

Charles Rosner

Are you (also)
from
CZERNOWITZ?

*Souvenirs of the Past,
Memories for the Future*



The Morariugasse in Czernowitz in 1999
Artist's picture donated by Marc Sagnol

Are you (also) from Czernowitz?

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Introduction

Do we know each other?

It's a nice day in June, I'm driving my car on a German motorway south of Cologne, towards Wiesbaden. Slightly tired, I decide to stop at the next service station so as to walk a bit and stretch my legs. While I march up and down, calling my wife on the phone, another car parks next to mine. A man, in his late fifties, steps out with a big dog to which he puts a line. His wife heads quickly for the station shop.

Having finished my call, I proceed to eat an apple, exchange a few words with the occupants of another car and watch the man with his dog.

Suddenly, he comes straight towards me and asks in German:

- *Excuse me: do we know each other?*
- *... Maybe, is my prudent reply.*
- *Tell me: are you from Czernowitz?*
- *Eeh... Well, yes, I'm from Czernowitz. How do you know?*
- *Are you Edy's cousin, Edy who lives in Berlin?*
- *Yes, that's me. Do you know Edy?*
- *So, you are his cousin Kooky, the one who lives in France?*

I'm stunned: very few people know that my parents called me Kooky (*spelled Kuki*), which comes from my first name Kurt, the forgotten one that I couldn't pronounce correctly as a baby. Taking a closer look at him and trying to save face, I propose:

- *I have a feeling we met before. Are you a friend of Edy?*
- *I am... We know from childhood on. My name is Robert L.*

His wife is back and joins us.

- *That's Kooky, Edy's cousin!*
- *... Yes, of course, it's him. How did you recognize him? And adding to my attention I'm Tami, his wife!*
- *From the eye look, I believe. Then to me: Were you in Berlin a month ago, for Edy's sixtieth birthday?*
- *Yes, I came with my wife and eldest son. But I don't remember having seen you there.*
- *We couldn't come, that's terrible! And we are the ones who suggested to his wife Gaby she should celebrate in big Edy's sixtieth birthday. How was it?*
- *Great and quite animated. It took place at the Kempinski hotel, about 150 people. Edy played the Cello, his daughter Nadine gave a few songs and a friend of theirs accompanied them on the piano. The German moviemaker, Volker Koepp, was also there, filming all those Czernowitzers, probably for his next movie.*
- *I'm Tami, Nurith's younger sister. We used to live in Germany, in Aachen. Your mother and mine were childhood friends in Czernowitz.*

These names start to ring a bell, especially that of Nurith who wanted to become a movie star, if I remember well... It was Aachen and I was about twenty years old, like her.

- *Yes, of course, I remember... I'm still surprised and try to gain time. My mother died in 1998.*
- *Mine also.*

She gives me details that I hardly hear. I remember that her mother, Lala S., used to be my uncle's girl friend, that uncle I never knew, Edi Wagner, who died in 1936, the youngest brother of my mother.

The man leads his dog back into the car. Progressively I relax.

- *You certainly look familiar to me, but I don't remember where and when we met?*
- *You worked some time in East Berlin, right? It must have been at Edy's place in West Berlin, long time ago!*

Unbelievable! I was posted three years in East Berlin, in the early eighties. The guy must have a very good memory; but that doesn't explain all, because at that time I had a lot more hair and they were not all white. I know that Edy, as a young boy, really admired his cousin Kooky who lived in Paris, while he and his parents were still in Bucharest, but...!

Impossible to call Edy, none of us having his phone number right at hand. We exchange coordinates; they get back into their car and leave.

This anecdote is not the only one of that type. It often happens that my place of origin suddenly comes up in the course of a discussion. For instance, a few years earlier in Austria, as we spent a summer vacation in Kitzbühel, Tyrol.

One evening, I was relaxing before dinner on the hotel terrace, next to other clients. After a while, I discuss with my neighbor, a man quite older than me staying at the hotel with his wife, his granddaughter and a nanny – with whom they spoke in Spanish – taking care of the child.

- *You are French, isn't it? How come you speak so well German?*
- *Oh, it's a long story! In fact, I spoke German at home with my parents; and I was born in a place in Eastern Europe you won't know about.*
- *No, no, go on, tell me!*
- *Well, I was born in Czernowitz, which today belongs to...*
- *But, I'm also from Czernowitz!*
- *What? Excuse me, but I heard that you speak Spanish and I believe you live somewhere in Latin America. I even heard your name: Teodoro Bardor.*
- *Yes, but before my name was Brettschneider. We live in Mexico by now, for many years; our children are Mexicans and we took our granddaughter with us in order to give a little rest to her parents.*

We start to exchange and tell bits and pieces of our life stories. Answering his question, I give my name, as well as that of my mother, which was probably well-known in Czernowitz: her brother Edi Wagner got famous there in the thirties, resisting the Rumanian fascists before WW2. He organized a folkloric ensemble of up to a hundred young people of all nationalities, who sang, danced and played balalaika and other string instruments. They gave a dozen performances, despite interdiction. The Rumanian police finally caught him in August 1936: he was beaten and tortured to death. But, clearly, my interlocutor is not aware of this story: he emigrated before these events.

- *Are there many Czernowitzers in Paris? He asks.*
- *I believe quite some. There was a time my parents used to attend evenings organized by some Bukowiner association. I possibly accompanied them when I was a child, but I do not remember. Maybe you know the name Kraft? This was a well-known family in Czernowitz. I was once married with a Kraft girl – actually, she was the niece of David Kraft, the ophthalmologist.*
- *What? You are this Charles?*
- *Eeh... Yes! I first married Martine F., Rika's daughter. We divorced after a few years.*
- *I know that story very well: I was Heinz Kraft's best man at his wedding long time ago; that's her other uncle, the one who lived in Brazil. Your story went round the world!*

What a small world!

More recently, I get invited for some jubilee reception in Kiev and stay there for a few days. I discuss with Ukrainians and foreigners, and come then across a Frenchman who's executive director for Europe of an important French banking group. He wants to know whether I'll fly back on Sunday, like most invited people who came from Paris. *No*, is my answer, *I'll use the opportunity to pay a visit to Czernowitz, looking for my ancestors: that's where I was born.*

The man is in his forties and bears a typical French name. I couldn't but notice his sudden interest when he heard the old Austrian name of the place.

- *You heard about Czernowitz? It is now a small provincial town, almost unknown in France: so, how come?*
- *My maternal grandfather was born there – but this happened by accident: at the time, his father had been appointed as head of the local subsidiary of the Central Bank; they didn't stay long. Much later, my mother was born in Vienna and she married a Frenchman after the war.*

My interlocutor isn't Jewish, that's clear: his maternal ancestor was an Austrian civil servant from Vienna. But, even by accident, he is a product of Czernowitz.

With the Kraft, my first family-in-law, we often joked over those encounters, claiming *"the world can be divided into people from Czernowitz and all others!"*

Actually, among a great number of artists, entrepreneurs, doctors in medicine and other scientists originating from Czernowitz, the most famous ones are the lyrical poet Paul Celan, the writers Gregor von Rezzori and Aharon Appelfeld – they respectively lived in Paris, Toscana and Israel after the war – as well as the biochemist Erwin Chargaff, one of the founding fathers of modern molecular biology: his work in the US led to the discovery of the DNA double helicoidally structure. But one could also mention in Hollywood the movie director Otto Preminger, the actors Edward G. Robinson and, at second-generation level, Harvey Keitel whose mother was from nearby Czernowitz. In France, we have the father of famous TV-people Jean and Michel Drucker, the mother of the writer and businessman Paul-Loup Sulitzer, the Schneider-twins who manufactured radio- and TV-sets at their name in the sixties and beyond, etc.

Many of those were Jews and emigrated in the twenties and thirties, when Rumania took over Bukovina. And, out of the sixty to eighty thousands Jews who still lived in

that town before WW2, only a few thousands survived. The vast majority of them then also emigrated later as they could.

Today, the Czernowitzers are scattered over all continents. Maybe that's why I often bump into a Czernowitzer, especially when I least expect it.

Somewhere, in the middle of a vast Texas prairie, a small point is growing at one far end of the horizon: a cowboy on his horse. At the other end of the horizon, another point is growing: a second cowboy on his horse.

It's hot, terribly hot; the air is heavy and the sun fills the sky with its yellow color. Apart of those two points and some skeleton bushes rolling in the dust as they are pushed by the hot wind, nothing moves.

Progressing slowly, the cowboys come closer. Finally, they spot each other and freeze. Two horsemen statues, if it wasn't for the horses' flanks shivering at some sweat-rivers finding their way through the crust of accumulated dust. Hands reach inch by inch, closer to the guns...

Suddenly, one of the cowboys takes-off his glasses and shouts "Itzig!" The other one reacts "Moïshe!" Two friends from Czernowitz who didn't see for twenty years! They congratulate, they laugh, they shout, they shoot their guns, and finally decide to gallop to the nearest saloon. And, while they drink whisky and beer, they call on the good old times and ask about other friends.

- *Do you know what happened to Shmuel?*
- *Yes, he is in Alaska, a gold mine and a real Mezieh, a good business! And have you heard of Beno?*
- *Yes, I understand he is in Venezuela: some oil fields. A gite Pernuse, a good fate! But what about Jossel?*
- *Last time I heard of him, he was in Australia with a sheep herd. It was difficult at the beginning, he didn't know how to handle it. But now it's OK. A git business! ... And, do you know something about Soniu? ... Now, why do make such a soïres Punem, such a sad face?*
- *I don't wanna talk about Soniu!*
- *Why? I liked him; he was a good friend, always ready to help!*
- *He's an adventurer!*
- *What? Soniu, an adventurer? Impossible! He was such a quiet and nice guy, always with his books and poetry... What did he do?*
- *He stayed in Czernowitz!*

How many stayed in Czernowitz? And to which period can we date this story: to the thirties, when more than half of the population of Cernauti – as it was called by the Rumanian – was Jewish? Or are these survivors of the Holocaust?

Today, Czernowitz counts close to 300,000 people, but only about 3,000 Jews, coming almost all from Russia and other ex-USSR countries. It's now called Chernivtsi in Ukraine and, although it didn't suffer any damage during WW2, its so special spirit is gone: you hardly meet any "authentic Czernowitzer" there.

So, yes, I was born in Czernowitz.

But until recently, I only used that origin as bait, surfing on people's interest for exotics. I didn't try to learn more about it: that was ancient history, a society where you could still find some Austrian humanists in the twentieth century; but a vanished society, devoured by war and History. I left it at the age of four and arrived in France at seven, without having ever gone to school and without knowing a word of French. In short: being born there didn't make a difference, except that I fluently speak German without any difficulty.

As usual, the triggering event came totally unexpected: it's August, I recently retired and enjoy a cocktail with some jazz music at my pool house. The telephone rings: it's Lydia S., a friend from childhood I didn't see for many years. She is a Czernowitz fan and I know that she visited the city a few times with a tour operator in the last decade. Although the purpose of her call is totally different, the conversation drives inevitably back to the subject.

- *... and, you know, I have a few books on Czernowitz.*
- *Yes, I also have one or two. At least one, which I bought in Frankfurt about ten years ago: I was there on a business trip and my interlocutor took me for lunch to a library where they had an exhibition on authors from Czernowitz, like Paul Celan, Rosa Ausländer, etc. I bought the book, which is called "In der Sprache der Mörder", in the murderers language, like the exhibition itself.*
- *I have also a very recent book in French.*
- *Really? The only books I know of are in German. Is it interesting?*
- *It's a thick and very serious book, written by a woman from the CNRS, the National Center for Scientific Research.*
- *First time I ever hear of a book about Czernowitz in French. Can you give me the references?*
- *Yes, wait... It's "Le Crépuscule des Lieux", twilight of the places, by Florence Heymann.*

I bought the book in Aix-en-Provence on the following day and started reading. Just out of curiosity at first, my interest grew with the chapters and, finally, I devoured it with passion.

Actually, right from the start, I discover that many names mentioned by the author are those of people whom I knew in the past, starting with that of her mentor Manès Sperber, as well as the Kraft family, my first family-in-law. Then, as I go on reading, it seems to me that one of the interviewed person, mentioned many times in the book, sounds like my mother. And when that person talks about her brother Edi Wagner, it's clear that it can't be but her!

She even explains under which circumstances her son – me! – got circumcised in October 1941 in the Czernowitz ghetto, despite prohibition by the Rumanian-German administration.

Incredible! My mother never told me that story; neither did she inform me about her meetings with the author, which I understand took place about twenty years ago.

I am stunned by the discovery and feel a strong temptation to go and see by myself; but it must be before winter starts, which might happen quite early in that area.

I do hesitate: I went to Czernowitz some four years earlier, shortly before leaving Kiev at the end of a professional posting; the memory I keep of it is truly that of an adventure. At the time, I booked a complete sleeping-compartment in a train leaving on Saturday at 12:00 am, in order to arrive early next morning at destination. The train stopped very often, babushkas were on the platform, praising all kinds of farm-goods that they sold so cheap; I got special tea on the train and, when I went to the toilet, drying women-underwear welcomed me. On top of this, I didn't master any of the languages those people spoke. And, once at destination, I walked and walked for two days: from the University – now lodged in the former *Residence* of the Greek-orthodox Archbishop, which counts among UNESCO's World Heritage – to the big Jewish cemetery of Czernowitz; from the *Morariugasse*, the street where my maternal grandparents lived, to the *Tempel*, the synagogue where the famous tenor Josef Schmidt used to sing...

I inquire and find out that it is now possible to get there by plane via Kiev. This facilitates my decision: I'll go. But this time I'll use the services of an interpreter, hopefully well introduced at the Archives of the city: I want to complete the embryo of a genealogical tree that I drew up twenty years ago, after questioning my parents.

I didn't know by then that I was heading for a number of surprises, including the discovery of some family secrets, something which seems to be quite a common fate for many families nowadays.

Isolated Bukovina

The history of Czernowitz is a complicated one. But the present times remind us permanently how special that city, and more generally the province of Bukovina, used to be. What made them so special?

Just looking at the official History, it appears that, from 1714 on, Bukovina was an Ottoman province for 60 years; then it became Austrian for 144 years – which brings us to 1918 – and thereafter Rumanian for 22 years; it was then occupied by the Soviets for one year, from June 1940 to June 1941; then again Rumanian over 4 years till the end of WW2, and back as part of the USSR in 1945 after the Yalta conference. And finally, today, the northern part of Bukovina, including Czernowitz – now called Chernivtsi – belongs to the Ukraine, which became independent in 1991, whereas the southern part is back to Rumania again.

