

# Ietti Leibovici

Ietti Leibovici (nee Davidsohn)

Botosani

Romania

Interviewer: Eموke Major

Date of interview: September 2006

*Mrs. Ietti Leibovici is a very welcoming, warm person. She lives alone in a block of flats in a two-room apartment dominated by an exemplary cleanliness and order.*

*Entering her apartment, and learning that she was born in Vatra Dornei – located in Bukovina –, I thought of the pride of the elderly inhabitants of Bukovina*

*– including the Jewish population in that area – with regard to their German upbringing, which sets them apart from Moldavians.*



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## • My family background

My father's parents, so my grandparents from my father's side, as well as his brothers and sisters, were born in Botosani. My grandfather's name was **Leizar Davidsohn**, and my grandmother's name was **Slima Davidsohn**. Both my grandmother and my grandfather had several brothers and sisters, but they were living in America.

They left to America in the 1900's or during World War I, and they corresponded with my grandparents. But I no longer know anything about them. They may have grandchildren or great-grandchildren still living there [*in America*], but I don't know them.

My grandfather was a butcher. And, as it happened in those days, he often bought cattle and slaughtered them himself. He slaughtered them at the animal slaughterhouse, and then he used to take the meat to the meat market in Botosani, where every butcher had a stall of his own, and the meat was put out for sale there.

My grandmother was a housewife, she took care of the children, then the grandchildren, as they do nowadays as well. I knew them, I loved them very much. But it wasn't until I was 14 that we became closer. I will recount later on the circumstances in which I arrived in Botosani.

They were religious people, my grandmother kept kosher very strictly, they used to observe all holidays very closely, they used to go to the synagogue. My grandfather used to go to the synagogue on Friday evenings, on Saturdays, holidays, but also when there were no special occasions, during the week – there were many Jews in Botosani and religious service was performed during the week as well, and he used to attend it.

My grandfather died here, in Botosani, in 1947, and he is buried here. My grandmother died in Rishon LeZiyyon, in Israel, around 1959-1960.

The grandparents from my father's side had 7 children: my father was the eldest, followed by Buium, then Lotti, Clara, Ana, Zalman, and Lica who was the youngest of the children. None of them is still living at present, but there are their children, their grandchildren, and they are all living in Israel.

**Buium Davidsohn** was a butcher. He lived in Botosani. His wife's name was Adela and they had 3 children: Anuta, Celu and Izu. They were older than me. Iosi Manas was Anuta's husband. They lived in Burdujeni, Suceava. *[Ed. note: At present, Burdujeni is a neighborhood of the city of Suceava.]*

Izu Davidsohn got married in Bucharest in 1956 – I attended his wedding. *[Editor's note: There is a photo about it: ROILE008.jpg]* My uncle died in Botosani around 1961, I believe, and she emigrated to Israel with Anuta. The 2 boys emigrated before they did. Anuta is still alive, the other 2 are dead.

**Lotti's** husband's name was Sandu Schwartz; they have a daughter, Ada. He was a shopkeeper. Initially, they left for Israel with their daughter around 1960-1961, but they didn't stay there for long. Their daughter met a young man from Canada who was visiting Israel on a trip. They met, they liked each other, she married him and they left to Canada.

Being their only child, her parents followed her there. That's how they arrived in Toronto, Canada, around 1965-1966. I visited them in Canada around 1982. For I was visiting some cousins of my mother's who were living in New York – I stayed in New York for 2 months –, and I went to visit them for a month in Canada.

My aunt and my uncle are dead. She was the first to die, around 1990, followed by my uncle in 2000. And, after their death, I've lost contact with my cousin. Ada has a daughter, Blanche.

**Clara** and **Ana** lived in Botosani, and they emigrated to Israel in the 1950's [1](#). Clara was married to Nathan Deutsch, while Ana was married to Srul Ifrim. Nathan Deutsch was a carpenter, but I don't know any details about Srul Ifrim. Clara had a daughter and a son who died in Israel, but they were already grown-ups by then. Ana had no children. These 2 sisters of my father's died in Israel as well, in the 1980's.

**Zalman** was a shop assistant in a shop in Botosani, and so was **Lica**. Zalman was married to Idola, and they have 2 daughters: Pepi and Ana. Zalman left to Israel with his family after World War II, I believe he died around 1996-1997. Cousin Pepi is living in Haifa, she is married – Pepi Super is her married name –, and has 3 children. Ana is living in Israel, too, she is married, has 3 children as well, and she already has grandchildren.

Lica Davidsohn was married to Mina, and he has a son, Hari, and 2 daughters, Cerna and Tili. Lica died in Botosani in an accident, he was crushed by something that fell on him inside the shop, and he died – I believe it was in 1949. His wife and children left for Israel, the children were still little at the time.

All 3 of them are still living in Israel, they have families there. Cerna changed her name to Sharona when she arrived in Israel, her name is now Sharona Iener. Tili changed her name too, but I don't remember her name or her family name.

My father's name was **David Davidsohn**. He was born in Botosani around 1900, I believe. I think he graduated secondary school – they attended 7 grades back then. My father owned an ironmonger's shop in Botosani – before he got married – where he sold other products as well.

I was told later on that my mother's family came to Vatra Dornei from Poland, I think. Or was it my grandfather... it had something to do with Poland. The name of my grandmother from Vatra Dornei, from my mother's side, was Rosa Laufer. My grandfather's name was Iancu Laufer.

But he died before I was born, I only knew my grandmother. He had died many years before I was born. Grandmother was a very kind woman. She loved her children, she loved us very much, her grandchildren. And the children loved her in return. They looked after her afterwards, when she was ill. She died around 1939.

My mother had two other sisters – **Ana Laufer**, Maly, and **Sabina Laufer** –, and a brother – **Iosef Laufer**. Her brother was older than my mother, while her sisters were younger.

Her brother was married to Mali, and they had 2 children – 2 daughters. One of them, Pepi, was 3 years older than me, the other, Letti, was 1 year older than me. My uncle was my father's partner at the shop. The entire family died in Transnistria [2](#).

The sisters weren't married. I believe they were employed. I remember there was a pavilion where mineral water was sold in the Public Garden in Vatra Dornei – they brought water for the visitors –, and the cadet, Sabina, used to conduct a band there – something like that, I remember it as if it were a dream.

She was either doing volunteer work or she was employed there, the whole matter is foggy in my mind. I couldn't be any clearer. I think the older sister worked at the Community [*the Jewish Community in Vatra Dornei*]. That's as far as I recall. They both died in Transnistria. They were young when they died – 21-23, around that age.

My mother's name was **Janeta Davidsohn**. Her Jewish name was Seindla. I suppose she too was born in the 1900's – given the fact that I was born in 1931.

They met either through a matchmaker or when my father happened to travel to Dorna and met my mother... These are suppositions, I didn't get to ask him these questions. I was 12 when mother died, there wasn't enough time for her to tell me all these things. Then, when my father returned after the deportation, he remarried, and there were things left untold, things that I would have wanted to learn, to know, but they remained unspoken.

My father was from Botosani, and he married my mother, who was from Vatra Dornei. And he stayed in Vatra Dornei as well after they married. My mother didn't work, she had no regular job, and my father was in charge of the store. The store was located downtown. I forget what it was called, but he ran it with my uncle, my mother's brother, Iosef Laufer. It covered the space of a two-room apartment and they sold hardware, nails, they even sold lime there.

75% of the population of Vatra Dornei was Jewish. There were 2 streets in the center of the city. As you walked away from the train station, there was Ferdinand St., which was crossed by the main street – larger than the one coming from the train station –, Carol St.

And there were stores on both sides of the bridge leading to the city: manufacture shops, footwear, stands, newspaper stands, grocer's shops, fruit vendors, dairy shops, restaurants. And most of them were Jewish. There were a few shops belonging to Christians as well – there was a shop belonging to a Greek, for instance, where you could buy coffee, halvah, specialties like these.

