, the Romanian owner having left it in a much better shape than it was before. We already knew, that in their hasty retreat, the Germans did not have any time to "deal" with the Jews in Transnistria. About three weeks later, my parents, my grandfather and all the other deportees returned. Since we had been forcibly evicted in 1941, and all the apartments occupied by the Romanian officials, were empty, all of the old occupants, us included had moved back into their old apartments. Our quarters were very crowded, we started to look for an apartment for ourselves, and restart a "normal" life.

I don't recall the exact circumstances, but sometime during that spring, the seven of us moved again across the street, this time into another building, and the apartment was somewhat larger, I didn't have to sleep in the same room with my parents anymore. I might be wrong but I seem to recall that some of the others, although owners, were also forced out, the building having attracted the envious eyes of communist apparatchiks.

As I already mentioned, the people who stayed in Czernowitz, had led a semblance of normal life, including schools. These were primitive, no libraries or laboratories, but they still gave the youngsters an education. Those of us who returned from deportation, used a loosely interpreted understanding with our local teachers, as a result of which, we would present some proof, that we received private tutoring in camp. Depending on the length of said tutoring, we would be allowed to jump one, or two years, to make up for the lost years out of school. Out of honesty, or most probably fear that I won't be able to follow, I opted to jump only one year, unlike my other friends, who all jumped two. Thus, since I finished 6-th grade in Soviet middle school in 1941, I entered the 8-th grade.

A few weeks after we started classes, sometime in April, the young lady I had behaved so clumsily with in Moghilev, came to visit me. She had been taken to Falticeni, another small town in Moldavia, and stayed there with relatives, later joined by her parents. At that time since Romania was still fighting alongside the Germans, there was practically no border between the part of Romania that was annexed by the Soviet Union, and the part occupied by the advancing Soviet Army in Moldavia. Not finding me at home she came to look for me in school. She looked for me in 10-th grade, then 9-th grade, and was very surprised to find me "only" in 8-th grade. She stayed only for a short time, but my pride was hurt.

I failed to mention, that this time, when choosing a school, I had made up my mind not to select either a Russian or Ukrainian school. Unlike 1940, there was no longer a Romanian school, the obvious choice was the Yiddish. Moreover my friend from camp Hardy, went there, and most Jewish kids, even those that had no knowledge of Yiddish. The teachers, were all highly qualified, they were known in the community and very respected. Hardy's uncles were both teachers at the school, one the math teacher, was also assistant principal, the other taught physics. Since it was Hardy's father who was the one that certified that I had some tutoring in camp, he was willing to let me try to enter 9-th grade. It's true, I worked very hard to acquire some basic knowledge on math, physics etc., but without the extreme benevolence of Hardy's uncles I would not have made it. So later that April, I entered 9-th grade. This was to be a short schoolyear anyway, since we started in March, so a lot of shortcuts were taken.

In April, my father got a good position in the shoemaker's cooperative he had worked earlier, my mother and my aunt were also working and although there were some food shortages, (it was still war time) a

semblance of normalcy had returned. The Germans were retreating, yet to put in the proper perspective, it was still almost two months before D-day.

The schoolyear was coming to an end, and a new danger loomed. The Donbas (Ukraine) coalmines had been badly damaged by the retreating Germans, and urgently needed manpower. Since all boys over 18, were normally drafted into the Soviet Army, the MVD (formerly NKVD, the Interior Ministry) troops, were taking youngsters from the street, if they looked healthy, and couldn't show that they were gainfully employed. We were of course grateful for being liberated, but work in coalmines, under conditions that were far from normal, (little food, no weekends etc.) was not something I thought should be my fate, after having escaped Transnistria. The obvious solution, to find a part time job. I first tried as a helper in a foundry, but the heat and the weight of the metal parts I had to carry, wore me down quickly.

Together with some friends, I managed to get into a training program for warehousemen at the local railroad station. It was easy, no physical work required and after I finished the 3-month course, I got my diploma as a certified "merchandise handler". Since the course was in the summer, there were some very pleasant outings with our female co-trainees. In the fall I went back to school, I was now in 10-th grade and proud. Naturally it took some strings to be pulled, to convince the railroad people, to release me, especially since the war was still going full blast (fall 1944).

During the summer of 1944, Romania had changed sides, and was now fighting against the Germans. We heard about it, also about the new Government that gave all properties and rights back to the Jews. Now, some of the people who had been in camp with us, among them the Board President of the ghetto, Fichman, had told us at the time not to remain in Czernowitz, rather to move to parts of Romania that although temporarily occupied by the Soviets, would eventually revert to Romania. It had been easy, one just had to hitch a ride on a Soviet Army truck, the fellow with my overcoat did it, and many others, now it was too late.

During that same summer of 1944, Polish and Czechoslovak Army units that were formed from POW's liberated from various camps, were assembled in Czernowitz. Some of the Jewish men in town, preferred to join these outfits, rather than the Soviet Army, with the obvious afterthought of being able to go any place, after the war. And hey, I'm not trying to ingratiate myself with anybody, but the prevailing dream, had just one name, America ! A friend of our family, the same doctor who wrote the musical before the war, after having spent 4 years, in the Soviet Union, part of the time in the military, joined the Polish Army, then moved to Germany, got his family out of Romania, and came to America. As an aside, all these former POW's or camp inmates, (there were also French and Dutch) were dressed in brand new US uniforms, with only the shoulder patches identifying the different nationalities.