In 1774, at the time the Austrian took possession of the province, its population was very small: just a transit area, at the crossing of some East-West and North-South commercial routes. The Austrian turned it into an immigration land, so that 150 years later, you could find Ukrainians, Rumanians, Jews and Germans, Poles, Armenians, Russians, Greeks, etc.: but none of these nationalities was ever in majority at any time in Bukovina.

Initially under military administration, Bukovina became a special district of (Polish) Galicia in 1787 – the Kronland Galicia being Austrian since 1772. The population of the district then grew rapidly. Traditional discrimination towards Jewish families went on, and the authorities tried to reduce their number; but the negative rules they implemented were less constraining than in many areas around: they failed to discourage their "infiltration" from Galicia, Russia, Bessarabia, etc.

Bukovina's district status came to an end in 1850, at which date it became itself a Kronland, with its own parliament and its own representatives in Vienna. The Jews – whom the central government did finally consider as its best allies to spread and reinforce the German language and culture in the region – could then enjoy full equal civil rights in the new Kronland, in terms of residence, profession, properties, representation, taxation, etc.; many of these rights were still refused to them elsewhere, including in some other parts of the empire. And thus, the better social conditions acted again like magnets on the Jewish population of all neighboring areas: towards the end of the nineteenth century, Czernowitz was the only European city of some importance where the Jews, whether or not assimilated, were in relative majority. It is only around 1930, and for different reasons, that this majority became an absolute one.

The sixty-four years preceding WW1 in the Kronland are considered as the Golden Age of the Jews in Bukovina: the province developed rapidly and its different nationalities cohabited without any major clash. It is only towards the end of this period that nationalistic feelings and the traditional anti-Semitic demons in the population were stirred up from outside – like in many places over Europe at the time. In addition, the (now usual) internal quarrels between Jewish organizations of different political or religious beliefs added to the problems.

After Rumania annexed the province in 1918, strains worsened due to the "forced rumanisation" policy of the State and its anti-Semitic position. The great number of Jews in the "new provinces" – which the country potentially needed to integrate – represented a problem because of their advanced emancipation as compared to the status of the Jews in the "Old Kingdom". The Rumanian authorities, as they couldn't immediately "equalize downwards" the civil status of their new Jewish subjects, developed all kinds of rules, chicanery and handicaps. Tensions increased, which degenerated sometimes into open and violent conflicts in the late 1920s and 30s. And finally, during WW2, this advanced post of western values got completely terminated. As for the atrocities that were done during this period, most are to be ascribed to the Rumanian fascists rather than to the German Nazis.

What should remain is that Czernowitz used to be a true culture medium, a city at the farthest oriental border of the Habsburg's empire, strongly attached to the Enlightenment values and to minorities emancipation: indeed, a multi-cultural melting pot, which used to be famous well beyond Europe at the time. So, how come that its history got lost? It is only since the early 1990s that some interest is perceptible in countries like Germany, Austria, USA and Israel for this far-east province of the defunct empire.

The WW2 trauma and the annihilation of the local population and of its corresponding social life, did certainly contribute. But other additional explanations come up as well: the fact that Czernowitz's cultural language was German, even after the Rumanian take-over in 1918; the Cold War, which banished the East-European countries on another planet until the Berlin Wall collapsed; and the fact that Rumania and the USSR still argued in the 1980s about Bukovina, a territory of some 10,500 km², roughly the quarter of Switzerland, the third of Belgium, a half of Israel or four times the size of the Luxembourg Duchy.

Of languages and nationalities

This complex history couldn't but affect the life of the individuals who survived. For example in terms of nationalities, when people ask whether I'm German:

- ***No, I'm French.***
- ***But, how come you speak so well German?***
- ***German was one of my mother tongues: I was born in a place that is today in Ukraine...***
- ***So, you are of Ukrainian origin?***
- ***No, when I was born, this was Rumania.***
- ***Then, your origin is Rumanian?***
- ***No, at the time of my parents, this was Austria.***

- *Well, then you are of Austrian origin.*
- *Well, yes... and no: my origin is that of a simple East-European Jew.*
- *So, you speak Yiddish?*
- *No, I speak German!*

To make a long story short, I often confirm that I'm of Austrian origin: my interlocutors would otherwise need a lot of patience to listen to a lengthy explanation. In fact, we spoke German at home and I chose to study it as a foreign language at college. My mother mastered perfectly German, which she also used as a child with her parents. The little Yiddish she knew, she got it from my father: Yiddish was his mother language and he only learned German as a teenager.

Personally, I certainly understand some Yiddish, but I'm far from speaking it correctly. This leads sometimes to funny consequences. Like in the seventies, when I twice visited a friend living in Israel at the time. He let me have his car, so I could play the tourist:

One day, I stop at a service station to buy some gasoline.

I ask the man *"Englit (English)?"* His answer is *"Lo (No)"*

So I say *"Germanit"*: again a *"Lo"*

Desperately, I try *"Tsarfatit (French)?"* and he utters a third *"Lo"*, adding *"Ivrit (Hebrew)?"* It's my turn to give him a *"Lo"*

The man then takes his time for a closer look at me and, bending his head over his shoulder, he asks *"Yiddish?"* I cannot but say *"Eeh... a bissele (a little)!"*

We exchange a few sentences while he is filling the tank. I pay and, as I am about to step back into the car, he says with a bright smile *"Ir red take Yiddish vi a Goy (You really speak Yiddish like a non-Jew, a gentile)!"*

Back in Paris, when I told this story to my parents, they laughed for days.

Although he wasn't Jewish, the writer Gregor von Rezzori mastered perfectly Yiddish. In an interview¹ of July 1994, he explains that he never tried to learn a foreign language methodically – he spoke fluently six languages – because he was born in Bukovina, *"a region where people spoke pell-mell about six languages"* A bit further he adds that, like every gift of God, the aptitude to language has also negative aspects: in Malaysia, for example, they say that monkeys could very well speak, but they prefer not to, because this would complicate their life!

But, in my opinion, the best story about languages appears in the dialog between Mordechai Schwarz and Israel Schmecht, in the excellent movie *"Le train de vie"* (train of life) directed by Radu Mihaileanu: Mordechai Schwarz must absolutely improve his German in order to be held for a Nazi captain; Israel Schmecht, who lives in Switzerland as a refugee after the *Anschluss* of Austria, is a cousin of the Rabbi. He tries to have Mordechai get a German accent by repeating the words *"Freundschaftliche Beziehung"*, a friendly relationship.

- *I don't get it! Why is it so difficult? It resembles so much to Yiddish; I understand everything!*
- *German is a rigid language, Mordechai, precise and sad. Yiddish is a parody of German: it has humor in addition. So, the only thing I'm asking of you in order to perfectly speak German – and to lose this Yiddish accent – is to take-out the humor! That's all.*
- *Do the German know that we parody their language? Maybe that's the cause for the war!*

¹ Interview in Rumanian by the journalist Catrinel Plesu (Dilema, n° 104 (Bucarest 1995)

Of emancipation

As I went on with my research, some very far characters became more consistent, a few of them truly looking like movie heroes. I had to understand their environment and to get a feeling of their life in Bukovina, that melting pot with its different nationalities cohabiting happily for generations. Bukovina, which appeared to me like a small European Lebanon before time, but a Lebanon missing the support of a "white knight"; a far-eastern post in Europe of modern western values that disappeared after two world wars.

There was a time, most East-European Jews dreamed of and went to America. My Jewish ancestors dreamed of France.

But, even in more advanced Western Europe, the insane ideologies that led to WW2 destroyed part of the progress accomplished there.

Many then dreamed of and went to the newborn State of Israel.

My parents still dreamed of France.

Today, still a Jew, I am French, acknowledged as such and proud of it.

And I understand that the emancipation of a minority – be it Jewish, Black, Arab or any other – is always a long-term process, over time and space, reaching far beyond rules and laws. Over all, a common and permanent will is needed that would respect both the individuals and the social organization of the host majority, in order to give a chance for a mutual understanding and an effective integration.

That is how I realized the permanent quest of my ancestors over the centuries: from Poland to Austria, in Vienna and Bukovina, then in Rumania or Ukraine, and finally in France and elsewhere, they all followed an emancipation ideal – except for their death or emigration under duress.

The following is their actual history and therefore also mine. A family history that I inherited and that is related to History in short...

I

At the times of Ancient Europe

Chapter 1

Poland

According to some authors, the first Jews to establish in Bukovina were Sephardim, coming from the Ottoman Empire. Others consider that Ashkenazi Jews, coming from Galicia around 1650, were the first ones, and that they were trading in alcohol, textiles and wood.

My ancestors were not among those first Jews in the province. But they were already in Bukovina around 1820 and all names in the family sound Germanic. From where did they come? Most probably from the Austrian Galicia, which borders north of Bukovina.

In 1764, the roughly eight hundred thousand Jews of the Poland-Lithuania ensemble represented circa 60 percent of the world's Jewish population. Then, in three successive moves before the end of the 18th century, its powerful neighbors – i.e. Austria, Germany and Russia – divided and shared the entire territory of the ensemble: already at the first attempt in 1772, Galicia became part of the Austrian empire.

The rule according to which all Jews had to adopt permanent family names was applied in Galicia in 1785.

A story of names

As it was the case in other countries, the names attributed to the Jews were related, at best, to their activity or to their place of origin. But, many others got names of animals – those were gratis – or mocking reminders of a physical handicap or of some anti-Semitic alleged defect. Only the wealthiest ones could buy for their family other names suggesting nice qualities or some spiritual nobility, sometimes translated from Hebrew.

Just imagine the tribulations of so many families in those times!

Autumn 1786 in Galicia: it's D-day for Yankel. All members of the family are gathered in his house and tell him hundreds of recommendations as to the way he should behave this morning: being the head of the family, he has been ordered to the gendarmerie where he will get and register the new name that they will from now on have to carry.

Yankel is wearing his Shabbat dress. He stands up, puts on his coat and gets out quickly without a word, happy to escape that brouhaha: it makes him nervous and that is the last he needs today.

The morning is gone and Yankel isn't back yet.

Grandma did fell asleep in an armchair, Mom and the two sisters are nervously busy, uncle Schmuel rambles on whatever in his beard and, of the five children, the four youngest play quietly, while the eldest is watching all this with a mocking light in his eyes.

The family waits silently.

The afternoon goes: still no Yankel.

Dishes are on the table for the evening meal. Some steps outside, but it's already dark.

Yankel's wife rushes to the door and opens it: he is there, his coat on the arm, with tousled hair and a shaggy beard. He gets in without a word, exhausted and defeated, throws his coat into a corner and sits down heavily at the table.

The family follows. His wife serves the soup. Yankel takes the spoon and starts eating. Nobody dares to ask the question, the sole and unique important question today. Even the eldest son respects the moment.

Finally, Yankel's wife gets up her courage and asks:

- *Yankele, what is our name?*
- *Schweissloch! (A pore, literally a hole for sweat) is his answer, his head still bend.*
- *Schweissloch...? Oy Vey! Oy Vey!*

Screeching laments fill the room: My God! What will we do? Everybody will make fun of us! How can they be so cruel with us! What did we do to God to merit such a shame! No decent girl will accept to marry any of our sons with such a name!

Taciturn and surly, Yankel eats his soup, waiting for the storm to pass. But laments and tears seem endless. Finally, his nerves fed up, he utters angrily:

- *Silence, you women! You don't know how much this "W" did cost me!*

*The easy humor of that story lies in the fact that, without the "W", this word means asshole in German. Still, it certainly was not far from reality for many Jewish and non-Jewish families at that time: for example, I met people called *Krüppel* (cripple), *Schmutz* (dirt or kiss) and even *Bettnässer* (who wets the bed) in Germany, Alsace, and Austria!*

Of course, I tried to trace the origin of most names appearing on my family tree. As an example, and as far as I know, there are only a few Rosner families in France – notwithstanding the fact that I spent some years together with a Daniel Rosner in the same class at school: we had absolutely no family connection and didn't really sympathize. In the phonebooks of Vienna and Berlin there are many pages of Rosner, not to mention the thousands of bearer of that name in Israel, Canada and the United States.

From an etymological point of view, there are three possible origins for my name, of which I prefer that of horseman, or rider or coachman ("Das Ross" is a kind of horse in German), because my grandfather raised horses and appears as a "Fiakerhälter" (fiacre owner or coachman) in an Address-book dated 1895. Otherwise, it might mean something like "the little offspring of Rose"; or be linked to a geographical origin from cities like Rosna, Rossen or Roessen in Germany.

I take it that my ancestors lived in Poland till the 18th century included. They possibly came there two or three centuries before, in order to escape the ongoing persecutions against Jews in Germany and Western Europe.

Back in those times, the polish kings and aristocrats often protected the Jews – in return for very heavy taxation paid to their treasury – against excessive anti-Semitic behavior of the population and clergymen. Of course, it was not a question of emancipation or integration; just a succession of Protection Charts applied in parallel with the Edict De Non Tolerandis Judaeis. According to the latter, Jews had no right to live in certain cities or, on the contrary, were only and exclusively allowed to live in certain streets of other cities. The Jewish communities, the Kehilla, enjoyed large autonomy in Poland, under the authority of the Vaad – the four countries' council. This was a kind of central council of the Jewish communities, in charge of collecting and paying to the treasury a municipal real estate tax, as well as a per capita tax, which was considered as a compensation for the fact that Jews were exempted of military obligation. Although the Vaad and all local community councils often abused of their power over their people, this autonomy system helped to maintain some sort of cohesion amongst the Jewish population. Also, a permanent Talmudic principle helped them in that respect: "Dina de malhuta dina" (the rules of the country/kingdom are the law) – which some consider as a basic proof of the permanent Jewish loyalty towards the ruling power.

It might be that some of my ancestors served under polish landlords, as those quite often entrusted to Jews the administration and management of their domains. But, more likely, most of them probably lived in great misery, parked into insalubrious areas of some small towns and villages of the Poland-Lithuania ensemble, into small and humid overcrowded houses...

During the 17th century, the trials and tribulations of the fake Messiah Sabbatai Zwi, were certainly often discussed in their community: although this man was born in Turkey, many of his convinced adepts could be found in Poland-Lithuania, even after his forced conversion to Islam by order of the Sultan in 1666.