### • Growing up

I was born in Vatra Dornei in 1931. The grandfather from my mother's side died long before I was born. We have the custom of naming children after dead relatives. And, had I happened to be a boy, they would have named me Iancu, after my grandfather. But given the fact that I was a girl, they translated the name of Iancu into Letti. I don't know how it is done, probably the initials have to coincide, Iancu begins with an "i," and so does Letti. My Jewish name is Ita [Ite]. I was an only child.

My mother had 2 sisters and 1 brother, all of whom lived in Vatra Dornei – the brother was married, he even had 2 children. We all lived apart, and at a certain moment we decided the entire family should unite. We moved in a larger house with several apartments, and everyone had their apartment.

So my parents and I lived in one apartment, my mother's brother lived in another apartment with his wife and two children, and my mother's sisters lived with their mother, meaning my grandmother. There were 5 rooms, 2 kitchens and 1 basement, where the laundry was located. And indeed, we were a very, very close, loving family.

My cousins and I were like sisters, there wasn't much that could come between us. We were together all the time, we ate together, passed the time of the day together, and the age gap wasn't that great. We were of close ages and we got along very well.

We weren't that close with our grandparents in Botosani and my father's family – uncles, aunts, cousins. We always visited them on Christmas, we went on a two-week holiday, I had a holiday from school, too; we used to visit them on Easter as well, but that was about it. They used to come to Vatra Dornei as well. We were always together, the relatives living in Vatra Dornei, day after day, hour after hour.

My mother was more severe with me. I was with her most of the time. But nevertheless, she overlooked many of my mischiefs, it was only later that I became aware of that. For it was very difficult to convince me to eat, and I was very picky about what I would eat. And in order for me to

eat, my mother had to hold me in her arms.

Even the cocoa with milk, which was served at 4 o'clock, I would drink it only if she held me in her arms and gave me to drink. It was still her who had to feed me. But my birthday came, and she invited children over. And then she said: 'Look what, I will tell on you to the children, I will tell them that you wouldn't eat by yourself, that I have to feed you.' Well, that cured me. I was big enough by then. But I was spoiled.

My father's native tongue was Yiddish, and my mother's was German. But my mother spoke Yiddish as well, and so did the grandparents from my mother's side, while father himself learned German in the meantime. My native tongue is German – we spoke German at home. I had a cousin whose name was letti as well.

And when I was in kindergarten, we went to the same kindergarten. And when the pedagogue would call us: 'letti!', both of us used to stand up. And thus, it remained settled: 'Kleine letti' and 'Grose letti.' Kleine letti means small letti, 'Grose letti' means big letti.

That's how they called us at home as well, 'Kleine letti,' 'Grose letti.' I attended a regular [state] kindergarten, where there were children of all nationalities: German, Jewish, Romanian. That's where I started speaking Romanian. The pedagogue spoke German as well, but she had already started introducing Romanian.

Religious life was observed piously. And to digress, I rebuke myself many times for not being able to do it. Food was prepared as laid down by our religion, every custom was observed. We had separate dishes for milk, meat. On Friday evenings, the table was laid with decorum, observing every custom for Friday evenings. It was the same on Saturday, it was a holiday, we didn't work, we didn't do anything, we observed the Sabbath. My parents didn't go to work on Saturday. I don't recall who used to light the fire, I believe there was someone who lit it for us.

My mother didn't raise fowls, she bought them. She took the fowls to the hakham – there was no question of doing it otherwise. Both my mother and my father would go to the hakham, but it was mostly mother who did it, for my father was busy. But sometimes he used to go too, in the morning, to buy meat. As a child, they wouldn't take me to the hakham to see how the animals were slaughtered, I think they actually forbade it.

My mother didn't wear a wig, nor did my grandmothers. The wives of rabbis had to wear their hair cut short – and I believe the custom still exists today –, and cover it by means of a wig.

My father would regularly go to the synagogue on Friday evenings, on Saturdays, on holidays, without fail. But he used to attend the service on regular days as well, during the week. I remember he used to go to the synagogue whenever the prayer for the dead was recited, when he had to bring something, have a ceremony performed –, or, as was the case, if he was summoned there for a special purpose.

But, come what may, he wouldn't miss the religious service on holidays and on Saturdays and Fridays. I used to go with them myself. But I used to stay close to my mother.

The synagogue in Vatra Dornei was very beautiful. And there were stairs inside the synagogue, and there was a box up there, a balcony where the women were seated. There was no curtain, one could see and hear the entire religious service unobstructed.

A rabbi would perform the religious service. It was beautiful. But there were 2 synagogues in Vatra Dornei: the large one, where my parents and grandparents always used to go, and there was another one on Main street, near the railroad, a little passed the train station, in the corner. I believe both of them were Orthodox.

It was quite impossible for all of us to eat together during the week, as some used to come home to eat earlier, while others would come at different hours. However, a large table was laid on various days and everybody attended, and we all used to eat together.

On holidays, everybody attended the dinner table: on Friday evenings, on Saturday at lunch, and on major holidays. We always had meat soup with noodles on Saturdays. They also used to cook steaks, they prepared all sorts of dishes.

My mother also made ciunt [*chulent*], but not very often. Often enough that I remember it. You prepare it from beans – and, if possible, from large beans –, but you also add buckwheat grits and meat. You also add potatoes to the mix. But it tastes very good. I like it, especially because it is made from beans – I like beans as a food.

On Friday evening my mother used to light 3 candles. As far as I know, the number of candles depends on the number of family members. For if you happen to have a child in the meantime, you must light a candle and pray for that child as well. 2 candles are lit – husband, wife –, and then 1 candle for every child in the family.

After the children are grown, move out of the parental home, and start families of their own, the number of candles decreases in the parents' household. But... to each his own. [Ed. note: *It is customary to light two candles, although some families light more, sometimes in accordance with the number of children.* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabbat>]

On Friday evening, we would first and foremost go to the synagogue, and sit down at table when we returned, we ate together. We always had fish at the table, it was a tradition, we ate it like meat jelly. If we didn't have fish, they would prepare some meatballs from poultry, chicken breast, which we also served as Vorspeis. And we had soup – meat soup was a tradition –, meat.

In addition to candles, the woman who lights candles on Friday evening or on the eve of a holiday must also have bread, which is kept covered – coilici. My mother used to bake nicely kneaded coilici. [Ed. note: *Coilici is a variant for challah, similar to the word „kajlics“ used by some Hungarian speaking Jews in Romania.*]

*Both words have the origin of the Hungarian word „kalacs“.*] The flour was very good, too. For I can't bake coilici as well as my mother did. I no longer bake it now, but I used to. 2 coilici were placed on the table. If you didn't have 2, you only placed 1. Or on Passover: you placed the matzah on the table, covered it with a special embroidered cloth, and you blessed the table with the matzah that was on the table.



On **Passover**, for instance, they brought matzah in boxes, small crates. But you had to clean the house in advance. A thorough cleaning of the house was performed a few days before Passover, including washing and ironing clothes. The doorknobs were scrubbed, everything had to shine.

The special dishes for Passover were prepared, mother used to boil and clean them. We kept them in the attic; all the dishes, cutlery, and everything that was needed for cooking, trays were placed in large straw baskets or small crates with lids and stored in the attic where they remained throughout the year.

Before using them again, they were all retrieved, washed, scrubbed. I don't remember with what they washed them anymore, but this I remember, that if we didn't have special ones for Passover, we used some of the trays or dishes that we used during the year, for instance, but they were koshered.

Large stones were heated in the fire and placed in those dishes and trays, hot water was poured over them, steam would come out – they were thus made kosher. This was probably the custom – these are memories that I still have.

The flour and everything that was leavened was taken out of the house. Of course, it wasn't thrown away. It was stored elsewhere, in a pantry, in a basement or somewhere, so that there was nothing of it left in the house – it is called chametz. When the matzah is brought, the entire house had to be clean, there shouldn't be any crumb of bread or flour.

