

Aristide Streja



The photo was taken in Bucharest area, at the Hippodrome, in the 1930s. In the center it was me, Aristide Wechsler. I, Aristide Streja [Ed. note: He changed his name from Wechsler to Streja after World War II.], was born in Bucharest on 19th December 1922, in a house on the River Dambovită's banks, on the Unirii Embankment [Ed. note: The area was relatively close to the center of the city and had a rather large Jewish population.]. I had a sister who was 7 years older than me and a brother who was 6 years older. One of the few things I was allowed to do was ride the bicycle. I learnt to swim and I went to swimming pools when I grew older. I played chess. At 14-15, I joined a Zionist organization, Hashomer Hatzair. I attended their meetings. We discussed Zionist organizations and Zionist issues and we also went out for sporting events. I usually went to the

Bucharest Hippodrome with my sister-in-law [Lola Sebastian]. Quality people came to the horse races. Those were people with a very good material situation, since they owned race horses. But there were also people who came to bet and who belonged to the lower and middle classes. There was an entrance fee. Betting was pretty complicated, because one had to carefully consider the chances of winning of a certain horse. One had to buy the program and study what was happening there in order to place a good bet. It wasn't like a lottery ticket that you just buy. The game was only for people who knew what it was about. We enjoyed going to the cinema too. We did it on Sunday. There were two films. I went through an adventure when in high school. Back then, students weren't allowed to go to the theater, to the cinema, or to any performance that wasn't approved by the high school. We had to wear our uniforms, and they had numbers on them, so we could get reported at any time. The cinema was safe, because it was dark and no one could see us. But we once went to the Tanase Theater. I had a friend who knew someone there, an actor. That guy got us in through the actors' entrance. We weren't allowed to go there because they staged variety shows which featured women who weren't far from being naked. From the actors' entrance, we had to get to the stage, pull the curtain a little, and climb down some stairs into the orchestra. When we entered the stage, we saw a naked woman (I mean, she only had her panties on). We couldn't believe our eyes at first, and then we got scared: if someone spotted us, we would be expelled from school. We sat in the first row. I looked behind me and I noticed that anyone in the orchestra and the circle could see us. So I stood up and went in the last row, under the circle, to avoid being seen. And I watched the rest of the performance in fear.