

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Stefan Moise
April 4, 1991
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PREFACE

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STEFAN MOISE

April 4, 1991

Q: Please tell me your name.

A: I must...Moise, Stefan.

Q: Please tell me where you were born and when.

A: I was born in the city of Iasi on January 30th, 1923.

Q: I'd like you tell me a few words about your childhood and ____ to tell me something about your family when you were a child.

A: My parents...my father was a guitar player, used to play in different restaurants. As a child I had to learn how to play the violin because I had to help my family, and my mother, my mother wasn't working and we only lived from what my dad used to bring home, so I also used to accompany my dad in restaurants and play so we could support our family. When I was a little older, I left...I didn't play with my dad any longer and I started playing with another younger chap and we played in restaurants to make a living. And I played the violin.

Q: Where did you learn how to play violin and where did you go through school?

A: In Iasi.

Q: Did you have any problems with children in the neighborhood or did you get along with them?

A: Around my house, everybody were our people. We used to play together and we were friends. We did really not have many problems as a child. No, not at that time.

Q: Mr. Moise, tell me a little bit about what happened with you and with your family when the war started? What did the war mean for you?

A: The beginning of the war...first of all, I could no longer make a living. All the restaurants closed down and I had no place where I could play. I had to work to find different jobs, jobs which I didn't really know how to do. For instance, to work in a _____ all kinds of agricultural work that I was not really qualified for, but I could at least make a living and I think _____ till the war crossed the River _____. The troops went on the other side during the beginning of 1941. In the beginning of 1942 and by that time a few more taverns opened up and I could at that time still find a few jobs playing the violin, so at that time I could still make a few bucks that way.

Q: When did you get married?

A: I got married in the beginning of February 1942, after my parents died. My dad died in 1941. My mother died right afterwards in January '42, a year later. I was left alone with my sister and I had to go make a living. I didn't know what to do with my little sister. I used to leave her with the neighbors but still when I took her home, she told me that they had beaten her up, they didn't feed her even if I did pay for her keep and they kept her for a night or several nights, I used to pay them to keep her until I returned from my work.

Q: How old was the little girl?

A: She was six years old. Maybe five, six. And she used to complain about it...they're beating me up, they didn't feed me, they scream at me. And the neighbors told me that since I was eighteen years old, look for a girl, get married, so your wife would take care of you and you should care for your sister. There's no other solution. For sure you will not be able to get by yourself because your brothers are gone but you have no relatives to help you. Nobody will help you, so get married and then your wife will take care of you and of your sister. So in the beginning of February I found some really nice people who are the parents of my wife. Somebody took me there and we agreed and we got married and indeed when I came home, at that time we didn't have radiators. It was a private home. We used to heat it with wood. I used to put the lights on, and I used to come home and find food on the stove, a little heat. My sister was taken care of. Somebody was there to take care of my sister.

Q: What happened afterwards?

A: So later I used to go to the city to play. I used to make a living because I had a home where I lived with my wife and my sister.

Q: Just keep talking about it.

A: Shall I tell you directly about the war?

Q: Yes...what happened.

A: In September _____ February, March, April, May, June, July...we had a quiet life in my own home. I had no problems. On September 15th at one o'clock in the morning, the police came to our house and they told me to get dressed. They asked me what's your name. Moise. This is my wife. This one is my sister. Alright...get dressed and pack up your luggage. I didn't even have time to consult with anyone. Nobody could explain to us what was going on, why they were taking me away, so whatever I could find around I put in a blanket, wrapped up their blanket, took it on my back and they took us at a commissary headquarter and there there were other people and they took us to this school, this school out on _____ in the town of _____.

Q: And who accompanied you from home to the commissary and to the school.

A: The police. The police. At the school was also guarded by the police. Probably it must have been pre-arranged because there were policemen when we came into the school. Maybe it

was a school or a former synagogue...I don't remember. So anyway, all night long until in the morning, they kept bringing in people from Iasi, gypsies. At a certain point they used to call our name and take us to the cell and they used to take information...ask us information about our address, the parents, where I was born...so anyway they filled up all kinds of forms. There were many many people. And we stayed there maybe about two days, until they finished the forms for all the people. After everything was done, they formed small groups and they took us to the train station in _____. There there were trains waiting for us, freight cars, empty. They were freight cars, yes. We had to climb into the cars. We were too many of us in a car. At least we were very crowded which found our little place and we stayed in these freight cars maybe another day, one night, in the _____ train station until they brought other trains from other parts of the country, also a train full of gypsies. They attached those newly arrived cars to ours and the trains left. Whenever train stops we were allowed to get out just for our basic needs. They would occasionally open the doors. We could get off, just for a little time and we kept going until we crossed the River _____, but it took a while. Then we crossed the _____ River and even then they would open the door at times so we could go out. Maybe they gave us some water too...and then we crossed the River _____ and we arrived. Whenever the train would stop, we arrived at the place where we could see Odessa (ph), not close by but far away, at least different uh suburbs of Odessa. On the left, so that the car was on the right on a secondary rail. In front of us were some military people, some soldiers. The soldiers were not doing anything. They did not have any kind of military exercises. They just stayed there doing nothing and there were some ditches near them, and the soldiers, they...we stayed in our cars and we stayed there from morning...I don't know exactly what time, but we stayed there until evening, maybe three, four, five in the afternoon. The soldiers did not leave. They received food. We saw that because there was a _____ right in front. They just stayed without doing anything. As soon as the mechanic engineer of the train gave the signal for the train to leave, we boarded the train again and we saw that the soldiers left as well.