Bread crumbs were burned – they were thrown into the fire, to burn on the embers. I believe it was my mother who was in charge of burning the chametz. My father steered clear of household matters. At 10 o'clock on the eve of Passover, everything had to be ready. My poor mother would wake up at who knows what time in the morning in order to take care of all these preparations.

Everything had to be neat and taken care of, as she in turn had seen her parents do. The cleaning, the preparation of the Passover dishes was done in advance. But taking the chametz out of the house was done during that morning.

I think they made matzah in Cluj, if I'm not mistaken. And the Jewish Community in Vatra Dornei brought it, and all the Jews went to the Community and everybody bought as much matzah as they wanted. But it wasn't sold in packages like nowadays.

It wasn't packaged back then, you bought it by the pound, wrapped it in a piece of cloth, something, 10 pounds, 4 pounds, 12 pounds, as much as you needed. I believe they sold matzah flour packaged in bags. The matzah was very good, I liked it as a child. I actually enjoyed eating matzah, I didn't feel the need to eat bread.

The Seder evening was magical for children, it was quite something else. We were seated on the bed, this was a rule, among pillows specially arranged for this... Admittedly, the bed wasn't large enough for the entire family, some were seated on chairs, as well. Usually, it was the head of the family who performed the ceremony.

In our family, it was performed either by my father or by my uncle, or by both of them, or by either of them assisted by the other. But it is a ceremony performed by men. When the Seder meal

ceremony was being performed, there was a plate on the table on which a piece of horseradish was placed, an egg, a piece of meat, parsley leaves and some water mixed with salt.

And on another plate or rather a small bowl there was a mixture made from walnut [*charoset*], apples and honey. These had to be on the table. And when the service was performed, the glass of wine had to be drunk from, then you had a bite of matzah with those apples mixed with walnut and honey – each of us received [*from the one who performed the service*] a morcel from it.

The one who performed the ceremony also dipped matzah in the water mixed with salt – I don't remember eating that. We probably ate eggs, for they were there. A separate glass was placed on the table for the Messiah as well; it was filled and the door was opened in order for him to come in and drink from the glass.

Anyone could open the door. The Messiah comes and tastes from the wine. [*Ed. note: In fact, they were waiting for the return of prophet Eliyahu who would come and drink a glass of wine with those who lived there. He will return again on the day of the Last Judgment to herald the coming of the Messiah.*] We, the children, kept looking at the glass, but didn't really notice that it had been drunk from.

And the one performing the ceremony had to take a piece of matzah and hide it. And the children in the house would rush to find this hidden piece of matzah, for, if they found it, the one performing the ceremony had to offer them some money or a gift – we didn't receive money –, to be given in exchanged for the matzah. Well, it was very beautiful for children.

There are 4 questions a child has to ask. Of course, the child prepared for this in advance. My cousins and me were the ones asking the questions. 'Maništane ahailaze... micol halelu...' It was either like that, or one of us talked and was joined by the other, we asked the questions together, in unison, we didn't observe any rule. And as we got along very well, we had no problem with this.

Afterwards, the one performing the ceremony used to read in Hebrew from the Haggadah. And then we sat down to eat. We sang 'Had Gadia' at the end. [*Ed. note: Chad Gadya means „one little goat“.*

*In Ashkenazi Jewish custom, it is traditionally the penultimate song of the Passover Seder, sung before 'L'shana Ha'ba'ah Birushalayim' ('Next Year in Jerusalem').*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad\\_Gadya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chad_Gadya) ]. And this whole ritual could well last until midnight. There was a lot to read. As a small child, I would sometimes fall asleep on the bed. But after I grew up I fought to stay awake. And the same ritual was performed the following evening as well.

People baked on **Purim** – all sorts of cakes. And women used to compete, each saying that she baked more, better, special cakes. For it was mandatory to send plates with all sorts of delicious cakes to relatives, friends, neighbors. And we sent them cakes and sometimes it so happened that they sent a plate of such goodies in return. Well, it was we, the children, who delivered the cakes. This custom of offering cakes is called salhamunas [*shelakhmones*].

As children, we used to mask ourselves, we were playing around. But many masked people used to knock on our door. And they came with violins, all sorts of instruments, to play by the door and receive something in return for the performance.



Very many people were looking forward to the Purim holiday so that they could wear masks and come gather some money. They used to play Jewish songs popular in those days. There were Jewish musicians among those who came, but also many Christian ones.

It happened that they would come wearing masks, and you didn't receive them inside your home. But when they didn't wear masks, or when they were acquaintances, friends, of course you invited them in, offered them a treat. We went to relatives as well, and to my mother's friends. It is a pity that these customs are lost with the passage of time.

On **Rosh Hashanah** we went to the synagogue, the religious service started at 9 o'clock in the morning or even earlier, and it lasted until one o'clock, half past one – our parents often returned from the synagogue at 2 o'clock. It was very long, it was an entire service, which included everything.

When they returned home, the table was laid and we sat down to eat. We usually ate fish, meat soup with noodles, boiled meat. I remember we ate the meat without sour pickles, as it was the New Year. Nor did we eat salads, we ate anything that wasn't sour. Only food that was sweet. For it was the beginning of a new year, and it should be a sweet and good year. That was the custom in our family.

We built a sukkah on **Sukkot**, a pavilion covered in green. It was built from rods, so that it could be covered, and it had to have something green. You placed a table and chairs inside, so that you had something to sit on. I don't believe ornaments were used.

We didn't build one at home, but the men built a sukkah in the courtyard of the synagogue, and that's where the religious service was performed. But when I was in America, I saw them in Brooklyn, where many Jews live, very religious ones; those who have houses with courtyards have a pavilion like that in the courtyard, where the religious service is performed, but also where they eat lunch and dinner.

At the end of Sukkot, on the last day, the holiday of **Simchat Torah** is celebrated. Children rejoiced when this holiday arrived. People went to the synagogue, the one who performed the ceremony, the rabbi, or whoever happened to be, would take out the Torah and give it to each man to walk with it. And they had to walk 7 times [*around the bimah*].

And if there were enough Torahs, he would give one to every man. If not, a series of men would go, followed by another series. It's a merry holiday, people sing and dance holding the Torah. But I see that nowadays people walk only 3 times around the altar [*Ed. note: Mrs. Letti Leibovici is referring to the bimah.*], and then others take their place.

[*Ed. note: The central element of the holiday is represented by the joy of reading the Torah and is expressed by means of a procession consisting in walking around the 'bimah,' meaning the podium where the Torah is read or the synagogue's podium; each person carries the Torah scrolls turn by turn.*]

*This procession, called 'hakafot' is repeated 7 times and it synthesizes the joy of reading and carrying the Torah.*] And there is also a smaller Torah for the boys over 13, and they can carry it, too. In addition, children had small flags with Magen David, and there was an apple impaled at the

end of the small flag. And what a joy that small flag with an apple was for children... And afterwards they served sweet must at the synagogue – it is the time when must is produced –, and walnuts, ginger bread, dry cake.

We received Chanukkah gelt on **Chanukkah**. We bought chocolate, candy. The traditional Chanukkah toy was a spinning top, you turn it a few times and it turns. I had one as well. What won't children play with...

And life ran its normal, quiet course, I didn't feel any sort of – shall I call it, anti-Semitism. Well, what do I know, I was little, perhaps I wasn't even aware of it. But I had many Christian friends. There were many Germans in Vatra Dornei, and we played with the children of those Germans, we'd go to their house, they'd come to ours. There was an atmosphere of understanding, of friendship.

The ordeal started around 1937-1938. However, as a rule, people never discussed political matters in front of us, children, either at school or at home. They tried to somehow protect us from these things, to let us live our childhood. But at a certain point we sensed something was amiss. Jewish men were taken hostage in Vatra Dornei.