In the same century, my ancestors survived the insurrection of the Ukrainian Cossacks against the "polish colonials", blaming the Jews for the exactions of the landlords. Together with Muslim Tatars, these Orthodox Cossacks invaded Poland, plundered and destroyed all on their way to the center of the country, and more particularly the Jewish communities. That insurrection lasted for 10 years, from 1648 to 1658. It happened that Poles gave up Jews to the Cossacks, hoping, in vain, that this would save their lives. All Jewish communities in Ukraine got savagely annihilated, while those of Galicia underwent repeatedly terrible pogroms.

After this insurrection, came the Russian and Swedish wars, the killings, the epidemics and the plague...

By middle of the 18th century, a new approach to religion developed among the Jewish communities: the Hassidism, founded in Galicia by Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer (1700-1760), who is better known under the name Baal Shem Tov, the Master of the Good Name.

Hassidism favors the praying fervor over the text itself; and it doesn't demand from its adepts a permanent and in-depth studying of the Holy Texts. Contrary to the traditional understanding, it considers that a "good" Jew is not necessarily an erudite, because even the simplest Jew has a right to this qualification. An enthusiastic and almost mystic reaction spread among the Jews whose rabbis followed this approach: more than half of the Polish Jewry did adhere over time to Hassidism. The orthodox and traditional

rabbis did resist – "a layman cannot be a pious man" claims the most famous one, the Gaon of Vilna – leading finally to open conflicts between "the Torah of the heart and the written Torah".

Although I have no evidence for this, I believe that the communities were my ancestors lived joined Hassidism by mid-18th century: I take this from the fact that, a hundred years later, most of my ancestors on both sides come either from Sadagura or from Wiznitz, two small towns in Bukovina that sheltered the major Hassidic courts of the province.

Towards the same period of the 18th century, biased ideas of enlightened reforms progressively reached Poland: the objective was to "regenerate the Jews" so as to "render them useful" for the country. Their assimilation should be favored by restricting the rights and powers granted to their communities, by forcing them to abandon their "gibberish jargon" (the Yiddish) as well as their "harmful rituals", and by re-orienting them towards "honest activities" that were forbidden to them in the past.

Life conditions of the Galician Jews got worse. The autonomy system of the Vaad was abolished in 1765 and a new way to directly collect the corresponding taxes instituted. A new Edict of Tolerance was promulgated in 1781, whereby the Jews got access to polish schools and universities, and were dispensed of capita tolls imposed to them; but it also canceled most of their civil rights and continued with a tolerance tax, taking now the form of residence permits. And in 1788, a specific military obligation was instated. Later, around the turn of the century and around the Napoleon wars, other discriminatory taxes were introduced, like a tax on their books in Krakow; or a specific tax on their marriage, in fact a kind of "right for a family", which allowed only the first born to get wed...

Many Galician Jews then decided to emigrate. Some of them did head for the nearby – although forbidden – Bukovina. The district was still sparsely populated, but life conditions were not as bad over there and there wasn't yet a military obligation like in Galicia, which permanently exposed them to the worst treatments. Many settled illegally.

The following authentic story (names have been changed) occurred many decades later; but it correctly illustrates the motivation of many Jewish emigrants at the time.

Isaac taps nervously away his fingers on his tiny shop's counter, while discussing with some clients: business is bad, taxes have again increased and, on top of this, he's been ordered to a medical examination for the military service!

- ... And the army, you know what that means: the Goyim mistreat you because you're Jewish and you get permanently assigned to the worst fatigue duties; when they do not immediately send you to the front line!
- Yes, you're right, Reb Isaac. See the Goldenberg cousins: they are both learned and marvelous musicians, nobody plays better fiddle than them. Well, they've been dragged far away from their family and village! And, when not fighting on the front, they were always the only ones of the battalion to be on fatigue duty at the stables, shuffling the shit of hundreds of horses all day long! That's why they fled at their own life's risk.

Enters Shloyme in the shop, a weak peddler far from home.

- ***Shalom, everybody! Do you know what happened to me? Last week, I finally went to the medical examination in my village and they decided that I'm not fit for military obligation!***
- ***You're a lucky man, Reb Shloyme!***

On same evening, Isaac and his wife Rachel discuss the details of a plan to help them out: Reb Shloyme will pretend to be Reb Isaac and go at his place to the medical examination!

On the following day, action takes place. But, this time, the peddler is promptly enrolled, without even having the time to inform his family. Isaac has no other choice than to cover all costs of living of Shloyme's wife and children.

It's a heavy burden and Rachel fears that Shloyme's family will try to extort more and more money from them over time. They decide to go to Wiznitz, just across the border in Bukovina, where nobody knows them except Rachel's brother who settled over there; and they will ask the famous local Rabbi for advice.

The Rabbi knows of a wine merchant in Sadagura, that's close to Czernowitz, who is looking for a reliable employee to take care of his business. They contact him and, finally, Isaac and Rachel settle down illegally in Sadagura with their baby.

Shloyme died many years later, which decided Isaac and Rachel to return to their village. But their children stayed in Bukovina...

The story doesn't say what the Rabbi advised to do for Shloyme's family, neither how this family survived all these years.

In the second half of the 19th century – "the Golden Age of Bukovina's Jews" – the situation reversed completely: quite a number of Jews served on a voluntary basis in the Austro-Hungarian army as soldiers and officers. Some were even granted land and farms in Bukovina, after having accomplished twenty years of good and loyal service.

Chapter 2

Austria

At the time of the Austrian takeover in 1774, the Jewish families represented roughly 3 % of the Bukovinian population. The province is under military administration. Four years later, the general heading this administration is a man with little education and strong anti-Semitic convictions. He quickly complains in Vienna about the fact that "the Jews have complete control of all trading, commercial and industrial activities in the three towns of Suczava, Sereth and Czernowitz, as well as in many others; they sell wine, beer, strong alcohol and vodka to Christians; and, in many villages, they rent rural domains, having therefore – it is terrible – Christians at their service ... a great number of them tries to settle in Bukovina, but I don't let them do and I go after them with all possible means."

And, in spring 1782, as the number of illegal Jewish immigrants still grows, that general decides to simply deport 365 Jewish families from Bukovina. Thereafter, he installs a special commission in charge of dividing the Jews into three categories: peasants, traders and artisans. Those who do not fit into any category have to be deported. In addition, the Jews declaring themselves as peasants are only allowed to acquire the land they work after twenty years of tenant farming and under the condition that they become Christians. As he said, "all possible means" are used: a whole arsenal of specific taxation, the prohibition of certain activities, the establishment of "marriage licenses", the obligation to work the land or be deported, etc. The number of Jewish families, which counted 1050 in 1781, fell down to a scarce 175 four years later.

Comes the end of the military regime: Bukovina is incorporated into Austrian Galicia as a special district. But the situation does not improve: in November 1789, Vienna decides that all Jews in this district who live in villages must move to one of the three towns Czernowitz, Sereth or Suczava. This decision leads some local authorities to officially protest against the measure, from an economic point of view...

With the Napoleon wars, the Russian army runs across the province in 1808. Then, in 1812, Bessarabia's annexation by Russia induces a new influx of Jewish families from that region. But, even formerly established Jews in Bukovina get upset. In 1817, for example, the Jewish community of Wiznitz addresses two official petitions to the Austrian Emperor, complaining about the great number of "illegally infiltrated Jews": out of a total of 180 Jewish families in Wiznitz, only 83 were already there before 1783!

...

In the 19th century, all my ancestors lived already in Bukovina or on its borders...

The Picker from Sadagura

The township Sadagura goes back to the 1770s: it developed around smelting works created for the production of Russian coins during the Russia-Turkey war, and is located at a rough 10 km distance from Czernowitz, on the other bank of the Pruth River. It is thus in close proximity to Bukovina's capital.

My great-great-grandfather Elias Picker was born there in the late 1820s, in-between two plague epidemics that raged over the area. As an enterprising young man, he tried different activities, like tombstones engraver or bar manager.

Two successive spouses gave him four sons and six daughters. A hundred and more years later, the Second World War will decimate this family: the lineages of three sons are now totally extinct and there is only one descendent left of the fourth one, a woman who lives in London. His daughters were luckier: descendents of four of them live nowadays scattered throughout the world.

One daughter of his second wife Golda will become my great-grandmother Regina (Rachel) Picker, born in Sadagura on 14th January 1854.

The Lackner from Sereth

Hungarians founded the small town of Sereth in the 14th century, after they chased out the Tatars of the region. It is located on the river with same name, and is today in Rumania at a distance of about 50 km south of Czernowitz. In its cemetery, many very old Jewish tombstones can be found, dating from the Ottoman times.

My great-grandfather Leib Lackner was born there on 3rd March 1848. He has a rather long face and grows a small beard, but is not very active in the local Jewish community. He believes in the constitutional rights for all Jews in the Empire – rights that Emperor Franz Joseph did confirm once more in 1867 – and considers himself as an Austrian.

Although he likes that small city of Sereth, far from the industrial revolution, he decides to go his own way while the rest of the family makes a living there: he travels and becomes a trader in wood.

On a visit to the match factory in Sadagura, he meets a son of Elias Picker; they become friends and, a year later, Leib marries his friends' sister Regina Picker. They will have three sons and six daughters but here also the Second World War will be at work: the lineage of five of them, who all lived in Vienna, will be brutally terminated.

One daughter will become my maternal grandmother, Netti (Haye Neche) Lackner, born 26th August 1876 in Sereth.

The Rosner from Wiznitz

At the time of the Ottomans, Wiznitz was a small town on the border between Moldavia and Poland. It is located on the flanks of the eastern Carpathian Mountains, and the traditional local population was Ukrainian mountain peasants, the Hutzuls. The Polish town of Kutylia lies just in front of Wiznitz, on the other bank of the Czeremosz River: already at that time, some Jewish families practiced cross-border commerce in Wiznitz.

After the Austrian annexation and the Napoleon wars, a Rosner coming from Galicia settles in this small town. Among his children is my great-grandfather Arié Moshe Rosner, born in Wiznitz around 1840. He will have four sons, one of them being my grandfather Haïm Schmiele Rosner, born in Wiznitz in 1867.

Yiddish, but also some Polish and Ukrainian, are the languages spoken at home as well as outside. The family isn't much involved in the activities of the local Hassidic community, but it sends its young children to the Jewish school, the *Heder*. For two generations already, the family raises horses, which are the major civilian and military traction and transportation means at that time. Haïm Schmiele follows the tradition: he becomes a fiacre coachman but also deals with horses as much as he can. And, now that Wiznitz has become an important market place – like Sadagura and some other towns in the province – he doesn't really need to travel for his business.

But time flies: as he gets close to his thirties, Haïm Schmiele still isn't married. Finally, It is in the small and close village of Berhometh, at a distance of about ten kilometers, that a wife is found for him: in 1897, he marries Mina Alper-Salomon, aged twenty-two. She will become my grandmother.

The Hassidic Courts in Sadagura and Wiznitz

In 1841, a Rabbi called Israel Friedmann, who is wanted in Russia and Ukraine, looks to establish in Bukovina. He first thinks of Czernowitz, but encounters hostile reactions from Haskalah adepts, a movement promoting modern European culture among the Jews and opposed to Traditionalism as well as to Hassidism.

The land around Sadagura belongs to Baron Mustatza, who already opposed in 1809 to the expulsion of Jews. He suggests to the Rabbi to settle in Sadagura. He also succeeds convincing the Governor of the district to inform higher authorities that it would be good to encourage the installation of this Tsaddik² in Bukovina, as this would benefit the economic development of the whole region.

That is how Israel Friedman settled in Sadagura with his followers and founded the first Hassidic Court in Bukovina.

The Court developed quickly around a vast residence that the Rabbi built the very first year of his arrival – he probably had the means for that. He was already a well-known Tsaddik in his former heartland of Ruzhin, and his presence in Sadagura draws on all kind of people eager to get his advice or his benediction. As well Jews as Christians – even some Russian and Polish aristocrats – listen to and respect him; but, at the same time, the progressive Jews from Czernowitz and other places, oppose him strongly.

When he dies in 1850, his second son Abraham Yakov succeeds and reigns for 33 years: he builds a second palace – this will be considered for some time as the most luxurious residence in Bukovina – and he goes on developing the community in the same sovereign spirit as his father. The Sadagura Court wants to give an impressive image of itself: the Rabbi appears rarely in public, a rigorous etiquette prevails in meeting him, and his family goes on high living standards with private coach and servants.

² Tsaddik = “the Righteous One”: title given to the miraculous Rabbis by their followers, the Hassidim.

In 1869, a big scandal affects the Tsaddik's family and develops into an international incident:

The fourth son of Israel Friedmann, Berisch better known as Beriniu, is at the time Rabbi of Leova in Rumania. One day, he decides to abandon his post, as a kind of protest against the outrageously sovereign style of life of his family in Sadagura. They kidnap and bring him back by force to Bukovina – thus deteriorating the Austrian-Rumanian relations – and confine him illegally in Sadagura. Of course, the progressive Czernowitz Jews take up the incident and succeed in having him liberated by the authorities.

Living then in the house of his lawyer in Czernowitz, he at first refuses to return to Sadagura, in spite of many conciliation attempts by the family. Even the Rumanian head of Leova's district comes personally to try and convince him to return to his town: officially, the objective is to clarify the issue of Beriniu's kidnapping; but some people hint for a fortune that he might have hidden over there. Nothing does help.

The dispute grows further with the intervention of the Tsaddik of Sandec in Galicia, who denounces the exhibitionistic way of life of Sadagura's Tsaddik, so contrary to true religion. The dispute spreads all over Galicia, many violent street-clashes occur; the Government in Vienna gets involved and finally decides in favor of Sadagura, calling it a "progressive" Hassidic Court...

A few months later, Rabbi Beriniu acknowledges apparently that he doesn't have the financial means to pursue his revolt, and thus reconciles with his family and returns to Sadagura: a jubilant crowd welcomes him. He will stay there till his death in 1876. But the dispute with Sandec's Tsaddik will last seven years and only come to an end with the deaths of the parties. It will even be the subject of a theater play in German and of a popular song in Yiddish.

At the time this affair was on the news, about 3,500 Jews live in Sadagura – more than 80 % of the population. Beyond the smelting works, there are some small enterprises, like a beer brewery, a matches production factory, etc.; there are many artisans and the cross-border commerce with so close Russia is well developed. As for the Mayor, he's a Jew since 1863.



