

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

By Dr Moses Zwecker

Edited by Dr Erika Shaffer

Translated into English and expanded by Hava Oren

Translator's note

This text is based on a draft written in German by Moses Zwecker in 1976, at age 80. He never finished the project. His daughter, Erika Shaffer, collected and edited the fragments after his death in 1982. I am his granddaughter. Here are all of us in a family photo taken in 1963: my grandfather Moses Zwecker, my mother Erika Shaffer (in the middle), and myself, Hava Oren, aged 11



I started to work on the English translation in 2004. I did not change any words or passages written in Yiddish or Hebrew. My translation of these passages, as well as my comments, are given in brackets. Since the “Childhood Memories” span only a limited period of time, I collected additional material related to Moses Zwecker’s life from my mother’s recollections. They form the second part of the book.

A serious problem was the matter of names. Jews living in Bukovina in the 19th century used Jewish names. By the turn of the century, with the gradual increase of the use of German, a German name was added. Many also had nicknames. Sometimes it becomes very confusing. From all the names I chose the one by which the person was actually called as far as I know.

In spelling place names, I found different versions. For instance, one town is spelled Radautz on German maps and Rădăuți on Romanian maps. I usually chose the German version, but sometimes I made up a version of my own which to an English speaker will sound closest to the original.

Contents

Chapter 1. My mother's family.

Chapter 2. My father's parents. The farm.

Chapter 3. My milk brother. Education on the farm. My uncles and aunts.

Chapter 4. My father's birthday. My first suit of clothes.

Chapter 5. My parents. Religion in our family. My brothers and sisters. My birth. Do I bring bad luck to the family? Customs related to giving birth. The Circumcision ceremony.

Chapter 6. My native village. The sale of liquor. Jewish institutions. Our neighbours. Education. The story of Herschale Goldberg. The tragic death of the teacher. School in the next village. The study of German. Stealing pears with the German teacher's son.

Chapter 7. The little stream by the house. The Hlinitza stream. Bathing in the Prut. Floods on the Prut. The old synagogue. My illness. My sister Hendl cares for me.

Chapter 8. Our new house.

Chapter 9. Aunt Toni's wedding. My sister Schlieme. The life of the peasants.

Chapter 1. My mother's family.

My grandparents on my father's side I remember quite clearly, but my mother's parents I have never known. From my mother's occasional remarks, I learned that they lived in Sniatyn, a little town on the border of Bukovina. My mother was born there in 1858. My grandfather, Shlomo Birnbaum [from Kolomea], died at the age of 36, leaving my grandmother alone with five children. Sarah, the eldest, lived in Kuti. I hardly knew her. The second was my mother. Then there were two younger sisters and a brother. My mother was very proud of her brother. She spoke of him often and never forgot to mention that because of his good looks he served in the imperial guard and for several years he stood guard before the palace in Vienna. In my childish naiveté I expected to find in him a reflection of the imperial majesty, whom he had seen face to face almost daily, but when I finally met him, I was quite disappointed to see only a poor, middle-aged Jew.

My mother's younger sister was called Ethel and she lived in Vashkautz. Aunt Ethel and uncle Urzi were frequent visitors in our house. They were always short of money and my father had to come to their rescue. As for the third sister, my mother once told me that she died young, of some disease.

How my grandmother, a widow with five children, made ends meet I don't know, but she did. After her daughters were married, she sold all her worldly goods and went to spend the rest of her life in Eretz Israel and be buried in its holy soil. There she lived on *Chalukah* money ["alms" sent by Jewish communities in Europe], which she received along with thousands of other devout Jews in the Holy Land. She never asked for anything and I never heard of my father helping her in any way. I don't know when she left; it was probably before I was born. I remember only that once in a while we would receive postcards with Turkish postmarks from her. Once a

parcel arrived. I think it was in 1906. It contained dried herbs which were prized as good luck charms, some holy earth and other such things and for me a little prayer book bound in red leather. Sadly, I lost it during World War I. When I came home for the school vacation in 1908, I found my mother in mourning. Grandmother had passed away in Tiberias. I never tried to find her grave because during her last years she had remarried and consequently had changed her last name. She was a God-fearing woman and my mother took after her. Where else could the poor widow have found the strength to carry on if not in her faith?

Chapter 2. My father's parents. The farm.

My great-grandfather on my father's side, Moishe Zwecker of Arelitz, was also called Moishe Arelitzer, after the place in Galicia where he lived. It was customary at that time that devout and respected men, even if not rabbis, were called by the name of their town. He was a renowned Talmud scholar. As an old man he spent long hours teaching Talmud to my father and his brother Chaim. I inherited his noble name – Moishe – but for me it was the source of much hardship. Although the clerk in Stănești entered my name officially as Moses, this made little difference. Whenever a state official, a teacher or just any good Christian called me by my name, I could see their faces harden and a cold wave would engulf me. Nevertheless, I refused to change my name into Moritz or Marius as some people had advised. My family and friends called me Otto. How it came to that I will explain later.

Reb Moishe Arelitzer had three sons, [Menachem Mendl, Meshulam Hersch and Froim], the eldest being my grandfather Mendl. They left home in their youth and migrated to Bukovina. In the late 19th and early 20th century, many Jews moved from the poor and backward Galicia to Bukovina which was in full economic boom. The Austrian government encouraged this migration as a way to counterbalance the Romanian and Ukrainian majority. The Jewish immigrants were officially registered as Germans, to which they didn't object because this gave them many advantages. They enjoyed the same rights as Germans did, at least on the surface. My grandfather's move to Bukovina was part of this trend. He settled down in the hamlet Krostovata, near the then Jewish village of Hlinitza on the river Prut, about 150 kilometres away from his native town. It was there that he married the beautiful Esther Herzig who became my grandmother.

<https://www.google.com/maps/@48.3352293,25.6668434,12z>

She was a native of that village, born on the edge of a beautiful beech forest. Her father, Shloime Herzig, a hard-working and thrifty man, had accumulated a considerable fortune. He owned fields and hired local Gypsies to cultivate them. For a time, he also managed the local pub. Shloime Herzig was not a migrant like most of the Jews of his time. His ancestors had lived there for generations. Half the village bore the name of Herzig, the others were the “newcomers”.

Shloime Herzig had several grown-up children. Two daughters lived in Czernovitz, two sons in Hlinitza. Grandmother Esther, the youngest, was the only one

left at home. She was expected to take care of her parents in their old age and later inherit the farm. Marriage to Esther was my grandfather's good fortune.

When did they marry? Their eldest son, Chaim, was born in 1858, so it must have been in 1856 or 1857 when they both were barely 20. At first sight they might have seemed an odd couple. Although she was almost 15 centimetres taller than her husband, this never hindered their harmony. I never heard them argue or express different opinions. I think that Grandfather in his kindness was the one who always gave in. His eyes sparkled with kindness, happiness and wisdom. A smile was always playing at the corners of his mouth and when not eating or talking, he would often hum a tune under his breath. Six of his nine children inherited the typical Zwecker features. Grandfather was dark haired while Grandmother was blonde; however, I only saw them both grey. Grandmother had a serious face; I don't think I've ever seen her laugh. There was a look of suffering about her as if she were ill. Some said that she feigned illness in order to get attention and she certainly did get attention from all of her children and most of all from her husband. Of ill health or not, she lived to the age of 90.

Despite her real or imagined sufferings, Grandmother was an active person, busy from early morning until late at night. Caring for nine children was not easy and although they had numerous servants, many chores were hers alone. She had to bake the *challahs* [white bread for Shabbat], cook dinner and keep a watchful eye on the Gypsy servants who had a tendency to steal. The livestock was also her responsibility; there were cows in the shed and a yard full of chickens, geese, ducks and their newly hatched chicks every summer. Grandmother's work would never end. Only on Shabbat she could rest, at least if the children let her. All her life was spent in Krostovata. Every time my mother talked about the first two years of her marriage, spent with her in-laws, she would shake her head and say: "*Krostovake, farworfen fin Gott in fin Lat, kein einziger Jid, nor Ziganer en asoi wat we de kikst, nor Felder en Walt en Himel. Se lign mir noch im Tam di zwei Jur Kest in Krostovake!*" [Krostovata, forsaken by God and by men, not a single Jew, only Gypsies and as far as you look, only fields and forests and sky. I still feel the taste of the two years spent there.] Indeed, she never had a neighbour to talk to, only Gypsies, she was alone her whole life. Only before *Pessach* [Passover] and *Rosh haShana* [the New Year] she would go to Czernovitz to do her shopping and visit her sisters. Otherwise, she was alone with her children, her husband and her work. These were her only sources of happiness.

Great-grandfather Shloime Herzig couldn't have chosen a better husband for his daughter or a better worker for his farm. Despite his devout father, Mendl was no scholar. He was too energetic to sit in a corner and study the Talmud for hours on end. Even if he wore the long, black *caftan* [coat] and the black velvet hat with a skullcap underneath like all Jews at the time, he was not as pious as the others. He didn't travel to the courts of famous rabbis. He paid the rabbis their share but had little use for their teachings. I don't recall that he ever went to the rabbi of Vizhnitz whose New-Year blessing was greatly sought after by the Jews in that area. My father didn't hold the rabbis in high esteem either. God save us if anyone had found out or even suspected what my father thought about the miracle-working rabbis. The rage of the whole community would have turned on him.

Reb Moishe Arelitzer may also have been a small-scale farmer but it was from his father-in-law that Mendl learned how to sow and reap. The Gypsies whom he hired to work in the fields were lazy and dishonest. He had to keep an eye on every detail, or they would cheat him and make fun of him too. This is not to say that he only supervised. I often saw him giving the servant a hand with unloading sacks of maize and carrying them on the narrow path to the mill. This usually happened at the busy time of harvesting or sowing, when the horses were needed elsewhere.