The temple in Vatra Dornei was very beautiful – I think it is rather derelict nowadays. And there are tall, iron fences inside the temple courtyard, and the Romanian army kept the men hostage there, in the yard, in collaboration probably with the Germans.

I think Cuza [*Alexandru C. Cuza*] had been killed, and this law was passed that all Jewish male individuals be taken hostage. [*Ed. note: A.C. Cuza dies in 1947, Mrs. Leibovici is probably referring to Corneliu Zelea Codreanu who is assassinated during the night of 29th-30th November 1938 together with other 13 legionnaires, on orders from Carol II, by gendarmes transporting him to the prison of Jilava.* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corneliu\\_Zelea\\_Codreanu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corneliu_Zelea_Codreanu) ]

It was believed that it was the result of a Jewish plot. They were held captive for a few days, after which they were released. The shops were reopened – there were many Jewish shops in Vatra Dornei –, life went on. But in what manner? They know better, the parents – and took it to their graves –, what they experienced in that period. And we, the children, living beside them, felt that something was amiss. In the meantime, my grandmother from Vatra Dornei died in 1939.

I attended the 1st and 2nd grade at the Romanian school, where we all studied together, without any differences. And then the racial law was issued [3](#) and they pulled us out of schools. I was in the 3rd grade. A Jewish school was founded, with Jewish teachers – for Christian teachers were not allowed to teach there –, and we resumed going to school.

[*Ed. note: In October 1940, Jewish pupils and students were denied access to public education of all degrees. Jewish people were free to organize private primary and secondary schools. The Jewish schools were allowed to function but they weren't allowed to be advertised. The graduation diplomas were not recognized by the state and had no practical validity regarding the graduate's admission into a profession.*]

I didn't attend the cheder, but we also learned Hebrew at the Jewish school. I attended this Jewish school during 3rd and 4th grade.

- **During the war**

And this was during the period of the autumn holidays, the first few days of the holidays were over, then the Sukkot holiday arrived – which is at the end of the holidays. The holidays last around 4 weeks, and this was at the end. And we prepared food, as we usually did.

My father went to the synagogue in the morning; my mother attended as well, together with all the grown-ups, and usually they were supposed to return home at one o'clock. And around half past ten, eleven in the morning, our parents returned from the synagogue together with our aunts and uncle.

'They are deporting us, and we have to be at the train station at three o'clock.' During that very same day. So the racial law was passed in September 1940, and this was happening around October 1941. Of course, everyone packed in their suitcases whatever they could, they used blankets in which they wrapped underwear, bedclothes, clothing, the food that had been prepared for the holiday, in pots, bags, whatever they had.

As for our valuables, we took some of them with us – they came in very handy later on –, and we left the rest with some neighbors in a small chest. And it wasn't three o'clock yet, it was half past one, two o'clock, and they came with the carts.

There were pre-military units back then – youth that had probably been recruited –, and they came with the bayonets: 'Get out of the house, get out, get out!' There was a German or two among them. And we loaded that cart with everything we could, and we set off towards the train station.

But prior to this, all the Jews from small villages and towns had been evacuated to Vatra Dornei. Just as it happened in Botosani as well, in the case of Sulita, Stefanesti, Saveni – the inhabitants of which came to Botosani.

The inhabitants of Carlibaba, Dorna Candrenilor, Rosu... there were several villages, small towns, all came to Vatra Dornei. I believe this was at the end of 1940. For there were many teachers from these towns and villages who came and taught at the Jewish school. So there were many Jews in Vatra Dornei.

The train in the Vatra Dornei train station had 8-10-12 cars – I won't tell you how many, for I don't know. And they started loading us in the train cars. They were stock cars, we boarded the train, we were 150-200 in one car, it was very crowded. There were old men, children, and some sat on their luggage, others were standing up.

When they finished boarding everyone on the platform, they closed the cars, drew the bolts, and the train started moving. [Ed. note: On 9th October 1941 the operations for the deportation of Jews to Transnistria started in all localities in South Bukovina (Suceava, Campulung Moldovenesc, Radauti, Vatra Dornei).]

A single Jewish pharmacist remained in Vatra Dornei, as there were no Christian pharmacists there and the decree that was issued stated that the pharmacist should remain there until they bring a Christian one, and then he will be deported, too. And that's what actually happened. He joined us as well, I don't know, a few weeks later.

The train started moving and stopped in Campulung [*Campulung Moldovenesc*]. There are approximately 50 km between Vatra Dornei and Campulung. [*Campulung Moldovenesc is located 49 km north-east of Vatra Dornei*]. But Campulung was also a city with many Jewish inhabitants.

And they took the Jews from Campulung, Gura Humorului, Radauti. I don't know whether they managed to send all of them at once on the same train, but anyway, other trains came, and they sent the remaining Jews. And the trip was a long one. People relieved themselves there, as the cars were bolted and the train was moving at a snail's pace.

After having eaten whatever food they brought along, people still had the pots where the food had been stored, and everybody used them to... There was tragedy everywhere. And the memory I have of this episode is terrible, for people started praying.

Especially since it was a holiday, too. And you have to wash before praying, you have to be clean. And they recited the prayers on the train despite everything, and especially despite people relieving themselves there. So the train kept moving along. We passed through Cernauti [*Chernivtsi*].

There was a ghetto in Chernivtsi not far from the railroad, you could see it from the train – for people finally managed to open a little the door of the stock car – just enough to see outside, and let in a bit of air. And you could see poor people standing there and looking, there was a fence around the ghetto so they couldn't get out of there, but they were waving at us – for they knew by then that we were being evacuated and taken to Transnistria.

We arrived in Bessarabia. And all of us got off the train, with luggage and everything, and headed towards where they took us. There were some devastated houses in a town, Iedenit [*today Yedintsy, in the Republic of Moldova*], they had no doors, no windows, and all who managed to fit in those houses lived there. And it was October by then, close to November.

It is terribly cold in those parts, hard winters, with snow, with frost. But there were inscriptions in Romanian in these devastated houses: 'Here, in this house, lived this and that person with his children, grandchildren, ...'. It was still Jews who lived there before us, and they were deported to Siberia – there was no trace left of them. We stayed there for a day or two.

It was raining when we set out from there, and it was muddy, the streets weren't paved – countryside roads –, we were swimming in mud. We rented some carts from the local peasants to carry the luggage. And everybody paid using whatever they had: if they still had some money left or some jewelry, something. And they bartered.

They gave you something in exchange, if you needed a loaf of bread in exchange for... [*an object*] And we pressed forward. Old people of 80, older than 80, fell to the ground and never rose again. And you weren't allowed to help them to their feet. There were soldiers, and they herded us like cattle.

We arrived in another village where we stayed over night. Well, it lasted a while until we reached the river Dniester. When we reached the river Dniester, they transported us by ferry to Moghilev, on the other side of the Dniester. Across the border, in Ukraine.

We arrived in Moghilev [4](#). This whole adventure lasted 2-3 weeks. But this was the beginning, it continued there afterwards. In Moghilev, those who were lucky remained in Moghilev, and their situation was bad, but not desperate. But those who didn't remain there were taken to concentration camps.

And it was the same ordeal all over again, we had to get there on foot, it was tens of kilometers. And we arrived at a village called **Kopaygorod** [*today the region of Vinnytsya, Ukraine*]. It was a stable for cattle – there were no cattle, there was nothing there – of huge dimensions, very large, what do I know, as large as a block of flats with 2-3 entrances.

A bed was built there out of planks, along the entire length of that room. Straw was placed on top of it, and that was called a 'prici.' We slept on this 'prici' – women, children, men. We covered ourselves with blankets, eiderdowns, great coats. For it was terrible. It was the end of 1941, the beginning of 1942 by now. And from there we went to the fields.

For many peasants had left, and there were unearthed potatoes and sugar beet on the field. We, the children, went and gathered them, and we gave them to our parents. And they boiled them in a large bucket filled with water, over a fire kindled with a few wood branches torn from trees, corn stalks. And they were frozen, but they tasted so good... Hunger will make you eat anything.

