

SOFIE TIHEL  
AND  
ELZA FRIEDMAN

Sofie Tihel, born 1911, is the mother of Elza Friedman who was born in 1931 in Jassy, Romania. Elza had a happy childhood and studied piano, French and Hebrew. Her father had a small manufacturing business making bottles and metal accessories. When the war came to Romania in 1941, there was a pogrom by the local population aided by the Nazis and about one-half of the Jewish population was killed. People were taken to the town hall supposedly to check their documents. Some were lucky and sent back while others were killed in the streets or taken away in overcrowded trains that were left standing for a long time. Most of those also did not die; they were killed in some camps. Her immediate family survived but many other relatives were taken away on the trains. Their home was robbed. The burglars took clothes and left their own instead. When a neighbor's family had to go to the town hall, they left their 9 month old baby with a household help. When they came home both had disappeared but came back after a few days. Once some drunk soldiers came and threatened to kill them but left when they could take away what they wanted. They then went next door and killed the entire family there. Elza could no longer go to school and went to a Jewish school that had been improvised at the synagogue. Her father's business was operated by an appointed gentile "partner" who ran the factory but shared the profits with her father. The factory then produced goods for the army. People realized that money was of little value and helped each other as much as possible. Once, Elza came home from the synagogue and was sprayed with something by a German soldier. Apparently, it was a poison because she was sick for months. People in the streets were always in mourning and crying. Every month, new male hostages were taken by the Germans who killed ten persons for every German soldier killed. Radios had been confiscated and they learned about events from friends with radios or from newspapers by reading between the lines.

In 1944, when the Russians approached, the family moved to Bucharest because of what they had heard about the Russians. Their "partner" made the arrangements but they still had to bribe the police. The Russians were almost as bad as the Germans but most of the time did not kill people. The time from 1945 to 1948 was considered "nap" time while they waited for developments. At first, she continued at a Jewish school but then had to attend a Russian School because no private enterprise was permitted. She studied chemistry at the University but was on a "blacklist" because her father having owned property was considered a bourgeois. Therefore, she had to pay a high tuition and had to sell personal belongings to get enough money. The Russians took many people to work on a canal between the Danube and the Black Sea where many died.

Elza's father died in 1949 and her mother managed by door-to-door selling. She remarried a pharmacist in 1958. Under the communists, he was not allowed to have his own business and had to work for the government. Elza worked as a chemist but when the family wanted to emigrate, they all lost their jobs as "traitors" and had to do other work at a much lower pay.

In 1966, her mother and younger sister could finally come to Buffalo, where they made new and helpful friends. Elza had married an engineer but he also was not allowed to do proper work because of their planned emigration. Her mother helped by sending packages from the United States. Finally, an Englishman who had dealings with Russian Government helped them leave Romania by requesting some people to be allowed to leave. They still had to borrow \$5000.00 for the permission to leave. When they arrived in Buffalo in 1971, the city looked quite different from what they had expected from pictures of New York City but they did have a good impression. Within four weeks, she found a job at a chemical laboratory at the University.

Both Elza and her mother say that people should appreciate freedom and that, over all, their struggles had been worth it.