Around 1910 – The synagogue of Sadagura's Wonder-Rabbi

Did Elias Picker disapprove these events, as well as the popular fervor around Rabbi Beriniu's return? His daughter Regina, like a true and tough teenager, certainly expressed her opinion.

In our today's laic society, we would probably laugh – or maybe cry – over the human stupidity, in front of such an affair; and we would quickly pass on to other issues. Maybe some members of the family did so? But probably not Elias: I only know that he was a pious and generous man, and that many years later, after his second wife Golda died, he preferred to go and die in Palestine around 1910.

Many years later, some people – like the father of the poet Rosa Ausländer – would call Sadagura "Der kleine Vatikan", the small Vatican...

Wiznitz is a rural commercial town, at a distance of 70 km from Czernowitz and therefore less subject to its influence. The Jews over there speak Yiddish, not German, and their life seems easier in a way, with the rhythmic of ritual obligations, family events and seasonal land works.

In 1845, a Rabbi called Menachem Mendel, third generation of a Tsaddik family, accepts to come and settle in Wiznitz at the request of its Jewish community, which represents already the majority of the population. He then founds the second Hassidic Court in Bukovina. This Court appears to be much closer to people's aspiration and in strong contrast with the splendor of Sadagura's Court. The only common characteristic is that both of them call upon the spirit of the Baal Schem Tov, which does not request from its adepts a profound knowledge of the Holy Texts.

Both Courts and their successive Tsaddik will become famous far beyond the borders of Bukovina, and their notoriety still exists nowadays...

Although both towns of Sadagura and Wiznitz appear in my family origins – the first one on mother's side, the second on father's side – I must consider that my ancestors were simple Jews who believed in God, possibly even pious ones, but that they were never "fanatics". Otherwise, how would they react in front of my children, Jews, with their first cousins, some being Christians and others Muslims: the cousins of the "Good Book"! But this is another story. Anyway, it is only under that condition that I can feel at ease with my unbeliever's convictions in life.

The Golden Age of Bukovina's Jews

After the revolutionary wave that ran across Europe in 1848, Bukovina got detached from Galicia and became an independent Duchy, directly related to the Emperor. It will remain as such for almost 70 years, till 1918 when the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed.

Also in 1848, the Emperor decreed "equal rights for the Jews in all parts of the Monarchy". A few months later, he canceled the taxation systems only based on the fact of being a Jew. These decisions will at first be only partially applied. The population of Bukovina is then close to 381,000 people, of which 3.8 % are Jews. At the time, Czernowitz is still a small town as compared to Lemberg, Galicia's capital. But its vice-mayor will be a Jew already in the 1860s...

As time passes, the Viennese Government understands that the Jews are its best allies in promoting and reinforcing the German language and culture in many areas of the Empire; and thus, in 1867, Emperor Franz Joseph confirms the constitutional freedom for all Jews in the Monarchy: this time, his decisions will be regularly applied in Bukovina. The Jews there can now fully enjoy equality of rights, rights that are still denied to them in other parts of the Empire.

This development leads to a new and strong immigration of Jews into the province, coming mainly from Galicia, Russia and Rumania; and with the economic development of the province, other kinds of immigrants follow, thus reinforcing Bukovina's multi-cultural characteristic.

On the occasion of the 100-years celebration of Bukovina's annexation to Austria, an official inauguration of the University of Czernowitz takes place in October 1875. It comprises three faculties at the origin and is the most eastwards situated university with German language in Europe.

Still, Czernowitz then counts only a little less than 10,000 inhabitants, of which already 37 % are Jews. But that is when its real development starts: the population grows rapidly, reaching 67,000 (of which 21,000 Jews) at the turn of the century; then 87,000 in 1910, with a stable percentage of Jews around 32 %. Meanwhile, Bukovina's population also grows, going from 572,000 in 1881 (11.8 % of Jews) to 800,000 (12.9 % of Jews) in 1910.

Throughout that period, "acceptance of the other" appears as a general posture: some are or get rich, many are and remain poor; groups live in correct harmony with each other; they exchange and, from a cultural point of view, they all get richer. The Jewish community of Czernowitz helps out financing the construction of the new Residence for the Greek Orthodox Archbishop; and, when time comes for the construction of a new and vast synagogue in 1873, Great Rabbi Lazar Igel lays the first stone, the second one being led by the Archbishop Eugene Hacman. As for the University, it has successive rectors coming from different nationalities, and many of them will be Jews. Access to public schools is open to all and, when a student's strike paralyzes all Hochschulen in the Empire in 1898, the courses in those of Czernowitz are not interrupted.

The confirmation of their equal rights induced a crazy hope among the Jewish population of the Empire: a hope for a possible renewal in this modern era; and, this time, it would happen in connection with the German language and culture. Even more so in Bukovina, which still welcomes immigrants and where competition is limited.

This dream of a possible renewal is certainly at the origin of the nostalgia that so many Czernowitz' Jews cultivate even today, after two world wars and many exiles, for the "blessed period" of Austria.

This doesn't mean that there were no disputes and quarrels.

Like elsewhere, the Jewish population is perfectly aware of its specific position in society, but it is also quite divided. It is well known that, except in the presence of a common external threat, it is very difficult to get a bigger number of Jews agree among themselves: those of Bukovina didn't escape that fatality. And thus, fierce disputes flourished between different Jewish movements throughout the 19th century – the Mitnagdim (traditional "opponents") who first opposed the Hassidim, but then fought together with them against the Maskilim (tenants of the Haskalah, the Jewish version of

the Enlightenment) – all of this taking place even before the publication of the "Jewish State" by Theodore Herzl in 1896.

And in the twentieth century, with the Zionist and Communist ideologies also coming on the table, these disputes will further develop and interfere...

The Wagner from Zaleszczyki

Zaleszczyki is located at about 40 km north of Czernowitz: it's a small border town on the Dniestr River, on the bank that belongs to Galicia. It is a bit aside from the major routes connecting Lemberg (nowadays Lviv in Ukraine) with Czernowitz.

Meier Wagner and his wife Ettel live there when she gives birth to my grandfather Joseph David Wagner on 4th June 1873.

Although Meier is a Cohen³, the couple is well integrated in the urban life, far from the *Shtetls*, the small Jewish villages of its ancestors in Poland. German is spoken at home and the children attend the public schools, which they complete with private courses at home for Hebrew prayers.

In total, Meier and Ettel will have three sons and three daughters. All sons will do their military obligation and the eldest will become a teacher in Stanislaw – today Ivano-Frankivsk in Ukraine. As for Joseph David, he will become an accountant.

³ From the Hebrew word *Kohen* = priest, i.e. a descendant of Jerusalem Temple's priests. This title is transmitted over the generations, only via male descendants (which means that I am not a Cohen), although all rights and obligations which were part of it are not anymore in use.

Chapter 3

Czernowitz The "Little Vienna"

Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, is located on top of hills on the right bank of the Pruth River. This one has its source in the dark forests of the Carpathian Mountains and rolls for some 626 km until it meets the Danube in Rumania.

According to some authors, the name of the city comes from "Chern" (Hamlet or Thatched Roofs), an ancient village founded in the 12th century at the crossing of some important commercial routes. According to others, it is of slavish origin and means "The Farm/Residence of the Black".

Baedeker's travel guides issued around 1900, state that Czernowitz counted "45,600 inhabitants (about 14,000 Jews)" in 1887 and "69,619 inhabitants, of which over 20,000 Jews" in 1902.

"The main building is the Archbishop residence on the heights, a modern and impressive construction of red bricks. This palace of Byzantine style was erected in 1864-75 and it is possible to visit it ... There is a magnificently decorated hall for festivities ... Churches are less important. The biggest is the Greek Oriental Cathedral ... More noticeable is the new synagogue ("Der neue Jüdische Tempel"), a beautiful building of Moorish style achieved in 1877 ... with a dome that can be seen at a distance; interior of good taste, not overloaded."

Most of the buildings of Czernowitz didn't suffer during the world wars: they are still there and in particular The Residence, still quite impressive. There are many Magendavid (David's Stars) which appear in the decorative mottos of the building, thus evidencing the good relations that prevailed at the time between the Christian and Jewish communities of the city, as well as the fact that the latter largely helped in its construction.

Nowadays, its many rooms and big gardens accommodate the famous University of Czernowitz, a campus able to incite all elderly visitors, like me, to start it all over again as a student...

On the contrary, the great Tempel, the synagogue, which today bears the sign "Kinotheater" and accommodates some markets and gambling halls, appears terribly sad: its old stained-glass windows have gone and all openings have been walled up; inside, there is a small black plate in a dark area, which reminds that the tenor Joseph Schmidt used to be a cantor there... The Nazis put the building on fire with grenades in 1941; later on, the Soviets tried in vain to destroy it completely – only the cupola is gone – when they came back; but they let believe the new population of the city that settled there after the war, that the Nazis did it...

Although Baedeker considers that "the churches are less important", these are part of the multicultural image of the city: "the most important one is the Greek-Oriental Cathedral, on Franz Joseph roundabout, a construction with a dome achieved in 1864 ... Then comes the Armenian-Catholic church" achieved in 1875: it got never in use as such, because one of the workers

committed suicide inside. "Then, there is the Holy Heart (Jesuitical) church", finished in 1894 and of neo-gothic style: it was disused recently and accommodated offices of the Regional Central Archives. At the time of old Baedeker, there was also an ancient St Nicholas Church dating from 1607 and entirely built out of wood: it burned down in 1992 but has been restored as before. A lot more visible in its immediate neighborhood, is a new and big St Nicholas Church built by the Rumanians in the 1930s: its style is modern and it shows funny twisted torrents that seem to dance, a view that the population says, with humor, is due to an excess of alcohol.

The list of churches is much longer; but, in order to complete this pre-war image, one should add the numerous little synagogues in the poor and popular areas of lower-town. Today, almost all are completely abandoned, when they are not used as sports halls or just accommodate some public service.

Old Baedeker doesn't mention at all the specific atmosphere of Czernowitz, which led to its name of Klein Wien, Little Vienna. The guide goes on: "... Nice busy walks in the Volksgarten, at the southern end of the town, with a Shützenhaus (a shooting barrack) and a Kursalon, both with a restaurant."

I'm not the nostalgic type of a guy, like some old-timers who run through Czernowitz's streets, overwhelmed with emotion and tears in their eyes: possibly, this is due to the fact that I was only four when I left.

I nevertheless went up and down its hilly streets on my first visit, looking for some remnants, or just for a trace of that atmosphere of the old vanished Empire. In vain: with the radical change of population and after forty-five years of soviet regime, Czernowitz appears to be terribly far from the "Little Vienna" era.

Still, everything is there, starting with the Ringplatz, the central roundabout: at one end is the town hall, built in 1848; seven streets originate from it, among which the famous Herrengasse "with its luxurious private townhouses, its shops a la mode and its comfortable cafés"⁴ where the better society used to meet and enjoy; in the 1920s-30s, there was also a movie theater and the German Cultural House.

The nice downtown areas show high standard stone buildings, typically 19th century Austrian style, in particular along the Herrengasse and around the Austriaplatz and the Theaterplatz. The latter is probably one of the most beautiful roundabouts of the city: at one end is the theatre inaugurated in 1905, while its major part is a garden arranged at about one meter lower than the street's surface – but this garden was built much later, during the Rumanian period. The theatre, which offers 800 seats, was built along the drawings of some very famous architects of the Empire, and displays on three façades the busts of great musicians and writers in German language. Between 1907 and 1922, a statue of Schiller stood in front of the theater; today, it's a statue of Olga Kobyljanska, the great Ukrainian poet, which replaces it.

On the same roundabout, at the left side of the theatre, is the "Jüdische Haus", the Jewish Cultural House. After WW2, the Soviets tried to erase its original dedication. For example, inside the building, already in the hall on the ground floor, one cannot but notice that the Jewish decorative mottos of the staircase guardrail's have been altered: the original guardrails'

⁴ From "Le Crépuscule des Lieux", page 75

decoration used Magendavids, David Stars; all of them, but one, appear to have two of their six points been cut-off...

In the late 1990s, the municipality, using its meager means, undertook to renovate the downtown streets and buildings. But the lower parts of the town – including the ancient quarter where the more or less poor and simple Jewish population, as well as some non-Jewish ones, used to live – were not taken care of till 2007; at which time the city improved its refurbishing effort in order to prepare for the celebration of its 600-years Jubilee in October 2008. Still, at the time of the Jubilee, many streets were dirty, full of potholes, and sidewalks did not exist; from place to place, an abandoned house looking like a synagogue appeared at a corner. In this area, most houses are just at street level, only a few have more; There are very few people on the street, at any time of the day: you can only guess how lively those streets used to be...

Shortly after my first visit in May 1999, Marc Sagnol, at the time head of the French Institute in Kiev, offered me a recent black-and-white artist's picture of the Morariugasse, that street celebrated by the poet Rosa Ausländer, where my mother grew up. I look at it while I am writing these lines: a strong impression of sadness and poverty emanates from it. I imagine, maybe wrongly, that this street used to be busy, and that poverty was not as sad in the Austrian times.

There is also the famous Jewish cemetery of Czernowitz, which counts about 50,000 tombstones, of which 30,000 are still readable.

Apart of the main alley and a prayer chapel at the entry, it is only episodically maintained, depending on the generosity of its foreign visitors: those vestiges deserve a better treatment.

With the help of an officer from the cemetery's administration, I was able to locate a few tombstones of my family, people who died there between 1906 and 1939.

In the last decades of the 19th century, the vast majority of Bukovinian's population, including the Jews, is still quite poor. In Czernowitz, many do work for miserable salaries in small workshops or lend their services to some rich farmer of the neighborhood; others are water porters or small peddlers. There is a lack of hygiene and epidemics often burst out in the overcrowded lower part of the town. It's only in 1894 that the installation of a sewage network begins for the main downtown streets; this is followed a year later with running water facilities. Then, in 1896-97, appear the first public electric streetlights and the first tramway: this one goes from the central railway station to the Springbrunnenplatz, along a very steep 600-meter long street. But, for many more years, emaciated horses will struggle on its wet cobblestones, laboring their way in front of old carts and carriages, under hurled insults and whip slams of their coachmen.

Almost half a century later, it is on this street that I will see my father for the first time: by then, I'll just be over three.

