

The following is an interview of Ionel Ghelman. Today is May 9, 1996. The interview is being conducted in Silver Spring, Maryland by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Could you please give us your full name?

My first name is Ionel, last name Ghelman, not middle name. I was born in Bucharest, Romania on March 27, 1929.

Let's begin by talking about your family. Who made up the members of your immediate family?

My father name [? Yankiel ?] Ghelman, born in Briceni, Hotin County, Russia, on March 13, 1895. My mother, Edna [? Steiner, ?] maiden Wolf, born in Vutcani, Vaslui County, Romania. And the only sister what I have, Anneta married [? Lebu. ?] She is living right now in Tel Aviv, Israel. That was my family.

Was your sister older or younger than you?

No, my sister is younger than me. She is born on November 1934.

And tell me a little bit about your father. What kind of work did he do, and when did he come to Bucharest?

My father, he is taking the skill from my grandfather. They were watch repairmen. My grandfather was also. He had his little shop on Briceni, would buy and sell some jewelry, some watches. And he was also a watch repairman. My father, as far as I know, he's coming in Bucharest because was not a future for him in the little town where he was born.

Around 1925-- '26, something, and two years before I was born, he married my mother, who is coming from Vutcani in Bucharest, Romania with her family. They meet there. They married there. And they build their little family.

Did they themselves come from large families? Did they have brothers and sisters?

Yes, my father's side, he have two brother and one sister, a brother older than him. He was the second. After he is coming a sister, Rachela. And the last one was Nathan Ghelman. Except my father, all of them, they were remain-- living in Hotin County, in different little town like Secureni, where they have their families.

So your father was the only one of his family to come to Bucharest.

Exactly.

So you didn't have extended family, then, in Bucharest.

No, no. I have the extended family only from my mother's side, her parents and her sister and brothers who were, all of them living in Bucharest.

So did you get together with cousins and aunts and uncles for special occasions?

Yes, I have cousin only from my mother brother's side. Because the other two sister of my mother, they don't have kids. They are married but without kids. Then my mother died in 1938. Me and my sister, my mother's sister take care of us.

Her name was Blima Hoffner, and she was living with her husband in the same building with us in different apartments.

So you lived in an apartment house?

No, we are living in our own house, who was built on-- and the house is two apartments. It was only two apartment house with a little yard around the house.

Was the house in the center of Bucharest or on the outskirts?

It was on the outskirts of Bucharest. The name was Parcul [? Berindei. ?] Was our little village on outskirts of Bucharest, close to Dudesti Avenue, who was a half Jewish--

Neighborhood.

Neighborhood.

So when you were young, you had neighbors who were Jewish and some who were not.

Exactly.

Did you play with the--

I play with all my friends. Half of them was Jewish. Half of them was not Jewish. I was in elementary school, in a public elementary school. Was in Bucharest at this time some private, but very, very few of them and very expensive. My father-- my family were middle-- middle class family. And my father was working for somebody else in downtown Bucharest.

My mother, before she was married she was a tailor working for a big family who was close to the royal-- to the royal palace in Bucharest, Romania. And this time the King was Carl II. I was in elementary school, a public elementary school. 95% from the kids there was not Jewish.

I was the only few of the Jewish kids what we were at this elementary school. And all around I have a lot of trouble when I was a kid in the elementary school because I was a Jew. I remember the first day when I go in the school the other kids was looking to me and say a Romanian slang, which is "jidan" and pointed to me. I don't understand why.

And when I'm coming home, I ask my mother "mom, why they named me like this?" And she said, "don't worry. Close your mouth, be quiet, and started going."

Were there any other incidents at school besides that?

No. No, I remember and the school what I was in the first class, the principal of the school was also the priest of the church close to the elementary school. In Romania, from the first grade to the fourth grade, we have some religion classes. And the only religion classes was Romanian Orthodox. And I was so good I remember in the religion because the priest who was the principal and also the religion teacher, he pointed me-- once he put me on the front of the class and say, "look, this guy who is not a Romanian-- a Christian Orthodox, he know better religion. This Jew who is not a Christian Orthodox, he know about your religion than you."

That was one of the memory what I have from the elementary school. From the second grade on the elementary school, my parents moved me to the other school. Also not too far from where we're living. And I have good teacher, good teacher. A good teacher, yes, who was not anti-Semitic. He was very friendly with me, and he liked me because I was from the couple of kids what we know and we like to understand what I'm doing in this school.