I have not witnessed the times when Grandfather had all the five sons at home. When I was a child there was only Motl, the youngest, who would eventually inherit the farm. In fact, he took over most of the responsibilities, while Grandfather was still alive. As far as I remember, there was a division of work between them. Motl took care of the farm, while Grandfather supervised the mill. Farmers paid a measure of grain for each sack that was ground and this was in turn sold for cash. Since uncle Motl was still much too young to do the bookkeeping, this remained Grandfather's job. However, he had enough to do. Grandfather was operating the farm according to modern principles and planting more than just the traditional grain. For years he had a contract with the Austrian authorities to supply tobacco. Whenever I came to visit on weekends in the autumn, there were long rows of tobacco leaves drying in the yard. He also had a contract with the sugar refinery in Lujan to supply sugar beets. The land of the region may have been poor, yet Grandfather did better than most other farmers. He kept cows and fertilized his fields with their manure. Of course, there were no chemical fertilizers yet. The tobacco production went on for many years; it started before I can remember. Tobacco was freely available for anyone who wanted to smoke. My father started smoking when he was still a boy. The coachmen found it was very amusing to offer him their pipes and with no one around to stop the game, the smoking for fun quickly turned into a habit. The consequence was chronic bronchitis: my father suffered from it all his life [and it was eventually the cause of his death in 1929 or 1930].

Grandfather would get up early every morning, say his prayers, eat a modest breakfast and then drive out to the mill. He would return only towards evening. The mill was merely 3 or 4 kilometres away but the road was in a very poor condition. In the rainy season it was almost impassable. It was a dirt track which crossed a miserable Gypsy settlement, then went along the river Prut to the bridge. Beyond the wooden bridge stood several small water mills. They were built on boats secured to stakes on the river bank and accessible through narrow gang-planks. It happened sometimes during floods that a mill broke loose and floated downstream; but I'll say more about this later.

Grandfather's house was built on the right bank of the Prut. It was a one-storied farmhouse with six windows in front. The typical peasant house was much smaller, with only two windows in front. The roof was made of wooden shingles, unlike the thatched roofs of the peasant houses. Its best feature, however, was its placement. From the high river bank the whole valley of the Prut was visible. The left bank was low and one could see far away. As a child I cared neither for the wooded horizon, nor for the shiny snake of the river. Much more interesting was the enormous building of the sugar refinery in Lujan, some 2 kilometres away. The smoke raising from its tall chimney in autumn was for me a wonderful sight.

There was never a quiet moment in the farmyard. Next to the house there were stables for horses and cows. Across the yard ran a wire to which a large dog was chained. The dog barked loudly while all around it chickens cackled. Geese swam in a man-made pond. Beyond the pond was the vegetable patch. All the vegetables needed in the kitchen all year round came from there, especially onions and garlic. Behind it was the orchard. It stretched over a steep slope down to a nearby stream. Beyond the stream was the forest, one of those thick beech forests which gave the name to the land: Bukovina in Ukrainian means land of beeches. The large and shady orchard was neglected and the yields were poor. Grandfather had no time to look after it and his sons were still too young and inexperienced. When uncle Motl took over in 1903, the situation changed dramatically. He replaced the old trees with choice saplings which bore wonderful fruit. Nevertheless, I liked the old orchard better. It used to have small, yet very sweet plums and cheap apples. When I came with my sisters to visit on week-ends in the autumn, we would always have some. As we would come in, we would hear Grandmother call in a tired voice from her couch: "Motl, take the children to the orchard and give them Shabbat fruit!" And Motl would take us to the orchard, which was for me a small paradise, and let us gather the apples that had fallen from the trees during the night. We were not allowed to pick fresh fruit from the trees because it was Shabbat. We didn't mind, however, since fruit of any kind was a rarity for us at that time and we loved it. We had only to cut away the wormy parts. We would even take some home in a basket.

All this was my grandfather's little kingdom and it made him a rich man. Everywhere in Krostovata one could see his property in the form of small plots of land, some inherited from Great-grandfather, others purchased by himself. Peasants in dire want were known to sell their land. Needy and uneducated peasants were often cheated out of their land for a pittance. Sometimes they took loans with high interest which they couldn't pay; sometimes they just sold their land for liquor. Grandfather did run a small pub for some time. Is it possible that he may have acquired some of his land in a dishonourable way? I don't know if he did, but years later some of his descendants would pay for this with their blood.

Chapter 3. My milk brother. Education on the farm. My uncles and aunts.

There were five boys and four girls in my grandparents' nursery. In fact, there was no nursery as such; the whole house was the children's territory. All nine of them were born in the hamlet of Krostovata, next to the forest. They were all suckled by Gypsy women and rocked to sleep with Gypsy lullabies. Each child had his own wet nurse. Even I, who was born more than 15 years after the youngest of them and in the bigger village of Hlinitza, even I still had a Gypsy wet nurse. I discovered this by chance 35 years later. One day a poor man came to my clinic. He looked like a Gypsy and carried a violin under his arm. I supposed he was a patient and asked him what I could do for him. He smiled slyly and said he wanted to see how his brother was doing. Who, me??? Of course!! He said that I was his milk brother; his mother had been my wet nurse. That was the only time I met him. Perhaps I haven't given him a friendly enough welcome? Maybe so, because at that time I was in a very bad

situation and I had other things on my mind. I didn't even offer him a drink. He left disappointed and never returned. I will say more about this bad period of my life later.

But let us return to the nine children born in Krostovata by the forest. The parents were not worried about the girls, but there was a problem concerning the boys, and it had to be addressed urgently: there were no other Jews in the vicinity, there was no *cheder* [religious school], and the boys would grow up like *goyim* [non-Jews]. They had to learn to read the Torah! At the time it never occurred to any Jewish parents to give their children a secular education or to teach them a profession. Children were educated as devout Jews and the rest was left in the hands of Providence. Usually, the boys studied until the age of 15 but sometimes they had to leave school much earlier and start work to help their father. It was impractical for the boys to walk to the closest *cheder*, in Hlinitza; therefore, a private *cheder* was organized in the house. In order to get a teacher, it was necessary to travel to Czernovitz. Twice a year, after *Pesach* [Passover] and after *Sukkoth* [the Feast of Tabernacles], a "teachers' fair" was held in the city. On a certain street, *cheder* teachers who needed a job waited for prospective employers. The envoy of the community that needed a teacher took the candidate under a doorway or into a Jewish pub to check his qualifications. The requirements varied: for the youngest children, it was enough to teach them to read and a little of the *Chumash* [Five Books of the Torah]. For older boys, the teacher needed to be well versed in the entire Old Testament, the Rashi commentaries and the Talmud. If the candidate was satisfactory, he would be employed for a term.

When I went to *cheder*, German and arithmetic were part of the curriculum, but they were not taken as seriously as the Jewish subjects. In my father's time it was probably the same, at least in the *cheder* of Krostovata. All the boys could read and write acceptable German and they were good at arithmetic too. Girls were also taught to read, they needed to read their prayers too. But were girls taught German? I'm not so sure. My mother for instance could read the prayers flawlessly, both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. She could speak German but she could not read it at all and as for writing, she could only sign her name. My father often wrote letters in German, private ones as well as requests and complaints to the authorities. He even drew up a number of wills for his acquaintances and they were so well written that none was ever rejected because of any mistakes of form. He was an assiduous reader of the German newspaper. None of his brothers did as well as he in German. In Hebrew he was also the best, not only in the Old Testament but also in subjects far beyond the scope of any *cheder*. He could discuss the *Zohar*; sometimes he mentioned Maimonides' famous work *More Nevochim* [Guide for the Perplexed]; he quoted from the *Midrash* and from the Talmud. He may have learned these things from Great-grandfather, with whom he used to spend a lot of time.

My father's eldest brother was Chaim. He looked like his father, short and dark haired. He rarely smiled. When I saw him for the last time, a few years before his death, his proud bearing made me think of a retired officer. He was married to the beautiful Big Hannah. (There was also a Little Hannah in the family.) He was also quite rich; he owned large tracts of forest and together with his brother-in-law he operated the beer brewery in Solca.



The remains of the Solca brewery in 2019. It continued to operate under the communists, but it was closed after the Revolution of 1989.

He lived in Arbora, a little town in the Radautz district and for many years he was the town's vice-mayor. In fact, he was the undisputed chief of the town. He controlled the elections so the mayor was his pawn. He was held in high esteem all over Bukovina and in any office where he had business he was treated with respect. I don't know if he was really talented or just lucky but his life was a success story.

The second son was my father, and after him came Hendl. [Hendl seems to be a nickname. His Jewish name was Chanoch.]



Despite his Zwecker features, Hendl was very different. He was slightly above medium height and as strong as a bear. He showed little interest in the wisdom taught in school; instead, he was very active on the farm. After getting married he settled in Duboutz, a village on the other side of the Prut, where he managed a pub. His wife, [Rivka Schachter] was very witty and would make everybody laugh at family gatherings. [They had six children. After Rivka died, he married Rosa Ebner. The children of his first marriage disliked her and most of them emigrated to the USA.]

The fourth brother was Pinchas. He didn't remain in Krostovata either. I remember him as a real gentleman, a man who knew how to get along with people. His wife, Aunt Fanny, came from an excellent Jewish family from Kimpolung. Aunt Fanny was pretty and slender and she had good judgment too. She also brought with her a sizable dowry. With the help of her money Uncle Pinchas leased a pub in Solca,

where he soon became a respected citizen. [Their only son, Siegfried, was a doctor. He died young, in 1940.]

The youngest son was Motl, about whom I have already told. When we left Hlinitza he was not yet married. I don't even remember what he looked like because I have never seen him since. His wife, [Fanny], I have never met. It may seem unbelievable, but my sisters and me never returned to visit our grandparents, although we didn't live so far away. Grandfather was very busy, Grandmother had 32 grandchildren and showed little interest in them. They never invited us and even if they had, my parents would probably have grudged the expense. To throw money out of the window, this was beyond Mother's grasp. The children should stay at home and so did she. In all the years there was only one instance when we had visitors: for *Simchat Torah*, in the autumn of 1908. We shall return to this event. Those two days were unbelievable; I'll never forget them.

I have to add a few words about the four daughters of my grandparents. They were just as worthy as their brothers, except for Little Hannah, called so in order to distinguish her from Uncle Chaim's wife. Little Hannah was different from the rest both physically and intellectually, a little woman with a modest housewife's mind. I think I haven't seen her more than once, but I heard about her often enough. She lived in Berhomet on the Siret where her husband, Bertziu Kurz, had a mill just like my grandfather. He was known as an extremely stingy person, so they were the object of much gossip and ridicule at family gatherings.