In the fall of 1944 we, I mean the majority of the Jews in Czernowitz, started to dream about leaving the Soviet Union. The war was still going strong, but somehow everybody had their hopes in the new peace, which this time around, would surely bring freedom of choice to all of us. It was maybe a naive thought, but.....it turned out to be right.

In order to prepare me for life in the "world", my parents, or truth be told my aunt, decided that I should start taking English and French lessons. The French teacher, a Mr. Bong, had been a high school teacher before the war, and his very special teaching aids were known all over Romania. The English teacher, turned out to be quite an outstanding woman. She became later, (in the seventies), one of Germany's acclaimed poets. Rose Auslaender, was along with Paul Celan, Moses Rosenkranz, Alfred Margul-Sperber and a few others (like our former campmates, Imanuel Weissglas, the fellow who owned the violin, and Alfred Kittner), part of an extraordinary group, of German poets and writers, all coming from Czernowitz. She was a handsome woman, in her early forties at the time, always dressed in a sort of oriental type, loose house dress, that gave her a somewhat mysterious aura, at least in my eyes. This 16-year old was naturally smitten, yet I think I managed not to betray my feelings.

What with school, (where I also sang in the choir) private lessons and a lot of friends of both sexes, life was almost normal, naturally except for the restrictions caused by the war.

Then, in October, everything collapsed. My father was arrested by the KGB, together with the other three members of the Tulchin Ghetto Board, (the Head, had presciently left, for Romania, as I said earlier, he ended up a respected judge in Israel). We were later to learn that the charges were treason and collaboration with the enemy.

Our life changed overnight. My father, through his connections, was the one to be able to get otherwise unobtainable foodstuffs, also his was the biggest income in our family. We no longer had the necessary cash to buy food on the "grey" market, but our main concern was naturally his fate. While we tried to adapt to our new life, it was my aunt who took over the reins of the household. Both my mother and my uncle (her brother), thought that maybe due to our difficult circumstances, I should stop my language lessons. My aunt however, was adamant, we will eat less, but the lessons will go on.

Up to that time, we never used our bread coupons, since the officially available bread, was a somewhat tasteless, dark brick, which contained potatoes and chaff besides wheat. Now, not only did we use them fully, but we also collected those from my uncle the dentist. We started saving every possible way, my aunt wanted

money available, for possible emergencies. The KGB allowed packages (food and clothing) to be delivered once a month, and we were waiting to find out where he was.

Finally, I don't remember the exact date, we learned that he was in the central city jail, pending an investigation, that would be followed by a trial. The Soviet judiciary system at the time (under Stalin), was such, that seldom had anybody who was arrested for alleged political crimes (real or imaginary), managed to escape a prison sentence. My aunt started to inquire among all our friends, acquaintances, neighbors, if they knew anybody working at, or knowing somebody who had access to the State Prosecutor's office. It was a long and seemingly impossible task, nobody believed that there was the slightest hope.

In the meantime our life got bleaker with every passing day. I was in school, and sometimes the only lunch I had, was some black bread with a few slices of onion. Yet French and English lessons, were not interrupted.

While we were slowly adapting to my father's absence, my aunt finally got somewhere. A man in our neighborhood, who was kind of an ardent admirer of hers, (to this day I am not certain whether she rewarded him, or not, but I am sure that she would certainly have done it, if it would have helped her brother), became friends with a KGB prosecutor. While reluctant at first, the prosecutor who was familiar with my father's case, at his friend's urging, finally accepted to receive my aunt. Again, I don't recall the content of their conversations, or whatever, I only know that after her visit, he promised that he'll try to help.

It turned out, that in the thirties, he was a "legal officer" at a Soviet consulate in the US. While there, he developed a fondness for \$20 gold coins. The difficult task ahead was first to find a sufficient number of these coins, and secondly, the money to pay for them.

Meantime, the investigation continued, and the prosecutor kept my aunt informed about its progress. Then a quasi miraculous thing happened. Mitya Prostavok, the former partisan who knew my father from the time they used to listen to the BBC, and who now had an important job in Tulchin, came to visit us. Upon hearing that my father was in jail for alleged treason, he courageously volunteered to testify in my father's favor, declaring, that my father had helped the resistance movement, and was not a traitor.

This testimony, and a number of US \$20 eagles, (I don't remember how many), convinced the prosecutor to intervene. In order to protect himself, he freed also another member of the board, Moritz Steinbock. The poor man's misfortune had been, to have shared the same apartment with us. My father needing somebody to help, had persuaded Steinbock to join the board. Since the head of the board, Shulim Fichman, had, as I said before, the inspiration to leave for Romania, the prosecutor, was hard pressed to find somebody guilty, (these were still Stalinist times). So the unfortunate other two board members, Wittner and Weschler, whose guilt was as imaginary as my father's, were sent to Siberia. Markus Weschler, perished there, Harry Wittner, returned after many years to Czernowitz, a broken man and died soon thereafter.

On March 13, 1945, Steinbock and my father, returned home. My father swiftly resumed his job, and since he was found not guilty by the KGB, his status rose immensely. The war, was nearly over, he was promised all kind of promotions, this was typical for the Soviet system. He had as it were, passed an initiation rite, now he was to be trusted implicitly. I am not going to describe the conditions, or the treatment of political prisoners in the Soviet Union's prisons, especially in those days, when the war was on, and Stalin saw traitors everywhere, more eloquent testimony is plentiful. My father though physically intact, was obviously shaken by his months spent in jail and had only one dream, to go as far away from the Soviet Union as possible. He did not tell us much about his time there. Among the few things I remember, him having to share a cot with a dead man, (corpses were not removed at night), and also whenever they were called for interrogation, it was always around 2 a.m. He obviously had to sign a paper that he received good treatment and, that anything he might tell about his stay there, could bring him back for a longer stay.