Q: Who used to guard the train?

A: The soldiers. They were soldiers, dressed in khaki uniforms.

Q: What happened later?

A: We went through Odessa. I don't remember all the names of the train stations. After Odessa we were closed into the cars. We couldn't see any names. When we arrived at _____, there we all had...many of us had to get out of the train and we had to march in a column to the small train, the train that would go, not _____. Probably it continued to _____. It was not a train that could climb mountains. So there were trains there, but they brought some carts and they took some of the luggage, some old women and children, and put them in the carts, but not many of them. Most of us had to walk and we walked and we walked from morning till late, late at night, maybe until around one in the morning. We marched on without any food, any water, just a few stops along the road. And so we walked maybe till one, one thirty. We used to stop...then we stopped on the right and on the left sides of the roads and we rested until morning. Maybe they were afraid that since it was dark, we would run away. So we slept along side the road and in the fields until morning. In the morning we started again, and we marched and marched and around two in the afternoon we arrived at this farm, _____ Petrosky (ph)...

Q: I would like to ask you something. Tell me how were the conditions during the march?

A: Very, very hard.

Q: Tell me a little bit about it. Was it a long column?

A: Yes, very long. There were military guards, Romanian guards.

Q: Was it police or gendarmes?

A: They were gendarmes or military people. They were dressed in costumes (ph). There were many, many people. Sometimes you'd rest and there were many who would come from behind, from the back of the column. How shall I say...they would rush to come so they could rest for a longer time because those who were at the beginning, at the head of the column, would rest a little longer. The ones in the back, until they arrive to sit down, then we had to start all over again, so all these people from the back would come to sit with us. They told us there was a cart with a rifle behind us, so we guarded on the right, on the left by these sentinels but there was an armed cart behind us, and we arrived at ____ Petrosky, so...

Q: Excuse me all the time interrupting you, but on this road, you are thirsty, you are hungry...

A: Don't even mention that. We were just about bursting. It was September which is very hot. The sun was burning. We would go by wells, by running water, brooks, rivers...we were not allowed to stop to drink. We were not allowed to drink anything. Not even a drop of water till we arrived in _____ and no food. No. No food. We arrived in ____ Petrosky and there when we arrived, there was a ____ full of water from where the cattle would drink. We filled ourselves on this well and drank some water. We were left out there in the field and we no longer saw any soldiers or no one whatsoever. We were just left alone without any guards, no one to talk to us.

Q: What did they tell you before they left?

A: Nothing. Nothing. They just left, left us there alone without telling us anything. We just stayed on this field. On the right there was a stone quarry or a stone mine. There were some pits. How should I call them...pits, you know, stone pits, no longer in use, so all we could see was the place, you see, open pits. And we just stayed there on the field. When it rained, we would go down the quarry. And we just stayed there on the fields until November. Some people already started to die off.

Q: Why?

A: From starvation and diseases. The food, two hundred grams of flour, oats flour...

Q: How were we given this?

A: They singled out somebody to represent each city, a group of the city, a delegate who would represent Iasi or another town. They would go this town nearby and they would bring the flour back and he divided it. We had a box, a tin box like...but the flour was not really processed. It was rough. So he said that each person would get about two hundred grams, which was a full cup of that tin, two hundred grams per person. A family that had five people, who'd get five cans _____ and you couldn't really protest. You couldn't do much with this flour and occasionally you'd get two or three potatoes too. Excuse me. A cup of porridge and potatoes, and that's how we survived, until it being fall, there were fields...they had harvested the fields but on the field were left some cobs of corn, a few kernels of wheat, and we'd go and pick them up, but we were afraid because if they caught you, nobody...we were afraid. We would come back. So very few of us dared to go. So they'd rather die with the family than go out to pick up these leftovers.

Q: Why wouldn't they come back from the fields, if they'd go pick them up?

A: There were these delegates I would call them who were going on these horse-pulled buggies. They were armed. They would patrol and if they found you on the fields, they would shoot you, or they would take you and you'd never come back.

Q: Were they Romanians or Ukrainians?

A: They were not Romanians. They were not Romanians, no.

Q: And they were in civilian or uniform?

A: No, civilian. And meanwhile as we stayed in the fields, we were very upset, hungry, full of diseases. Three men arrived, three young men, and they gathered us there and told us that they came from Bucharest. They came to send you back to the country. We came as a delegation...we have an authority. We received an order from Bucharest to send you back to Romania, but if you want to go back to Romania, the country does not have any money so you must pay your own expenses back from Transnistria to whatever your home is. Can you imagine that. Anybody gives the shirts off their back or anything just to go back. We didn't have much but whatever we had, we put together and gave it to these young guys. They had some marks with them. Whoever had marks or golden earrings from women, wedding bands or maybe nice blankets or whatever special or valuable we had, we gave to these young men. They took everything and made a list, and they said wait, that the official delegate and we will come back. We'll go to pay for the transportation. We'll come back to pick you up, and you will leave. You will go back home, each of you to your own home. You can imagine how happy we were. We waited and waited and waited and never saw them again. Not to today. They saw everything. They saw how many we were, just about there, and they took the last penny we had. They took the last hope which you just sold for a piece of bread or a potato. There was _____ we sold anything for, but anyway...we stayed at this farm with our two hundred grams of this flour and nothing else...nothing, nothing else, and occasionally we got these two potatoes per person, and we stayed there until November. In late November, other people came and took us to _____.

Q: What did they do there?