The eldest daughter, Aunt Zilly or Zipre, was quite different. She had Grandmother's build, tall and slender, she may also have been blonde but I'm not sure. I saw her several times during my early childhood at family weddings and I noticed her nose which was rather bigger than was usual in our family and crooked. It looked like "the typical Jewish nose" described by the anti-Semites. Nevertheless, she was well liked and respected in the family because of her intelligence and of her noble bearing. Her husband, Uncle Itzie [Weiser], was quite a gentleman. He had a goatee and wore a pince-nez on a black ribbon, which in my eyes made him look very noble indeed. He was a salesman for several firms, well travelled, all in all a man of the world. Uncle Itzie lived in Arbora, the same town like Uncle Chaim and was a very respected citizen there.

Aunt Toni was also called Toubé. She got married when I was about five years old and since the wedding was held in our house, I remember it in detail. Aunt Toni looked like her mother, tall, blonde, with a pretty but unsmiling face. She was a very capable woman, which helped her to overcome many difficulties in her life. She met her husband, Uncle Butziu [Hanenzahn], during a visit to Uncle Pinchas, in Solca. He was tall and dark-haired. Both were kind hearted and of noble character. Uncle Butziu worked as a bank clerk. After the wedding he quit the bank and opened a money changing office in Solca. What kind of business was transacted there I don't really know; I suppose it was like a small bank. Aunt Toni lived with him in Solca. So it happened that a large part of our family lived either in Solca or in Arbora. These towns are very close to each other and form practically a single community.

The youngest daughter, Babtzie, also looked like her mother although not quite as tall. She was engaged to be married, when she fell ill. I was told that she became paralysed and then she died. What her illness was I don't know, maybe multiple

sclerosis or a tumour of her backbone, which caused hemiplegia or perhaps a metastasis of another undiagnosed tumour. [Babtzie is in fact a nickname, meaning Granny. Her real name is not known.]

Chapter 4. My father's birthday. My first suit of clothes

My father was born in the year 1860. The exact date I don't know, or rather I have forgotten. In our family of traditional Jews, birthdays were not celebrated, except for the 13th, the *Bar Mitzva*. Having grown up like this, small wonder that I dislike the whole ado about congratulations, gifts and stinking candles stuck into birthday cakes. Whenever I felt like giving anyone a present, I just did it, without thinking about dates and holidays. And that's how it has always been in my family: birthdays and wedding anniversaries, mine, my wife's, my daughter's and my grandchildren's, always went unnoticed. Besides, traditional Jews, even if they are non-religious like me, always remember the death day rather than the birthday of relatives in order to say *Kaddish* [the prayer for the dead].

Once I held in my hand a paper on which my father's date of birth was written down. It was long ago and I don't remember it any more, but how I got that paper is an interesting story, a part of the tragic story of the Jews in Romania. It happened in the 1930s, when Cuza and Goga were in power and anti-Semitism flourished. The government looked for excuses to deny the Romanian citizenship to Jews. Each Jew who wanted to retain his citizenship had to prove that he as well as his father were born in Romania. I sought help from the registrar's office in Stănești but was told that the office didn't exist yet at the time of my father's birth, so he couldn't be registered there. I didn't know what to do. Somebody advised me to try the priest of the village where my father was born.

When I returned to Hlinitza after 33 years, I was deeply moved. It was the same familiar place, yet the best part was missing. The manor and park which belonged to the landowner Wiggniowicz were gone. The manor had been destroyed during World War I. After the war the land was sold, the trees were chopped down and replaced by dreary looking peasant huts. Nothing else seemed to have changed in the village. The house where we used to live, with the grocery store, was still standing. Some people recognized me and talked to me. It was afternoon and I found the priest at home. It was no longer the old and friendly Father Weissmann but a new one whom I didn't know. He received me in his stained cassock, in a room containing only an old table and a few chairs. He seemed to know about my errand and didn't show any surprise. He opened an ancient chest and brought forth a thick and narrow ledger, opened it and found my father's name. It was not on one of the yellowed pages: these were reserved for Christians. For us Jews, there was room only on the inside covers of the book. "Zwecker?" he asked, "Hersch Zwecker? Here!" He dipped his pen in the inkwell, then suddenly stopped. He read the entry aloud: "Avrum Hersch, son of Mendl Zwecker and Esther Herzig, both of Hlinitza, illegitimate." I felt terrified when he added: "Your father's name is not Hersch Zwecker but Hersch Herzig. Your father was a bastard." He said it haltingly, as if waiting for something. I got the hint. I took out of my pocket a shiny silver coin of 250 lei and put it on the table. He took

it as a matter of course, lifted his cassock and dropped it into his trouser pocket. At that moment I noticed that his trousers were torn and a piece of his underwear showed through. Strange how such insignificant details stick in one's memory. Now everything was okay. With the paper in my wallet, I returned home, relieved: my father's honour was vindicated and I could continue to be called Zwecker. And all this thanks to one silver coin, hardly more than I earned for seeing one patient.

I think I can brag about my good memory. I remember things which happened as far back as the year 1900, perhaps even earlier. I remember for instance the day when I received my first real suit of clothes. I couldn't have been more than four. Before that I used to wear a sort of smock buttoned in the back, like the other children in the village. The lowest button was often undone, showing a not very white undergarment. The new suit, trousers and shirt, was made of light grey striped flannel. The shirt had a large sailor's collar with a bow in front. The outfit also included a large straw hat with a ribbon. My mother thought that it was still too early for me to wear trousers but at my sisters' insistence she gave in. I gave her no cause to regret her decision. I can still see myself carried by a servant girl on our outings. I also have a vague recollection of lying in bed together with my sister Schlieme, when she had the measles. Are these memories from the same time? It all happened so long ago that events get mixed up and the terms "earlier" and "later" lose their meaning.

Chapter 5. My parents. Religion in our family. My brothers and sisters. My birth. Do I bring bad luck to the family? Customs related to giving birth. The Circumcision ceremony.

My father had his picture taken only once in his life, at the age of 55. In the picture he looks much older than his age. But I remember him from around 1900. At that time, he was at his best, active and full of energy. He was of medium height, slightly taller than Grandfather. There was not a single white hair in his thick, dark beard. He wore it parted in the middle, with two separate points. It looked somewhat like Emperor Franz-Joseph's, only that the chin was not shaved. At that time religious Jews would use neither razor nor scissors on their hair. His cheekbones were rosy and slightly protruding. The nose, narrow and well proportioned, he may have inherited from his mother. In contrast to his dark hair and beard, his eyes were deep blue. This contrast gave him an interesting look. But his face was always enveloped in a shadow of sorrow and worry. In fact, I found the same sad look in the eyes of all the Jews from our village. It may even be a common trait to all Jews from Eastern Europe. Has anybody ever seen a Jew laugh heartily? The only exception was my grandfather whose eyes radiated happiness.

My father had more cause for sorrow than many. His right leg was damaged by polio when he was still a baby. The muscle atrophy caused by the illness was relatively mild. He could walk with a cane, but when he was in a hurry, which happened most of the time, he limped badly. Nevertheless, he was a very active person, he would finish every job quickly and well and he expected the same from others, his children as well as his servants. In his youth he could walk for long

stretches with his cane but with advancing age walking became more and more difficult. This impediment affected him; he became more and more bitter. He was better educated than most around him. In his youth he and his brother Chaim had spent long hours studying the Talmud with their grandfather Moishe Arelitzer. Indeed, many came to him to seek advice. Shortly after getting married [to Rentzie Birnbaum] he became the temporary deputy of the secretary of the Jewish community of a neighbouring village. Later, in Hlinitza, he replaced the school principal in his second job of cattle inspector, when the latter was absent during school vacations. I don't think he was paid for it, he did it only out of friendship for the principal.

For the first two years of their marriage, my parents lived with my grandparents. Then they bought a little house in Hlinitza and started a business, a grocery store. This was a common way to start out for a young Jewish couple at that time. Thanks to my father's brains and ambition, the business prospered. The store sold more and more items which previously had been available only in the city. He had a particular interest in the leather trade and was soon supplying all the shoemakers in the region with raw materials. In this period, he had one or two employees and Mother could stay home and look after the household and the children. But when things got worse and my father came close to bankruptcy, my mother joined him in the store, for she was a brave woman.

In her youth Mother must have been a beauty. My sister Babtzie looked like her and I found her fascinating. Anyway, when I came along, Mother had already put on weight and little was left of her beauty. But in the children's eyes parents are neither beautiful nor ugly, they are Father and Mother and love doesn't criticize. While Father was rather lenient with us, Mother was firm but just. Her views about education were based on an often-quoted Ukrainian proverb: *Liube iak dushu, treste iak chrushu* (Love them like your soul; shake them like a pear tree). My mother was deeply religious and her faith helped her through the hardest times. She prayed every Shabbat; she kept a strictly kosher kitchen and never missed an occasion to give alms to the poor. This was done not out of pity, but in accordance with a religious conviction, from a desire to fulfil a *mitzvah* [commandment]. She fervently believed in the help of God and of the rabbis. To her all rabbis were holy, but the holiest of all was the rabbi of Chortkov.



CZORTKÓW. Synagoga Rabina.

Whenever something in the family went wrong, a child fell ill, a daughter had to be married or an important business decision had to be made, she would travel to Chortkov to see the rabbi. She brought me more and more amulets and hanged them around my neck. I wore them faithfully, day and night, until one Friday afternoon a peasant boy attacked me in the street and tore the bundle of blessed coins from my neck. I must have been about 5 or 6 years old. The only thing I could do was to scream at the top of my voice. We Jewish children grew up in constant fear of the *goyim*. The only thing we were taught to do for our defence was to scream and run away. Not long afterwards I had a new bundle of *shmirot* [talismans] hanging from my neck.

Father disagreed with Mother's faith in the rabbis. He considered them swindlers who speculated on the purse of the faithful. To him it was all a sophisticated scam. And still he let her go to see one or another of them. He grumbled not only for the principle, but also for the waste of good money that his wife brought them. And in difficult economic situations she would give them even more, hoping for a warmer intercession with God. But this was not all! When the rabbis failed, she would turn to soothsayers. In Father's eyes this was no longer superstition, it was an insult to God. But there was no stopping her from giving away money, liquor and black chickens to all kinds of magicians and other swindlers. She did it out of a deep conviction that in this way she was helping her husband and her children whom she loved with all her heart.