Meanwhile, the rumors circulating among the Jews, that we will be permitted to leave the Soviet Union, became stronger every day. Something was surely behind those rumors, since suddenly my father was called to a high official's office, and promised a car and driver, after the war. He was now the president of the shoemakers cooperative, and there certainly were many Soviet officials longing for a pair of shiny new boots. My father, having the power to decide who jumps the waiting line for new boots, became very popular with the local bigwigs.

Then in April, when President Roosevelt died, our hopes suddenly collapsed. It was part of the local Jewish folklore, that US Jews somehow could persuade the US Government to intervene with the Soviets in our favor. Of course with the war against Japan still being fought, this was a ridiculous assumption. The Allies surely had other worries, besides our lives were not in danger, and theoretically we were Soviet citizens, who had rejoined their motherland.

Yet, miracles do sometimes happen ! Maybe because of the recently discovered horrors of the German death camps, or because they considered us tainted ideologically, the Soviet authorities decided to allow all Jews who had been born outside the borders of the prewar Soviet Union, to leave for Romania. To this day, I found no logical explanation for it.

As a matter of fact, not only then in April-May 1945, but one year later, in 1946, they allowed another batch, among them my friend Hardy Mayer, to leave. At

the time, the Jews firmly believed that somehow, the US Government was responsible for our departure. Again it was something going against the grain of everything the Soviets ever did, and in retrospect nothing short of miraculous. It is true, as my father was told by certain higher ups, when he told them that he wants to leave, "where are you running, we'll be there soon, you're better off staying where you are", they, were convinced that they'll incorporate Romania into the Soviet Union.

Anyway, he used his connectios, (a few pairs of boots), and we received our permit to leave. I recall it, a small piece of paper, not more than 4x3 inches. On May 8-th we put all our moveable belongings on two hired peasant carts, and started our trek to the border, about 30 miles away. I don' t recall where we spent the night, but when we got to the border, on May 9-th, the Soviet Army was celebrating VE-Day, the following day, May 10-th was Romania's National Holiday, so we spent two days in a border village, lodging with some peasants. Finally, on May 11-th 1945, we left the Soviet Union, and crossed into Romania.

Our feelings, utter exhilaration, are difficult to describe, and even more difficult to explain. We left behind those who had liberated us, who freed us from camps and most certainly saved our lives, and we were looking forward to rejoin those who had mistreated, deported and brutalized us, and maybe would have exterminated us, had the fortunes of war taken a different turn. And yet, we strove so very hard to leave. It was really not the economic hardships, that drove us, but the eternal fear, of being spied on, of being denounced, the everyday presence of the subtle terror that kept this tyranical regime in place. And last, but not least, the knowledge that we are really not part of the rest of the world, that travel to even a neighboring city requires a "komandirovka", (a specially issued travel authorization), whereas foreign travel is something, that a mere mortal could only dream of.

The first Romanian we encountered, was a tall dashing cavalry officer, with a resplendant furtrimmed riding jacket, we just stared incredulously at this apparition. He kept smiling and asked us half-jokingly "so you're all born in Romania are you ?" We of course answered in the affirmative, and then being asked where, we all chose localities that were far , far away from the Siviet border.

Our precautions were naturally not necessary, since once we were let go by the Soviets, Romania, at that time still occupied by Soviet troops, had really no power to oppose any decision taken by the Soviet Union.

Our first destination was the border town of Siret, where we all found places to stay. The means by which we paid for lodging and food, were again something difficult to explain. People, almost everybody, managed to bring along either Soviet rubles (strictly forbidden) or dollars, or other sellable valuables. My father took off for Bucharest, to try to get back into business (one of his former Jewish partners was there, so was his friend, the judge). He also had some well-to-do friends, who he hoped might help him out. We, the rest of the family, after about two weeks, left for the town of Vatra Dornei, where we had some friends. There we were going to spent the next few months, waiting for my father to beckon us to Bucharest, to start our new life.

CHAPTER 9 - Romania

While my father tried to rebuild a business in Bucharest, the rest of us, settled temporarily in Vatra Dornei. This was a former resort, which was a rather picturesque town nestled in a beautiful valley on the banks of a river. We had friends there, who helped us at the beginning, since our material means were totally depleted. The remaining Jews in Vatra Dornei, (all had been deported, and many never came back) were trying to rebuild their lives, there was great optimism all around.

My first priority in those early days was to get back to school. The Romanian Government had issued some special rulings to help those who, through no fault of their own (mostly former deportees but also some who were drafted into the army), had interrupted their high school studies. The "Dragos Voda" high school, where I was to attend classes, was located in the neighboring town of Campulung. I, i.e. my aunt and uncle who went with me found a Jewish family where I was to have room and board for the duration of the summer.

The teachers at the high school, all ethnic Romanians of course, some of them very highly qualified, (for example, the Romanian language instructor, G. Voividca, was well known as an author/epigramist), went out of their way, to help us. I can not vouch for anything, but I had the feeling that they were really sorry for what had happened to us, and in some way were trying to repair the terrible injustice that had befallen us.