A: We found out later they emptied this _____, a village. There were some very good homes built of stone, good roof, good fences, very good quality homes but empty. There was no food in there, no fire, nothing. When the people evacuated, they took everything with them, so they took us there. There were homes with two rooms, with three rooms and they packed us in these rooms. They were so full that you couldn't even move around. All you had room is to stretch out to sleep and a little path to go out to the hall. There were so many of us _____. And this representative, this delegate who was old and probably he knew more about these things, started to give us this flour again, two grams per head and we stayed there, hoping to be repatriated to Bucharest so we stayed there till maybe until February, March, 1943. And again somebody came to say the order came from Bucharest that you go back to Iasi, that the trains were waiting at _____, at _____. They are waiting for us. Again it's cold weather. Everybody let's go. We hardly had anything else with us. Everything that we had we sold for potatoes, for bread. We had really nothing, so during the night they took us and we started again marching about two days to return to the station in _____. There, you can imagine what happened on these two days on the road. It was cold. The children were naked, without shoes, without food. In the train station, the guards surrounded us. Where are you going? Why did you come back? Well, we heard this and this. No. Nothing is true. Go back. There were old people who said well, if we have to go back, we'll just die on the roads. It's cold. We are hungry. Then they thought about sending us to _____. In _____ we...these people arrived at the station of the gendarmes and somebody, probably the mayor...I don't know who...then said why did you run away from _____. You had homes there, and you ran away, because we don't have a place to put you up. All the people who leave here from Romania who are here, we don't know where to put you up. Go back...or we don't know what to do with you. One of the people I remember of the places was a barn _____ which was just being built, was still in construction. It was being _____, no windows, just the outer walls, no doors, no roof, just ground on the floor, bare ground, and that's where they took us. But this would be our home. We have no other place to put you in. We were even happy with that. At least we were protected from _____. They showed us, somebody from the village, are going to find some straws. We put them in the window places and in the door places and on the roof to protect ourselves, so we built this protection. And each of us took a little place on the ground. We already knew how to do this, and we stayed there also with this two hundred gram of flour. It was not...probably was a practice everywhere, even in the larger villages. That is what they distributed probably everywhere, because _____. We would have liked to work. We ask to have some jobs. In _____, I went to some fishermen to see if I could work with them, to make a little living. I was just idle. I was young. I wanted to work. Others wanted to work, not really for money but to work for food. Anyway, no, we couldn't. No, nobody gave us any work. Nobody talked to us. They didn't ask us who we were and even there people started dying. In the morning when you would wake up, you saw your neighbor dead. And the guy who distributed the rations, the flour, must have heard something and ran away. He took his wife and in the morning when we were waiting for our flour, nobody bring it. He ran away. When we heard that...when, you know, when you are so desperate and you are in a situation and somebody who is a little smarter...at least we thought he was smarter...when he leaves you, we lost all hope. We just thought that this guy who had been more capable than anyone ran away, then we thought that we were really gone. It is the end of us. We stayed a little longer. We chose another chief who'd find the flour, but people really starting to die, many of them. My wife told me that, you know, I was a strong man. If I had stayed there longer, I might

die too _____, so my wife told me like this...go, run away, run, even if you don't succeed, you'll die somewhere but...

Q: Don't hurry.

A: Can I have a little water please?

Q: Don't hurry.

A: I didn't believe I would start crying.

Q: You probably saw this again. Just sit quietly. Drink water. Wipe your eyes. We'll continue whenever you want to. (Pause) So what did your wife do?

A: Go. If you escape, be careful. Let me relax a little longer. (Pause) I didn't believe...I really didn't think I would be like this.

Q: It happens. Don't worry about it. Mr. Moise, you are there, with your wife and with your sister...

A: Yes. Yes. My sister was near my wife. They were just dressed in very light clothes that they brought from home. They had _____ her shoes. She was barefoot. We were in wretched conditions. We hadn't cut our hair...I was thin, close to...so she tells me, I don't want to see you. Go, and if God willing you come out alive...(crying)...take care of me and of your sister. We borrowed from a woman some slippers made of rags and they were two sizes smaller than my size, so they didn't even fit but I was happy. I tied them on my feet with some rope. My heel was kind of hanging out but anyway I put some rags around my feet. I took my violin with me. I bid farewell (pause - crying)...so I bid farewell to my sister and they left there and I thought that it's probably the last time I'm going to see them again, that I'll never see them again. I knew what I was going to leave them because I knew where I was going to go, but I didn't know whether I'd get there or if they would survive. I left. I cut through some fields. You had to make some detours, and I arrived at a train station. _____ already. Back at the station _____ there was no longer like before. How shall I say...empty. I mean there were many, many people, many soldiers and they didn't notice me when I arrived there. I was with another guy. Nobody really noticed us. It was dark too and the train was there already. The train probably came from _____ or somewhere. This train had some freight cars and also some cars for, you know, third class...people's cars, passenger trains. I had my violin with me. I didn't leave it there, and the other fellow had a guitar. We boarded the long, long car. We got on. We stayed there in a little corner. The train left and we left with it. We went and went. They didn't open the doors. Nobody asked us anything. We just kept to ourselves. At a certain point, it was maybe after midnight already, the door opened. There was no light, not even in the train stations. It was complete darkness. The door opens to the car, and some...they start loading some bags with wheat, with corn...I don't know what they were. They just loaded car freight with these bags and then farm workers who had loaded the bags, got on too, and they just sat on the bags in the darkness eating _____. We were like in the corner. In the morning when dawn came and they saw us...hey, this is...down with you. So they must have been Russians, but probably they were afraid too. Who