But you weren't allowed to stray to far, and if you did, you were taking a chance. There were people who did. They even came back, they weren't caught. My father scouted the area, too. At a certain point, there was an epidemic of exanthematic typhus because of the filth.

And father used to go to the village with objects – earrings, for instance, a ring, wedding rings –, and he gave them to peasants in exchange for spirit, alcohol, brandy, which he used for massages. This is what saved me. Well now, did this save me? Or perhaps my time hadn't come yet. This may be true as well. And people died in great numbers. My uncle, Josef Laufer, died there, one of my cousins, Pepi Laufer, died there. Hunger and disease – the typhus, which cut people down with no distinction.

We ran away from there one night: my father and my mother, my aunts, and another cousin of ours. They said: 'We're going to take a chance, we'll run away, maybe we'll get somewhere from where we could reach Moghilev.' Moghilev was the target.

The city was bigger, it had a hospital, and there were Jews working at that hospital. But we didn't manage to get too far, they caught us and they took us to another concentration camp, in **Shargorod** [*Shargorod, today in the Vinnytsya region, Ukraine*] [5](#). A lot of people, the same situation, still the same bed made from wood and planks, with straw on top of it.

There was less and less luggage. It was 1942 by then, it was the winter of 1942. That's where my aunt died, my mother's sister-in-law. And I was left only with my parents and my mother's 2 sisters, Ana and Sabina Laufer, and cousin Letti Laufer. Perhaps we could save ourselves.

We decided to run away. There were some guards and we gave them something, and they let us run away. We ran away, but, unfortunately, to our misfortune, they caught us this time as well, and they took us to the concentration camp in Piciora [Pechora] [6](#).

There was a large house in Pechora, I believe it was a castle once, for there were many-many rooms and they were too nice – that’s where we lived. The camp in Pechora was ‘The Death Camp’ – that’s what they called it. Guarded, fenced. There was a common burial ground there.

And if someone died – tossed into the common burial ground. We had nothing left to eat at a certain point. Destroyed, weakened, my mother’s sisters – one was 23, one was 21, they were very young – felt that the end had come. They embraced each other, and that’s how they died, embracing each other. People drank urine for lack of water. They ate whatever they could get their hands on.

We were 9 when we left home. And little by little the family lessened. ‘What shall we do, wait to die here?’ ‘We’ll run away.’ And we set out again one night. And we arrived in a grove, and a couple of soldiers came in that grove, they caught my mother, they beat her until she couldn’t get up.

They stripped her of her coat, pulled the teeth out of her mouth – she had gold teeth. Father was shouting at my cousin and me: ‘Run! Run! Run!’ Father was shouting at us to run and hide in the woods. Well, we didn’t run to the end of the woods, there was a clearing at the skirt of the woods, we ran there, remained crouched, and then father came holding my mother in his arms – they had beaten her to death. It was in 1943.

We walked across the grove, and kept moving forward. There still existed kolkhoz [7](#) farms. We entered a kolkhoz during the night, we used the animals to keep us warm – for there were animals there. And they fed animals with sunflower bread. And we said: ‘Let’s eat some of it ourselves!’

We ate, and it seemed to taste so good... No cake ever tasted as good as that one. And we came out of there at a certain point, and a cart with 2 people passed by. We had already started learning Ukrainian, Russian, a little bit. They were very nice people, and they took us in the cart. My hand was already frostbitten because of the cold, and it was infected. ‘To Moghilev. Moghilev, let’s go there.’

I was hospitalized when we arrived in Moghilev, the doctor there was from Vatra Dornei, he admitted me into the hospital for treatment, for that infection. My cousin was admitted into an orphanage, also located in Moghilev. And father stayed in Moghilev, so that he could visit me and my cousin. Meanwhile, they caught my father in Moghilev and took him to a labor camp. And, starting from that day, I had no news of my father anymore.

It was the end of 1943 by then. I stayed in the hospital for approximately 2 months, and in January 1944 I left the hospital and was transferred to the orphanage. When I arrived at the orphanage I found out that my cousin Letti Laufer had died in the meantime. And I was all by myself there.

I was 10 and a half when they deported us from Vatra Dornei. By January 1944 I was already 13. The Federation in Bucharest sent the orphanage and the hospital some food and clothing, and we seemed to fare a little better. There were some teachers who came to the orphanage to teach lessons every now and then, give us some activities, some handiwork.

It was more humane. And lists were drawn up, for a delegation from Romania representing the Federation of Jewish Communities was coming there to take the children aged 1-15. A list was drawn up with the children who were eligible, I enlisted as well. And the question was:



‘Where should I ask to be sent?’ Someone asked to go to Bacau, someone else to Roman, others to Falticeni, Bucharest, Timisoara. ‘Should I go to Vatra Dornei?’ Nobody had returned home at that time. We, the children, were the first to return home. ‘What will I do there, at only 13 years of age, all by myself?’

So I asked to be sent to Botosani, and I enlisted to be sent to Botosani. I didn’t know their address [*of my grandparents and uncles from Botosani*], only their names. The delegation came indeed, they brought clothes for the children, they dressed us and boarded the children on a special transport train. This was happening in March 1944. So I stayed in the orphanage until March 1944.

There were very many children there. It was interesting that I had no document to prove that I had been deported to Transnistria. I had no proof from anywhere. And I needed it at a certain point in order to [*request and*] obtain support from the Claims Conference. And I addressed myself to the Institute for the Study of Jewish History in Bucharest.

They have all the information. They sent me the list issued by the city hall of Moghilev with all the children that came on that train – the full list came from Moghilev together with the children. I am at number 15 on that list. I forget how many children there were in total, but I believe there were approximately 50.

That’s how I arrived in Botosani. I arrived at the Botosani train station. Many, many, many people. Some came out of curiosity, knowing that children were coming, others came to see if any of the children from their families had returned. I inquired about the Davidsohns. I saw a lady and a gentleman: ‘The Davidsohns.’

‘No, we don’t know them.’ The city was big, approximately 25,000 Jews lived there. None of those that I asked could help me. Evening was drawing near, and I could see that I was making no headway. Then a young man came and told me: ‘Where are you from?’ I told him. ‘Did you just come with...’

‘Yes.’ He asked me how old I was. He said: ‘Look, would you like to go with me? There is a family who have a daughter your age, and they would be happy to take you to live with them.’ It was a family with a very good financial situation. Seeing that I had no family, no anything, I said: ‘Alright. I will go.’ And I went.

This young man was a neighbor of that family, and he was the son of a rabbi who also lived there. And he took me to that family, the Fichmans. I spoke Romanian very poorly, for we spoke German at home. Ever since I was born I had been speaking German. Even at kindergarten, and then at school. And you had to tell the story to everyone. People didn’t know the exact details. They knew about Transnistria, they knew about the Gulag [8](#), but they didn’t know everything.

And time was passing by. One day, the father of this Mrs. Fichman comes. And he starts to talk with me. He says: ‘Where are you from?’ ‘From Vatra Dornei. But I have family living in Botosani.’ And when I tell him about my family, about their name, he says: ‘Isn’t David your father?’ My father’s name was David. David Davidsohn.

I say: ‘Yes, it is.’ ‘Oh,’ he says, ‘but I know your family. I know your grandparents, I know your uncles and aunts. I know them.’ And he went and broke the news to my grandparents. My

grandparents came, my father's sisters and brothers came. Well, we were rejoicing. 'What do you know about father?' 'I don't know anything.'

To think what has become of us...' Mrs. and Mr. Fichman insisted very much: 'We will see to it that she is reunited with her father when he returns. And let her live with us until then.' On the other hand, my relatives argued: 'We share the same blood, and we want her to live with us.' And of course I went to live with my grandparents, and I stayed with them.