We were a group of about 30-40 youngsters, most of the others were older than myself, and our knowledge level, with respect to our age, was from barely adequate to practically insufficient. We studied for about three months, and then, we were to take exams.

In my case I was to take so called "summary" exams for the 3-d and 4-th high school grade and more thorough, all-inclusive exams, for grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. As a parenthesis, the Romanian normal curriculum included 4 years of grammar school and 8 years of high school, for a total of 12 years. In the Soviet system at the time, there were only 10 years. Since I had left Soviet school a month before graduating (the 10-th grade), I was allowed to take all exams in order to finish high school.

It was not easy, and again, only due to the extreme benevolence of our teachers, which was on the other hand sort of expected, did I pass all these exams. A typical example, our Latin instructor, was asking me for a solemn promise, that I will not continue the "literary" section in the last two grades, so limited was my knowledge. Literary, meant those who would not take the "scientific" (math, physics, chemistry) path to higher education.

Armed with these certificates I now embarked on a most difficult task, the baccalaureate exam. That had to be taken in the regional capital, Suceava. This time I found some lodgings with a Jewish lady, who besides myself had several other lodgers. After some very busy weeks, when I was cramming for 10-12 hours a day, the dreaded moment had arrived. This time, there were no special considerations, we were taking the exam together with all the regular high school graduates, at the prestigious "Stefan ce Mare" high school. At first I had flunked it, but later through some reevaluation, I just squeezed through.

I came back to Vatra Dornei, and soon thereafter I (except for my maternal grandparents, the others were already there) travelled to Bucharest. I remember the trip vividly. Trains at the time were running on and off, the preferred mode was by open truck. Since the distance was about 400 miles, we stopped at the onset of darkness and spent the night in Bacau. These trucks were actually used to carry all kinds of illegal merchandise, (mostly food, such as butter and cheese) for the black market in Bucharest, and the owners or those who chartered the trucks, were making good money, with all the risks and rewards associated with smuggling. To me they looked like some modern day privateers.

My parents had rented a furnished room, I slept on the floor. My aunt and uncle with my paternal grandfather also shared a room, in a different place.

That first year in Bucharest, was not easy. My father did manage to start a business (with two of his former Jewish partners and the judge), but we had to all live off his earnings. I had a baccalaurate diploma, but I did not have enough time to study for the Polytechnic School entrance exam, and to be honest I was also scared, since only I knew the extent of my knowledge, or to put it bluntly, the lack of it. I availed myself of the free admission which existed only for a few disciplines, and ended up studying mathematics. I never intended to continue beyond the first year, but I found out that I really liked it, in spite of the fact that at times I could hardly follow the instructor. That first winter 1945-1946 in Bucharest was quite enjoyable, in spite of our crammed quarters, and modest means.

In the spring of 1946, my former math tutor from high school, arrived in Bucharest. I had started to prepare myself for the Polytechnic entrance exam, and my father hired him to help me (at the same time

helping him to earn some money). Needless to say, that I had started English lessons again, we, like many people around us were well aware of its importance.

I joined a Zionist student organisation, and started thinking seriously about going to what was still British Palestine. My father's business was doing well and in the summer of 1946, we moved to a rented three room furnished apartment. For the first time in my life, I had a room of my own. In the meantime, my youngest uncle had returned from the Soviet Union, after almost 5 years in the Red Army. He had fought all the way back to Stalingrad, and after being wounded, he was to spend the rest of the war years guarding prisoners of war. Anyway, he made his way to Bucharest, found his wife, and started to work in my father's business.

In the fall of 1946, after some very heavy cramming I managed to pass the entrance exam to the Polytechnic School to study Chemical Engineering. At first though, I failed, since I came in 56-th (out of some 630 candidates), and there were only 50 places. But a week later the number was raised to 60, and lo and behold, I was in. I was very happy at school, and I soon had a lot of new friends, leading a relatively carefree student's life.

I said relatively because slowly, the communists started to make trouble. I found myself being saddled with the maximum tuition payment, in no way determined by our material status, but rather as punishment for not wanting to join one or the other demonstration or protest meeting. I have to sadly mention, that those that decided tuition levels, and who generally made life difficult for most students, were mostly if not all, Jews, and usually sons and daughters of the rich or even the very rich.

I even developed a romantic attachment with one of my coeds, the poor girl suffered for it. At the end of the first year, at the inorganic chemistry final exam, she sat next to me so that I might help her. One of the teaching assistants, who had a crush on her, observed our "collaboration", and he came and confiscated our papers. We had to start anew, I barely finished on time, she obviously couldn't, as a result she had to repeat the year. Needless to say, our relationship became suddenly somewhat shaky, but after a time all was well.

My father's business was quite successful, and our lives were back to almost normal. In the summer of 1947 I finally had my first trip to the Black Sea, life couldn't be better. Then, in the fall of 1947, things started to deteriorate.

First in August, a confiscatory monetary "reform" had already made life much more difficult, especially for people in business. Later, the Communist Party, which had been the real power in the so-called coalition government (forced upon the King by the Soviets on March 6-th 1945,) staged elections, with preordained results that, gave them complete control. Following in the wake of the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty, they now proceeded in spite of their promises, to turn the country into a "People's Democracy".

Again, only two short years of relative tranquility, and the desire to leave, became very strong. The handwriting was on the wall, we were slowly moving towards the type of regime we thought we escaped from.