knows. Down with you. I took my violin. He took his guitar. We got off the train when the train stopped at the next station to _____, something like this. I just have this sounded the name of the town in my ear...and we went quickly to a passenger car. There were women who were going to the market to Odessa and they had all kinds of goods to sell there. They knew who we were and they hid us in near behind their baskets and we stayed there until Odessa. In the train station in Odessa, we got off. We looked left. We looked right. Nobody was there. Just a soldier, a guard at the door. Near that station, there is like a zoo or something, maybe a garden, a park. It had an iron fence in front and a little gate and near the gate was this guard. We saw the guy, had I think a mark or some money, gave it to the guard in his hands, and we entered into this park. There were several sculptures there, some statues. I don't know who they were. We...anyway, some statues. And we kind of hid behind those. There were some bushes and we just hid there and my fellow said, you stay here and I'll go in the station. Let's see where we can go. Maybe I can find a Romanian railroad worker from Iasi because Romanian trains would arrive to Odessa. Maybe I'll find a Romanian. Let's see what we can do. If we managed to get all the way here, maybe we can get away from here, because in Odessa if they saw you in the station, they would arrest you, we know.

Q: What happened?

A: The week before, one guy ran away. Also a guy from ____ who was a violinist, a young man without any family. He was by himself or who knows...maybe his family was someplace else, but he was alone. He ran away to Odessa. Maybe he knew that somebody in ____ where he was from...I told you that...from the town of ____ or ____ and _____ so maybe a long time ago had somebody who had worked with this Romanian who was the owner of a restaurant in the Hotel Passage (ph) in Odessa. The street King Michael the First, something like that. So this man, what did he do. He dressed this violinist a little better. He was kind of light hair. He was not that obvious that he was dark. He had some documents with the logo of the hotel, and everyday in the station in Odessa he tried to find a musician to take into the hotel, to the restaurant of the hotel. He wanted a Romanian musician and he was looking for them in a station, because most of the musicians who were playing in the restaurant in the hotel were Romanians. So they would send him to the station in Odessa to find these people who ran away from the camps, to see if he could put together small orchestra, and luckily my colleague found this fellow. We kind of knew each other. He asked would you go with me. We have no time to talk about it. Do you want to come? Yes. And _____, you used to know _____. OK. Let's take _____. Let's go. We got onto the streetcar and we went to the Hotel Passage. Nobody knew me. The owner didn't know me, but this chap from ____ was already there for a while, gave me a key, gave us a room. That night we didn't play because we were really...looked terrible and this was a good restaurant, a big restaurant, so the next day the old man who had distributed the food before, to us the flour, was there. I saw him there. So we met there. It was a small orchestra. There was a trumpet player, also picked up in the train station in Odessa, and I found a comb. I combed my hair. I managed to pull myself together, and the next day I asked for an iron from the girls who were working there at the hotel. I cleaned myself up, but my head...hair it was just long. Anyway, the next night, that's how I played, with my feet in rags, unshaven. I don't...in this restaurant, I don't now remember how much they paid us, how many marks we got every evening, because they paid us right after the show. And so I made a few marks that night and the owner gave me some money. I played the second night the same and I put together some money

and I went to the market, to the bazaar and I bought some shoes. I bought a shirt. I went to a bath, a public bath. I went to a barber. I still remember today what the barber said, that he found some bugs in my head. Of course who could have washed himself for weeks _____, so I remember today how I was in the barber's seat. The barber must have told to his colleague...parasite...parasite. I realized that he must have found a bug in my hair, but anyway he didn't kick me out. He cut my hair. I went to the bath. I took a bath. I shaved and by now I had my _____. I had a place to sleep but I didn't have any peace in my soul because I knew where I left my wife and my sister. I used to cry all the time. The girls who worked in the hotel saw me cry all the time, but I didn't tell anybody where I came from, only the people who were around me. One evening...so here, here in the...we played Romanian folk music at this hotel. Many people who came to eat, they were Romanians who were coming back from the front, pilots, officers. And I still play Romanian songs. When they heard the pilots, when they heard Romanian music, the Transnistria government department _____. There were Romanians there too in that area. They were working for the government, young men who would come in the evening and take me to their restaurant after I'd played, and I'd go with them. They would take an accordion player, a guitarist, and we would go with them and play for them a little longer, and they'd bring us back. But in my soul I was not happy. I know I had food. I had a bed, but I wasn't peaceful. One evening, there was a big banquet, a dinner, and who gave it? A colonel, a Romanian one with his family. He was there, and hearing that there's Romanian folk music at this restaurant, he...that's where he decided to have the dinner. We played. I didn't drink. I was a young man, but who knows what I did that evening. They fed us too. I had two or three glasses of wine. I started crying. And I had this boldness that I said I just can't continue on like this. I have everything I need here...food, drink, money, whatever money, but can I do anything _____ this evening. Can I do anything tonight. If not, I'll go back to my wife. I saved all the money. I kept it all with me. I didn't smoke. I didn't drink. I would only maybe buy a little something. I wanted to save the money and to keep my promise. So I went to the colonel. I said mister, I'm from Iasi. And he thought that we had been hired by the owner directly from Romania, that we had our papers. I went to him and said, Colonel, do you want to help me. Yeah. Tell me. I'll help you. I am _____. My family is in...what's the name of the place...not in a camp but where I just left them, before _____. Anyway, I have my sister and my wife there. I promise that I'll bring your wife here. And I held to this promise, but afterwards of three days, I almost thought that they would arrest me, and escort me out. I saw the colonel was not coming back and I realized that I was in problem. Meanwhile, two invalids from the war from Iasi came there. They had tried to go by train to Iasi, Odessa...I don't know why they came, but they could travel by train. They heard that's Romanian folk music. They were curious to hear. They came to the restaurant. One was from my neighborhood, from Iasi. _____ was his name, an invalid from the war. When he saw me, hey_____, do you want to go home. I can take you home. I said leave me here. Here, I'll give you the money. You go and take my wife from such and such a place, and from there we'll go back to Iasi. Now I can't right now because I now have business in Odessa but you come back with me to home. I'll try to take you to Iasi. I'll come back here with another delegation and I'll bring your wife. Of course, he didn't come back. He was probably doing some business on the train. I don't know what. Anyway I took my violin and I decided to go back. Maybe in Iasi I have maybe more possibilities to do something. I got back on a train. My other Romanian fellow also, and the others stayed in Odessa. Before getting on the train, I started crying in the restaurant where I was waiting for the train to come. Maybe somebody at the table next to me...because I kept telling this guy that I stayed here...I'm leaving my sister. She's