I can't say that my parents were stingy. They spent their money with restraint and both wanted to buy only the best. Father would not easily decide to part with his money but once he did, he was very generous towards everybody. For Mother the decision to spend was perhaps a little easier. Once she decided that the children needed something, there was no stopping her. The girls loved pretty dresses. Mother understood them. Father grumbled but had to give in because Mother was very strong-willed. She wanted little for herself, although she liked to dress well too. I remember that one day she returned from the city with a new hat. This was a real extravagance, usually she wore a silk kerchief, a brightly coloured one in her youth and a black one later. When she got married, she shaved her head in accordance with custom and wore a wig. The wig, however, was used only on festive occasions. Later on, she stopped using it altogether. Her last wig remained in the wardrobe, untouched for years, and after Father's death she got rid of this last remnant of her youth. Until the end of her life she was very neat, there was never a stain on her clothes or a speck of dust on the furniture. And she taught her daughters to be like that too.

My mother bore nine children but only five of them survived. She could never forget the ones she lost in infancy. Her firstborn was a son. He was named Moishe in honour of Great-grandfather. He died in his cradle of one of the common childhood diseases. Then one daughter came after another. Two died in infancy. A third one, Zlate, died of an accident and Mother couldn't forget her. She may have been two or three years old. She was sitting on the table, playing with a pair of scissors, when she fell down and the scissors pierced her skull. Had a doctor been called immediately, it may have been possible to save her. Instead, they called Mime Esther who filled the wound with bread and butter. A few days later the little girl died of infection. I think Mother never forgave herself and this is why she talked so often about the lost child.

She usually took very good care of her children and it was quite unfair that such a thing had to happen to her of all people.

After me she had another son, Berl, who survived only a few weeks. In those days child mortality was very high. In summer it was caused mostly by intestinal fevers and in the colder seasons by various children's diseases, even measles. Scarlet fever was an almost certain killer for adults as well as for children. Nowadays it is harmless. Not only do we have antibiotics at our disposal but also the virulence of the pathogen has diminished in recent years. In my youth there were still isolated cases of smallpox. The survivors were marked for life with the characteristic scars on the face. After the whole population has been vaccinated, this disease has disappeared completely. The intestinal fevers were called by the doctors of the time "cholérine", although they were not related to cholera in any way.

So it happened that I was the long-awaited only son of the family, the one to say *Kaddish*. I remember the day that Berl died. I was about four or five years old. It was Friday. When the little casket was taken out, I started to sob. I didn't just cry because the others did. I think that on that day I have for the first time grasped the meaning of death.

Did the rabbi of Chortkov really work miracles, or did my mother's bitter tears and prayers bring forth the miracle? Yes, during my childhood miracles still existed. They were controlled and distributed by the rabbis, in return for good money, of course. The wonder rabbis could do anything: heal the sick without even seeing them, find husbands for old maids, improve the income of impoverished breadwinners. To be here at the age of 80 and write my memoirs may in itself be a miracle. Perhaps it wouldn't have happened if the rabbis hadn't healed me of mortal illnesses and guarded me through their talismans. And perhaps the greatest miracle was that I was born male.

I was born the 5th of Iyar [a month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding to April – May], on a Saturday, at 7 in the morning. My father was waiting, shivering, in the next room, when the door opened and the midwife called: "*Ofitzerek, ofitzerek!*" [A little officer]. It seems that in her view a man's highest achievement was to become an officer. But she would be proved wrong: I never became an officer and, I'm sorry to say, not even a real soldier. The news spread through the village like wildfire: Hersch Zwecker has a son! When my father came to the synagogue two hours later, everybody congratulated him. All were delighted: a week later there would be a *Brith* [circumcision], everybody was invited, and Hersch Zwecker was not going to spare any expense in honour of his long-awaited first son. I was born April 16th but since the registry office in Stănești was notified only four days later, my birth was registered: Moses Ben Zion, born April 20th 1896, son of Hersch Zwecker and Rentzie Birnbaum, illegitimate. Father had to sign that he recognized the child as his. My parents were not legally married and this was very common at the time. There was an old Austrian law which permitted only the eldest son of a Jewish family to get married; the others had to stay single. It seems like a variation of the old pharaonic law. Both were attempts to hold back the multiplication of the Children of Israel and both failed. The Jews found a solution: they organized a *Chuppah* [religious wedding] and did not notify the authorities. Later the children were registered as illegitimate. Big deal! No one minded. And so it happened that in school I was

called Birnbaum. As I grew older, the situation started to get unpleasant. I don't think that at the time of my parents' wedding the law still existed, as far as I know it was cancelled in 1848 but the custom of holding only religious weddings was kept up. When my parents got married, the registry office was already operating and recording births and weddings. Once among my father's papers I found a booklet containing all the data about his children. They were entered in the order of their birth: Moishe (deceased), Ruchel, Hendl, Etl-Mirze, Schlieme, then myself, Moses Ben Zion, and Berl. [Ruchel = Rosa, Hendl = Helene, Etl-Mirze = Mina = Babtzie, Schlieme = Suzanne]. I was not entered as Moishe but as Moses. This was a wise decision and I thank him for it to this day. The name Moses was difficult enough to live with, but to be called Moishe would have caused endless giggles and scorn. I also thank the clerk of the registry office in Stănești, wherever he is now, probably in *Gan Eden* [Paradise].

There is an evil legend which hovers around my birth. My eldest sister Ruchel, who for some reason saw in me a competitor, told me that a few months before my birth an old man came to see Father and asked him whether he wanted a boy or a girl. If he chose a daughter, he would continue to be prosperous, but if he chose a son, hard times would befall him. Father chose a boy. I don't understand why I never talked to my parents about this. I considered it a malicious tale and I felt uncomfortable to talk about it. When I heard it, I was about ten years old and I soon forgot it. I remembered it again much later and by then it was too late to investigate. But the fact remains that hardly a year after my birth my father was badly afflicted by Fate. It seems that in my sister's fantasy a connection was formed between my birth and the economic decline that came soon after. People often say: "The child has brought them good luck". Did my sister feel that I have brought bad luck to the family? Perhaps I also started believing this and the idea was so unbearable that I never dared talk to anybody about it.

Now let's return to my *Brith*. Father and Mother had fond memories of the event and talked proudly about it. Wednesday night Father with two fishermen went down to the Prut to get fresh fish. At that time, it was permitted to catch fish using explosives. The fish killed by the explosion would rise to the surface and would be easily gathered by hand. The Prut was so rich in fish that no restriction on fishing was necessary. During World War I however, Russian soldiers with hand grenades destroyed so many fish that after the war the use of explosives was banned and only fishing by net was authorized.

Father brought back lots of fish and gave them to Old Esther. (It was not the same as Mime Esther who "treated" little Zlate to death. That one was the wife of Berl Herzig, a brother of my grandmother. She was a very handy and helpful woman and a skilled healer. If she couldn't help Zlate, it was not her fault. Even the greatest doctors are not always successful. She also treated me more than once during my childhood and I survived. Every time a child fell ill, my parents would send for Mime Esther and she would always come, day or night.)

Whenever there was a happy occasion in the family, Old Esther would come to help without any special invitation. In the kitchen she reigned supreme. She helped with cooking and baking, never asking for anything in return. Mother was very happy to use her help and let her work her hands to the bone. Sometimes mistakes happened

in the kitchen (not only in medicine), but no one is perfect. For instance, at my sister Rosa's engagement party, she got the wrong box and sprinkled the cookies with salt instead of sugar. I'll tell later about the results of this mistake. And still, Old Esther was a great cook. Who else could have prepared so many delicacies for the *Brith*, the *colaczes* [yeast cakes], the *lekech* [honey cake], the fish and the *fluden* [a very rich cake with honey and nuts], the baked chickens and the *kigl*. Do you know, dear reader, what a *kigl* is? It is a pudding made of egg noodles. But it is more than just pudding. It is an integral part of the Shabbat and this gives it a special quality. A Shabbat dinner without *kigl* was unthinkable. Now it doesn't seem like a big deal: egg noodles are readily available in any grocery. But when I was a child, each housewife had to make her own. To honour the Shabbat no task was too difficult. *Kigl* at a *Brith* ceremony was not a must, but since mine was held on a Shabbat, it was expected. And it couldn't have been done without Old Esther. Her helpers were Father's unmarried sisters, Toubie and Babtzie, and some of Mother's friends. Of course, none of them were paid, they did all the work for the honour of God and expected their reward in heaven. Just the same as people tended the sick, fed the poor, helped orphan girls to get married, they also helped with organizing *Brith* feasts, and all this was done as a *mitzvah*, to fulfil a commandment. People would not only refuse to take money; they would even offer some when it was needed.

Meanwhile my mother stayed in bed for eight days with me, the new baby, as was the custom. Hardly anyone was allowed to see us for fear of the evil eye. The bed was hanged with sheets and on them were stuck pieces of paper with prayers to ward off bad spirits. It was believed that bad spirits were especially attracted to women who lay in childbed, perhaps because women in childbed bleed and are therefore unclean. The result was childbed fever which frequently ended in the death of the new mother. The actual cause of infection was not yet known, neither was the importance of cleanliness. Midwives were unschooled. Any woman with some experience could act as a midwife. Of course, they had no idea of hygiene. In Hlinitza there was an old peasant woman who had the reputation of an infallible midwife. She was lucky and only very few of the women she cared for died of infection.

A few weeks before they expected to give birth, pregnant women started preparations. They fattened several chickens, baked lots of cookies with plenty of eggs and sugar, hiding them from the children, and made arrangements with the best available midwife. Sometimes a midwife would be called from the neighbouring village. And then the woman waited for the fateful day. After giving birth, she would remain in bed for a week. Next to her, on a chair, stood the bag of cookies and she had to chew on one all the time. The fattened chickens were slaughtered one after the other and made into soup. Not just any soup, *youch*, like the family had, but a "little soup", *youchale*. During the laying-in period, a woman had to eat well to restore her strength, but most of all to have enough milk.