In 1947, quite a few Jews who had lived under Soviet rule before, had started to leave the country illegally. Both Romania and Hungary were occupied by Soviet troops, as was a part of Austria, where the borders were practically open to the West. There existed a lot of "passers", who helped people cross into Hungary, from Romania. Once arrived in Budapest, the Jewish Community, with money from the AJDC, helped the people to get to Vienna, from where, they could go anywhere. Many left for Palestine, through Italy, others stayed in Vienna, or left for other countries in Western Europe or America. My father, refused to join those, who left illegally, he said he no longer has the stamina, to walk again with a knapsack, and to be on the run. I was a student at the Polytechnic, I was tempted to go, but I stayed with the lame excuse, that I'd rather finish my studies first.

In the fall of 1947, the authorities allowed the Jewish Agency to bring in two ships, the "Pan Crescent" and the "Pan York", for those Jews wishing to go to Palestine. My father who knew somebody at the Agency, got to have a look at them, and told me, he didn't think they're seaworthy. He was wrong, about 10,000 people managed to reach the shores of Palestine, were intercepted by the British, and all aboard were taken to Cyprus, where they stayed till May 1948.

In December 1947, the communists, forced the King to abdicate, and the country was now totally theirs. Yet, the economy was still mostly, in private hands. In June 1948, they nationalized all important businesses and commerce. My father's business was not affected, yet he had to close it soon, since he no longer received raw materials. However, this being Romania, and due to the fact that the new communist "managers" having come from mostly menial tasks, some of them practically illiterate, had no choice but to work with the former "exploiters" especially if properly "rewarded". Thus, he managed to still make a very good living, working in a nationalized rubber plant, that had belonged to one of his friends.

In the summer of 1948, a funny episode occurred. One of my father's acquaintances from Czernowitz, a certain Frenkel, appeared in the guise of a Soviet Colonel by the name of Altov. He offered to take people to Vienna, for the modest price of \$300 a head. My father decided that it was time for me to go. However he told

also some rather rich people he knew about it. They decided to send their recently married son with his wife. The mother of the young man, a certain Paul Lengyel, asked if Altov wouldn't be able to take her daughter in law's mink coat and engagement ring. He of course accepted gladly. We went by train, the three of us, to the assigned meeting place, a railroad junction in Transylvania, where we were supposed to change into German military uniforms. Colonel Altov was the commander of a train with returning Austrian ex-POW's, that was the reason the train went to Vienna. Altov, having the coat and the ring, which were worth many times the \$900 he was to get from us, never showed up.

Later in the fall of 1948, the authorities through a Jewish Police Commander named Kweiler, started a flourishing business, selling passports for \$10,000 a family. My former travelling companions, Paul Lengyel and his wife Suzy Ormos, had no problems to pay, and left. Unfortunately our family didn't have the \$10,000 so neither I nor anybody in our family could leave. Passports were also obtainable, if one could show a valid entry visa to any country, but Israel, and one didn't hold an important job. Since we managed to obtain some Latin American visas (naturally for money), and my father also paid the required "handling fee" (through two crooked lawyers, the brothers Meth), we had high hopes to leave. My uncle the dentist, found a willing lieutenant (a patient of his) who for a very decent "handling fee" got him his passport. However the new head of the passport department, a Jewish police colonel (also from Czernowitz), had a gripe against my father, because of some unfounded rumors concerning his wife, (she had been in camp with us), refused to sign my father's passport and, we stayed.

During the winter of 1948, I had my first encounter with the new order. For Christmas break I went with my young uncle and aunt and some of their friends on a skiing holiday in the mountains. At night the only entertainment available, were card games. My uncle played hearts, and I with one of my classmates from school and two of his friends, settled for a game of poker. At some point a group of some young people entered the room. One of them, knew me from Czernowitz, he was a Chemical Engineering student one or two years ahead of me at school, I also knew he was a communist party bigwig. He came over to our table and admonished me for playing cards, while the country's new strongman (Gheorghiu-Dej) was talking on the radio on the first anniversary of the proclamation of the republic. I jokingly told him to mind his own business, especially since nobody else paid any attention, people just continued whatever they were doing.

Soon thereafter I was punished for my transgression. To be able to stay overnight in one of the mountain cabins or huts, one had to be a member of an organisation called "Popular Tourism" (ATP). Several days after I returned home, I was called to headquarters and informed that because of my "reactionary" attitude, I was no longer fit to belong to a progressive organisation, which meant I could no longer visit any of the mountain cabins or huts. It took a lot of diplomacy at my mother's card games, since she was friendly with the guy's aunt, and a solemn promise from me that I will from now on behave and respect the beloved leaders, and after a few weeks, I was reinstated. I mentioned this rather innocuous incident, to illustrate the arbitrariness of all the actions taken by those now in power.

At the end of the 1948-1949 schoolyear another, this time quite heavy, blow. Just before the June final exams, a list appeared on the bulletin board at school, with some 12 names, who apparently not having fulfilled the attendance criteria, were prohibited from taking final exams for the year, which in practical terms meant losing the year, or even exmatriculation. Inquiries, petitions all to no avail. We were told (I was on that list), by the dean, a very famous scientist, Prof. Nenitescu, that there is nothing to be done, there were no attendance problems whatsoever, but "they" have ordered it. I was naturally crestfallen, and I now felt like an idiot. I could have left in 1947, studied in Vienna, or even gotten to the USA, and now here I was facing a rather bleak future.