staying here...my wife...maybe they'll die here. I'm going to go back. He was afraid, this other fellow, that somebody's going to hear us and arrest both of us. I was decided to go back by now. Anyway the train came. We boarded the train. We took the instruments, the violin and the guitar, to the passenger cars. It was maybe a rapid or a fast train, and in the area between the trains there was some room for the guitar, for the violin. We didn't have a ticket so we kind of hid there so we wouldn't get caught, and we went till we got almost at _____.

Q: Let's stop here.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

END OF TAPE 1

Q: We're on the train, on the way to _____, yes?

A: Well, I couldn't hide anymore because I was caught. The guy who was checking the tickets and a gendarme, a military man...I don't know what _____ he was. He was in a military uniform. He was not an officer but a lower...maybe a major. Ah, he says...I've been watching you. I've been looking for you. From Odessa I've been trying to find you in the train and finally found you. We got arrested, both of us. And between these passenger cars...before those doors some cars especially for prisoners that they were transports. There were thieves and other criminals, and they were transporting in a special car. They took us to put us in that car. My companion was older. He had already done his military service. He told me, _____, get your money out and let's give it to them. So, Mr. Radu (ph), I was left with nothing. Everything I took out...I don't know my companion had anything left, but I tell you, I was so afraid. Everything that I had saved to save my family, I gave to this soldier and we put it in the pockets of the soldier. He didn't say anything. He didn't take us to the car but he left us...he let us stay on in the passenger car on the corridor. He pretended to talk to us, until we arrived in _____. In _____ he kind of disappeared. I don't know whether...I seem to remember he kind of took an oath or promise...I don't know...anyway we got off the train and we crossed the train station. The restaurants were open or these pubs, these taverns, in _____ and right away, we just crossed the street to go into one of these restaurants. We found the instruments. We took them and we went into the restaurant. We were...there was nobody in the restaurant. The owner asked us, did you come from the restaurant across the street, because probably the other owner had ordered the Romanian to send him some musicians. He said don't you want to play for me. Why not, we say. He takes out a piece of white paper, a blank sheet, and he writes up a contract between the two of us, and here we leave our instruments there. I had quite an extraordinary violin. It was worth ten times more than the advance he gave us. So we left the instruments there, but we wanted to have some money with us so we left the instruments there. We said we'll go to the train station and wait for the people who are coming from Iasi to play and we will start playing that night. He gave us an advance but obviously the restaurant owner knew what quality violin I had. Anyway, we went to the station and this we were waiting and hiding until a train arrived. We got on a train. No problems. There were passenger cars. We'd go from one car to another. We crossed _____. We arrived at the _____ River at this border...what's the name of it...this border town... at _____ with a border crossing. We quickly got off the train because they were really checking the documents at that time. We went into the restaurant and we stayed there near a table. Nobody

asked us anything. We were there like two patrons, standing. When the train signaled departure, we got out of the restaurant. It was the _____ restaurants at the train station. We got back on the train and right away _____ close to Iasi. We arrived in the train station in Iasi. My companion got off and the gendarme or border officer...I don't know who...grabbed me. My companion still had some of the money that from the advance and gave him a hundred _____, made of a metal coin, monies which...anyway put a hundred _____ to this chap and he let us go. And I went to his home with him. I stayed there about two days. Then I went to my former neighborhood. You can't imagine when her mother saw me, my mother-in-law saw me, that I came without her daughter. You can imagine. She fainted. I promise that I'll go back and bring her back. Anyway, she really didn't look with good eyes at me, like almost accusing me that I left her daughter and ran away. I told her that I came here so I could go back. I told her who brought me here, although this _____ didn't lift a finger for me. He didn't tell me maybe if I hadn't had any money, we would have even been arrested on the way. Anyway, we stayed there. Everybody was looking at me. Ah, you ran away from camp. In my neighborhood there was a sergeant. How to...now they call them...a police sergeant, yes, in charge of this neighborhood, district. The policeman, he knew everybody of course, and he wanted to catch me. That was his ambition. As soon as I heard he would arrive on duty, I'd run away. And of course not long afterwards he caught me. It was already almost the end of '43. France were already broken in two, broken, and about two days...he said I'll let you about two days free and in two days you come back with me. If you run away I'll catch you. What did I do? My companion and I talked about it, and we said let's go back from where we left. He said, well, if we'll go, we'll just die there. What are we going to do there. We'll die. So we left for the _____. There we went into a restaurant again. We played a little bit more. Meanwhile, this was the end. My father-in-law went to Bucharest. He was serving in the army, and he came...he had gone in Iasi. He found both sisters. One was somehow ill...no no...not in Iasi. She had gone to a camp I think, but he couldn't bring them back. He couldn't get them out because the girls' last name was the mother's maiden name, but the children did not carry the same last name, so he couldn't take them out. He was told to go back to Bucharest and to bring the papers. And you bring me the papers, I'll free your daughters.