During the war, the grandparents from my father's side remained in Botosani. And those living in Botosani weren't deported, they remained there. I couldn't tell what happened here during 1940-1944. *[Ed. note: Restrictions and bans were enacted in Botosani as in other Romanian towns.*

*According to the law, Forced Labor started in December 1940, but before 1940, the Jews from Botosani aged 15 to 70 had to perform the labor in the town and its surroundings. They worked on building roads, railways and the dams of Iasi, Falciu and Braila districts.*

*During 1940-1943, the Jewish high school students were forced to sweep the snow and ice from the streets, under the supervision of their teachers. In 1942, 148 Jews were deported to Transnistria as Communist suspects.* [http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas\\_romania/rom1\\_00029.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_romania/rom1_00029.html) ] I arrived there in March 1944, and the conditions had already improved. My grandfather worked during that period, still as a butcher.

#### • After the war

6-8 more months later I received a postcard from my father saying that he was in Iasi, that he has returned. When the Russian army came here, he arrived at a later time with other people who had been taken to perform forced labor. And he arrived in Botosani. And that's when we saw each other again. It was already 1945.

After my father came, I actually went to Vatra Dornei with him. The store had been emptied, and it served a completely different purpose, it functioned as a Loto-Prono Sport terminal [*National Lottery terminal*]. But after a year or two, when we returned to Dorna, the entire row of stores was demolished – there were some 3-4 stores –, and a cinema is built on that place, on that area.

I kept living with my grandparents. They were gorgeous. I loved them very much, for they looked after me a great deal. It was after the war, and it was the period of the famine – there was a severe drought in 1947, and famine –, and they somehow managed to get by in order for me to have my morsel of bread.

They could do without, as long as they could provide for me. I lived with them for approximately 4 years *[Ed. note: In fact, 3 years, from 1944 until 1947]*, after which, when my father remarried, I lived with him, also for 4-5 years. But my father's place wasn't far from where my grandparents lived, and I was always over at their place.

They were very kind people. In fact, all their children were like that, my father included. It was also from my grandparents that I learned Yiddish, after returning from the deportation. I kept talking now Romanian, now German, but my grandparents were talking in Yiddish, and I started learning it in time, and I even started speaking it myself. Even now I speak Yiddish rather well.

My father remarried in 1947. And a daughter was born out of his second marriage, Jenica. I was glad when that happened. And we got along very well. But people started leaving, emigrating [1](#) to Israel. And I wasn't a minor anymore, I was 18, and I had my own passport. My father, his wife and his little daughter had one single passport.

So they were listed on my father's passport. At a certain point they received the approval for departing. And so did my grandmother. My grandfather was no longer alive. I received a negative, a reply stating that my request for departing was denied. 'What shall we do, then?' 'I will apply again.' I applied again. In the meantime, they had a passport, they had to leave. My father left together with my sister and her mother; my grandmother left as well.

I went to live with one of my father's brothers, Buim Davidsohn, who hadn't applied for emigration permission. He was living in Botosani with his wife and had a daughter who was 3 years older than me. And we got along very well. And I didn't apply for an emigration permission afterwards, I got married in the meantime. I lived at my uncle's until I got married.

After returning from the deportation my father developed a brain tumor. He had been beaten, hit, and, approximately 2 years after he got married again, around 1949, he started having terrible headaches. He went to Bucharest, underwent surgery – he had a brain neoplasm. He recovered well after the operation.

He left to Israel. But these operations are effective only for a year, a year and a half, after which the tumor grows back. And he passed away in Israel. They emigrated to Haifa in 1951. And life over there was hard in the beginning. They had nothing when they arrived there.

My father received a job, he worked until he saw that he started having a relapse of the disease. And he died in Israel a year later, one year and a half after emigrating there, in 1952-1953. He died in Petah Tiqwa, for that's where he was hospitalized, and he is buried there.

And the little girl grew up, she went to school there, she got married. Her husband's name is Miha Haftca. He was born in Israel, but his parents had come to Israel from Poland around 1932, and they had 3 children there, if I remember correctly. Her name is now Iaffa Haftca.

When she was living in Romania, her name was Jenica, Jeni, but she changed her name to Iaffa when she arrived in Israel. But I still call her Jeni, as I used to do. We lived under the same roof until she was 3. Our relationship is very good, we are very close. She calls me even twice a week and, if she feels like it, 3 times a week. And I travel there very often to visit her. She too came to visit me on 2 occasions, but this was many years ago.

She is living in a kibbutz, Kibbutz Lahavot HaBashan. It is far away, in the north of the country. Life is nice on a kibbutz. And she is still working. She is 58, she is 17 years younger than me. Usually, people living on a kibbutz work until they are too old to do so.

She too could retire at 60 years of age, but nobody wants to be left out. Everybody keeps working. The kibbutz has ponds where they grow fish in order to sell it. They also grow fowls in order to have meat and eggs for the kibbutz' internal consumption, and cattle as well; they run a factory for fire extinguishers. And then there are kibbutzim that have large orchards where they grow grapevine, orange, lemon, and banana trees.

There was a time when living on a kibbutz was heaven on earth. There was the mess hall, where people ate, in the morning, at lunch, and in the evening. There were 10-15 dishes to choose from, you could choose what you wanted to eat. It was very-very good.

If the gas cylinder became empty, you made a phone call within the kibbutz, the person in charge of this would come and replace it. Everything was free of charge. And their salary was very small. For they received very little money, given that everything was free.

Nowadays, kibbutzim don't run so well. Now they foresee that people will pay for everything. And every member of a kibbutz should receive a salary, and he should live off that salary like everywhere else. So things have changed very much.

Jenica has 3 children. She has 2 married sons who have children of their own, and a little daughter. The elder son's name is Gay, and his wife's name is Talia. They have 3 children: a little daughter and 2 sons. Gay is working for a TV-cable company.

The elder son is living in Ra'ananna – Ra'ananna is a city located near Herzliyya. The second-born, Roy, is living in Tel Aviv and is working as a programmer. Roy has a little daughter, and another child is due to be born – his wife is expecting a child. The little daughter, Nufar, is living and studying in Tel Aviv.

She will probably get married soon, for she is attending her final year at the university. She studied for 2 faculties at once. She graduated the Faculty of Biology last year, and this year she will be graduating the Music Academy. But let us hope that all will be well, and she will graduate without any problems. And life goes on.

I graduated the first 2 years of primary school at the Romanian school in Vatra Dornei, and 2 years – 3rd and 4th – at the Jewish school in Vatra Dornei; then, when I returned from Transnistria, for another 7 years, I attended high school under the evening studies system – there were 11 grades in those days [*after World War II*]. I resumed my studies around 1946. I studied both under the optional attendance and under the evening studies system, as I started working. I started working in May 1949.

My first job was for the Knitwear Factory as a quality controller. I got married in 1954, and I left my job at that time, I stayed at home for approximately 5 years. I secured another job after 5 years, in the beginning I worked at the policlinic's registry office for 26 years, then all the Hospitals and Policlinics merged, and everything was placed under the leadership of the Sanitary Department, and I was transferred as a cashier working for the Financial Office of the Sanitary Department. I worked there until I retired in 1986.

My husband's name was Iosef Leibovici. He was born in Botosani in 1924. He was a dental technician. We met at a youth party. People organized balls, reunions. We met through a third party and we liked each other. The balls were very nice, with Wienesese waltzes – the waltzes of Johann Strauss –, tangos, with 'damen waltz' – meaning a waltz like all others, but it was the women who invited the men to dance.

There was a cinema, which was called Lux [*Luxury*], where balls were organized, and also at the Casa Armatei [*House of the Army*] – there were several ballrooms there. I don't remember separate

parties to be organized for the Jewish youth – these balls were for all who wanted to attend. On Purim it was a different matter.

A ball was organized on Purim. There was a hall, Sala Meseriasi [*the Handicraftsmen's Hall*], which belonged to the community and where weddings and parties were organized. I think many handicraftsmen used to meet at this club, in the Handicraftsmen's Hall.