But.... this was Romania. By some administrative quirk, the Polytechnic School, was under the tutelage of the Metallurgy and Mining Ministry. My father, found a willing and "flexible" engineer there I think his name was Blazian, who properly "rewarded" arranged for the whole thing to be dropped. His only condition, he couldn't do it for me alone, it had to be for the whole group. My only gripe now, I couldn't brag about it, not even to my fellow nonattendees. Many years later, one of those on that list, became a member of the government, deputy minister for the petroleum industry.

After having failed at our earlier attempts to leave, we now joined the majority of the Jewish population, in trying to get exit permits for Israel. After the State of Israel came into being, there was at first a total embargo on exit permits to Israel. Then, sometimes in late 1949 or early 1950, whether it was for some political reasons, or most likely because there was some financial "reward" involved, the authorities permitted a fullfledged mass emigration to Israel. There were weekly sailings on a former cruiseship the "Transilvania". Everybody we knew, even some of those who had flirted with the regime, were aching to leave.

At the time in late 1948 or 1949 when we hoped to be able to leave, my parents gave up the apartment that they had previously rented, and settled in one room, in order to protect the owner. This was due to the fact, that all living quarters freed by people who left the country were automatically confiscated, and distributed to the party faithful. There was no room for me there, so I moved into the living room of an apartment shared by two of my uncles. It was not very comfortable, but we all thought it won't last for very long, of course it lasted

more than two years. I continued my studies, and except for my lack of privacy, there was a semblance of normal life.

Earlier that winter, my uncle and aunt got their exit visas for Israel and left. I thought that I might finally get a room of my own, but it didn't work. My young uncle and aunt were told to move into the now vacated room, and a woman, a janitor in some ministry got their room. I remained in the living room.

Then, one night during the spring of 1950, around 2 a.m. we were awakened by the security police. They came for my young aunt, we didn't know it at the time, but it was a very large sweep. Those arrested had all committed the same crime: they had visited the British Library to watch the film of Queen Elizabeth's marriage, and had been filmed exiting the library. There were American, British and French libraries in town, all sponsored by the respective embassies, they all had quite an impressive number of visitors. They had all been closed, for allegedly spreading antisoviet propaganda or some other trumped up charges. My aunt, as well as myself and many of our friends were card-carrying members at both the American and British libraries. I had gone there often, but somehow, I missed the Royal marriage. That was the fateful day, they decided to film all visitors.

The Romanian Communist regime, slavishly copied and imitated everything that the Soviets had done. For example, the former administrative units called "judet" were changed into "region" to more closely resemble the Russian "oblast". The city precincts formerly "sectors" were now "raions" the police was now the militia etc. Even the sporting clubs, the former "Rapid" became "Locomotiva", the dreaded Interior Ministry "nationalized" a private club, and the new name, obviously "Dinamo" like their Moscow counterparts.

But nothing was as terrible as Gheorghiu's mania to build his own pharaonic canal, modelled after the Volga-Don canal. Stalin had used his to get rid of his prison population, now Romania's prisons were beginning to be full, with political prisoners, whose only crime was, that they either were part of the former landowning bourgeoisie, or members of various (albeit democratic) non-communist political parties. In addition, they invented a new term in their jurisprudence, called administrative detention, duration, open. To build his Danube-Black Sea canal, Gheorghiu needed even more people. That was where my aunt and tens of thousands of other people were sent. Some didn't even know what their crime was, it was enough if somebody sent an anonymous letter saying so and so is talking against the regime, or if the family was somehow related with former dignitaries. My aunt was formally charged with "involuntary spying" and sentenced to 6 months of forced labor at the canal. Some of my wife's girlfriends were also taken, one who was a ballet dancer at the opera, was freed after a few days, everything was totally arbitrary, they apparently had to fulfill a quota.

Around that time, it was June 1950, I started my final exams. Suddenly, my parents got their exit visa. No connections, or bribery were of any help, my case was hopeless, there was apparently something in my file, that made them wanting to keep me. The official explanation was, that since I was about to be a graduate engineer, the country needed me. Yet some of my Jewish classmates, left during that summer. Be that as it may, I was now alone, with only my uncle in the apartment. Then in late August he got his exit permit, yet his wife was in a labor camp, building the canal. Miraculously, I don't recall the exact circumstances, she was freed earlier for some reason, and they also left.

Their room was given to a married officer with two children, the three room apartment now becoming extremely crowded, since the janitor did not move. Every time I had to use the bathroom, I had to pass through their bedroom. Our relations became quite tense, I only kept them somehow at bay, telling them that I will be leaving soon to be reunited with my parents. I really hoped that by writing to the authorities, explaining my case, they will finally relent.

All my efforts, as well as those of some people who interceded in my favor turned out to be useless. In August I started to work on a temporary basis, to prepare my diploma, however, I did not take a permanent job, thinking that it might prevent me from leaving. Fortunately, I had enough to live on, and soon I started to do technical translations, which were quite well paid. My knowledge of the Russian language was now a great help, since the powers that be, zealously wanting to copy everything that was published in the Soviet Union, provided lots of work. I did not take a permanent job, still hoping to leave.