If the new-born was a boy, on the fifth day the rabbi would come to see the mother and baby. He was accompanied by a group of boys. Together they said a prayer by the childbed and were rewarded with large slices of honey cake. The boys came to greet and to bless their new friend: what a beautiful tradition! This event was called the *Krismelenen*. On the sixth evening, the adults would come to congratulate

the father and to greet the new member of the community. Traditionally the guests were served red beans and wine or beer. Prayers were recited again. This was the *Shulem sucher* ceremony. In our case it was held on a Friday night and things went on a little differently.

Father had prepared lots of liquor. The guests, young and old, did not need much encouragement to drink and soon the atmosphere warmed up. First, they started to sing and dancing followed soon after. At the height of merry-making, two of my father's friends found their way to the kitchen and brought the *kigl* which was ready for the next day. With much ado, the whole *kigl* was eaten. When there was nothing left, a few young men went over to the neighbours' houses, plundered the ovens and brought more *kigl*. It was a big *tohu vavohu* [disorder]. Before sunrise, the *shoichet* [butcher] stood up on unsteady legs, banged his fist on the table and called out: "*Rabotai, higia zman shel Shacharit!*" [Gentlemen, it is time for the morning prayers!] They got up, the whole group went together to the *mikveh* [ritual bath], plunged into the cold water and then set off to the synagogue to say their morning prayers.

For days, weeks and months the poor village Jews worked hard and led lives full of suffering and deprivation. But if once in a while an occasion for merry-making presented itself, they did it wholeheartedly, young and old alike. The loudest of all were the Hassidim. One should serve God with joy, was their motto. The merriest of all was the poor old carpenter, Michel Stettner. He was a good friend of the family and he loved my father like his own son if not more. We shall meet him again.

And this is how Father continued the story of my circumcision. The whole company arrived at the synagogue earlier than usual. They finished morning prayers before ten o'clock and then all of them came to our house. The godfather was my father's good friend Yankel Greif who had come the day before from Storojinetz. The *mohel*, the man who performed the circumcision, was not a local either. What a *Brith*! The whole village was present. Some of my father's brothers and sisters had arrived on Thursday from Arbora and Solca and slept in the neighbours' houses. Grandfather and uncle Hendl came Saturday morning directly to the synagogue. It was too difficult for them to come on Friday to the *Shulem sucher*.

Father paused in his story, closed his eyes and his face clouded over. The memories overwhelmed him. How much suffering has befallen him since then! He lost his fortune, maybe because of me, maybe not, I never dared to ask him. How many disappointments he has had! His long-awaited son caused him much trouble. I guess he had expected something else.

A few moments later his face cleared up and he continued. It was indeed a *Brith* the like of which Hlinitza had never seen before. After the ceremony, all sat down to eat and drink as God had ordained. Only the *kigl* was missing! But one could hardly be angry with the men who had stolen it from the oven and eaten it the night before: they were too *shicker* [drunk] to know what they were doing. Now they had to make do with fish, of which there was plenty. After *Bentshen* [the blessings at the end of a meal], they all went to the synagogue for the *Mincha* [the afternoon prayer], then back home to continue the feast. Grandfather called with a hoarse voice: "*Trinkt, Yiden, Hersch hot a yingale bekimen!*" [Drink, Jews, Hersch has got a son!], and he also joined in the dance. When night fell, all said *Ma'ariv* [the evening prayer] and then

the guests left. The relatives stayed on, to say *Melave malka* [another prayer], and Grandfather lit candles and said the *Havdalah* [the ritual that ends the *Shabbat*]. Meanwhile Mime Esther changed the sheets of the childbed. She removed the prayers warding off the bad spirits and burned them, so they shouldn't get to any unclean place and lose their power. There was no more need of them because the bad spirits were powerless after the baby had been consecrated into the Covenant of Abraham. The evil eye, however, was still a menace, so the red threads around the wrist of the mother and the baby were left in place. The red thread was the best protection; at least this is what people believed. Father laughed at this superstition but nobody listened to him. In this respect the authority of the midwife was higher than Father's.

Chapter 6. My native village. The sale of liquor. Jewish institutions. Our neighbours. Education. The story of Herschale Goldberg. The tragic death of the teacher. School in the next village. The study of German. Stealing pears with the German teacher's son.

I was born in Hlinitza and I always loved the place. Maybe it was indeed special. Most villages in Bukovina at the turn of the 20th century were miserable settlements of between a few hundred and two thousand souls. Each consisted of a group of huts with small windows and thatched roofs, surrounded by fences made of willow branches. Next to each house was a shed where the inhabitants kept a horse or a cow, if they had any. Some were so poor they had only a few scrawny chickens or ducks in the yard. Behind the houses there were vegetable patches and sometimes a few fruit trees. In each village there was the manor of the landowner, a church and a school. The grocery store and the pub were usually run by Jews.

Hlinitza was quite different. First of all, there were many more Jews than in other places. The village was crossed by the imperial road which linked Czernovitz and Storojinetz. On the wayside, there were many shops, some larger, some smaller but all kept by Jews. This made the village look almost like a little town. Besides, there were two landowners and both had elegant manor houses, little palaces set in splendid gardens. Moreover, there were two Gypsy dance bands which were famous far beyond the confines of the village. There was music in the air. Hlinitza meant music. They were the same as the Gypsies from Krostovata but the successful musicians among them settled in Hlinitza. They made good money and could afford it. They usually played at weddings and the better one, Aleco's band, was even asked to perform in Czernovitz. Each of the two estates included a pub. They had beautiful gardens and games of skittles. On Sundays, music played until late at night. People would come from other towns to enjoy themselves.

In the late 19th century, the landowner had the exclusive right to sell liquor on his estate. The right to operate the pub was usually leased to a Jew in return for a percentage of the profit. Landowners built special houses to serve as pubs, some smaller, some larger, some almost urban in character. Baron Flondor built a spacious "entertainment centre" which housed the performances of wandering magicians and even whole circuses. The other landowner, Wiggiovitz, owned a much smaller and older drinking house but for a village it was still presentable enough. Towards the end

of the 19th century the right to sell liquor was taken away from the landowners who were suitably compensated and leased to the highest bidder for a period of 3 or 5 years. Most pubs fell once again into Jewish hands. The publican would pay rent to the landowner for the use of the building. This created a bond of common interest between him and the landlord. Baron Flondor's drinking house was kept almost constantly by his "court Jew", Yoel Kaswan. The Baron, with his connections to the authorities, protected him and in so doing he protected his own interests. But once, between 1901 and 1903, the right to manage the Baron's drinking house went to another man: my uncle Chaim.



Baron Flondor's manor, Hlinitza

In a village with two landowners most of the land obviously belonged to them and very little was left over for the peasants. Most peasants worked for the landowners. No one questioned this state of affairs, least of all the peasants themselves. It had always been like this; therefore, it had to be ordained by God. The peasants' houses were some distance away from the road. We hardly saw them except on Sundays, when they went to church or to the pubs. Most of the residents of the centre of the village were Jewish, except for some Gypsies who lived on the side streets. Along the main road all the houses were Jewish. The place looked like a little Jewish town, with its grocery shops and neat little houses, most of them painted pink. There were two houses of prayer. One was for the poorer class, such as cobblers, tailors and the poorest among the shopkeepers. It was located inside a private home. Our family went to the other one which was built in 1902 and faced the imperial road. Typical of the village synagogues built at time, it was higher than the surrounding houses. It could be recognized from a distance as a Jewish prayer house. The new synagogue was the pride of the community. I never understood how our village could afford it.

There were only a few affluent Jews in Hlinitza. My father was considered one of them, although in later years this was no longer true. I believe that he was among the main donors, for he held a seat of honour by the Eastern wall, directly next to the Ark. The richest Jew of the village was our neighbour Yoel Klar. His *parnosse* [income] was secure. In front of his house was a large heap of timber and whenever a bridge on the Prut between Hlinitza and Napolokautz was damaged, it was his job to repair it. Once or even twice a year there were floods and some bridges were washed

away. He replaced them with new ones and made a neat profit. Within a few years he had become a rich man. He donated some of his timber for the construction of the synagogue. He also donated money, hoping to avert the bad luck which was plaguing his family, but to no avail.

Hlinitza was a very special village thanks to the Jews and to the Gypsies. Thanks to the Gypsies there was music. Thanks to the Jews the village had a baker, a carpenter, a hairdresser, a butcher, several shoemakers (two of whom were Jewish), a tinsmith and a barber. No little town in Bukovina could boast more craftsmen. There was also a *mikveh* [a ritual bath]. Every Friday, summer or winter, the Jews went to take a steam bath. Avrum, the bath assistant, would pour water over heated stones to make steam, of which the men just couldn't get enough. Some climbed to the highest bench where one could hardly breathe because of the heat and the steam. They struck at each other with bunches of leaves and yelled like wild. Whoever could stand the heat the longest on the upper bench was specially honoured. At that time the Guinness Book of Records didn't exist yet. Had it existed, the *shoichet* [butcher] of Hlinitza may have got a world record. I still wonder that no one died or fainted during the Friday bath. I went there often with my father. On which day was the bath open for women? I don't remember. But I know that the bath was exclusively Jewish, Christians were not allowed in.

At that time no one thought to teach children a trade. The bride would get a dowry and the bridegroom was supposed to use it to arrange a modest existence for the new family. To help young couples, the parents of the bride would take them in for up to three years. This was called "*Kest*". Meanwhile the young man, advised by his father-in-law, would seek an opportunity to start a business. Practical education he had none. Before getting married, the young man usually lived with his parents and helped in his father's shop. To be a craftsman was considered an inferior social position. Every young man aspired to become a merchant. In Hlinitza he could try to open a grocery store or he could buy calves from the peasants and resell them at the market. It was a miracle how so many grocery stores survived in Hlinitza. When my parents got married, there were not so many yet, but my father understood that there was no future in a just another grocery store. He had a more sophisticated plan. Next to the grocery store he opened a small warehouse and dealt in merchandise which before had been available only in Czernovitz. His specialty was leather. There were several cobblers in the village who made shoes for the peasants and he supplied them with leather. My father always looked ahead. All his life he dreamed of big business and riches. He thought big and the business flourished. The other affluent Jews of Hlinitza were the bridge builder Yoel Klar, the publican Yoel Kaswan and also the butcher and the baker who had no competitors. Most of the craftsmen were very poor, with the exception of the tailor Zanvl.