I didn't wear long dresses. The fashion was to wear dresses that weren't too short, above the knee, and with sleeves or sleeveless, low-cut, yet not too low. It was very beautiful. But it was very hard to manage to buy something. It was just after [*the return from*] the deportation, just after the war, and you didn't even have something to wear.

Fabrics were being sold on a system based on points. For everyone had a card with a number of points. In the 1950's, from what I remember – for so many years have passed since then –, the City Hall issued cards with a certain number of points to everyone who had an ID card; everyone received the same number of points, and you could use them to buy anything you wanted, but you would eventually run out of points.

I don't remember exactly, you had 100 points, and if you bought an overcoat, that would be worth let's say 80 points, you'd have 20 points still left, enough to buy a pair of socks. But there were huge queues, you had to stand in line from daybreak, when you found out they were supplying the stores. And if you managed to buy a piece of fabric for a dress, oh dear, it was quite something [*a big deal*]...

There were calicos for dresses, pajama fabrics, and you could buy a few fabrics or a pair of sandals, a pair of shoes. That's how it was in those days. I believe even food was being sold based on a points system back then. But I'm sure it was like this in the case of clothing.

Our wedding took place in 1954 and, since it was during communism, and the system was very strict about religions, we had the religious ceremony performed – we had the civil ceremony performed in advance – among family members, at uncle Buium and my aunt's place.

That's where the religious ceremony was performed. That's how it happened to be, because there had to be not too many people present. There were a few relatives of my husband's, there probably weren't more than 12 persons at the ceremony. I didn't wear a bridal gown, I had a light-colored dress instead, cream-colored, rather.

I didn't have a veil, but you must wear something to cover your head when you are under the chuppah. And my husband was wearing a suit. And they performed the religious ceremony, with a chuppah, a rabbi, everything was in Hebrew. The groom, the bride, the sponsors, the parents, if present, walk around the chuppah.

And that's when a drinking glass is broken – it is the groom who has to break the glass, to show his strength. He tosses it, and then kicks it with his foot. Afterwards, the kettubah is written; it is written in Hebrew on parchment.

And we had already rented a place where we lived, and we prepared a feast there, and we went home after the religious ceremony, we had guests, and it was very nice, very special. We had

many guests, I believe we were 70 in total. We had 2 large rooms, a hallway, and the neighbors across the hall, some extraordinary people, offered us 2 of their rooms.

The music played in the hallway. There was an accordion player, a jazz player – a sort of drum –, a guitar player. They played music from the 1950's. The waltz, the tango, the foxtrot, these were fashionable in those days... and other dances as well, the name of which I have to think hard in order to remember.

And we laid tables in the rooms our neighbor gave us to use, in a corner, in yet another corner, and we had a table filled with all sorts of meat specialties, sausages, steaks, cookies, cakes, wines, with... Everyone would enter, help themselves to some food. And the music played in the hallway, people danced in this other room, and it was beautiful. It was, how should I say, more special.

My husband has a brother, Jean Leibovici, who is living in Bucharest. He is one and half, two years younger than my husband. He worked as a clerk for the Ministry of Food Industry. He is married and has a son.

I knew my husband's father, my father-in-law, we even lived together. His name was Moritz Leibovici, he was from Botosani, he was married around 1897. [*Before World War II,*] he was an agent for the company Singer, the one selling sewing machines. We lived separately during the years after we got married – from 1954 until 1972.

My father-in-law had his own house, but systematization [9](#) came, and his house was to be demolished. It was located on Calea Nationala St., on the way to the train station, close to the tramline. And we lived in a rented house not far from there, on a street a bit to a side, it was called Casin St.

And in 1971, when my father-in-law's house was demolished, we decided to move in a somewhat larger house, where he could have his own room, where we could be together. And we moved in a house located on Calea Nationala as well, but closer to the downtown area, where we had 4 rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, a verandah, a pantry – it was still rented. I lived there until 1981, until my father-in-law's death. As I was alone, I moved here in 1981 [*in an apartment in a block of flats*].

My father-in-law had a sister, her name was Fany Schwartz. She lived in Botosani, too; also, she was our wedding sponsor as well. [*Editor's note: Mrs. Leibovici is referring to her as her aunt.*] My aunt's daughter, whose name is Tili Schwartz – which is to say her name was Schwartz before she got married, her married name is Anavi – went to study in Bucharest, was appointed to work in Onesti, and they emigrated to Israel afterwards. She got married in Israel.

I had a daughter, Claudia, who was born in 1968, and died in a car accident together with my husband in 1978.

I was an UCY member when I was in school [*member of the Union of Communist Youth*]. That's how it was in those days, you had to be a member. But I had no position in the organization, no activity, I only attended a meeting every now and then. And then I turned 18 – I believe 18 years of age was the limit –, and that was the end of it.



My husband was a member of the Communist Party – you had to be in those days. For he didn't choose to be a member of the party, he was forced by the circumstances. They made him a member of the Communist Party, and could you refuse and tell them: 'I don't want to be a party member.'? They didn't make me a party member, and he used to say: 'Suffice it that I am a member, let it be.'

After we got married, we went on trips every year. We've been to various places, both in the mountains, and at the seaside.

I visited America on 2 occasions. I've been there in 1982 and in 1984. And you won't believe this, I had no problem whatsoever. I visited New York in 1982 and from there I also went to Canada; I traveled to Israel in 1983, and in 1984 I went to New York once more, also for a period of 2 months, and I stayed in Florida for a month, to visit some of my mother's cousins, too.

I liked America, but I put myself in the shoes of some of those who live there. I'm not talking about those who have roots there and... [*have a good life.*] For I strolled down some streets, like Diamond Street, with some stores... It intrigued me back then, for we don't see something like that over here. But I went on a trip in the mountains.

And when I returned from the trip, there was a rally of gay people. For me, this was something unheard of, not to mention that it was never seen here, in Romania. But they were so at ease, and they walked in the street... Then, they told me on a certain occasion: 'This is a place which is best to avoid, there are many drug addicts here.' 'What?' You wouldn't have heard something like that in our country.

Or we happened to be in the vicinity of Harlem, the neighborhood of African-Americans. And they told me once again: 'If you want to, we could go, for you to see.' 'No, I don't want to go. I don't want to put you in such a situation.' For people avoid going there. I wasn't used to such things over here, of course I didn't like this.

I also visited a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, where you see men wearing payes and kaftans. The people living there go to the synagogue on Saturday morning or on holidays, but you aren't allowed to carry anything in your hand on a holiday or on Saturday. You have to have a prayer book stored in advance at the synagogue, all these things.

If you have a baby you aren't allowed to push the baby carriage, it is too great an effort to make. Or you aren't allowed to knock on a door. But you're sooner allowed to knock on a door than to ring a doorbell. For the doorbell is electric, and you aren't allowed to use things powered by electricity on holidays. For instance, the lights are programmed to switch on – let's say – on Friday evening at 4 o'clock, and to switch off at 10, 11, 12 o'clock.

So that they don't have to touch a switch. My relatives were people who observed religious traditions, but not in an exaggerated manner, not like this, by going to such extremes. And so were my parents in our home.

I first visited Israel in 1972. For it was forbidden to do so before that time, you couldn't go to Israel. Approximately in the 1970's they started to allow people to visit Israel [10](#). But, of course, the entire family couldn't leave, you had to leave a warranty here. On that occasion it was I who left, while

my husband remained in Botosani. Afterwards, I only went there in 1982. I was there in 1984, 1987, 1989, then in 2000, 2003, and also last year, in 2005.

Whenever I go and see once more the places I had already seen, Israel seems more beautiful to me, and entirely different. It is a young country, it was formed in 1948 – it isn't even 60 years old. And when you see from what – sand and rocks – such a beauty was erected.

I went to visit the holy places, and Mount Tabor as well, for I have a cousin there who teaches geography and is also a guide. He took a few days off, and: 'Come, I will take you to Nazareth, to see Mount Tabor.' But I've been there a few times. And it is as if each time I see something else.