In the summer of 1951, my neighbor, now a full colonel, put in a good word for me with the military authorities, stating (it was true), that I did not have a job, that I finished my studies, and suggesting that there was no reason for me not to do my military service, (all students were automatically deferred, and most engineers were considered too important for the industrial effort to be drafted). The situation was solved by my father in law to be. He doggedly followed a master sergeant from the draft board, that I had pointed out to him, and went to his house. There he explained that if I should be drafted for two years, I might not marry his daughter, and thus make the whole family unhappy. This sad story and a relatively reasonable sum of money, solved the problem. The sergeant just buried my file in some drawer, where it remained until I turned 26 when I could no longer be drafted.

This friendly service, made me aware that I better move, since I could expect other surprises. I found a furnished room with some people who were friends with my friend Hardy's parents, I moved there and I kept

hoping.

In the summer of 1952, after endless memoranda and supplications to various government leaders, I realized that my efforts were in vain, and I decided to take my diploma exam, and I became a certified engineer. Among the mandatory subjects, required for the exam was marxism-leninism. I studied hard to remember all this mumbo-jumbo, and really at the exam, I had all the right answers. However the professor, one Paul Ioanid, gave me only a passing grade. I had the nerve to ask him why, and he told me that I know why, and I should be grateful that he let me pass. Of course he was also Jewish.

This brings me to some observations, that might not be politically correct, in today's world, but nevertheless they represent my views, as I observed the events of those days.. As I said before, at the end of the war, I had the impression that a lot of Romanians, having witnessed the persecution of the Jews, were somewhat remorseful, and were willing to help the Jews reintegrate into normal life. On the other hand, a great many Jews, some out of honest hopes for a more egalitarian society, but alas, the majority for the simple fact that they sensed which way the wind was blowing joined the Communist party. But, there were so few ethnic Romanian communists, that it became almost a given, that many of the leading positions in the so called "ideological" sector would be held by Jews.

At the same time, many Romanians were either purged for having belonged to the former elite, or worse, were languishing at the canal or other parts of the Romanian gulag. Of course this changed later in the 60-ties, when ethnic Romanians who originally were reluctant to join the party, did it for their material wellbeing, and to be honest, with the same abject subservience to the new masters, for which they had earlier accused the Jews.

Yet the majority of the Jews, who had flocked en masse to the communists, did, when the possibility arose in the early 60-ties, have no qualms try to leave the "building of a socialist society", for the greener pastures of the West. This of course was one of the main causes of a renewal of antisemitism, which later in the last years of the regime, became almost official.

As a footnote, to this, sometime in 1959, that same marxist Ioanid, together with some other Jewish highly placed "intellectuals", (and who considered themselves superbrains) staged a bank robbery, with all the trappings gleaned from american gangster movies, got away with an enormous sum of money, and tried to leave the country by bribing a pilot to provide them with a plane. They were caught, and sentenced to death, wheather they were actually executed, I don't know.

When wholesale emigration to Israel was abruptly stopped late in 1952, I realized that I'll have to remain there, for some time at least. I started looking for a job, and in February 1953, I began my first full-time job. These were the last days of Stalin's life, and the political terror was at its peak. Many a time, we would wake up at night, hearing the elevator, wondering at which floor it would stop. It was always the police looking for somebody. We had a little, scare since we were regularly listening to the BBC and to the Voice of America, and a former servant girl who lived in my wife's apartment found it useful to tell the police about it. But, once they found out that we were listening only to programs in English, they left us alone.

I have to confess that, whereas almost everybody tried to keep a low profile, so as not to provoke the ire of the political nobodies who ran the party (communist) and trade union offices, which were a kind of parallel power structure in each plant or office, I really played with fire. I'll freely admit that I was childishy cocky and now in retrospect, downright lucky to not to have had any major troubles. For example, when asked to name relatives abroad, I snidely put down, they (i.e. all my family) have a relative abroad, since I'm the only one left in Romania, all the others being abroad.

One of the "punishments" for my attitude, which I really was happy about, was that, while all graduate engineers, were automatically made officers in the reserves, I was classified "untrained soldier". I also remember refusing to take part in all kind of special activities like "the soviet step", which entailed learning to march in goosetstep, and at parades, to have to come earlier than anybody else, in order to put on some uniform. I also once misplaced the portrait of some communist saint during a forced parade celebrating some revolutionary event, i.e., I left it on the road and just went home, pretending to have left it with somebody. In a normal society these things would seem utterly ridiculous, but anybody who has had to live under a communist regime will understand.

Later in 1958, in one of my shortlived jobs, I worked at a prestigious chemical research facility, where I got hired in spite of my "bad" file, only because the chief engineer was a personal friend. A few weeks after I joined, I was called to the personnel department. Usually that meant trouble, because under the communists, "personnel" was closely associated with the secret police. Every working person had a "personal file" that went along to every job, and that contained not only the normal information regarding family and education, but all kind of political evaluations and also, a detailed description of the individual's personality, related to his life both on and off the job.

The woman who headed the personnel department, was Jewish, she had been at Auschwitz. She was horrified that I, a former deportee, could have such a reactionary attitude. She told me about all my "sins", that

were duly recorded, the "soviet step" refusal, the lost portrait, and also many things I didn't recall, where I made disparaging comments about the regime, or some remarks considered either anti-soviet or pro-western. In short the good woman, cleaned my file of all those incriminating notes, while I promised to be more careful. It didn't help, the general manager, who was Jewish as well, called me one day into his office, and upon my refusal to withdraw my application to leave the country, fired me on the spot.