Two of the Lackner daughters, Berta and my future grandmother Netti, attend a *Töchterchule*, a public Austrian school for girls; these two will later become qualified teachers. In those times, women of the better society did not work on a job. But, while their parents move from Sereth to Suczawa around the turn of the century, they decide together “to go for Czernowitz” where they have been so lucky to find teaching posts. They settle in the lower part of the town. Of course, it is not like living downtown, but it’s the capital and they will have running water: they rent a small apartment in the street that will be called later the *Morariugasse*.

In Zaleszczyki, Joseph David Wagner works as an accountant. He is still a bachelor as he gets close to his thirties. He is a small man, strict and severe in public, bearing a little moustache in a round and harmonious face with prominent cheekbones, always well turned out and immaculate.

One day, his elder brother, the teacher, takes him along to Czernowitz, where they will meet some friends and go to the theatre. That is how he met the Lackner sisters and how he got interested in Netti: she is a relatively tall woman, with a long face and self-willed chin, her long hair being put up in a bun.

Their civil wedding takes place in September 1903, after a religious ceremony in the presence of the great Rabbi Rosenfeld.

Joseph David and Netti live at first in Zaleszczyki, but it is in Czernowitz that Netti will deliver their first son Maximilian, born in July 1904 – the second child, Ignatz Nathan, will be born in Zaleszczyki in December 1906.

Leib and Regina Lackner, Netti’s parents, decide by end of 1904 to buy a house in the *Morariugasse*: it is in fact a compound dating from the 1880s and comprising a simple street-level house of 120 m² with toilets outside in a closed yard on the back; plus two small apartments in another house giving on the same yard and, at the end of the latter, a bigger house on top of a few stairs.

Leib is still active with his trading business. He and Regina will occupy the house on top of the stairs, together with those of their children who do not yet live on their own, and they do hope to be able to convince the Wagner to join them on the compound, so that they will live close to their first grandson. But Netti and Joseph David still hesitate to move and pretext of Joseph David’s work in Zaleszczyki to temporary decline.

The first Jewish Mayor of Czernowitz, Dr Eduard Reiss, is elected for three years in 1905. The city is now well known, to the point that high-level teachers, like the economist Joseph Schumpeter, accept to be posted there; or that magistrates, like Hans Gross, founder of modern criminology and of the fingerprints interpretation, have no objection to spend there a big part of their career.

And in 1908, quite surprisingly, the first Worldwide Convention of the Yiddish Language is organized in Czernowitz, that famous metropolis of the German culture in Eastern Europe! Representatives from all over the world attend the Convention and, after harsh debates, they acknowledge and declare that Yiddish is a “national language of the Jewish people”, next to the Hebrew language. There will be no other Yiddish Convention in the 20th century.

Leib is now in his sixties and suffers some health problems. He cannot travel anymore like before and must slow down his business activity.

Regina still insists that her daughter Netti shall join with her husband and two sons into the *Morariugasse*: they finally accept to leave Zaleszczyki and move close to the Lackner. Joseph David is thirty-five in 1908. He has found a job, still as an

accountant, at the sugar factory in Czernowitz. As for Netti, she plans to take up again being a teacher, after delivering of their third child. It will be a girl, called Rosa, and she will become my mother.

And here is the first family secret that properly stunned me: until my trip to Czernowitz in September 2003, I believed that my father, born in 1910, was two years older than my mother, and therefore that she was born in July 1912.

At the Public Records Office, in an annex to the town hall, I first had to prove my identity and ask for a birth certificate; only then, was I allowed to ask for a wedding certificate of my parents and a birth certificate of my mother.

Surprise: both registers confirm that my mother was born in Czernowitz, but actually in July 1908!

I now understand the connivance looks they had for each other every year, when we celebrated their birthdays early July, as well as the surprised reactions of some of their friends, when my mother's age was mentioned. Apparently, this subterfuge appeared in 1948, in order to facilitate our emigration from Rumania.

Anyway, I was immensely surprised finding out that my mother was four years elder than on her French Ids. This also means that, as she passed away in January 1998, she was by then in her 90th year of life.

Joseph David and Netti Wagner will have two more children: Eduard, born in Czernowitz in September 1910, and Alma in January 1914, who was possibly born in Zaleszczyki – or anywhere else, second family secret, because she is not mentioned in Czernowitz's birth register.

Haim and Mina Rosner will stay in Wiznitz until WW1. Of their six or seven children, five will live: the eldest David born in January 1898, then Isidor (Israel) in November 1899, followed by Etki in 1907, Simon – who will become my father – in July 1910, and lastly Clara in 1912.

Although Simon was very young in Wiznitz, he will always remember his happy days there: the pony that his father offered to him for his birthday; the frequent and ongoing sneezing of his mother; the fun he had with other children when they ran on country lanes behind the rattling cart of the man emptying septic tanks, shouting at the top of their voices "*Povna bochka!*" full barrel in Ukrainian...

Chapter 4

World War One

The First World War in Bukovina⁵ didn't end up in trench warfare like in Western Europe. On the contrary, being far from Vienna and bordering on Russia, the province became the scene of a permanent movement war: its capital Czernowitz for example, located at some thirty kilometers from the Russian border, changed hands six times during the four years of the war.

On 26th July 1914, a partial mobilization order is posted in Czernowitz; this is followed nine days later by a general mobilization. Some inhabitants have already left the city. But the patriotic spirit and the attachment to the Emperor Franz Joseph still predominate among those who stay: the majority remains confident.

The first battle – which the Austrian won, by the way – takes place a month later on 23rd August, at a distance of only eight kilometers from the town. Many city dwellers using binoculars watch it happening from the top of Czernowitz's hills.

But, a week later, there is no more regular Austrian army in Bukovina; and, upon its withdrawal, it blew up the bridges that crossover the Pruth River in the capital.

The municipality council tries to organize, in anticipation of the enemy's occupation of the city. The first victims from outside arrive, telling about horrible practices by Cossack patrols; like a Jewish peasant and his daughter who could do it to the town hall: his tongue and his ten fingers have been cut-off.

On Wednesday 2nd September, the Russian are in fear of a trap and send an emissary: they do wait nearby the sugar factory for the town authorities to come and to surrender without condition; otherwise the town will be destroyed and razed down to earth!

Dr Salo von Weisselberger – the last Jewish Mayor who got elected in 1913 – goes to the meeting, accompanied by the lawyer Philipp Menczel. Both explain to a Russian officer that a formal surrender ceremony is superfluous, because the Austrian troops have gone and the city is in their power. The Mayor adds, in German: "We hope that your troops will treat correctly the civil population, which is peaceful and non-aggressive, when they will enter the city." The meeting lasts no more than five minutes.

Meanwhile in Czernowitz, the population did gather in dense groups on the main street, waiting silently for further developments. Jews from Sadagura arrive at lawyer Menczel's place: they are terrorized and describe the Cossack's terrible behavior in their town. Menczel gets there immediately with his wife, who is dressed in her nurse's uniform of the Red Cross. To an officer who calls out to her, she retorts that his Cossacks steal, assassinate and plunder in Sadagura. No, that's not true! is his harsh reply. But another

⁵ According to « *Geschichte der Juden in der Bukowina* » by Dr Hugo Gold, 1958 ; and « *Als Geisel nach Sibirien verschlepp* » by Dr. Philipp Menczel, 1916, a lawyer at Czernowitz and publisher of the « *Czernowitzer Allgemeine Zeitung* »

officer recognizes her husband as a member of the surrender delegation. She repeats her accusations, adding that this is not the way the army of a country of culture should behave. Cooling down, the captain answers that he cannot do anything for the time being, because he must take position in Czernowitz; but also that, immediately thereafter, he will send a patrol to Sadagura. He kept his word.

The very same evening, the Russian troops occupy Czernowitz.

During the following days and weeks, the Russian officers do their best to appear as civilized, but they have a hard time keeping control of their troops on the country outside the capital: the Cossacks take it violently on the population, plundering and ransoming as they can. Northern Bukovina is massively destroyed. Of course, the entire population is affected, but they take it more particularly on the Jewish communities: Sadagura and Wiznitz are plundered and put on fire, as well as all the synagogues in the area; the Hassidic court of Boja is razed down to earth...

Meanwhile, the southern part of Bukovina is spared from the battles: that's where the gendarmerie Major Eduard von Fischer calls for volunteers and organizes the armed resistance. In less than two months, on 21 October, his troops are back in Czernowitz.

Many families then flee to the center of the Empire, most of them towards Vienna. Given the extent of the phenomenon, the Austrian Government creates refugee's camps in Bohemia, Moravia, Carinthia, Salzburg, etc.

Leib Lackner and his wife Regina use the opportunity of Czernowitz's recapture to find refuge at their children's place in Vienna. As for Joseph David Wagner, who saw the surrender talks in September close to the sugar factory where he works, he is now mobilized. He will spend most of the wartime nearby Vienna, while his wife Netti and their five children stay in Czernowitz.

The Rosner also leave their town of Wiznitz during the November lull. But, as they have absolutely no contact in Vienna, they are directed to a refugee's camp in Bohemia. The father Haim Schmiele joins the army as non-commissioned officer. He is a relatively tall and slim man of forty-seven, with a long face and prominent cheekbones, bearing a moustache and a small goatee.

The Russian troops are back in Czernowitz on 26th November. All well-known and influential figures of the town – among them the Mayor von Weisselberg and the lawyer Menczel – are taken hostage and deported to Siberia. Hundreds of apartments are plundered; but most of the town and all buildings of Jewish worship are spared, thanks to the courageous intervention of Dr Vladimir von Repta, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop. He will even have the Tempel's Torah rolls removed into his residence, where he will protect them till the end of the war; he will then give them back to the Great Rabbi of Czernowitz, upon the return of the latter.

On 17th February 1915 – i.e. eleven weeks later and right in the middle of the winter – the Austrian army recaptures again Czernowitz.

For over a year, these battles and troop movements continue on Bukovina's northern border, while beyond that border, in Eastern Galicia that the Russian conquered already during the summer, massive deportations take place between March and September 1915.

Communication between Czernowitz and Vienna is again operational, but the population in both cities gets to know the wartime difficulties and restrictions. In Vienna, Leib and Regina stay separately with two of their children, in order to lower the burden on the latter's shoulders. But they are worried about their daughter's situation, staying alone back in Czernowitz with their five grandchildren. On 15th June 1915, Regina returns to Bukovina to be close to Netti, while Leib stays in Vienna.

A year later, on 18th June 1916, the Russian recapture Czernowitz.

Two distant events then precipitate the end of the war in the region: Emperor Franz Joseph's death in Vienna, in November 1916 – his nephew Charles succeeds, having the peace as main program – and the "February and October 1917 revolutions" in Russia.

By June 1917, the final Austrian recapture of Bukovina starts: Czernowitz is freed on 3rd August 1917 and, two months later, the new Emperor Charles 1st comes for an official visit to the city.

In 1917, the Rosner are still in a refugee's camp in Bohemia near *Merisch Budowitz*, the place of origin of the famous Budweiser beer. Haim Schmieles has been demobilized for health reasons: he now appears in civil clothes on a family picture, looking tired and without his goatee, but his moustache is still quite thick. On the other hand, the eldest son David, aged nineteen, is now in military uniform. On the same picture, mother Mina looks well rounded, with pinched lips and anxious eyes.

Calm and hard at work, she earned respect from all those who knew her. Recently, seeing her on a picture, the mother-in-law of my cousin Edy suddenly said "Sie war ein sehr guter Mensch!" she was a very good person!

By the end of the summer, Netti Wagner who stayed all this time in Czernowitz, hasn't seen her husband Joseph David for almost three years. As the communication with Vienna is again operational, her mother insists that she shall travel to Vienna in spite of their meager means: she can stay at one of her brothers' place and meet her husband, while she, Regina, will take care of the children in her absence.

Netti gets a passport at her name with a travel permit to Vienna, issued on 18th October 1917. But she won't finally use it: now that the Russian troops stopped hostilities, the end of the war seems very close; and, in addition, Joseph David informed her that he might soon be demobilized.

It is only on 3rd March 1918 that the peace-treaty of Brest Litovsk officially ends the Russian participation to the war.

In May 1918, Leib Lackner leaves Vienna and returns to Czernowitz.

Emperor Charles 1st is aware of the necessity to reform the Empire in order to solve the problem of nationalities. On 18th October 1918, he addresses all his subjects and incites them to constitute National Councils in view of the creation of a Federal State. But the Jews in Bukovina – who represent the third minority in that province, where there is still no majority group – are not acknowledged as a distinct national entity.

Some Jewish leaders then decide to set aside their differences in opinion and try to organize lobbies and ways of pressure in order to have their right for self-determination be acknowledged. But they also fear that the National Councils' process might lead to merciless fights between the two main minorities, the Rumanian and the Ukrainian ones. A few Jewish officers of the Austrian army, fully aware of this potential threat, decide discreetly to organize armed vigilante groups among Czernowitz's Jewish population.

At first, the National Council for Bukovina decides on 28th October 1918 to incorporate the province into Rumania. The Ukrainian reaction comes a week later: more than 10,000 Ukrainians in armed bunches enter into Czernowitz and the Ukrainian National Council decrees the incorporation of Bukovina into Ukraine... The Jewish vigilante then seal off the access to the Jewish quarter in the lower part of the town and give message to the Ukrainians in charge that the Jewish persons and goods will be defended... After a while, the Ukrainian withdraw in good order, singing national songs...

Finally, on 11th November 1918, the very Armistice Day on all fronts, the Rumanian troops enter into Bukovina: a new era begins.

With the end of the war, a big number of refugees pour into Bukovina. Most of them are originally from the province, but there are also many Ukrainian Jews who try to escape the sudden outburst of pogroms taking place in 1918 in their home state.

Eight years later, a Jew named Shalom Schwarzbard will kill in Paris Simon Petlioura, an exiled Ukrainian politician who led the resistance against the Red Army. The murderer claims that Petlioura is responsible for the death of 100,000 Jews in his country. Today, the official Ukrainian history considers that a great number of these pogroms were actually organized by the Soviets and put on purpose on Petlioura's account in order to stir up unrest and sow discord among the population. Yet, the judges in Paris decided to acquit Schwarzbard...

In Bukovina, the population of Czernowitz increases rapidly once more. Most of the newcomers are Jews and, a year later, the Jewish inhabitants count for 47.7 % of the total.