Why did your parents change your school?

Because the school what I was in the first grade was low class, in the low class, and Bucharest, Romania at this thing was more anti-Semitic than the upper level, who are more intellectual and are more friendly with the other Jewish people.

How religious was your family?

In our neighbor where we were living in Bucharest, my father and with other Jewish people, they built a little synagogue. The synagogue name was [? Ahavat ?] [? Stora. ?] Was a little building. First by the beginning was a wood

building. After years when they make some money selling places for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and we make some money, they built a brick house for this little synagogue.

After I am coming on this State, I was two times in Romania. The first time when I was in Bucharest, I was there to see the neighborhood where I was growing up. And the little synagogue was an empty building. They move all the Torahs and everything, the Siddurim and everything, to the main synagogue and the main temple in Bucharest, the Choral Temple in downtown Bucharest.

The second time when I was, they destroyed the synagogue and all the houses and the neighborhood, and they built high rise building. But it's improper to name high rise building, because everything was so dirty. So the grass was tall to the first-- the second level. And the synagogue don't exist more. and the house what I was raised in Bucharest was demolished, and they built all kinds of damn buildings there.

What kind of-- what language did you speak at home?

Only Romanian. And my mother and my father-- my mother, she died in 1938. But I remember my father and my mother, they speak Yiddish. And my second mother and the third mother, because I have two stepmothers, both of them they speak with my father Yiddish.

When I was a child, I speak a little bit Yiddish, but I understand 100%. Here right now I understand Yiddish, but because I don't practice more, I don't speak, I forgot.

Did you get any Jewish religious training?

After the elementary school, I was in a technical industrial school, a Jewish on the DudeÈ™ti Avenue. Was Ciocanul, was Foundation Adolf Salomon for only-- for Jewish kids. And I was to have to be a craftsman. And after this, after the four years, to be a high school graduate. I was attending this technical school.

And when the German army, they are coming in Romania, that was in 1940. They occupied our school, Ciocanul. And we were moved in a little Jewish temple in the neighborhood. The name of the Jewish temple was CredinÈ»a in Radorin Park. We don't have workshops. In the main building, in the main school, we have also workshops. We make half day school and half day we are training in the workshops.

When the German occupied our school, the German army, and we were moved in the Jewish temple, we make only half days, because in the temple we don't have workshops to practice. And after-- I don't know. I don't remember exactly-- after one year, we moved from there. Was a rich Jewish man who have a big building, and close to Romanian downtown-- not in downtown. In the neighborhood.

And they give to our school his big building. And we have there our technical school with some little workshops. We can practice to be some craftsmanship.

So just to go back to the religious life in your family, was your family a very observant family?

No, my father go to the synagogue every Shabbos, every Sabbath. And he was on the committee to the temple. Everybody give money. All the Jewish people from our neighborhood give money.

Did you get any Hebrew instruction, Jewish instruction?

No. No, I was not instructed in Jewish. I have bar mitzvah. I was trained to read the Siddurim for bar mitzvah. And when my sister was born, also we have for-- I don't remember the name for the girl. When a girl--

A naming ceremony.

A naming ceremony, exactly. And we were-- I remember every Friday evening, my mother have two candlelight, and

she covered her head. And we were not very religious-- very observant, but we were religion people. Before we move in our house in Parcul [? Berindei, ?] a couple of months before the house was ready, and they have a little temple in our house before they built the temple in our neighborhood.

Do you remember your early childhood as being a pleasant time?

My childhood--

The early childhood.

The early childhood was not very pleasant because we have in our neighborhood not Jewish kids who were instructed home to be anti-Semites. Instructed at home, I said. Because when the kids were young, they don't have this feeling to be. But then their mother or father told them to be like this. They were, and they give to me and other Jewish pe--

Can you describe any other incidents? You talked about it in school. Anything else?

I remember in the school I have not Jewish boys friend with me, very good they were. And the higher families, very educated. And I have neighbor, not Jewish neighbor, who were very good people. When they have their Easter, I remember, and they painted eggs, and they make special cake for Easter, always I was invited there, and they gave me some--

I remember some years was Passover and Orthodox Easter and the same. And I go to their houses, and they give me painted eggs and cake flour. This is a cake was special. And I told them, don't tell my mother or my father, because we have Passover, and I have to eat only matzos. And they said, oh, OK. Don't worry. We don't tell them.

And some of my friends, what they are not Jewish, they are right now in New York, and I'm very friendly and good relation. But I remember I have also some friends, what they were very, very anti-Semites. And they play with me, and every other hour or two hour, they name me, "hey, jidan," "Jewish."

How did you feel as a very young boy hearing that again and again?

My feeling was-- when I was--

Scared?

At the beginning, I was scared. But after months and months, I don't worry more about this. I said, maybe that's the way it has to be. I don't know.

Did you have any hobbies? Were you interested in other things besides school?

Hobbies? I have some Jewish friend. My father bought me a bicycle, and we are traveling with the bicycle. And we play ball, but because my father was not a very rich man, he was a middle, middle class man. And he have to have money to put food on the table and to buy clothes for me and my sister.

I remember when we played ball, always I looked to my shoes and I say you have to [last--long last because I don't know if my father was able to buy me other pair.

Were you interested in reading or music?

I was interested in-- always I was loving music. But I cannot have an instrument and play because my father have not enough money to buy me something. I was interested in reading, and I have some-- I remember-- not Jewish friend. We were in the same elementary school, in the same class. Radu [? Aujin. ?] He died. He was a very high mathematician in Romania.

He was from a Romanian English family. And he have a lot of trouble over the years, when the communists take the power in Romania, because he was raised in English culture. And he defect Romania. He married, and have two girls. And he defect from Romania, and he defect to Paris.

He was a professor, a top professor at Sorbonne University in Paris. And he traveled once a week to Casablanca, because he was also a professor at the University in Casa-- and I was a very friend, a good friend when we were in the elementary school. And he borrowed me a lot of books. And I was started to read, and liked to read from the books what he gave to me to borrow. Because we were not able to buy enough books to read and to be satisfied with what I was reading.

Would you call your family a very close family, your parents and you and your sister?

Yes, we were.

Was your father very strict?

My father was more than very strict. He was very, very strict with me. Not with my education, because he was not very educated. He was educated in Russia. He was born and raised in Bessarabia, which was a little territory between Romania and Russia. This territory sometimes under Russians, sometimes under Romanians.

When he was born there, the territory Bessarabia was under the Russian rule. He was-- I don't know if he graduate from the elementary school. I don't know. But what I remember always he have a problem with the Romanian language. And he have also a problem anytime when he have to read some-- write something in Romanian, in Romanian language. Yeah.

So you said he was very strict?

Very strict. My mother was-- she died in 1938, when I was 9-year-old, in the second grade in the elementary school. And my father after a couple of years, he remarried with a high educated woman from a Jewish, Sephardim Jewish, from the other part of Romania, who was sometime in the Bulgarian side, sometime on the Romanian side.

Her name was Betty [? Tiefermann. ?] She was married with my father, and she lived with my father for four or five years. After she died. And my father remarried again with my third mother, who was not very-- educated, but not very educated woman. But I remember with my second mother, who was very well educated, I have a lot of things she teach me.

She gave me a lot of books to read. And she gave me a lot of books who educate-- give me-- because I was a boy. I was, I don't know, a 14, 15 year boy. And he gave me a lot-- she gave me a lot of books to make my sexual education.

OK. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about, about your early childhood, before conditions started to change? Anything else you'd like to mention?

Yeah. What I remember-- I remember in close to the elementary school, what I was, was a little park. And after we finished school and we go home, we are traveling into the park. And that was in 1936. And I remember I saw in the park young boys, bigger than I am, what they were seven, eight people together. And they were starting to be what later was the legionary and the fascist party. That was the growing part of the future legionnaires Iron Guards, what they make the pogrom in Romania in 1940, '41. That was their start.

How did you know that, who they were? You were so young yourself.

Because I have in the elementary school kids in the same class with me who his brother, his bigger brother was in the park and the group. And later, I know him, he was with a green shirt and with the leather diagonal, what they were the legionnaires.

So when you saw them, you know who they were.

Sure.

And again, what were your thoughts as a young boy?

And yet I remember his brother later, the guy who was with me in the same class, later he was a major or a colonel in the Romanian security.

But was this a disturbing experience for you at that point in your life? You were so young.

I was young. I don't understand what they are doing there. But later, and I understand what is the problem-- what was the problem. Yeah.

All right, well, let's now start moving along in years. The government changed in 1940. What do you recall about that?

What I remember in our neighborhood, the 19--

You were 11 years old now.

1940, late '40. January 1941 was the program. The pogrom--

But the country came in, I understand, in September of 1940, the fascist government.

The fascist government.

Did that have any meaning for you?

The fascist government, they don't have a big meaning for me, because I was a kid. I was not traveling--

You were only 11.

I was not traveling in downtown Bucharest. I was leaving in my part of town in the Bucharest suburb, what I was living. And I don't have too much to do with what was going on in Bucharest. But I remember in January-- what I remember, I remember in 1938 or '39, Romanian give up Bessarabia to the Russian.

And what I remember, a lot of Jewish people, they go to the Russian embassy in Bucharest. They built-- the Russian built a brand new embassy. On the same place where is the Russian embassy right now, they built a brand new embassy in 1938, '39. And a lot of Jewish people what they were born in Bessarabia to escape from what's going on in Romania. They put the paper in the Russian embassy, and if they received approval from the Romanian government, they left Romania with their family, and they move in Bessarabia to stay away from what would happen later with the Jewish people. And that was their reason to escape from the fascist government, what was going on little by little in Bucharest.

This is tape one, side B.

And I remember my father, he go also to the Russian embassy, and he put a paper. He fill up some paper there, because he want to leave Romania and escape with his family to Bessarabia. And the fascist, they take their power in Romania. They put an end to the Jewish emigration to the Bessarabia.

And I remember, the Jewish people said in the nighttime they sent some trucks, and they pick up all the Jewish people, what they put a paper to leave Romania and to go in Bessarabia. And they sent them with their family in Transnistria, over the Dniester, into what later was concentration camps.

And I remember, we stayed packed with all our belongings, with what we have in some bags waiting. Listened to every

sound what was going on, on the street. And all the time, we say they are coming to pick up us. That was one of my memories.

Did your parents talk over with you the changing situation?

We were too little to talk with us, but we understand, and we talk with our other kids, what they listen what's happened in their family, and we put together everything to us to understand what's going on. What I remember in 19-- January 1941, when was the big pogrom in Bucharest, and our neighborhood cop, a quarter of a mile from our house, was Dudesti Avenue, what was an avenue with a lot of shops, different shops with some Jewish shops.

The legionnaire, they are coming, and they put fire over a lot of Jewish stores. We have in our neighborhood a store with clothing. And they put a fire there. We have other store who have fabrics, different kinds of fabrics. They put also fire there. And to listen, we don't have a radio, because when the fascist government take the power in Bucharest, they give a law, all the Jewish family have to pack their radio and give to all of them-- to put all of them in police station.

What I remember more, later when the fascists was in power, every-- I don't know exactly, but every couple of months or every three, four months, we have to give clothes. If we don't have, we have to go to buy clothes and give clothes to the police station for the Romanian people, because that was one of the Jewish obligation, to give clothes to the fascist government.

A lot of Jewish people, they have to go to clean up the street any time when was snow. Because I was younger than was the law, I don't go to clean up the street, but I have friends what they were one year older than I am, and they have to clean up every winter after a storm. And one hour after the storm, they have to be all together in some places and go to clean up the streets.

What was the age?

If I was born in '29, that was 19-- the minimum age I believe was '30-- '41-- I was 13. I believe from 14 or 15 year.

So we're talking about the winter of '41.

Exactly, exactly.

Yeah.

That was winter or '41. And we listened from the other Jewish people what's going on when they go to the main slaughterhouse in Bucharest, Romania, and they kill. They kill and they slaughter Jewish people. They hang and they slaughter in slaughterhouse. They hang Jewish people. And the night when was the pogrom, some 21st or-- 20 or 21st of January 1941 when was the program, they kill and hang in the slaughterhouse Jewish people.

And are Jewish-- if you go in the main Jewish cemetery in Bucharest, Giurgiu, highway Giurgiu from Bucharest to Giurgiu City is the main Jewish cemetery. If you go in the old part of the cemetery, immediately after the gate on the right side, you will find a big couple of hundred of graves.

All of them was kiddush hashem. All the people what were killed in the Bucharest Pogrom on night January 20 or 21, 1941. All of them kiddush hashem.

I was there a couple of years ago, and I go specially, and I show my wife. She is not Jewish. And I show her to find out and to understand it's not lie, to see with her eyes. All the graves what they have stone. And all the stone with the date kiddush hashem, January 20 or 21, 1941.

Did you know that that was happening that night?

After a couple of days, because we don't have a radio, we can't listen-- we cannot listen to the radio. But was not in the

newspaper, but was some rumors. And the Jewish families--

After.

After this.

But while it was happening, your family was no aware.

No, no, no, no.

And then your family heard about this.

Right.

And what was their response? What was their reaction?

Afraid. There was nothing else to do. We don't have--

Who were the people that were targeted for the pogrom?

They take-- the legionnaires, they take the Jewish people from the streets, and they go to slaughter them. And not downtown-- close to downtown Bucharest was a Jewish Sephardic temple. They name it spaniol, Spanish Jewish temple. The legionnaire, they burned the temple, and they danced. When the flame was-- the temple was burning, they danced around the temple.

And inside the temple was a lot of Torahs and a lot of Siddurim. Everything was burned to the ground.

But they didn't come to the outskirts of the city. The Jews who were taken were Jews from the inner city.

From the street. I don't know exactly.

So they didn't come to your area. That's what I meant.

No, only in our area they burned Jewish shops.

Did you see that?

I saw it with my eyes. Next days, when I go out-- I go outside, because on the same day we stay in the house. We were afraid what is going around the street. But after a couple days we have the courage to go a little bit, we see with my eyes Jewish shops. If my memory was-- [INAUDIBLE] family shop, what was burnt was the express train. Other Jewish shop what was burned to the ground. Everything was--

What I want to tell them more is when the fascist government take the power in Romania, all the Jewish people, they have to go to enlist in the police station, and go to work for the government, all kinds of work, dirty work.

And my father, because he was working for a Romanian boss, who was a watch importer from Switzerland, and he imported very expensive watches from there, the watches, they are not coming directly like they are. The machinery is coming in little aluminum boxes. And the rest of the watch, what was platinum or gold for rich people, they are coming on the other side.

My father, he have to put together. And he was working for-- his name was Ion Ionescu. Very good, very attached to the Jewish people. He give, and his family special. His wife, they give us a lot of food. Because for the Jewish people in this time, everything was with--



Ration.

Ration, ration. And we have some little-- what do you name it?

Cards?

Cards. The Jewish people, which I remember with my hand, because I was in the school. I have to put a diagonal with ink on every little ticket and with ink. And to have half of the--

Ration.

Ration, what the Romanian people have it. If Romanian people have half bread, half black bread a day, because we are Jewish, we have a quarter. And I had remember, we have in our neighborhood a bakery, from where we go to buy bread. My father will wake me up-- was big lines.

And I remember, my father wake me up at 2 o'clock in the nighttime. And I have a little chair. And I go with that little chair and stay on the line at the bakery. When the bakery is open at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning, to be close to the gate, you can have bread. Because if I was late, was not more bread.

And I remember I give the little ticket. And because we were four people and we have the right-- four people, four Jewish people. Our bread was black, only black bread. And my father gave me money. And there was a little window. And I was friendly with the store, the bakery owner.

I buy some bread on the black market. I give him I don't know how many times the price of the bread. And I have instead to have one bread, I have two breads. We have also now also in our neighborhood food, a little food store. Everything was private. A little food store from where do we buy different oil, and rice, and flour.

And I was in the same elementary school, in the same class with one of the owner boys. And for this reason, only we paid them I don't know how many times that price, we can have more food than we were-- sugar we were able to have, something on the black market.

Did you ever hear of a man named Hitler at that point?

No. Later I know.

Later, yeah.

Later. Later.

'40, '41.

In '40, '41 we know. We know because the German occupied our technical school, the German soldier. They are coming, I remember, with bicycle. Hercules bicycle. And from this time, we know what was the German army and who were their Fuhrer, Hitler.

And that was--

And that was in 19-- 19-- '39 or '40. That was when the German army-- it was the first time when I saw German soldiers.

What was your reaction to seeing a German? To seeing Germans?

We were afraid, because we know that they are looking-- because they know they are coming on a Jewish school, and they occupy the Jewish school. For the little time when they are coming till we left the school definitively, they are

looking to us with big eyes. And they tell us "verfluchte Juden."

Did you understand German?

We have some German classes in the school.

You took German as a subject.

German as a Subject and we have a German-- a Jewish German teacher, who teach us German and Gothic writing.

You were saying the Germans spoke to you?

Right, they are looking to us, and they said "verfluchte Juden."

Which means?

"Dirty Jews."

Did you have to wear anything on your clothing?

No. In Bucharest, no. In Bucharest-- I heard in other parts, in the other cities of Romania, they have to have the white-- the yellow star. But in Bucharest, we don't have to wear. What I want to mention also is-- and this time-- not this time. And this time, the chief rabbi in Bucharest was Dr. Niemirower.

After he died is coming the chief rabbi was Alexander Safron. When the communist, the 1940-- '45. They take the power in '40. The Russians, they are coming to Romania in '44. I believe in '45 something, early '46, late '45, the chief rabbi, Alexander Safron, he was arrested and put in jail. Because in this time in Romania was forbidden to have foreign currency.

And the Jewish Agency-- I've heard of this. The Jewish Agency from United state sent American currencies to the chief rabbi to help the Jewish community. The Communist Party, they make something, a scenario of this, and they said he is a broker with hard currency. They put him in jail.

And what I know also after a couple of months in jail, the American-- the Jewish Agency paid the Romanian government hard currency, and they take him from prison, and he left. And he left, and he is right now the chief rabbi from Geneva, Switzerland.

I know this, and I want to tell this, because I heard from my friend. Last year or two years ago, he was like a witness in Romania. Because right now the Romanian government want to show the world the Romanian-- the General Antonescu, who was the head of the fascist government in Romania, he was not guilty to murdering Jewish people.

He was not murdering Jewish people in Bucharest. But over the Dniester in Transnistria, where the Romanian army was altogether with the German, the Romanian army murdered thousand and thousand of Jews. All of my father family was murdered, 22 person was murdered in Hotin County. Not the German killed them. The Romanian army, they killed all of them in the name for the cross and the right thing, we have to kill Jewish people.

And all of them were killed from the Romanian army. I know this because of my father after the war, there are coming some people from his little town, and they told him the Romanian army occupied Bessarabia. They killed all his family. And I want to mention especially this, because the truth is, Romanian army killed thousand of thousand of Jews in Bessarabia when they go together with the German army against the Russian troops.

Let's go back in time. The pogrom is over, and then what were the changes in your life right after that?

The changes of my life?

It's winter of 1941 now.

I want to mention my father was not to work for the fascists like the other Jew. They have to work seven days a week, clean up streets, make all kinds of dirty work. And some of them have the right to pay instead to go to work. Because my father was working for the Romanian watch importer, and the boss was a brother, was in the Romanian royal palace, working for the King, was in his entourage.

And the King have sent to my father to repair his watches. They give my father a little card, what they show he is working for the Romanian King, and he don't have to work, to make obligatory work. And after this-- you said about what was the change?

No, no.

The changing on my life after the war--

What about school after the pogrom?

After the pogrom?

Yes, February, March of '41.

'41.

Did school change for you at all? Did you continue going to school?

No, after the program was, I don't know how many months, everything was-- school and everything was--

Stopped?

Stopped, especially Jewish schools.

OK. So what did you do?

Staying home, nothing to do. Nothing to do. There was something special feeling in the Jewish families. They don't want to go in downtown Bucharest, because they were afraid something happens with them. Because when was the pogrom they catch Jewish people from downtown Bucharest from the street, and they hanged them, and they killed him.

And you're a 12-year-old boy. So what did you do to occupy your time?

Nothing.

Did you go out on the street?

Around the house.

Only around the house.

Around the house.

And then in the summertime comes?

When the summer time was--

Summer '41.

Summer '41, we go back to the school.

You started school again.

Starting school again. And that was-- and sometime I go to my father's place, and I make some work for them, because they have to make some-- to help them to clean up the shop, to make some little jobs to make some money.

And then when you started school again, were there any problems in school?

Was not problem, but the feelings was--

Had it changed among your non-Jewish friends towards you? Could you sense that?

No, it was not big changes, because all the-- no Jewish people what was in our area, they were not involved. There were some parents, not close to our house but a little bit far, what we see in the daytime they are coming with the green shirt and with the leather diagonal. And we find out there are legionnaires.

Ah, what's happened after this. In our neighborhood, we have some neighbors what their houses were occupied--

The Jewish neighbors or non-Jewish neighbors?

No, it was also Jewish people and not Jewish people.

So both kinds of houses.

The Jewish people, yes. But some houses, they have to leave their houses because there are coming some people, Romanian people, and they occupied their houses. And they evicted them from their houses. And I remember my aunt, what they take care of us because my mother was dead. She have two rooms. One of the rooms, we take some Jewish people what they get evicted from their house because the Romanian people occupied their house.

So it was the Jewish people who were evicted.

Exactly. The Jewish people were evicted, Yes. And they were Sapira family. One of them there, my neighbors, my friends, one of them right now is in Los Angeles, and the other one is in New Jersey.

OK, so now you've started back to school.

I started back--

Summer, fall of '41.

'41. And--

Anything that you recall there?

Nothing, nothing, nothing. We go to school and we are coming back, because we are afraid what's going on. My father, sometime I go with my father because Bucharest in this time was streetcars. And we are traveling with the streetcar. Same time I remember on the streetcar they are coming Romanian soldier, an officer. And they check everybody's identity.

And when my father, he showed his identity, he is asking him about what is going on with you? You are not working for the government. First, it's not a free [? way. ?] And my father, he showed them his little paper, what they give him from

the royal palace because he is working for them. And they give him-- he was free to go.

Did you have your own identity card?

No, because I was a teenager. In Romania at this time, you have to have an ID card from 17 or 18-year-old.

So if someone saw you on the street, he wouldn't know that you were Jewish.

No, because again, in Bucharest we don't have to carry the yellow star. But some people, I don't know. After this I meet some people, Jewish people, what they are from Iasi, from other parts of Romania, what they show me the little badge with the yellow star.

Tell me about your bar mitzvah in March of '42.

My little bar mitzvah? Was in the little temple, the little synagogue what we have in our neighborhood. And I remember was there shammes. A shammes is a guy who take care about the cleaning the temple. My father, he pays him something to teach me about to read the Siddurim and everything, the ritual what for the bar mitzvah.

And I remember I put that tvilum on my hand, on my head. And I have to [? sing ?] some brachas. And I go to the Torah, and I remembered it was a long, long time ago.

Was there any celebration in your house?

No, it was a celebration in the synagogue. Because all our friend, they are coming in the synagogue, and they celebrate with the lekach. You know what that? Is little-- some special cake, Jewish cake, and brought this with the wine and brandy, all the celebration for bar mitzvah and all the holidays.

So there was no problem in holding religious services. The fascists didn't make it difficult for you?

You cannot go on the street and celebrate, but the syna--

It was still safe to be in the synagogue.

It was safe to be in the synagogue.

At that time.

Mm-hmm. Yes. Yes, and also safe-- was safe also because I remember we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur. And I remember I was a kid, and it was very hard for me to fast on Yom Kippur. But I remember it was some hard days, and you cannot celebrate on the street. But everybody celebrate in his house and in the little synagogue.

How far was your house from the central part of Bucharest?

How far?

How far?

Five, six miles. Five, six. Something like this, five, six. A little. Seven miles, something like this.

So it was very ordinary for you to see Iron Guard troops?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They are marching on the streets with their right hand. And it was not like on the German. The legionnaire also with the right hand, and they said not "Heil Hitler," but they said [SPEAKING ROMANIAN] --is the head, was the head of the Legionnaire. His name was Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. And--

Was this a frightening spectacle for you?

Was. Because we see so many time. Was not more--

Became ordinary.

Ordinary. Right, right. Yeah.

All right. And just to continue on, in the summer of '42 or early fall, things just continued on your 13th year, your 14th year.

I remember.

When was the next change?

Next big change was in '44.

So things went on '42, '43.

'43.

You stayed in school.

I stay in school. And was nothing to do.

In this high school. You were in this--

Exactly. And was nothing, not too much.

Were you involved in any youth groups at that time?

No, no. What youth group?

Nothing permitted?

Nothing permitted there. No, no. What I you remember, I remember in late '40-- late '43 or early '44 started night and day bombardment in Romania, in Bucharest. in the nighttime, the RAF, Royal English--

Royal Air--

Royal Air Force is coming in the nighttime. In the daytime is coming the Air Force, American Air Force. And the bombed Bucharest.

Just for a moment, were people being picked up in '42, '43, other Jews?

No.

Or do things quiet down?

No, not quiet down. Everybody was working without pay for the Romanian government, for the fascist government.