Q: These two sisters were your wife and her sister?

A: No. So your sister...yes, yes, yes.

Q: Tell me again so I understand...your father-in-law was serving in the Romanian army...

A: He was to bring the two daughters, my wife and my sister-in-law. He went in that place there. Yes. He went there all armed. He took them some food. He took them some clothes, spare clothes, but he couldn't bring them out because he didn't have the same last name. He left them there. Even if he had brought only one daughter...the older one...she would have survived because she was ill. Then he went to Bucharest to get the papers done. He went to ministries, to the army regiment, trying to do the forms, but he got ill.

Q: Who got ill?

A: In the meanwhile my wife's sister became really ill. When the father went back the second time...I heard all of this...I wasn't there any longer...anyway I was no longer with them. When the father went back for the second time to pick them up, the sister was almost on her death bed. She had clothing now. He wanted to take the two daughters back. The older daughter couldn't resist any more. She took him back to the barn where she was living, left her there, and continued the way back with my wife and my little sister.

Q: So let's go back to the _____

A: In _____ I played in a restaurant, so in the meanwhile I had heard that my wife was home but she will tell you how they came back also because they didn't have any papers. They ran away too. Meanwhile I sent a letter to Iasi. When the letter arrived there, probably somebody read it and went to the police and said so and so didn't run away back to where he had to but he is in _____, and one evening as I was playing in a restaurant, three policemen or maybe two...it was maybe about eight, eight thirty in the evening...came all armed with the guns in their hands and told me to lay down my violin, during the program, while I was playing, and to stay still, not to put my hands in the pockets, to...and he was ready to handcuff me and my companion. You can imagine that having been there for a while, some people knew me in the restaurant. The patrons knew me and they thought that maybe I was a thief, so I told the policeman why do you not handcuff me. I'm an honest man. If you want to arrest me, arrest me, but without handcuffing me. I can declare in front of you that if I'm going to try to escape or do anything against the law, you can shoot me. They agreed. They took me to the police headquarters. They locked me up, me and my companion. Somebody from Iasi had been sent there to arrest me, these people from the police in Iasi had sent to arrest me for having run away from Transnistria. It was already the end of '43. I arrived at the police station. I stayed there. My mother-in-law hired a lawyer. They said he's not a thief. He never stole anything. He didn't do anything. _____ in a police. See if he's not guilty, why detain him just because he's a gypsy, because he's a little dark. Is that why you keep him? He didn't do anything. Maybe it's good for the country or what? Why are you taking him to his death? So many young people died in vain without doing anything wrong. So then probably the others were coming from the east, so they let me go. I came home but I was still not very much in peace because I was afraid anytime I'd say anything to anyone, they would again have me arrested by the police, because they said I was not Romanian. My place was in jail. '44 arrived. In 1944, the same...I was playing in restaurants and that's how I made a living. In March again I was arrested. No...they took me as kind of a military service. They took all the young people in Iasi and around Iasi and they marched us again. Again I left my wife and again they took me and we went somewhere in Moldavia. Meanwhile the people in Iasi was evacuated. My wife, my mother-in-law left, so I heard from wherever I was that my wife was in _____ where all the Moldavians had been evacuated, the refugees. So I stayed in this pre-military service and then I left for _____ to find my wife. We were sent in _____ in this small town. We were told to stay there. I could find some work. I no longer played because there was no place to play, but this was not a camp...no, no. It was...I was like a pre-military service. I stayed there until May 20th as a refugee in _____ then I left in the military service as a soldier. Nobody...I didn't have to account to anyone as such, so I went to this other village where I was taken into the military service May 20th, 1944, from _____ and in 1947 on January 1st, I became free.

Q: I want to ask you something. So you said '47?

A: Yes.

Q: I understood that your father-in-law, the father of your wife, went to Transnistria and brought back your wife and your sister. What happened to your sister, your little sister?

A: She returned very ill. She...we didn't have any money to take her to a doctor, to see what's wrong with her. She probably had an infection. She had diarrhea, probably dysentery, and she passed away.

Q: When did she die?

A: She died a few months later, after she returned.

Q: How old was she?

A: Six. She resisted after so many people whom I saw die, people who were younger, older...this little six year old girl still resisted until she got home, and then she died.

Q: Mr. Moise, we are coming then to the end of the interview. Tell me what happened to you after the war, after you came back from the military service?

A: It was very, very hard, after the war, after what I had suffered from '42 to '47. There was only hell, torture. For five years I only spent my time on the run or in camps. In '44 I went to the front as a military service. I came back in '47. There was hunger.

Q: So you fought on the front. Where? In Hungary, Czechoslovakia?