II

The Rumanian Intermezzo

Chapter 5

The 1920s

As they come back to Wiznitz in 1919, Haïm and Mina Rosner can only acknowledge that they lost their home and all of their goods, and that Bukovina is now part of “*Romania Mare*”, the Great Rumania, comprising three new provinces – Bukovina, Bessarabia and Transylvania – in addition to the Old Kingdom. As for Czernowitz, the “*Little Vienna*”, it has become “*Cernauti*” in Rumanian.

The former Jewish population of Austrian Bukovina enjoyed full and authentic civil rights. But, as they come back after the war, they are confronted with all kinds of chicanery and handicaps that the new authorities impose in order to avoid their re-installation and incite most of them to leave.

This policy stems from the fact that the Old Kingdom of Rumania – the “Regat”, composed of Moldavia and Valatie – counted only 340,000 Jews for a total population of 7.2 million; whereas Great Rumania now counts almost 4 million Non-Rumanians – of which 767,000 Jews – for a total population of 18 millions. The Jews represent the third minority in the country, behind the Hungarian and the German.

A priori, the Rumanian government has absolutely no intention to integrate all these members of their new and alien subjects. Its objective, on the contrary, is to “equalize downwards” the minorities’ statute; and this is more particularly true for the Jews, in order to harmonize their statute with the still middle-aged one of the Rumanian Jews living on the territory of the Old Kingdom: those are not allowed the Rumanian nationality, they have no civil rights and may only perform various intermediary activities. The discussions and negotiations with the Allies trying to establish a new order in Europe, stumble on this issue among others.

A first progress is achieved in May 1919, in the form of a Rumanian statutory order guarantying certain rights to the Jews of the Old Regat... but it specifically excludes those of the new territories. Many Jews then choose to emigrate and start a new life in America or Western Europe.

It is only in December of that same year, thanks to the Allies’ strong insistence – and more particularly to that of France – that Rumania accepts, in the Treaty of Saint Germain, to recognize as full Rumanian citizens, without further formalities, all Jews living on the territories of the New Kingdom who cannot prevail themselves of another nationality than the Rumanian one.

Florence Heymann writes, “The Rumanian anti-Semitism was nourished by a feeling of inferiority that found an outlet in the hating of a people considered and stigmatized as weaker and inferior. The creation of Great Rumania remains associated in Rumanian minds to a conflict with the Jewish population, wrongly

identified as an opponent to the fundamental national ideals. Granting them civil rights thus appears as a condition imposed from outside, resulting from "foreign intervention" and part of a "plot" by some "all-powerful" Jewish international organizations."

The Jews who decide to stay in Bukovina must undergo long administrative procedures in order to win out. They must establish and write down their family history over a few generations and provide evidence as to their roots in the region. The difficulty of this procedure is further increased when the new authorities confiscate the BMD Registers concerning specifically the Jewish population in all towns and villages of Bukovina – a move that many consider as "suspect". In addition, all necessary steps in the procedure must be performed in Cernauti, which induces many to settle in the capital, even if they are not from there: for most of them, Cernauti remains Czernowitz, an environment that seems also more secure in front of the new Rumanian administration.

At the University, 31 out of 35 professors who were teaching until then in German must leave the city in 1919. Many of their successors are simple school or college teachers, coming from the Old Regat. The "rumanization process" is further extended towards the schools and colleges of Bukovina: although a numerus clausus is not yet in place at that time, the purely Rumanian pupils and students get favored in their studies.

Having acknowledged their losses in Wiznitz – now called Vijnita – Haïm and Mina Rosner decide in 1920 to settle definitively in Cernauti with their three children not yet of age: Etká, Simon and Clara, respectively twelve, ten and eight years old. The two eldest sons, David and Isidor, have gone to Germany and try their luck there. But Haïm is tired and ill: he dies on 11th October 1923 from a cancer at the age of fifty-six. His second son Isidor then decides to come back to Cernauti in order to help Mina, who has neither a job nor any income and cannot provide alone for the youngest.

Isidor did learn the profession of furrier. He is a "bon vivant", who loves women and good food: quite slim at the time and well turned-out, he looks like a true dandy. Besides, he got a taste for luxury and for the western way-of-life, on which he rubbed his shoulders in Germany; and just being a craftsman in a workshop in Hamburg doesn't satisfy him anymore. He is always ready to help his friends and family, but unable to manage a budget: together with a partner, he starts a fur shop in Cernauti, but they won't earn a fortune with it.

At the age of twenty-four, Isidor marries Regina Blei in Cernauti. At the civil ceremony he cannot – for a good reason – provide a birth certificate from the register in Wiznitz: in one column of the marriage register, it is written, "*Pretends to be born and originating from Vijnita...*" and, in the column for comments, it is indicated that he benefits of a "*Special exemption by the Ministry of Interior n°3781/C, dated 16 February 1924, to provide a birth certificate for the husband*"

I only remember Isidor many years later, in Bucarest and then in New York: he was already bold and had put on a lot of weight. But he remained always very clean and immaculate. For me, he will forever be "Der gute Onkel mit den Bauch", the good uncle with a belly, as well as the uncle who couldn't lace up his shoes alone.

Simon is thirteen when his father dies. Since the family's return to Bukovina, he goes to school in Cernauti: Netti Wagner will have him in her class for a time. He always wanted to become an engineer but, after his father's death, long studies are out of question: he enters as an apprentice furrier at a contact of Isidor, but still attends school for some time.

As an adolescent, he doesn't talk much, preferring to act: he is emotional and has difficulties to express his feelings with words. His meager salary, which he regularly gives to his mother Mina, goes entirely to the cost of living of the family.

One evening, as he got his pay, he comes back home with a satisfied and implied look in his eyes. The family gathers in the kitchen. Excitedly, he takes out a worn violin from a bag and shows it triumphantly to his mother and brother: "It's a Stradivarius!" he shouts; he then explains how and to what derisory price he could get it from a secondhand-goods' dealer. In fact, talking of a derisory price, almost all of his pay went into the bargain! Of course, he got quickly disillusioned, but the story remained with humor in the family and became synonymous for swindle, as well as for the fact that Simon was certainly not a talented businessman.

Towards the late 1920s, when the eldest brother David pays a visit to the family, Simon wants to prove he is not anymore a child and suggests to go out one evening with his two brothers – "just us three men!" They'll have a drink with a few friends in a bistro downtown: a nice evening, indeed, drinking, talking and singing! But when time comes to leave and go back home, Simon feels unsteady on his feet: zigzagging heavily, he goes on singing and talking loud to the empty streets; his brothers have no choice but to keep up and help him all the way back from downtown to the lower quarters.

I believe that this was the only time in his life that my father got drunk. Actually, I have never seen him in such a condition, probably because my mother, Rusia, called us drunkards at the simple view of a half-full glass of wine.

Still, I know that the three brothers – and especially Isidor – liked to have from time to time a small glass of schnapps or of vodka, but out of sight of their respective wife... who was certainly aware of that.

David stayed in Hamburg. He is a tall and strong lad, apparently calm and quiet. In 1928, he marries Rachel Hausner and they will have three sons: the eldest Carl Heinz, soon followed by Wolf Joseph, and then the youngest Ely Helmut. They will divorce in the mid-1930s and David will finally come back to Cernauti, his three sons staying in Germany with their mother.

Back into town, David will meet a young woman called Annie, a lot younger than him and whom he knew from before as a child. Calm and quiet as he is, Annie appears quick and chatty, permanently doing something. He is free and available: they will marry and will have a child shortly after WW2, but that child won't survive.

"Opposites attract each other" is the say: many years later, in New York, she will tell me that she was already in love with David when he came to visit the family in Cernauti but wouldn't drop an eye on the forward kid she was at the time.

They were a good couple and I know that David's best years in life, despite all hard times they overcame together, were those he spent with Annie.

Simon's two sisters, Etka and Clara, will have no children. Etka will remain single till after WW2, while the youngest Clara wants to be part of all and everything: this behavior will earn her the nickname "*Das Schleppe*", the little thing you drag behind you; that nickname remained and became sometimes "*Das Schleppzeug*", the contraption you drag behind you, when the person using it had something against her.

In the early thirties, Clara will become a beautiful brunette: permanently cheerful and lively, she will often be asked for. Finally, she will marry an Ukrainian called Titiu (Titus) Worobciuk: a nice guy, not a Jew, but speaking perfectly Yiddish! Clara will nevertheless drop him in Bucharest after the war, and try to start a new life in the West.

After the WW1 trauma, the Lackner parents and the Wagner live again together in the Morariugasse. Leib is seventy at the end of the war; he is worn out and cannot run his business anymore. All Lackner children did leave the family home, except Netti, her youngest sister Shella who is still single, and her brother Kalmann who will become a legal advisor.

Misery and poverty reign as before over the lower parts of the town and mud still covers the streets whenever it rains. But those who decided to stay, happy as they are to have survived the war, fiercely believe in better days ahead. As is often the case in poorer circles, all mothers of the neighborhood, whether Jewish or not, help out each other.

Times are difficult: Joseph David and Netti's meager salaries hardly feed the family. Leib and Regina then decide to let-out the house on top of the stairs, in order to add to the family's income. Together with Shella, they will occupy the small apartments on the yard, while the Wagner and their children will stay in the two rooms of the house on the street: the five children will all sleep in one room, with the two girls head-to-tail in one bed. Everything feels damp inside the house and the toilets are still outside in the yard; winters are harsh and a unique coal stove provides heating. Brother Kalmann moved out already. As for Shella, she is much younger than Netti. Well educated and nice looking, she finds a job in a bank and moves out, leaving her parents alone with the Wagner; but she regularly comes to the Morariugasse to help out with the children. She tries to teach them the piano and plays for them – Rosa will have a deep chagrin when that piano will be sold – and she often takes them out for a walk. It is Shella who offered to Rosa the sole and unique doll of her childhood, a doll she did admire for months in a shop's window.

Joseph David now works as an accountant for a mill owned by three brothers named Trichter. He can often bring home some cornstarch and give the flour to a baker in the neighborhood, who then prepares "*mamaliga malaï*" for them: it's a kind of polenta liven up with some sauce, and the children find it delicious. Instead of butter, too expensive to buy, the chicken fat is collected – chicken bought alive from Ukrainian peasants and killed in a kosher manner by the "*shoykhet*", the ritual slaughterer – and used to make "*shmalts*" that you then spread on a slice of bread. But the family doesn't eat strictly kosher: occasionally, there is some ham at home. And to celebrate a child's birthday, a pocket of father's coat filled with walnuts, is a beautiful present when he comes back home from work...

He is a fine and cultivated man, who considers himself as an intellectual and accepts the secular power. Every evening he reads the local press and holds out his newspaper, declaiming the title "*Das Czernowitzer Morgenblatt*" till one of the children brings him his glasses. A tolerant believer who doesn't often attend the

synagogue apart of important holidays, he makes *Kiddush* at home every Friday night. The children do not attend the “*Heder*”, the religious school: they learn some Hebrew at home with a student, who also teaches a few short prayers to the sole boys. For Kippur, the parents fasten; but father goes first to the *Tempel*, leaving time for mother to prepare “unknowingly” some food for the children. At *Pessah*, the Jewish Easter holiday, a big spring-house-cleaning is done, with all furniture taken out into the yard: Rosa helps as she can and is often angry over her sister Alma who doesn’t want to give a hand.

As for Netti, she is teaching in a boy’s school; but her quickly declining eyesight handicaps her: towards the late 1920s she must give up her professional activity. Concerning religion, she doesn’t practice much and is even more tolerant than her husband, so that the children often confide in her.

The five children believe that their parents are very strict, especially the father, and address them with “*Der Papa*” or “*Die Mama*”. Punishments are never corporal: “*Hold me back, or I’ll be a smash hit!*” yells the father with his belt in his hand, when a child goes too far; Netti then holds him back by the shoulders in an agreed manner, and everything gets back into order.

Despite the difficult times, both parents do their best to have good mood and humor prevail at home. Music is a must and the children like to sing, some being even quite talented: they are taught some German songs, which the whole family then sings in choir. And, when Joseph David gets a bonus from his boss on a holiday’s eve with the formula “*Here’s some money that a wife shouldn’t know of!*”, he quickly gets back home and happily says “*Mother, here’s some money that a wife shouldn’t know of!*”

At home, all members of the family continue to speak German; it’s only quite rarely that a Yiddish word is used. The children attend the public schools, where nationalities are mixed: learning Rumanian there is an obligation and all youngsters communicate in that language outside of home. On the contrary, learning foreign languages is not an obligation at college, but the eldest son Maximilian – called Milo in the family – learns Latin, while Rosa attends the French courses...

Cultural life is very dense in Cernauti, with all kind of events and activities; and despite the resolute “rumanization” imposed by the authorities, it remains deeply impregnated by Austrian culture. The Wagner children often spare pennywise their money in order to go to some theater play in German, or to listen to concerts on Sunday mornings, standing at the top of the gods. And they often spend their afternoons during the week at the *Akademische Lesehalle*, the public library of a Jewish association where the great majority of the works is in German.

In 1925, King Ferdinand 1st of Rumania forces his eldest son Carol to chose between the throne and his mistress Helena (called Magda) Lupescu. She comes from a Jewish family named Wolf – translated Lupescu into Rumanian – and divorced a lieutenant of the Rumanian army. Carol decides to give up the throne in favor of his son Michel, who is just four years old, and leaves for abroad with Magda.

Two years later, Ferdinand 1st dies and Michel is declared king with a regency commission. But, meanwhile, the fact that the crown prince preferred to give up the throne for his love affair with a Jewish woman fueled all conversation in the country. In Bukovina, only a few Jews understood that first alarm signal.

In spite of the difficult life conditions and of the xenophobic and anti-Semitic social environment of the “rumanization”, the Wagner family doesn’t even consider emigration. They obtained the Rumanian nationality in 1920 and they do believe, like many Czernowitzer at the time, that the presence of their community with “nationalistic activities” will gently lead the Rumanian one to acknowledge and admit that they are part of the society. The three main minorities of the province – i.e. the Ukrainian, the Jewish and the German ones – do regularly co-operate in order to withstand the always-increasing hold of the “rumanization”: this co-operation will last till 1933.

Still, a local event, the repercussion of which went national, should have opened the family’s eyes.

In June 1926, some xenophobic and anti-Semitic examiners to the high school diploma do systematically fail candidates of national minorities at Gymnasium L3: out of 106 candidates, 94 are Jewish and 92 are declared to have failed. The youngster protest at the entrance of the high school; one of them, David Falik, goes after a professor known for his extremist opinions. The professor puts up a complaint, declaring that this verbal aggression is “an insult towards all Rumanian people”: about ten Jewish students are arrested.