In 1956 I got married. I had postponed it for many years, always hoping to leave, and then have my wife follow. During all the years emigration was practically stopped, there always was somebody who knew somebody who allegedly could provide the exit papers, obviously for a hefty payment. I can not even remember how many times this occurred, but always something happened at the last minute and the whole scheme collapsed. Even now we first got married secretly at the mayor's office, in a collective ceremony with no witnesses of our own, not even a flower for my wife. This because a dentist friend of my parents had a "sure thing" going. Obviously this too was a nonstarter. Finally, in the fall of 1956 we had a real wedding, with all the required paraphernalia, my wife in a stunning dress and I in a borrowed morning coat. None of us was religious, but we wanted our wedding in the "Big Synagogue", with lots of people, just because we knew that it was against the prevailing official dogma.

My cockiness had however brought me my comeuppance. After almost two years in my first job, at the end of 1954, I was transferred to another city far away from Bucharest. Naturally I refused, with the result of being fired on the spot. I tried for a whole year to find a suitable job, it was in vain. After some influential friends pulled the right strings, I was rehired. This time, I tried at first to behave, but in 1957, emigration to Israel was again opened. I dropped all pretense, and at the end of the year I was fired again. I managed to land (again only because people I knew well, helped me) a couple of shortlived jobs, but thinking that I'll leave soon, I managed to get fired both times. In all honesty I was refusing extra so called "voluntary" work, and whenever there was a protest meeting (usually against american imperialists and their "lackeys" of the day), I made myself scarce.

I could engage in these dangerous (now I'd have to say, stupid) shenanigans, because I could afford it. I made money with my translations, and I also received packages from abroad (God bless America, my uncle in Philadelphia sent money to a lady in Paris, and she took care of the rest), the contents of which I sold.

There were also quasi comic interludes during those times. Every few weeks, there were new rumors about impending reopening of the emigration spigot. Sometimes in 1956 or 1957, the street rumors, in spite of the fact that several of our friends who were active Zionists before, had been jailed, had it that everybody who registers at the Israeli legation (at that time it was at a lower level than an embassy) because of family in Israel would be allowed to leave. All non-communist diplomatic missions were guarded by uniformed militiamen, and there were usually a few plainclothes secret police in the vicinity to photograph and/or follow anybody venturing inside. I decided, together with a friend of mine, Eddy Reichman (he is now a respected journalist in France) to try it.

We went there, were duly identified before entering, and once inside, registered, although the people who worked there, some of whom I knew, were quite skeptical about the whole thing. When we left, we realized that somebody was following us. We took a tram for one stop, then when it started to move, jumped out and started to run, our man running behind us. Fortunately, we were very close to where my wife lived. We turned a corner and went inside her house, the man behind us about 70-80 feet. We quickly entered her apartment, and from the window, we watched the guy turning around in circles trying to find out where we are. I could of course remain there, but we had to somehow extricate Reichman. Fortunately, a mechanic was in the apartment, he had come to repair a broken refrigerator. He gladly offered to help. We got Reichman an old soiled shirt, he smeared his face with a little grease, put on a workman's cap, and carrying the tool box followed behind the mechanic. It worked perfectly, the policeman continued his vigil till nightfall.

In the summer of 1959, I had the first real scare. I was called to Militia Headquarters under the pretext of filling out some forms required in my (maybe tenth) passport application form. It was obviously meant to prevent me from telling my wife. Needless to say, that for the six hours I was there, she waited in a milk bar across the street. The reason they called me in, was for me to start informing on my various friends and also just people I knew socially, especially a famous writer who they seemed to be most interested in.

I was threatened - you'll never be allowed to leave the country- etc, and also reminded about the fact that the Red Army liberated us, and we owe it to the regime to fight against the "enemy", whoever he might be. I managed after 6 hours of continuous arguments back and forth, to politely decline, my excuse being my known tendency to talk, sometimes too much, I explained that sooner or later, I might betray myself. I was called once more, for another 4-5 hours, but I managed to discourage their efforts, I signed a secrecy vow, and that was the end of it.

A few months later when I met one of my "examiners" in a restaurant, I nonchalantly greeted him. He came after me, and threatened me with dire consequences if I ever again show that I knew him. I think he had a

general's rank in the Romanian version of the KGB, the "Securitate" In the fall of 1959, I got another job, this time in the design department of an equipment plant. This department was filled with mostly people that were fired from other jobs, or were politically tainted. Jewish engineers who had asked to leave the country, ex-members of the royal armed forces, former jailbirds like this very nice lady engineer I worked with before, who had purged a two year term for some gold coins they found in her apartment, and also one of my former bosses. They discovered (after 25 years), that he had been associated with the Iron Guard during the war. I spent 21 months there and except for the fact that regardless of function or task (I had quite a responsible job, liaison with the Soviet customers, my knowledge of Russian again helped me), I was paid minimum wage as it were, but I was reasonably satisfied.

It was only in 1961, with money provided by our proverbial uncle from America, that my wife and I, managed to leave Romania. This time the Romanian Communist Government was running a quasi official emigration business, through a Hungarian Jew (Henry Jacober) living in London. He was a wonderful person, who helped a lot of people who didn't have the money, to leave Romania. Later in 1962, with borrowed money, we "bought" my in laws, and my brother in law and his family. They all settled in Italy, my wife and I, after spending a year in Israel, finally came to the United States.

Who could have imagined this happy ending, back in 1942 ?

END

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