The Jews never sent their sons to the general school. The boys had to go to a *cheder* and study Hebrew and the sacred texts. Girls would sometimes go to the village school. My sisters did. There everything was taught in Ukrainian. There were two *cheders*: one for the youngest children, another for the Talmud students. The *melamed* [teacher] was usually a foreigner engaged for one semester at a time. But our melamed, *Reb* Hendl, brought his wife and child and settled in the village. Some people didn't like him but there was no choice. His problem was not lack of

knowledge but a violent character. When he got upset, which happened often, he would beat the students mercilessly. Sometimes a boy would panic and forget his lesson and then he would be beaten even more. Eventually he paid dearly for mistreating the children.

In Hlinitza there was a pious Jew, the husband of my mother's cousin. His name was Hersch Goldberg, but unlike my father he was called Herschl, or Herschale. He spent his free time alone in the room, studying the Torah. He was of medium height. His long black beard, together with his austere bearing, gave him a look of authority. And Herschl had indeed risen above the rest, for he was the trusted manager of Baron Flondor's estate. Being the mayor of the village, Baron Flondor was involved in everything that went on, even in peoples' private affairs. He was wise and just, but he was also the absolute lord of the village and as such he didn't hesitate to order a whipping when he deemed it necessary.

How did Herschl become the Baron's manager? My mother told me the following amazing story: Herschl had been a poor man. Sometimes he lacked even his daily bread. His wife, Perl, convinced him to go to the Rabbi and complain about his hard life. Being such a pious person, he was entitled to a reward, she suggested. This was based on the prayer before meals, which was said three times each day: "*Naar haiti, gam zakanti, tzadik neezav lo raiti*" [I was a youth, then I grew old, but I've never seen a righteous man abandoned.] It made sense; the Rabbi would have to agree. The Rabbi thought for a while, then his face darkened and he closed his eyes as if in a trance. (When this happened, he was supposed to be in heaven, said my mother.) Then suddenly his face cleared, he opened his eyes and smiled, for the Almighty had just given him a message:

"Herschale, a Mensch tur nit sitzn en wartn as der Eiberster soll im arubvarfen a Sak mit Randlech. Der Eiberster sugt: di ti en ech wel der helfn." [Herschale, a man shouldn't sit and wait for the Almighty to throw him down a bag of bread crusts. The Almighty says: you do and I'll help.]

"Wus sol ech tin, heiliker Rebbe?" [What shall I do, holy Rabbi?]

The holy Rabbi thought for a few moments, then answered: "*Gibt es nischt a Puretz ba aich?*" [Isn't there a nobleman in your village?]

Herschl answered: "*Zwei Pritzem hobn wir. Einer fin sei hot san Git verdingen a Posseser, en zim ondern ken men nischt zitreitn, heiliker Rebbe. Er est Yidn, bam lebendikm Lab, a Rusche, a Soine Yisrael."* [We have two of them. One has let his estate to a leaseholder and I can't go to the other, holy Rabbi. He eats the Jews alive; he is an evil one, a hater of Israel.]

"Nischt kusche! Me tur sech nischt iberschrekn. Di ti en Got et helfn." [It's not so bad! Don't be so scared. You do and God will help.] And this was the end of the interview with the Rabbi.

Herschl returned home with a heavy heart and couldn't sleep all night. Early next morning a peasant knocked at his window: the Baron wanted to see him. And what do you think happened next? asked my mother. The nobleman to whom Herschl had never talked before gave him a friendly welcome, provided him with a horse and cart and asked him to travel to Ciortoria. The Baron's son had just taken over that estate. The Baron didn't trust the young man and he asked Herschl to help him administer it. From that day on Herschl was the right hand of the old Baron Flondor.

He now lived in plenty and didn't worry any more how to feed his family. This was a *ness* [miracle] performed by the Rabbi!

He had three daughters and one son, Itziki. The boy was a student in *Melamed* Hendl's *cheder*. One day he came home from school sobbing: the teacher had beaten him. Indeed, there were weals all over his body. Herschl, who happened to be at home, didn't say a word but went directly to see the Baron. Not long afterwards, the local policeman appeared at the *melamed's* door: the Baron wanted to see him right away. The teacher could imagine why and took fright. But he didn't dare not to show up, so he went with the policeman. The whole way through the village he lamented: "*Yiden, rettet mich, er will mich hargenen!*" [Jews, save me, he wants to kill me!] People already knew what was afoot. No one dared to do anything, they just looked at him from behind closed windows, many with tears in their eyes. After a while they saw him return alone, a broken man. Some asked him what happened but he walked on without a word. For the next few days, Hendl's wife sent the children home, there would be no school. On the fourth day his condition deteriorated so much that some neighbours decided to take him to the doctor in Lujan but he died on the way. He had been young and strong. If the shock killed him, can it be because of some heart defect? The wife remained alone, penniless, with a 7 or 8-year-old boy and the village was left without a *melamed*. Luckily it was mid-*Ab* [a month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding to July-August] and the school year would have ended anyway in six weeks.

Meanwhile I was sent to the school for older boys. The *melamed* had agreed to teach me and another boy during the breaks. In fact, he cared about us very little and we spent most of the time playing in the garden, until one day I got a thorn into my heel and limped home crying. This was the end of *cheder* for me in the village. During the next month I had to walk to the *cheder* of the neighbouring village, Draczinetz, together with my elder sister. There were too many children there and too little learning, but it was fun. The road to school was wonderful, especially in the early morning, when the dewdrops turned into shining pearls in the first rays of the sun. We did not walk on the stony imperial road. Instead, we ran through the fields and bathed our feet in the dew. We walked through an area that I wasn't familiar with. Our way passed next to the priest's house, then next to the fishpond which the Baron had built. In his generosity he left the gate open every Saturday afternoon for the Jews to take their walk by the pond. *Goyim* wouldn't come. They didn't wait for the caretaker to open the gate. Whenever they felt like it, they climbed over the fence and plundered the pond. We walked through fields and meadows. There were very few houses along the road. In one place a wooden pole painted black and yellow barred the road. This was the tollgate where every passing cart had to pay a tax. The road administration leased the operating of the tollgate to Jew. I was always uneasy when I passed through the tollgate: perhaps the pole was going to fall on my head?

I gained little knowledge from that *cheder*. There were many children from Hlinitza. The place was overcrowded and the poor teacher was overwhelmed. He could hardly find half an hour a day for me, sometimes not even that. Instead of learning, we ran wild in the cornfield behind the house; we played tricks and got into mischief. Luckily, August was rainy that year, and I didn't have to go to school in the

rain. Two weeks before *Rosh haShana* the term ended, and I was finally released from school.

The study of German needed special attention; it was imperative to have good German, both spoken and written. The basics of German and arithmetic were taught in the *cheder*. This was the norm in most villages where Jews lived. A law student from Czernovitz settled for a while in our village and taught German for a modest fee. I remember him quite well. His name was Pauker. He was a highly respected person in the village. He used to wear the square student's cap and a colourful ribbon around his breast. At that time law students were not obliged to attend lectures. Students who didn't live in Czernovitz studied at home and travelled to the city only for the exams. This was a godsend for many poor students, including Mr. Pauker. My eldest sister Rosa studied German with him while the younger ones studied with the postman, Mr. Pecher. He was an intelligent man and a well-liked teacher of German. He was considered an educated person and maybe this was true. Postmen in the former Austrian empire were retired non-commissioned officers from the army as well as from the police. When they reached retirement age, they could apply for various clerical jobs. The best of them went to work in the courts where they could reach relatively high positions. Why our Mr. Pecher remained a lowly postman I don't know, maybe his abilities or his knowledge were too limited?

Anyway, I was much more interested in Mr. Pecher's son. He was 5 or 6 years older than myself and the unanimously recognized chief of all the little rascals in the village. Wherever something happened, Karl was involved. He was the only one who dared to dive into the Hlinitza stream from a height of 5 metres. When he went with his band to steal pears from Nute Wolf's garden, I would tag along to get one or two small pears too. He was no egoist. He climbed on the tree and after filling his own pockets, he would throw down handfuls of pears to the rest of us and look on with glee while we were fighting among ourselves for every pear. When Nute Wolf appeared suddenly, roaring with anger, Karl would jump off the tall tree and run away laughing. And we, the little ones, were left to suffer the consequences. Nute Wolf would mercilessly twist the ear of any little boy he caught. But I was never punished. He knew that I was Hersch's only son and he wanted no trouble with my father with whom he prayed together in the synagogue. Young Pecher always waited for us on the other side of the stream and gave a handful of pears to the little boy who had been punished.

I suppose my sister really gained from Mr. Pecher's lessons, for I clearly remember how enthusiastically she used to recite Schiller's ballads. I also recall my sister Helene reading penny novels in bed. Among them was the Pope Gapon series. Later she became very fond of ghost novels. My sisters were not very good at spelling. But other girls in the village did worse. My eldest sister Rosa's accomplishments were above average for her time.

Chapter 7. The little stream by the house. The Hlinitza stream. Bathing in the Prut. Floods on the Prut. The old synagogue. My illness. My sister Hendl cares for me.

The place of one's birth and early childhood is a lovely dream for every man for as long as he lives. I remember with love and longing the few streets with modest houses, the fields, the forests and the people with their changing fates. I also think of the river Prut and of the little stream which flowed near our house, on its banks I played with my childhood friends. We little boys made mud dolls and tried to shape them in our likeness, while the little girls played house. With mud and stones, they built ovens like the ones their mothers used. Then they shaped *challas* out of mud and baked them in their ovens, without fire however. And in the middle of the greatest fun my elder sister came and started yelling at me: "Here you are again, you dirt bag! Smearred with dirt from top to toe! And you stink like a latrine in *Tammuz!*" [month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding to June – July]. It may well be that I stank, although I was unaware of it, because we used to play near a bridge under which passers-by sometimes relieved themselves. She caught me by the shoulder, the only part of me still dry, and led me home. When my mother saw me, she wrung her hands in despair and cried out: "He was there again! God in heavens, talking to him is useless!" Mother fetched the big tub, filled it with warm water and put me in.