For you can't memorize on your first visit absolutely everything you see. I visited Via Dolorosa, on several occasions as well, the Path of Jesus Christ the Lord towards Golgotha, I visited the holy places, which, if you are there, urge you to go and see.

Of course I keep in touch with the Jewish Community in Botosani. They invite us to attend whenever there are conferences, whenever delegations from Bucharest or elsewhere come to Botosani, and of course I always honor the invitations, I attend these events.

They also organize festive meals on certain days, such as the first evening on Passover and Chanukkah; they invite us, we meet there, and it is very nice. It isn't customary for women to attend the religious service on Saturday, these are performed among men, women attend only on major holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, other such major holidays, which I sometimes attend myself.

I observe tradition as much as I can. After getting married, I had separate dishes for meat and milk, for my father-in-law lived with us. And he had dishes from his household, and I kept [*kosher*] willy-nilly. But I also respected my father-in-law, I did this gladly, it wasn't a problem.

It is harder and harder to observe tradition, we keep eliminating some thing or other from all that we once observed. Formerly, the meat was kosher. Nowadays this tradition of kosher meat is lost, for they don't bring kosher meat to Botosani anymore.

I always see to it that the house is cleaned and the food prepared before the holidays, so that I don't have to work on holidays; I make sure to have cooked and baked and done everything there is to do in advance. I don't work on Saturday, I can do that during the rest of the week.

I don't light candles on Friday evening, nor on Chanukkah. When I had a family [*a husband and a daughter*], I used to observe all the customs, I used to light candles as well – both on Chanukkah and on Friday evening. Now I have given up on this.

How do I spend one day of my life? All days are not alike. First of all, the household, small as it is, keeps demanding. You must do something around the house every day. Some thing or other is bound to break, and I have to call someone to fix it.

Then I go to the market, I go shopping, cook, go out for a stroll, get some fresh air, I even go to the Public Garden and sit on a bench, I watch television, watch certain programs in order to keep myself up-to-date, I read the newspapers. I only have subscription to the Jewish Reality magazine.

[Ed. note: A magazine of the Jewish minority in Romania, which was issued between 1956 and 1995 under the name of 'The Magazine of the Mosaic Cult,' and under the name of 'The Jewish Reality' after 1995. It includes articles related to the social and cultural life of the community and it comprises a page in English and one in Ivrit.]

I buy the rest. Such as the magazine Magazinul, I never miss an issue. This is a national weekly magazine, I like it very much, it is a cultural, scientific paper which contains pleasant things. I also read the Jurnalul National newspaper [*the National Journal*], and the local newspapers from Botosani: Jurnalul de dimineata [*the Morning Journal*], Jurnalul de Botosani [*the Botosani Journal*, <http://beta.jurnalulbtd.ro/>].

## • Glossary

**1** Mass emigration from Romania after World War II: After World War II the number of Jewish people emigrating from Romania to Israel was much higher than in earlier periods.

This was urged not only by the establishment in 1948 of Israel, and thus by the embodiment of an own state, but also by the general disillusionment caused by the attitude of the receiving country and nation during World War II.

Between 1919 and 1948 a number of 41,000 Jews from Romania left for Israel, while between May 1948 (the establishment of Israel) and 1995 this number increased to 272,300.

The emigration flow was significantly influenced after 1948 by the current attitude of the communist regime towards the aliyah issue, and by its diplomatic relations with Israel.

The main emigration flows were between 1948-1951 (116,500 persons), 1958-1966 (106,200 persons) and 1969-1974 (17,800 persons).

**2** Transnistria: Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II.

After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester.

This first wave of deportations reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews.

A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation.

The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

**3** Anti-Jewish laws in Romania: The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime.

According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery.

More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish property, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city, were confiscated by the state, as part of the 'Romanisation campaign'.

Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc.

Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

**4** Mohilev-Podolsk: A town in Ukraine (Mohyliv-Podilsky), located on the Dniester river. It is one of the major crossing points from Bessarabia (today the Moldovan Republic) to the Ukraine. After Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the allied German and Romanian armies occupied Bessarabia and Bukovina, previously Soviet territories.

In August 1941 the Romanians began to send Jewish deportees over the Dniester river to Transnistria, which was then under German occupation. More than 50,000 Jews marched through the town, approximately 15,000 were able to stay there. The others were deported to camps established in many towns of Transnistria.

**5** Shargorod: A town in Ukraine, also known as Sharigrad. During World War II Jews from Romania were deported to various towns in Transnistria, which was then under German occupation. Large-scale deportations began in August 1941, after Romania and Germany occupied the previously Soviet territories of Bessarabia (today the Moldovan Republic) and Bukovina.

Jews from the newly occupied Romanian lands (Bessarabia and Bukovina), as well as from Romania were sent over the Dniester river to Transnistria. The severe living conditions, the harsh winter and a typhus epidemic contributed to the large number of deaths in the camps established in many towns of Transnistria.

**6** Pechora camp: On 11th November 1941 the civil governor of Transnistria issued the deportation of Jews. A camp for Jewish residents of Tulchin (3,005 in total) was established in the village of Pechora, Vinnitsya region in December 1941.

This is known as the 'Dead Loop'. In total about 9,000 people from various towns in Vinnitsya region were kept in the camp. They were accommodated in the former 2-storied recreation center building. There were up to 50 tenants in one room. No provisions were made for the most basic necessities of the inmates. Inmates hardly got any food and the building had no heating.

About 2,500 Jews were taken away by Germans for forced labor. None of them returned; they all died from forced labor beyond their strength, lack of food, hunger and diseases. In March 1944 Soviet troops liberated the camp. There were 1,550 survivors left in the camp.

**7** Collective farm (in Russian kolkhoz): In the Soviet Union the policy of gradual and voluntary collectivization of agriculture was adopted in 1927 to encourage food production while freeing labor and capital for industrial development. In 1929, with only 4% of farms in kolkhozes, Stalin ordered the confiscation of peasants' land, tools, and animals; the kolkhoz replaced the family farm.

**8** Gulag: The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps.

By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters.

The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

**9** Systematic demolitions: The passing of the Law for the Systematization of Towns and Villages in 1974 incited a large-scale demolition of Romanian towns and villages. The great earthquake of 4th March 1977 damaged many buildings and was seen as a justification for the demolition of many monuments.

By the end of 1989, the time of the fall of the Ceausescu regime, at least 29 towns had been completely restructured, 37 were in the process of being restructured, and the rural systematization had claimed its first toll: some demolished villages north of Bucharest.

Between 1977 and 1989, Bucharest was at the mercy of the dictator, whose mere gestures were interpreted as direct orders and could lead to the immediate disappearance of certain houses or certain areas. Old houses and quarters, the so-called imperialist-capitalist architecture, had to vanish in order to make room for the great urban achievements of Socialism as it competed with the USSR and North Korea.

**10** Travel into and out of Romania (Romanian citizens abroad, and foreigners into Romania): The regulations made it extremely difficult for Romanian citizens to travel into non-socialist countries. One could apply for a passport every second year; however, the police could refuse its issue without offering any explanation.

One had to attach to the application for a passport a certificate from work, school or university proving the proper behavior of the applicant, and an invitation letter from a relative or an

acquaintance had to be enclosed too. If a whole family solicited for passports, the authorities usually refused to issue a passport for one member of the family, thus forcing the traveler to return.

The law controlled very severely the travel of foreigners into Romania. No matter if they were tourists or visited their family, foreign citizens had to report when entering the country the number of days they intended to stay, and had to exchange a certain amount of money defined by the law for every day they intended to spend in Romania.

Furthermore a foreign citizen could stay only in a hotel. Any individual Romanian citizen could get a significant fine if it turned out that they secured accommodation for a foreigner. The only exception were first degree relatives, but they also had to be reported to the police, indicating the number of days they would spend at the person accommodating them.