A: No. I didn't get to Czechoslovakia, but I fought until the liberation of Transylvania. I was in _____, at the Danube. There I was till March of '45, and when I came back from the front, there was a disaster at home. Hunger. You could barely recognize anyone in my neighborhood. Everybody was changed, was different. Even the grass was no longer there because people even ate grass out of hunger. It was like kind of a feed that we'd give to the pigs. It's like a plant, grass...that's what people would eat. We would boil them. We would boil even like some kind of poison ivy and people used to get sick. We'd make some kind of pies from the grain after it had gone through the press for oil. That's what people would eat. So that's how we carried on in this hunger. Meanwhile we had children, two children who died. My mother-in-law tells me...I just remembered that...this was in 1947...I returned home in the meanwhile on the leave during the military service, but this was '47, I think February. My mother-in-law and my father-in-law tell me we are dying here. Let's go back to where we had...in _____ where we lived as refugees. There we worked. All the Moldavians used to go in these areas and they'd bring wheat. They would bring cornmeal, whatever they could find. They would sell something and they would bring back this food, so my in-laws said let's go there. We can work there. At least we'll get away from this. My father-in-law had a little home. He sold it for some cornmeal and for some money, for tickets on the train. We boarded the train and we returned to _____. There's a train station, a _____ from _____ to here. We arrived there and we lodged at a gypsy musician. He was very happy. He gave

us this little home and we would work. My mother-in-law, my father-in-law, I worked. The children got ill and died, two children. I dug the...with my own hands their hole and buried them. They were maybe two, three years old. I buried them with my own hands. And we stayed there till June until the harvest came out. We came back and I started again playing here and there. In Iasi they had founded this orchestra, a voluntary kind of music. I went there. I was happy. I got some bread. I got some pants. I did rehearsals. We had performances in different companies, factories, _____, _____, meeting factories, _____ which was up on the hill. It was a factory that made all kinds of ropes. We would play in hospitals and I did this till 1950. In 1950, the philharmonic orchestra Moldova (ph) hired me as an employee and we toured the country with that. They gave us costumes so we had a regular salary, and I stayed there from 1950 till 1970. I played in the philharmonic too. In 1970 we were over thirty, thirty-five of us with a vocalist and all so we were taken over by the trade union. The trade unions took over a lot of these orchestras which were playing with the philharmonics, so from the thirty-six, they choose twelve instrumental players, two vocalists and one conductor, so fifteen altogether and we formed like a band and I worked there till 1983 when I retired.

Q: Mr. Moise, would you like to add anything? Do you have anything else to say in conclusion about your experience during the war, or do you think that you've said it all and can stop.

A: Whatever you want. Shall I tell you...what else shall I tell you.

Q: Is there anything...a detail that you may have missed or forgotten, something that you believe is important? If not, we can just stop right here.

A: Mr. Radu, I'm a little troubled and I don't remember. If you let me think a little bit...

Q: So we can stop right here. Thank you so much.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: I would like to ask you to describe me very briefly, how was your life and of your family with your parents, the life of the gypsy community before the war? Just to make it a little bit more clear, how was your life?

A: My father was...played the guitar. We were many children, but many children died, one after another. And my mother was a housewife. She took care of the children. My father could make a living if he played. If he played at night, the next day we could eat. If he didn't have an income one evening, the next day we didn't have any money, so because of this, maybe I could have also go to school, learn more. I could have also learned maybe to be a better musician, maybe something special. Maybe I could have learned more scores. I don't want to say, but I think if I played from 1950 till '83 with the philharmonic and I had to pass so many exams, I obviously the talent I must have had, but I didn't have opportunities. I tried to learn how to play something, how to sing, so I could make a living, not for myself but for my family, so I could help my dad because he was ill. I told you he died when he was 41 years old, when he was just in the best years of his life. My mother was 42 when she died.

Q: How many brothers and sisters were you?

A: Mr. Radu, I think we were many, many. Seven...eight, but many died one after another. My mother was always crying because she lost her children, and finally it was just me and another one left, and a step-brother because my mother remarried.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: The scene that I remember the mostly to my days, the most awful thing was the separation from my sister, from my wife. When you leave like that and you know somebody's following your steps, they are looking at you leaving and you think that you may never see them again in your life. That's the most awful scene I remember.

Q: I want to ask you something else. You said that when you described the moment when you left your violin in a restaurant, as you departed, your violin was so extraordinary. Why was your violin so special, so extraordinary?

A: There are violins who may not be anything special, but the wood was very good, the sound was very good, not just a Stratovarius (ph) or a _____ are so good, violins that everybody knows, but there are other violins which unfortunately were being built, I mean unfortunately I shouldn't say that but they were built from a wood which was almost similar to the wood of the famous violins. It's the wood, and the artisan that makes them that makes a violin special. So this violin that I had and there are so many violins which are good without being a grand name. Anyway the violin was so good...what makes a violin good also is the age. The older a violin is, and the more dry the wood gets, the sound, the vibration, the resonance is better, so this was a special violin. Yes, I can say it's best but it was a good one.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: I'd like to go back a little bit to the moment for the first time in Transnistria you got off the train, and I'd like you to describe to us the march, the two marches that you had because you marched twice, right? So I'd like to ask you to start from where to where you marched, how long was the trip, and to describe to us what went through your mind, that you felt.

A: We arrived in the morning, before dawn yet when the cars opened up and we looked at the fields.

Q: This was when?

A: 1942. Yes, yes. In September. At the end of September, because we spent two weeks on the train. We arrived only at the end of September. From the 14th of September to the end, we were closed in these cars. Not in Odessa.

Q: The first time you mentioned, yeah? When you were marched on foot.