An intense emotion reigns at Wagner’s home, the more so because this is the school that all three boys attended; and the youngest, Edi who is just sixteen, is still going there.

Follows the trial: on 10th of November 1926, the sentence day, a Rumanian pupil of last grade coming from Iasi in the old Regat, shoots three times at touching distance on David Falik. The victim collapses seriously injured, and dies two days later at the Jewish hospital. On the day of his burial, all Jewish storekeepers, workmen and craftsmen close their shop: a crowd of 25,000 people follows the procession till the cemetery.

The murderer’s trial takes place in Campulung in February 1926. Professor Cuza, leader of the Christian National Defense League – one of the most violent fascist parties in Rumania, a fraction of which will later become the famous “Iron Guard” – comes and testifies personally at the trial. The defendant’s lawyer is a member of the Rumanian Parliament; he does not hesitate to call him “a martyr and a hero” And, finally, he is declared “non-guilty” and carried in triumph at the outcome of the trial. Next day, the Minister of Interior in person, Octavian Goga, describes him in his turn as a “national hero”!

Implications of this event reach far beyond the borders of the sole Bukovina. Today, eighty years later in our western world, we wonder why the Wagner parents didn’t understand the full meaning of this alarm signal. Joseph David and Netti probably still believed that the Rumanian society would finally accept their integration, as it was the case fifty years earlier, at the time of Bukovina’s Golden Age, when they were Austrian subjects of mixed Jewish and Austrian culture.

The three Wagner boys think differently than their parents. The eldest, Maximilian, adheres to Zionist ideas and has already founded a group called *He-Haver*, the

friends: with the help of some, he restructures it into an effective Zionist and sportive youth movement, and finally gets it to join the major *Gordonia* organization in 1927. Of course, he does his best to also involve his two brothers; but the youngest, Edi, will later get closer to the *Bund*, the Jewish Social-Democratic Party, and still meet with his Zionist friends for some time.

The parents find it difficult to get used to these ideas. However, confronted with the Rumanian hassle, they cannot but accept that their children join a youth organization where they do sports, attend conferences, participate in excursions and outings, and have fun with young people of their age. The girls follow their brothers without conviction: Rosa is even allowed to do gymnastics with the *Gordonia* at the *Makkabiplatz* stadium, while Alma, the youngest, prefers to stay apart: she will also do gymnastics, but at the *Yaskoplatz* stadium, where she would meet more non-Jewish than Jewish youngsters.

Among the children, Rosa is the father's favorite. She has become a beautiful bit of a girl and distinguished herself as first gymnast on a podium, facing all other youngsters who must follow her movements. The other children often call her "*Den Papas!*", Daddy's one! This does not mean she can do all she wants, on the contrary: once, at the age of seventeen, she insists on participating with some friends to a two-days group excursion at a Zionist farm preparing the youngsters for their "*Aliyah*", their "Way Up" to Palestine. As they are meant to stay there overnight, Joseph David refuses: she cries and implores in vain, nothing would help! Similarly, he doesn't like to see young men taking his daughter home when she comes back in the evening with her bike from the *Makkabiplatz*.

As a graduate from high school, she would have liked to go on studying and become a doctor or a foreign language teacher. But, now that Netti cannot work anymore, the family does not have the means to cover such cost. She gets a job at the Trichter Mill where her father is employed. At first she is at the card index; later she is entrusted with the key of a safe at the sales department: still quite young and naïve, she sleeps for weeks holding the key tight and close to herself, and even refuses overnight excursions. And, being a good girl, she gives all of her salary to the parents, except of one time when she buys for herself an umbrella and a pair of stockings...

Grandpa Leib Lackner dies on 10th of May 1926 at the age of seventy-eight: at the Archives, a comment in the death-register states "*marasmus senilis*" in Rumanian, senile drowsiness! His wife Regina follows him two years later, on 12th June 1928, at the age of seventy-four.

These two deaths change the order for the house in the Morariugasse. What is more, Netti's sister Berta dies in 1929, and her other sister Shella marries her brother-in-law – who's also her uncle – David Picker; the new wed decide to move to Vienna. As a result, out of the nine Lackner children, only Netti and Kalmann are still residing in Cernauti: all others preferred to keep the Austrian citizenship and live in Vienna.

The house in the Morariugasse is the only remaining family property in Bukovina: in the past, all Lackner children had agreed that Netti and her husband and children could live there together with her parents. All had also agreed to proceed with the transfer of Leib's 50 percent after his death. But Regina's inheritance appears more complex after Berta's death and leads to arduous discussions among the heirs.

The Wagner decide that Netti will pay a visit to Vienna and try to solve the problem; and, given her eyesight handicap, Rosa will accompany her. Discovering this big city, which is still a capital but not anymore that of an empire, and to which the whole family is strongly attached, represents a major event for the young provincial: she will talk about it for long. In addition, as well on the outward journey as on the trip back, the train stops for over an hour in Stanislau, which is now in Poland. All members of Joseph David's family come to the railway station to meet Netti and Rosa: gifts are exchanged they greet each other and cry...

Some of the heirs would prefer to sell the Morariugasse house. But, finally, at the outcome of a complex restructuring in September 1930, everyone keeps a share in the house: it gets divided into 360 parts, the shares attributed to each one being quite unequal! And, most important, the Wagner may go on residing there, although Netti owns now only 13.61 percent.

Chapter 6

The 1930s

In June 1930, Carol of Rumania, who divorced two years earlier, comes back on his renunciation to the throne. Although still with Magda Lupescu – they will only marry in exile after WW2 – he is proclaimed King under the name Carol II. His son Michel is now aged nine and becomes again Crown Prince. The Bukovina Jews are delighted that the King's love affair is still ongoing with his Jewish mistress. But in December of that same year, fascist militants of the Iron Guard assassinate the Prime Minister appointed by Carol II.

The Wagner boys have grown up.

The eldest, Maximilian, is now married with a certain Regina Rosner⁶, whom he will divorce six years later. His brother Ignatz plays the dandy and spends most of his time on the *Herrengasse*, the main street downtown. As for Edi, he got trained as an optician and is a cheerful young man, whose charisma the *Gordonia* leaders couldn't but notice. They try to convince him to do his "Aliyah".

Edi is twenty-one when he goes on a trip to Palestine with some friends from the youth movement. They visit various achievements already operational and tour cities like Jerusalem, Jaffa and Beirut.

But, back to Cernauti, Edi resists the Zionist sirens: although still participating at the *Gordonia*, he is attracted by the *Bund* ideas and attends some of their meetings. There, he rubs shoulders with young workers of various origins, Jewish as well as German, Ukrainian or Rumanian; he becomes friend with some of them, among whom Simon Rosner: they knew already from the *Gordonia* and are of same age.

All Wagner children are now adult and they frequently invite their friends at home: that's how Simon gets to know Rosa, who is called "Rusia"⁷ for the rest of her life by all close friends.

Simon is left-handed, like Rusia, but both write with their right hand, a sign of the restricting educational system at the time. He is quite talented in his furrier job, as well technically as in terms of creativity, but he is unable to assert himself, so that his employer still keeps him at the grade of apprentice.

He is a quiet and serious young man, probably a bit slow and shy, tempering with his presence Edi's enthusiasm: the Wagner parents trust him and finally, when he starts to courtship Rusia, they do not see this in an unfavorable light. She is two years older than him and keeps her hair in long braided plaits, thus emphasizing her look as a young girl. It is only many years later, already in France, that she will cut her plaits and store them preciously in a box.

From then on, Simon enters Rusia's group of friends: he participates to their excursions and cultural outings, to their sportive activities – he is good at the vaulting horse – and does his best to get her to notice him. More a manual than an intellectual, he has some difficulties to express his feelings with words. By the end of 1931, he builds an Eiffel Tower – a sign of premonition? – made of thin plywood: it is 1.5 meter high, has the name Rosner inserted in the structure, and will be

⁶ There is not any known family connection between her parents and the Rosner from Wiznitz

⁷ Pronounced *Ruzha*

exhibited for a whole year in a Cernauti downtown shop's window. A nice illustration of the fame France enjoys in Eastern Europe.

The round and black frame of Simon's glasses irresistibly reminds of Harold Lloyd, that American silent-movies actor, whose character of a big clumsy boy is permanently and unconsciously running towards staggering adventures... It is certainly at that time that he got the nickname Bumerl⁸: Rusia, as well as all his friends, will call him by that nickname till the end of his life. In ancient Viennese, "Bummerl" stands for a puppy easy to fool; whereas, in informal German, it means a stroller or a slowpoke.

As for Rusia, he calls her Mäderl, little girl, nickname that he will sole be allowed to use all their life long.

More than ever, the German language is densely present in the cultural life of Czernowitz throughout the 1930s; it is even probably much stronger than what it would have been in the absence of any "rumanization" pressure. Beyond the local publications, the German and Austrian press is also regularly available in the shops: everyone mastering the language can easily keep himself aloof about the happenings in the world and, especially, in Western Europe. Conferences and theatre plays are given in German, young people write poetry in that language and the Hollywood movies are dubbed in German in all movie theatres of the city.

Czernowitz has already its celebrities during those years, like the tenor Joseph Schmidt, of whom the Jewish community is particularly proud. He was born in Bukovina in 1904 and first acted as a cantor at the Tempel, the famous downtown synagogue. From 1929 on, he starts a lightning career as a singer, in spite of his small height (1.59 m): at first as an opera interpreter at the radio in Berlin, thereafter as an actor in a few movies, the most famous one being the 1933 "Ein Lied geht um die Welt", a song goes round the world. And, when he tours the USA in 1937, the American public nicknames him "the Pocket Caruso".

After a brief visit to Czernowitz to see his mother in 1939, he is in France and Belgium at the beginning of WW2; he then tries in vain to board onto a ship in Marseille leaving for the USA, and finally die in November 1942 in Switzerland, where he is interned in a refugee camp.

Other celebrities in German language will appear after the war, the most famous one being Paul Celan, whose real name was Paul Pessah Antschel. Born in Czernowitz in 1920 from a Jewish assimilated family, he will become the greatest lyrical poet of the century in German language.

During the war, Paul Celan gets interned in a Rumanian labor camp. It is only after the war, as he is working in Bucharest as a translator – he perfectly mastered many languages – that he publishes his first poems in German. In 1948, he settles in Paris, works there again as a translator in a big publishing company, and still writes in German. It is in 1959 that he writes the famous say a propos Bukovina and Czernowitz, stating that this was "a region where people and books lived". And, starting of same year, he becomes a Teaching Assistant at the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

In 1970, he commits suicide by jumping into the Seine River.

⁸ Pronounced Boomerl

The town of Chernivtsi paid him tribute by erecting his bust made of black stone – possibly a reference to his poem "Schwarze Milch", black milk – in front of the house where he lived as a child. More recently, it also organized an international poetry festival, during which Paul Celan, Rosa Ausländer, Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger and other Czernowitz children were celebrated.

The Bukovina Jews still feel very close to Austria and follow all political developments in Vienna and Berlin. In 1932, Engelbert Dollfus becomes Chancellor of the Austrian Republic; and, by end of January 1933, Adolf Hitler is Chancellor of the German Reich.

After the Reichstag's arson in Berlin, Dollfus worries about the designs of that new power in the neighboring country; he openly considers that Austria "has become the refuge of the German civilization (meaning culture), since Germany has been taken over by barbarians".

The Nazis create troubles and unrest, degrading rapidly the situation in Vienna: on 25th July 1934, Hitler organizes Dollfus' assassination. The troubles persist, despite the efforts of the new Austrian Chancellor, who also wants to preserve the independence of his country from the German Nazi designs.

These events do not really disturb Simon's and Rusia's idyll, happy as they are to be together: they ideally understand each other and ingeniously believe that they will be able to manage their life far away and sheltered from the furies and crises of the world around them.

On a beautiful winter day of February 14th 1934, they have their civil wedding. Still, oddly enough, they stay with their parents till the religious wedding, which takes only place six weeks later in presence of the Great Rabbi of Czernowitz, Abraham Jacob Mark.

This delay often puzzled me, but I never got a clear answer to my questions. I do not believe that their parents caused it: for example, two days after the civil wedding, Netti transfers to Rusia, with a deed drawn up by a notary, all of her parts in the Morariugasse House. The delay is probably due to purely practical reasons: the Great Rabbi is not available before that date, while the new wed do not have a home of their own and are preparing everything for their move to Bucharest in a very near future. Actually, they are fed-up with the schizophrenic atmosphere in Czernowitz and believe that their integration will be easier if they make the choice of Rumania.

So, shortly after the religious wedding, Simon and Rusia leave Bukovina to try their luck in Rumania's capital: Simon got a job in Bucharest, this time as a qualified furrier. Good as he is in his work, he is quickly entrusted with orders for the royal family, which he perfectly carries out. In particular, the making of a mink stole for King Carol II earns him to be part of a group of people invited to the palace, with the special privilege of sharing a meal with the King: he is strongly impressed by the etiquette and the ceremonial of the service at the table, and will tell about it for long. As for Rusia, she is employed in an accounting department and participates to the income of the couple, which allows them to settle correctly in their new home.

But, like in all big cities, life in Bucharest is by far more anonymous than the one they were used to in Czernowitz. They nevertheless manage, busy as they are loving each other and working their social way up in an adverse environment. Of course, they occasionally miss the presence of their relatives and the warm atmosphere of

the Czernowitzer group of friends: whenever they can, they spend some short vacation there and invite them in return to Bucharest.

In Czernowitz, Maximilian divorces Regina Rosner in February 1936. As for Alma, the last-born, she goes out with Samuel Weissmann and marries him same year. Shortly after her wedding, she pays a visit to Rusia in Bucharest. For the young provincial that she still is, this is a special event: on the back of a picture of the two sisters taken on a street in the capital, Alma writes by hand in inverted commas "*Der Besuch*", The Visit! Actually, the contrast is striking between her and the resident of the big city: Rusia has changed!

Simon and Rusia will stay in Bucharest till 1939, till the German troops invade Poland. But a dramatic event, early August 1936, will harshly bring them back to reality: Edi Wagner's assassination in Cernauti by the Rumanian fascist police.

Chapter 7

Edi Wagner: A thunder before storm

As he returns from Palestine, Edi Wagner is a young man just over twenty-one. Everybody in the family loves music – some are even quite talented, like Edi and Alma – but none had ever an opportunity to study it methodically.

