

# Leizer Finchelstein's Membership Card



This is a membership card proving that I was on the "death trains" during the Iasi pogrom of June 29-30. The membership card was issued on 12th March 1947 by the Association of the Fatal Trains Survivors. At the same time, the membership card also proves that I was subsequently hospitalized in the Podu Iloaiei labor camp during 29th June-20th November 1941.

On 'that Sunday' [29th June 1941], Jewish men were taken out of their houses by force and taken to the Police Precinct. We had heard that Jews would be issued some sort of residence permit by the authorities. As we didn't hurry to get to the police precinct, on Sunday morning about 4 sergeants from the police station and a few civilians entered our house. We were threatened and taken out of the house. My mother and sisters were forced to get out of the house as well, but they were released immediately afterwards. They made father and us, the boys, walk towards the police precinct along Cuza Voda St. in single file and with our hands raised above our heads. Even if this happened 65 years ago, I cannot forget the horror on my mother's face when they took us out of

the house, but neither can I forget her joy when 6 out of 7 men returned home. She was the happiest of all mothers. I lost a brother then, Iosel, and to this day I don't know where he is buried. I would offer a reward even now to find out where he is.

The chaos at the Police precinct was indescribable. There were Romanian gendarmes and I think I even saw a few German soldiers wearing helmets with "SS" written on them who were delivering blows left and right with a baseball bat. Dead people were already lying in the courtyard of the Police Precinct, there was blood and scattered brains everywhere. It was for the first time in my life when I saw dead bodies. I was so terrified.

After being taken to the Police precinct on "that Sunday," I was boarded on "the death trains." I was 17 at the time. It is extremely difficult for me to talk about this. I think no film director will ever be able to depict the experiences on "the death trains." To lie with the dead, covered with excrements. We made chairs and benches out of the dead. We stretched the dead bodies and sat on them, stepped on them. Later, on reading about Auschwitz and other concentration camps, I told myself: 'By God, perhaps those people were more fortunate than us. At least they entered the gas chamber and were dead in a matter of minutes.' We stayed inside these train cars which turned into gas chambers and people would die just like that, standing up. Now one, another one 10 minutes later, and so on. Nobody had any hope left of escaping with their lives. There were over 100 people in our train car, of which about 20 survived.

When I was among those who stepped off the train cars and were instructed to bury our dead, I still had no hope left of ever returning home. Anyone could kill you, nobody was accountable for their actions. One of my brothers, Leon, who was also on these trains, was taken to the hospital, as he slipped when he got off the train car and a portion of skin from his back was torn off. At first, we didn't even notice that Leon was missing, that's how exhausted and terrified we were.

We were lodged overnight in Jewish homes from Podu Iloaiei. The following day we were taken out in the field where the dead bodies were unloaded from the trains and we were forced to bury them. The smell was awful and it was so hot.