The little stream carried its muddy waters, gurgling carelessly, toward the Hlinitza stream. This was a wonderful place to bathe. Not only children bathed there. Adults who didn't want to walk almost a kilometre to the Prut bathed there too. The Hlinitza stream had plenty of water and its banks were clean and grassy. The water was clear and cool and one couldn't suspect that a mere 100 metres upstream it had swallowed a dubious little stream. I spent whole days there before I had to go to *cheder*, of course. That was the end of the good life. Once, I remember it very clearly, I almost drowned. My sister who bathed with me pulled me out. I had to promise that I would never bathe unguarded. I could still watch young Pecher dive and the peasant boys stand in the water and catch fish with their hand nets. When the other children bathed, I went in with them, but the water never reached higher than my knees: a promise is a promise! But when my mother and sisters went to the Prut to bathe, they took me along. We bathed in the women's cabin and I was the only man there. I could bathe in the nude, but the women wore long shifts, sometimes white, more often red or blue. The bath cabin floated on boats anchored not far from the riverbank but the water was very deep for me and I held on to my mother with all my strength. Even on hot summer days the water of the Prut was quite cold and one had to get in very, very slowly.

The Prut came from far away, from the Carpathian Mountains of Galicia. But in spite of its long course, it still kept its mountainous character. The flow was fast and the water cold and clear. From the bridge one could see the bottom and watch the fish. It had lots of water and there were some deep places where several people drowned every summer. The only place where it was not dangerous to bathe was the cabin. It had a floor made of planks and it was only about 75 centimetres deep. Men and women bathed separately, of course. As I said, I was the only male bathing with the women and I was of course naked. There were enough protests coming from the other women but my mother didn't care. As a 3 or 4-year-old I was already 50 years ahead of my generation!

When I was a child, the Prut was spanned by a wooden bridge. It was very exciting to stand on it and look down into the water. Sometimes barges would pass

by. They were made of tree trunks bound together. This was the way to ship timber from the mountains to the port of Galatz, on the Danube, where it was loaded on ships and exported. Hutzul men from the mountains skilfully led the barges on the unpredictable river, by day as well as by night. And if there were floods, the spectacle was even more fascinating. One could see the current pulling at the pillars of the bridge and once in a while the bridge was simply washed away. At such times the floating mills were pulled onto the riverbank for safety. Sometimes the floods came so suddenly that it was very difficult and dangerous to pull up the mills. Those who were left in the water were often washed away by the current. If they didn't collide with a bridge or some other obstacle, they sometimes got as far as the Danube whole and undamaged and they could be towed back and used again. My grandfather once lost a mill in this way. Luckily it floated downstream only a few kilometres before it stopped, stuck in some bushes. Although the whole story was quite scary, the mill was later retrieved almost undamaged.

My mother told me that at the age of one year I was very ill and had to be urgently taken to a doctor in Czernovitz. Just then there was a flood and the bridge was in danger of collapsing. Crossing it was forbidden. In despair, my mother begged the mayor to let her pass. Eventually he gave in. She crossed the bridge safely, although she felt it swing under her feet, and not long afterwards the current carried it away.

The bridge over the Prut was a favourite spot for the village Jews' Saturday outing. From it the flat land on the left bank was visible for a great distance. On the right bank one could see my grandparents' house some 2 or 3 kilometres away. Across the bridge was Duboutz where Uncle Hendl lived. Duboutz was a typical farming village of Bukovina. Even the manor and park looked so neglected that I thought they were uninhabited. Only a handful of Jewish families lived there and they had no *minyan* [group of at least ten men required for a religious service]. For the holidays they came to pray in Hlinitza. After 1902 they used the new synagogue but before that they went to the old one, of course.

The old synagogue was in the house of Veter Mendl, my grandmother's brother. He had a long white beard and to me he looked extremely old, although he probably was hardly more than 70. At that time, he had already divided all his possessions among his children and he was spending his time studying the Talmud. He led a retired life and this excited the curiosity of the children. They would open his door stealthily, peer in and then run away. He did not show any anger, he only looked up from his book and called with a tired voice: "*Mach tzi di Tir!*" [Close the door!] For some reason we found this short sentence extremely funny and whenever we saw him, we called out: "*Mach tzi di Tir! Mach tzi di Tir!*" He had two sons, Duge and Hersch. The uneducated Hersch was quite well to do, while the refined and well-educated Duge, my father's best friend, was as they say "*a blitiger Ureman*" [a very poor man]. Nevertheless, he was the one who cared for their old father.

When the new synagogue was ready, with its great height and its arched windows, it became the symbolic centre of the village. Across the street from it were two houses, both painted pink, which wouldn't have looked out of place even in the city: our house and Yoel Klar's. Ours was called "The new house". Father built it in

1898, after the old one burned down on a Friday night. It seems my elder sister was right after all: I didn't bring any luck to my parents.

When I was a year old, I fell ill with a bad Staphylococcal infection. I'll try to reconstruct the facts, based on what I heard from my parents. It started with a boil which usually was not dangerous, even at a time when there were no antibiotics. But I suspect that somebody tried to squeeze it. I can see no other reason for what happened next: septicaemia with pus in the joints. No one in his right mind would go to see a doctor for a boil. It was probably treated by Mime Esther or even by my Gypsy wet nurse. There was no doctor in the village and in case of need one had to go to Dr. Hutschenecker in Lujan, 7 kilometres away. Very few did. I got a high fever and when my mother saw that the situation was getting serious, she took me to Sniatyn, where a military surgeon operated on my right ankle. (It seems there was no civilian surgeon available.) But this was not the end. Later my left shoulder became swollen. This time Mother took me to the district hospital in Czernovitz, where I had surgery again. For a long time, I hovered between life and death until, slowly, I started to recover. Mother watched over me in the hospital. She could never forget that time. "I ransomed him from God with my tears", she used to say, probably meaning not God, but the rabbi of Czernovitz. She never mentioned the rabbi explicitly because whenever she tried to do so, Father would turn away and start to grumble. He wouldn't say very friendly things in his beard about the rabbis and Mother tried to prevent this.

Mother often told me how happy she was when I finally returned home after several months in hospital. I was pale and thin, a bag of bones. An acquaintance suggested she should bathe me in a soup made of sheep's feet. And indeed, I began to improve: I put on weight, got rosy cheeks and started to regain the use of my legs, even of the one that was operated on. My Gypsy wet nurse didn't return. Instead, I was entrusted to the care of my little sister Hendl, later to be called Helene. I say "little" because, although she was the second eldest, she was the shortest of the lot. I started to walk later than most children because of the leg operation. She used to carry me in her arms most of the time. She was still a child herself and when she tried to steal away to play with other children, I would cry like mad: "Hune, Hune!" That's what I called her. And immediately she would be brought back, scolded and perhaps even hit for leaving me alone. I embittered her childhood and she could never forget it.

She was still carrying me in her arms at the time when our house burned down. I was then about two years old. After that I was sent together with Hendl to Krostovata. We stayed with Grandmother until our new house was built. I remember Hendl carrying me in her arms in Grandmother's house and the cries of "Hune, Hune!" still echo in my ears.



Helene and her son Isyu, around 1914.

For the time being I seemed to be doing well, but later it became more and more apparent that my left arm didn't grow properly. The inflammation caused the premature calcification of the bone and growth stopped completely. The right ankle was damaged and the foot remained turned inwards. Other joints were also slightly damaged. I was marked for life.

Chapter 8. Our new house.

My father could write German, in Gothic script, almost flawlessly. He read the German newspaper regularly but besides that he had no secular education. His education was strictly traditional. His only book was The Old Testament from which he read every Saturday. Yet, educated or not, he had a strong feeling for beauty. If he loved fiery horses, it was no wonder, he was the descendant of several generations of farmers. But he also loved stately houses with large windows and lofty roofs, which was more unusual. Farmers don't usually appreciate comfortable houses; good stables are often more important to them. Father could spend hours on a building site, advising the owner and the workers alike.

Our old house, the one that burned down, was built two years after my parents' wedding. It looked very much like the other houses in the village. The rooms were few and small, with little windows. The overhang of the roof hid the upper third of the house, making it look even smaller. As for the new house, the design was his own. It had a large front facing the street and tall windows with panes of Belgian glass. The ceilings were high and no one had to stoop when going through the doors.

Father loved light and air and he built it accordingly. The ceilings were not made of logs and planks, like in other houses in Hlinitza. They were plastered and painted white. To enter the house, one didn't have to descend three steps, as was usual, but to climb three steps. There were three rooms in the house. My parents' bedroom had two windows facing east. The living room, with four windows, was so big that weddings were held there. And there was one more room with two windows. My father built two kitchens: one for summer and one for winter. The house also included a roomy shop with an adjoining storeroom. Next to the kitchens there was a room used as a larder for most of the year. But during *Sukkoth* half of the roof was removed and the room became a *sukkah*. Before *Sukkoth* the room was freshly whitewashed, decorated with flowers and carpets; it was a pleasure to stay there. The house had three entrances: two in front and one in the back, so that each room had its own entrance. Between the rooms there were glass doors, something never seen in these parts before. The house also had a big cellar. In the back there was a wooden balcony which was later glassed over. All floors were made of smooth planks. I mention this because earth floors were still common at that time. All in all, father built the first modern house in the centre of Hlinitza, except for the manors of the landowners and one of the pubs.

In the middle of the yard there was a well which could be used by any passer-by. It was unthinkable to deny water to anybody. On the other hand, it didn't occur to anybody that if a dirty vessel was lowered into the water, the whole well could become polluted. On the other side of the yard Father built a roomy shed. We never kept more than one cow, but perhaps Father hoped that in better times there would be several cows and even a pair of horses. His dream was a pair of fiery Hutzul horses and a small carriage, a so-called "Stanevitz carriage". Next to the stable there was a privy made of boards. Most people lacked this comfort and went simply out, behind the house. The privy emptied into the little stream which has been lovingly mentioned above. The stream willingly received whatever was thrown into it, and flowed dreamily on. It marked the eastern border of our garden. I would have liked to go down to the water, but I couldn't reach it because Father in his wisdom built a fence of willow branches along the bank. The only thing I could do was to lie down in the deep shade and listen to the murmur of the water. Even on the hottest days it was nice and cool there. It was my personal retreat. The only other person admitted there was my best friend, Aaron. One day when we worked our way deeper than usual through the dense vegetation, we found next to the fence a young tree full of black cherries. What a discovery! In our garden we had only a few fruit trees, they were old and yielded little fruit. I wonder why Father, so fond of farming, did nothing about it. Our vegetable patch however, although small, was well tended by my mother and we had fresh vegetables all summer long.

Many people admired our house. They looked, they praised but few tried to imitate it. Either they didn't have the means, or they found their old houses still good enough, a pity to pull them down. There was only one other man who could afford a new house like ours. That was Yoel Klar. His lot was next to ours and he copied our house exactly. In the end the two houses looked as much alike as two eggs. Even the facades were painted the same shade of pink. Together the two houses formed the nucleus of a modern neighbourhood. Velvel the butcher, a prosperous man (aren't all

butchers and bakers prosperous?), decided to follow our example, but his house was more modest because his lot had a smaller front. Later another house was added and not a wooden one like the rest, but a brick building, planned and carried out by a technician, a house like those in the city. It belonged to the Provincial Government. And so, the upper half of the street which linked Czernovitz and Storozhinetz received a new look even though the old houses were still there.

Chapter 9. Aunt Toni's wedding. My sister Schlieme. The life of the peasants.

We moved into the new house in 1899. That far back I can't remember. My first memories are the birth and death of my younger brother Berl and the wedding of aunt Toni which took place in part in our house.

The preparations for the wedding started shortly after my mother left her childbed. The reception of the *husn* [bridegroom] and the guests was held in our house and the dancing took place in Yoel Klar's house. They came from Solca, Arbora, Berhomet and Czernovitz. The pride of the family was uncle Chaim with his wife, the big aunt Hannah. Uncle Pinchas with his wife, aunt Fanny, were also admired and so was aunt Zipre with her dignified husband Itzie. They brought their daughter Adele who looked very pretty and refined. Uncle Chaim also brought his eldest daughter Rosica. She must have been about the same age as my youngest sister Schlieme, for the two of them were inseparable. I was extremely fond of her. Wherever the two girls went, I tagged along, there was no way to get rid of me. Uncle Hendl came with his wife Rivtzie who entertained the whole company with her witty stories. After the *chuppah*, when everybody sat down to eat, it was fascinating to watch this group of proud and beautiful people, to say nothing about the fashion show they represented. "Is this Hlinitza?" many may have asked themselves. As soon as they arrived, the whole village was agape: so many carriages with fiery horses had never been seen in the village before. Uncle Chaim brought along from Radautz a waiter called Hirschleifer. He was a slightly comical figure and the guests made fun of him. No wonder that I still remember his name.

Not everything went smoothly, however. Grandmother brought all the food with her from Krostovata and kept it in our larder under lock and key. After midnight, at the height of the celebration, many guests asked for cakes, not only for themselves but also to take home to their children. Grandmother was in no hurry to bring the *lekach*. When she finally did, it turned out that it was awful: it smelled of kerosene. It was as if somebody had poured kerosene over the crate of deserts. Was it Grandmother herself who went into the larder and spilled some kerosene from the lamp in her hand? The event caused a great commotion and was remembered for a long time in the family circle.

My mother, who had recently given birth, had only an insignificant role in the wedding arrangements. Soon afterwards the baby died. I remember very clearly the moment when the small casket was taken out of the house. Everybody wept and I started to sob loudly too. For a long time, Mother couldn't forget her youngest and maintained that the wedding had caused the death of her baby. Because of the draught

the baby had caught a cold which had then turned into pneumonia. Who knows if this was true? There was no doctor in Hlinitza and to call Doctor Hutschenecker from Lujan was not an easy decision. Why spend money on doctors if one can call Mime Esther? Only Mime Esther failed once again.

When the family moved into the new house, I returned home from Krostovata together with my sister Hendl and I was put up in the kitchen. There were good reasons for it. For one thing it was easier to keep an eye on me because there was always somebody around. The kitchen was spacious, bright and airy and the whole family liked to sit there. There were four of us who slept in the kitchen: Hendl with me on the big bed, Schlieme on the cot and the servant girl on top of the stove. Poor Hendl couldn't get rid of me even at night! By that time, she wasn't carrying me in her arms any longer because she started to show a deformation of her backbone. It had become the servant girl's task. The doctors were of the (wrong) opinion that I shouldn't over-exert my operated leg. Being carried along was fun because everywhere the servant girl went, I went too. For instance, she took me to the funeral of the old Baron Flondor. The day before the funeral I watched while people were preparing the family crypt which had been flooded recently and the next day, I went along with the funeral train. I also saw the funeral of the school principal's daughter who died of tuberculosis. But it was much more fun to go with her when she took the cow to pasture. She used to put me down in the wheat field and let me run around barefoot in the stubble. It hurt but I didn't mind: there were beautiful flowers all around and I had to get them. It was great.

I mentioned that the servant girl used to sleep on the stove. This would seem curious to anyone who has never seen a farmhouse in our region. On top of the big oven where my mother baked bread and *challas* there was a large surface where it was a pleasure to sleep in winter. The kitchen was not very warm and on stormy winter nights I found refuge on the stove. Schlieme, who often suffered from a sore throat, would join me there. She was four years older than myself and went to the Ukrainian primary school. If she was in a good mood and didn't have any throat pain, she would tell me all kinds of stories and read to me. She loved to tell stories; she simply loved to talk. She could tell the same story over and over again, every day and I listened spellbound. Because of her endless talking, people called her "*Geletke*". The name had a double meaning. It was a wooden vessel used as a measure for grain [in Romanian: *găleată*] which appeared in one of the stories she retold endlessly, sometimes even twice the same day. I was usually her listener. The name also implied that she had a whole "*geletke*" of words to pour out at any occasion and pour it out she would while I was sitting next to her on the stove. In spite of the four years difference, we got on very well. We agreed that a little imp was living inside the oven. We pictured him very vividly, although we had never seen him. He was small and black and wore a round hat with a feather. He was a gentle creature who never harmed anyone. On top of the stove, we both went through the measles, first she and a few days later myself. Mother was glad that it was almost at the same time. It was not uncommon in those days to make a healthy child get the measles from an ill sibling and get it over with. To try to prevent contagion was futile anyway. The illness was relatively mild and it passed without the need for a doctor. After the measles Schlieme was left with a mild bronchitis

which bothered her for the rest of her childhood. She was a very pretty girl with brown locks and blue eyes. She looked like Father, a real Zwecker type. She was of average height with slightly protruding cheekbones and a thin nose. Our difference in age became more marked a few years later: while I was still schoolboy, she was already a young lady.



Schlieme with her daughter Martha in 1920

On clear summer days the kitchen was bathed in sunlight since early morning. When she woke me with a kiss and I opened my eyes, I had to close them immediately, to get used to the light first. The kitchen windows faced east and looked upon a hill which rose beyond the Hlinitza stream. In summer it was green, in winter it was shining white and the small thatched peasant houses seemed to stick to its side. They all faced south and were surrounded by fences made of willow branches. The street between them was so narrow that two ox carts could pass side by side only with great difficulty. In the rainy season one would sink into the black mud up to one's ankles. The road wound its way to the top of the hill, to Baron Flondor's vineyards. In Bukovina winegrowing was not common. But since the Baron did so well, he proved that it could be done. Still, he had very few competitors. The small-scale peasant had no interest in winegrowing, nor did he have enough land. He would consider himself lucky if he had enough maize and potatoes to survive the winter. Those who had a little more land could afford a cow and, perhaps, a horse. A pig was only for the prosperous among them. Most of the milk, eggs, pork and poultry were not for their own table. They were traded for tobacco, kerosene, liquor or cotton. The

women would weave the cotton into cloth during the long winter evenings and use it to make festive clothing for the family; everyday clothing was made of hemp bleached in the sun. The peasant women also spun and weaved wool at home. In winter the peasants wore heavy sheepskin coats. The tanning and sewing of furs were done mostly by Jews.

The peasant woman made her own clothing. She wore a long white shirt and a black skirt with a red stripe at the hem. The skirt was really no more than a square of fabric wound around the hips, the end of which was tucked under the belt so that the long shirt showed below. The shirts were embroidered with traditional patterns in black or red. For special occasions the embroidery was very intricate, made in many colours, sometimes also with beads or sequins. It covered most of the bodice and sleeves. Women would spend many sleepless nights embroidering but the results were well worth the effort. They were often real works of art, making the women wearing them look like great beauties. Over the shirt they wore an embroidered sleeveless fur jacket even in summer. On festive occasions women and girls generously greased their hair with butter and decorated it with flowers. On weekdays they made their hair into plain braids. They covered their heads with brightly coloured kerchiefs.

Peasant families had many children. At meal times a large earthenware bowl of beans, potatoes, milk or buttermilk was placed in the middle of the table and instead of bread there was a steaming pot of *mămăligă* [maize porridge]. They used no plates. They all dipped their spoons into the common bowl while the hot *mămăligă* was simply eaten with one's fingers.

Peasants usually had their heads covered even at home, but before sitting down to eat they would take off their hats and make the sign of the cross. Women and children followed suit. They ate with good appetite and consumed large amounts of food because they worked hard, and the food was poor in calories. It also lacked variety. Peasants had meat only for Christmas and Easter. Exceptions were weddings and funerals. Bread was only seldom seen on peasant tables. It was almost entirely replaced by *mămăligă*. The meagre supply of fat came from hemp seeds or from pumpkin seeds. The oil presses in the villages were mostly operated by Jews. The leftovers from the oil press were fed to the livestock. Sunflowers were almost unknown in Bukovina. Since *mămăligă* is boiled in water, the finished product contains lots of water and few calories; therefore, large amounts of it are necessary. Besides, I am convinced that it was not even properly digested. Bread was baked only for special occasions, so peasant women were not expert in baking, except if they had worked as servants in Jewish homes in their youth. If they did bake, they usually made a sort of flat bread from maize flour. It was called *mălai*. If it was well prepared, the Jews liked it too.

Sadly, the manuscript ends here.