

Eugen And Gizella Kohn



My mother Gizella Kohn and my father Eugen Kohn. The photo was taken in Arad in 1930.

My father and my mother met each other through mediators. My father was a merchant at the time, and my mother was a cashier in Chisineu Cris. The marriage was arranged because this was the custom among Jews. My parents got married in 1926, and the wedding took place in Sebis at the local synagogue. Shortly thereafter they moved to Beliu because they had found employment there. My mother became a housekeeper, as she was busy raising us at the time, and my father worked as a trader. My brother Toma Nicolae and I were both born in Beliu, where we lived until 1940. I was born on 19th October 1932, my brother on 16th March 1936.

While in Beliu my parents opened a mixed and textile shop. My childhood home was located at a corner opposite the Catholic church. The house was actually owned by a Romanian citizen who worked in the United States, and we rented it from him. We had three rooms: a kitchen, the shop and a very nice yard with flowers. We didn't have a vegetable garden or any animals at home, only flowers. Our carpets were hand-made, manufactured by my mother. We heated with wood, as we had tile stoves in the rooms. We also had two servants, neither one of whom was Jewish. One of them worked in the kitchen, and the other helped take care of us.

My parents had taken over a bankrupt shop from a Jew and made it prosperous. And indeed, the shop went very well. At the beginning Uncle Schwartz vouched for them and enabled them to get a loan. By 1940 they managed to pay back all the debt and buy a house in Arad. At first they had tenants in the house, but later it was nationalized and confiscated by the Antonescu regime.

The shop did so well, in part, because of my father's work ethic. I remember that in those days peasants would go to the fields at four or five in the morning, and they often knocked on our windows early in the morning in case they needed sugar, bread or cigarettes. My father got up and served them – many times even without getting money for it. Merchants were fighting for clients, and my father's generosity proved to be a useful means of attracting business.