A: Yes, yes, yes. When we got off the freight cars, we arrived in a train station. We could see in front of us other gypsies. Maybe they had arrived the day before or more. They were sleeping there. We thought that maybe there were some people...we didn't know if they were alive. There were so many of us piled on each other. This was in a train station in _____. We got off the train too. The others who were there already were woken up. They left us there a little longer. I remember that one of us didn't have time to get all his luggage from the cart because the train started already. We got off fast and they got up the other ones who had probably arrived the day before us. They formed a column and we started marching on foot, so we walked from the morning...I don't remember the exact time but I can't...we marched all day, all night as I told you till about two or three in the morning, so whoever could walk, walked. Those who were like old, it was sheer torture for them to walk. They had to be carried on the back and they were dragging the young people not to leave them behind, or see if they were left behind. Anyway, it was torture and we walked like this, so I told you till about two thirty...I can't remember the exact time but about two thirty. They allowed us to rest after we marched the whole day and we marched all day, evening and night, till three in the morning the day before, so with very few stops. They let us rest along side the road till the morning. In the morning again we started and we arrived again in the afternoon at this farm, Petrosky, and during another march right...yes when we returned from _____.

Q: To where?

A: Back to _____. This was even worse, this march.

Q: Why?

A: Because it was longer. You can imagine that we came back from the _____ to this _____ and from _____ we left towards _____, so an additional road that we had to walk. What is now we started from _____ so we started from further away. So this was a longer route. _____.

Q: How was it now, the second time?

A: It was more difficult. First time we were stronger. We were coming from home. Now we were weaker, all of us. You had no food. There was no food left. You know, everybody didn't know what was happening. Nobody came and nobody came to ask us do you have food, do you want to work. I'll take you to work, or I'll give you something, some wood work, some food...nothing. Only this two hundred grams of flour. That's how we lived. This oats kind of flour...two hundred grams and that included even the grains, and you couldn't do anything but the grain of a porridge from it. We were thin people, so we had three cans of this, so that's how we had survived all this time. And that is why being a longer road and we were sick and we were hungry. We were weak. Of course, it was difficult. Many people just were left behind. You already were used to these things though. You didn't even notice when people were left behind. You knew that your turn is coming too, and you knew your turn is coming...how should I say...you didn't even feel pity anymore. People knew that tomorrow is my turn, so you didn't even look back to see if anybody was dropping behind or you would never wonder what would this person, how he would manage left behind. And the soul was destroyed, it was ravaged. Nobody talked to us anymore. Nobody asked us anything anymore. What's with you? What did

you eat? Why were you brought here? Let me _____ while you are here? But just because you are a gypsy, to be tortured like that. With the torture, hunger, cold, misery...for what? For me to know that I suffer for something, if I did something I'd understand, but I didn't do anything. Why should I be tortured for that, and what a torture, because probably I know...they don't know that I didn't...I wasn't put in jail. I think in jail was better. At least the jail would have a roof over their head. Here, nothing. Through rain, through the snowstorm, wind, rats...like rats you had to go into holes to take cover. You thought why? Why? Why should I have to hide in a hole when I didn't do anything. I can work. I like to work. I'm good here for doing other things in life, not to hide in holes under ground. And still nobody asked me, nobody asked me why are you are. Why are you...how did you live before? Only when they hired me at the philharmonic when you have to give some kind of an interview or fill up some forms, and I had to write that I had been deported, the same thing in the second orchestra. I had written down that I deported. Nobody asked me why, how were you, how did you manage. All my neighborhood had been deported. People talked about it. People in the city talk about it. They knew, but nobody asked me. So what if my neighbors...everybody knew that I had been deported, but the people who counted didn't ask me why I had been deported. Luckily I found this conductor, Mr. _____, who told me _____, come tomorrow morning with some money. Why? We'll go to the National Bank and we'll pay...I don't know how much money it is, but we'll pay for some papers, some documents, because the Germans will pay us reparation.

Q: Who is Mr. _____?

A: My conductor, the conductor of my orchestra.

Q: Had he been in Transnistria?

A: Yes. And in the morning we took off from rehearsal. We went to the bank, the _____ Bank. We paid some kind of a fee. With the receipt we got together our papers. They made a file. We took the file over there, but I haven't heard anything since. Nothing. We didn't receive any answer. No. Just now before I came here, I went to...what's the name of it...anyway I asked, mam, I brought the file here, photocopies, everything, and she says well, it's fifteen, twenty years before. Maybe the papers are in Bucharest. Compare. Others told me to go or send to Odessa the papers because in Odessa they may do the investigation. Yeah. This is the bureaucracy.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: I have two questions for you about the deportation, your deportation. The first...were there all the gypsies from your neighborhood deported?

A: No.

Q: And second, were you deported because you were gypsies?

A: Those who had heard about this, whoever was a little smarter...I don't know how to call them sneaky...when the rumors started, when they heard about in the morning all these arrests, those who got whiff of it ran away.

Q: But the order was that all gypsies be deported?

A: Yes, yes. But some managed to escape and after they took us, they didn't come back for those. An order must have arrived the second or third day or a week later, that they were not taken, and many who were left in Iasi, even the let's say guilty ones, _____.

Q: So tell me, how was the order? Do you remember how the order was?

A: All gypsies in Transnistria were to receive a house and land.

Q: That was so in one way they lied to you?

A: Yes, yes. They lied to us. Of course they gave us land underground, because nobody asked us while we were there, how long we were there. Nobody came to us. Nobody who I see with my own eyes to ask us, why you came here, do you have food, do you have medicine. Nothing. We were left there to die. Yes. That's all.

Q: I'd like to thank you very much.

A: My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW