

IRIMIA SOLOMON

Born in Dorohoi, Romania, the Moldavian part, on November 3, 1924. Parents were divorced so he & mother went to live with grandparents in Falticeni. Grandfather was a farmer, renting the farm from large landowners. He used hired help, not the family. Had a large family. Household was not really religious but "the tradition was alive." Grandmother kept all the holidays; kept kosher; different dishes for Pesach. More observant uncle lived in the house. Large Jewish community in the town. All Moldovian cities, especially in the north close to Poland and the Ukraine, had large Jewish communities. Seventy to seventy-five percent of people were Jewish. Because grandfather was farmer, neighbors were Christian. They were professionals, clerks, teachers. They had children.

In primary school he went to Jewish school which was known as a Romanian-Israelia school. After four classes passed exam to go to Gymnasium and then another exam to go to Lyceum. Final exam determined whether you went to university or polytechnic. Played soccer with non-Jewish kids even though in the privacy of their homes these same people were calling Jewish I-people names. Knew from his grandparents of anti-semitism. Many Romanian Jews had come from the Ukraine to escape the pogroms.

Subscribed to national newspaper and he read the headlines so he was somewhat aware of the Nazi rise to power. Also had radio reports. Romanians didn't need any inducement to be anti-semitic.

Cousin tried to convince him that his place was in Palestine. To go to Palestine you need a trade. Parents not so happy about this decision because they wanted him to be a professional. So in September 1939 he went to Bucharest to the "school of the hammer." His uncle, a lawyer, and his two cousins were living in Bucharest. Liked school very much.

When he was in gymnasium he would visit his father periodically. His father would come to Dorohoi to see his parents. Would come twice a year to Falticeni. Came during his preparation for Bar Mitzvah. Saw other children getting things from their father and going on outings with their fathers and he wanted that, too.

The Russians demanded that Romania return Besarabia and Bukovina so his summer plans to spend with his father were interrupted. On September 6, 1940, there was uprising in Romania and the King was forced to join forces with the Iron Guard (Legionnaires). The Iron Guard was very anti-semitic. They would provoke you on the street and then take you to their headquarters and beat you. Uncle was very concerned and convinced Solomon's mother to take him back to Falticeni. This was December of 1941.

From January 1942 til the summer the Iron Guard tried to overthrow Antonescu. During this same time the Iron Guard undertook crimes against the Jews such as destroying Jewish businesses. At the end beginning of June he went with his parents, who were remarried, to Dorohoi. A law was put in place that prevented Jews from traveling freely. Arrived only ten days or so before the war came to Romania. On June 22 during the night they say Army soldiers going back and forth. His father was taken as a hostage to be killed if the Jews killed Romanian soldiers. A policeman came and said you must come with me. He was gone for several weeks and then was taken to forced labor in another city. Received one or two letters from him during this time. He and his mother had a difficult time managing after his father was taken hostage. He was taken to forced work, unloading rail cards, sweeping sweeps. Jews were wearing yellow

stars and army would just come and get them. His mother was made to work, also. Some food items were rationed but there was a sufficient amount. They continued to live in their own home. In November, he and his mother were deported to Transnistria. Signs were posted in the streets with a proclamation from the mayor that certain streets were being "evacuated." and the residents of those streets should appear at the train station by a certain time. He knew they were being deported because he was in the third or fourth transport to leave. Crammed into the train cars together. Trip lasted two or three days. There was no bridge over the Nistria so at the river they had to go by boat and then by foot, 40-50 kilometers. There were people who died along the road. Family members wanted to stay with the dead but were not allowed. It took two days to travel this distance because they were being pushed by the soldiers. They were not fed along the way. Were carrying their belongings. Since they had knowledge of what had happened to the earlier transports, he tried to bring things he thought he would need. He wore two suits, two overcoats, including one of his father's with fur on the inside.

They had no money or jewelry with them. At the time it was announced that they were being relocated, they had to trade in their Romanian money for Russian rubles. The Russian money had no value. Jewelry was given to National Bank and they were supposed to be given money in return. They were given practically nothing in relation to the value of the items. Were afraid not to comply because they thought they would be shot. They even sold their house at this time and got Romaninan money which also was exchanged for rubles.

When they arrived in Shargorod, they were housed in a synagogue that was no longer in use. It was so crowded there was no room on the floor. Some people tried to make fires because it was so cold. They were not given food so they ate what they had brought with them. Stayed in the synagogue for a couple of weeks. Later they stayed in a room in a house of a Christian family. There were 14 or 16 people living in one room. Very humid in the room from the number of people staying in the room. They bartered for the room, trading items they had brought with them. Others in the room were also from Dorohoi, including some distant relatives. Although the circumstances were difficult, they didn't steal from each other. Within the ghetto, they were allowed to move freely. There was religious life but no cultural life in the ghetto.

Administration of the ghetto were Jews. Thought themselves above the others because they spoke several languages. Heard that Jewish administration could be bribed just as the Ukrainians. Came to each house each day and took everyone to work. Built roads and slept overnight in rail cards outfitted with bunk beds. Were given just enough food not to starve. As long as there was daylight, that's how long they worked. No women or girls or old people worked.

There was typhus in Shargorod. There were doctors but no real medical care. Some doctors were afraid to help because they got sick and died, too. One of his jobs was to bury the corpses. People died sitting, with their hands in certain positions. And they were literally frozen in those positions and then buried in common graves. It took days to dig these graves. One time he had to dig out a road from under heavy snow with no gloves. His hands were frozen but someone showed him how to thaw them. He had to put his hands in hot water. Was able to do this because his supervisor, a Romanian soldier, knew that if he didn't help him he would lose him as a worker the next day. Ukrainians were all business, bartering only. Came to the ghetto each day and asked for things they wanted, such as wristwatches.

Mother had liver problems from the time he was born. Had liver attacks twice a year that

were very serious, but each time she survived. But during the time in Transnistria, there were no attacks. It was if God wanted her to survive. After returning, the attacks returned. His mother, since she was not taken to work, spent her days talking with others. She mostly stayed indoors to stay out of sight of the soldiers.

Final few months were better for them because her mother's first cousin was married to a Christian. He left the army prior to the war because he was married to a Jew. But during the war, everyone was necessary so he was taken back into the Army in an administrative position. He looked for them and found them. When some troops passed through Shargorod his mother happened to be on the street. He saw her but didn't say a word. Later he sent bread or other food once a week. Used these things to barter as well as to eat. Communication generally was by courier also paid on the barter system.

One day they received a notice that they should back up their belongings and return to the railway station. They took a truck from Shargorod to the railway station. Got back in the cattle cars, not as crowded as before, and they were taken back to Dorohoi. Arrived in Dorohoi on the 27th of December 1943. Fewer number of people in the cars on the way back. When they got back their house was occupied by other people. His wife, who he knew before, had an aunt who remained in Dorohoi throughout the war (she had bribed people not to be deported). He moved from house to house until they could contact relatives. Could not travel because of significant troop movements. Finally found a place to live.

When he got back to Dorohoi there was no feeling of relief or happiness. He had lost his father, everything was turned upside down.

His mother was treated as a war widow so she was allowed to sell certain items, stamps, alcohol and tobacco. He returned to school and when communists took over in 1945 he returned to the polytechnic. Waited from 1958 to 1972 to get a passport and the only way to leave was to go Israel. His wife couldn't handle the heat and tension in Israel. She decided to go to her brother who lived in Canada. Worked in Toronto as an engineer. Then he went to Montreal and became vice president of the company.