Meanwhile, the Nazi ideology has further progressed in town and, during Pessah 1933, a few groups of extremists and anti-Semites rush through the lower part of the city: they plunder and devastate over three hundred shops in the Jewish quarter.

Discussions at home become more vehement: Edi is convinced that young people of different communities – or “nationalities” – can understand each other: you just have to show them all those good things they have in common, and they will get together, no matter what limitations the ruling society is imposing on them.

Edi decides he must do something. Early 1934, he organizes a folkloric ensemble with young people of all nationalities: Jews, of course, but also Germans, Ukrainians, Rumanians, etc. Their number will grow and, towards the end, they will be over one hundred. They sing and dance and play balalaika and other string instruments. Edi himself plays the guitar and the balalaika by heart, but he knows that this is not enough for the quality of their concerts: he therefore asks a violin of the philharmonic orchestra to help them tune up at the start of each performance. Simon Rosner is also present and plays but, being the only left-hander in the group, he must always sit at the far right-end, so as not to hinder the other musicians.

For their first concert in Cernauti, seats are sold-out – possibly with the help of the *Bund* – but even more people come. Some policemen of the *Siguranta*, the political police, dressed as civilians, are also there in order to watch how this new group will behave. Of course, they soon feel outnumbered and call for reinforcement – but this can never arrive in time. And, when the choir starts to sing the “*International*” with a red flag in the back of the stage, everybody rise in the audience. The *Siguranta*-men cannot but rise as well and stay there till the end – the story doesn’t say whether they appreciate the purely folkloric part of the show.

Next morning, all theatre owners in Cernauti are informed that they are not allowed to lease their halls to Edi’s ensemble for any reason whatsoever. Never mind, says Edi, they will give their next show in Sadagura. But, a few days later, when they arrive in this town, the restraint is also applicable there. Creative like a true “born leader”, Edi decides they will walk back and perform on the road till Cernauti: songs, music and dancing all along the ten and more kilometers. As they pass through villages, inhabitants rush out of their homes; they participate, applaud and follow the ensemble till the capital. It’s a second success for the group.

For the third concert, it is still impossible to lease a theatre in Cernauti. Creative again, Edi organizes the construction of a stage in open air: a few planks will do,

assembled and fixed on top of some big barrels displayed on the street! A large crowd gathers before the *Siguranta* can intervene... and the show starts: another successful provocation, which further irritates the authorities.

The fourth concert takes place in the South, beyond Bukowina's border, in a town of the old "Regat". Like for the first concert, the local authorities have no idea of the context and do not take any preventive measure. All notabilities and important civil servants are invited... and they come. When the first notes of the "*International*" do resound through the hall, everybody rise, including the mayor who cannot but follow the movement...

I often wondered whether Edi Wagner was a true communist. Although my mother Rusia considered him as such – she had very superficial notions in politics – I don't believe so. He was certainly in favor of the socialist ideals that influenced so many young people in the thirties. But his own ideas were quite simpler and closer to the individuals: he was not acting in respect of the economic class-fight, but tried naively to induce some mutual understanding and come-together of the individuals from the different nationalities in Bukovina.

It's on 26th of April 2004, the very day of his 90th birthday, that I finally met in Chernivtsi an authentic member of Edi's ensemble: Johann Schlamp, a German born in Bukovina, who used to be a carpenter in his time. He had only a few friends among the German community, because most of them had turned to Hitler's national socialism. On the contrary, he had many friends among the Jews, because their cultural life, with literature, music and theatre, was so appealing on him.

Johann Schlamp meets Edi in 1934 and soon becomes a member of the ensemble as a singer and guitarist. He is four years younger than Edi and likes immediately his personality: Edi is a cheerful and friendly young lad, with a bright smile at which girls cannot resist "And, myself, I was also good looking at that time!" he adds. He confirms the happening of the first four concerts and explains that, thereafter, the ensemble performed in a few other towns in Bukovina, as well as in Cernauti. In Radautz, for example, two fascist groups tried in vain to interrupt the concert and threw stones at them. The concerts lasted well over the usual two hours, "rather four hours" with the requests for additional plays, and they often ended towards 1:00 am.

Anti-Semitic and violent actions of the Iron Guard and Siguranta worsen in the summer 1936: gangs of fascist students aggress Jewish people on the streets; the Jewish press from the West gets burned as soon as it arrives in the city; young Jewish workers take their turn to guard round the clock the Morgenroït, the House of Jewish Culture; fascist groups deny any access for Jews to all gardens in town: it's mainly the Volksgarten they are aiming at.

Edi is worried. The ensemble gave its last performance in April at the Scala, the House of Culture related to the *Bund*. Outside, the "hunt for Jews" has increased and it often degenerates into fights. Edi tries to organize a group of young people, whose task will be to intervene and protect the Jews from the fascists.

On 4th of August 1936, a few young Jews sit on a bench in the *Volksgarten* and read newspapers. Comes a group of Rumanian fascists who insult them. The verbal aggression soon degenerates into fight and the leader of the fascists, a student in theology, is stabbed into the heart and dies.

Edi isn't present, nor is Johann Schlamp: they did meet near the *Tempel* and have spent the afternoon together in town. Later, Johann accompanies Edi back to the *Morariugasse* and goes home as well.

On the same evening, thirty young people from the Bund are arrested; they are taken to the police headquarter and brutally questioned. At dawn, the *Siguranta* storms into the Wagner's home. They take Edi, search the house and find his address book. Soon thereafter, they do the same at Johann's home.

Edi, considered as the leader of the fight group, is bound into ropes, tortured – they tear-out his nails – and beaten near to death. In the evening, as they cannot make him talk and acknowledge “his crimes”, they throw him out of the highest window of the police headquarters. Later, in an attempt to save face, the police will pretend he tried to take his life and ran himself through the window.

No one is allowed to see him, except his mother. In his pockets she finds a note with the inscription “*Wagner judän mortratur!*” Wagner, a Yid, shall die!

Brought to the Jewish hospital in town, he dies next morning 6th of August 1936: he was not yet twenty-six years old.

The family is not allowed to organize a public ceremony for his burial: this has to take place same night at the Jewish cemetery and in presence of his parents only.

Most of the other young people are soon released without any charge: the police fears possible local consequences of its acts. But Johann is taken to court near Bucarest: he is accused of “*having brought shame on Rumania because of his Jewish frequentation*”! Finally, he is condemned to spend one year in prison and to pay a 10.000 Lei fine.

One year later, according to tradition, the family arranges for a tombstone on Edi's grave. As his father, and thus himself, are members of the *Kohanim*/Cohen caste, the sign of two open hands in a protective and blessing position appears on top of it; and, under the usual Hebrew inscription, his mother Netti wants a few words to be written in German:

***Besucht mich oft an meinem Grabe
Doch wecket mich nicht auf
Bedenkt was ich gelitten habe
In meinem kurzen Lebenslauf.***

***(Come often to my grave, but do not wake me up:
just think of what I suffered in that short life of mine)***

In May 1966, almost thirty years after these events, the city of Chernovtsy – at the height of the communist regime – organized an exhibition in memory of Edi Wagner “who died as a hero and martyr in the fight against fascism” My mother Rusia was officially invited.

I was working at that time in Marseille and I still remember the emotion in her voice when she called from Paris and told me about it on the phone. She went to Chernovtsy, but never again did she mention anything about this trip: all I have is a very bad group picture, taken at the cemetery next to Edi's grave.

Since then, a plate covering the “Kohanim sign” has been added locally. It says:

***“A member of the underground revolutionary movement in Bukovina,
Tortured to death by the Siguranta on 7th August 1936”***

I prefer to keep in mind the image of the happy and charming young man, as well as the memory of what he represented for his friends.

I owe a big part of this story to a woman called Evgenia Finkel, whom I met in Chernivtsi in September 2003: she was by then already ninety-two, but still clear and sharp. Although she never met Edi Wagner during his lifetime, she was probably the person who knew that story best. She came for the first time to Cernauti late August 1936, having been sent there by the Bucharest Communist Party in order to investigate about the happenings in this town. Apparently, she holds many testimonies signed by members of the ensemble.

Johann Schlamp confirmed most of Evgenia Finkel's story. He is clearly a fan of Edi Wagner, but also of Josef Schmidt: his archives are full with pictures, articles and other documents about those two figures of Czernowitz, so different and popular at their time, but both forgotten by now. He would like the city to name some streets after them...

When we met in April 2004, he was still quite excited about the movie "*Dieses Jahr in Czernowitz*" that the German moviemaker Volker Koepp shot there six months earlier: Johann, but also my cousin Edy Weissmann and his wife Gabriele, as well as the actor Harvey Keitel appear among others in the movie. Let me tell that I do not agree with the image this movie gives of Czernowitz and Czernowitzers: I believe that this city was much more than that!

Chapter 8

From Hell and Nightmare

After the terrible episode of Edi Wagner's death, Simon and Rusia return to Bucharest: they will stay there for three more years.

Their illusions have gone, but they still hope that King Carol II – whose love affair with Magda Lupescu is widely known – will be able to control the anti-Semitic maneuvers of the extreme-right. A hope that will suffer ups and downs in this particularly hectic and strained period. And, like many, they cannot believe that these are the premises of an upcoming war.

Actually, the King wants to counter the rise in power of Corneliu Codreanu, the founder of the Archangel Michel Legion, which has become the Iron Guard. He maneuvers, with the objective to gain back full power for himself, even if he has to beat the said extremists on their own grounds.

By end of December 1937, Carol II appoints Octavian Goga Prime Minister, although the latter's party got only 9 % of votes in the recent elections with a program quite similar to that of the Iron Guard. This Government holds only six weeks, but time enough nevertheless to implement a new and strongly anti-Semitic legislation: on 21st January 1938, a decree signed by Carol II and by Goga, starts a review-process of the Rumanian citizenship granted to Jews. About 500,000 Jews are concerned, principally those from the territories acquired after WW1, out of a total of 700 to 800,000 Jews living in Rumania. The avowed objective is their expulsion from the country, simply defined as a "massive emigration" in order to solve the "Jewish issue" in Rumania.

Three weeks later, the King believes his time has come: on 10th February, he replaces Goga with the patriarch Miron Cristea. Then, still in February, he dissolves the Parliament and gets for himself dictatorial powers in accordance with a new constitution and a single-party regime.

In the West, Hitler proclaims in Linz the "Anschluss" of Austria on Sunday 13th March 1938.

Simon and Rusia, who gained back some hope with the February events, are totally dismayed, like most Bukovinian.

Again a weak hope in April, when the King has Codreanu and some leaders of the Iron Guard arrested. A few months later, he will even visit Paris and London, looking for some economical and military help for his country...

On the evening of 9th November 1938, the "Crystal Night" hits all over Germany: on next day, this event sounds like terrible news for the Jews worldwide!

A precarious lull persists in Bucharest. Hope will then increase again by the end of the month, with the news of Codreanu's and some Iron Guard leader's deaths – in fact, they have been murdered by order of the King during a prison transfer.

In reality, the King, who didn't get any support from the western powers, has turned towards Germany. Nevertheless, he still tries to evade the issue. In March 1939, he appoints a new Prime Minister. But, six months later, Germany invades Poland and, on next day, France and the United Kingdom declare war to Germany.

In Bucharest, the Prime Minister is assassinated. During the last quarter of the year, Carol II appoints successively three Prime Ministers, among whom a General who will only hold for eight days.

Still in Bucharest by end of September, Simon and Rusia decide to definitively return to Czernowitz. Their decision is not based on a simple comparison between the existing latent risks in the two cities: the situation of the Jews has worsened in the whole country, including the capital where their number is quite limited; then, on the other hand, Czernowitz is only at a rough fifty kilometers from the Polish border. They are trapped in Rumania and therefore prefer to return to their families and friends, and to the provincial capital that they know so well and where there is still a big number of Jews.

In spring 1940, they are back and live with the Wagner and the Weissmann in the Morariugasse house.

There is a smell of war in the air and many are scared: here we have the Rumanian, of course, and we should also fear the German after Poland's invasion. But it is the Red Army that will suddenly enter Bukovina in June 1940.

On 26th June 1940, in accordance with the secret paragraphs of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, the USSR addresses an ultimatum to Rumania, claiming the return of Bessarabia and North-Bukovina. King Carol II gives-in and two days later, on 28th June 1940, the Soviet troops are in Czernowitz, quickly renamed as Chernovtsy.

Many incidents occur on the countryside and in the villages – but not in Czernowitz – during the withdrawal of the humiliated Rumanian troops: massacres of Jews take place, because they are "obviously responsible for the situation"!

The Red Army

The Russian soldiers marching into Chernovtsy wear white trousers and gym-shoes. Part of the population welcomes them cheerfully: they believe that this is the end of their painful life under the nationalistic Rumanian rule. Another part leaves for Bucharest or elsewhere, as long as it is possible to go. But the big majority of the Jewish population, plus all those who do not have the means to leave, remain in town, although they fear the Stalinist order.

Very soon, all members of the German community are "strongly invited" by their organization to immigrate to the German Reich: special passes, in German and in Russian, are delivered, certifying that the bearer belongs to

that community and requesting the Russian troops to protect this person and his or her assets. In total, between 27th September and 14th November 1940, about 44,600 members of the German community, on board of 44 special trains, leave North-Bukovina towards Germany.

A communist society gets into place: all banks, pharmacies, factories, bigger private companies, printing workshops, etc. are nationalized, and their owners arrested and deported to Siberia. Same treatment applies for leading civil servants, big landlords, etc. And you had better not pass on a street next to a lorry being loaded with deportees: if the maximum number of "passengers" is not reached, every passer-by might be forced to embark as well!

The Russian buy everything they can get hold of and food is getting scarce, queues appear in front of the shops, many flats and houses are vacant...

The Wagner, Rosner and Weissmann are still in the *Morariugasse*. They are small people with little means and certainly not at ease in this house: nobody bothers them. In addition, Edi Wagner's story, and the fact that Simon's youngest sister Clara is married to an Ukrainian, possibly contribute to the fact that they are left in peace. On the other hand, Samuel Weissmann's businesses on the black market are quite risky; but already at that time, Alma and Samuel profit alone from that business and cry misery.

Simon speaks some Russian: he is appointed responsible for a block of houses, although he didn't apply for the job. In fact, these are a few houses in the *Strada Brancoveanu* – the former *Liliengasse* – where a small room is attributed to him and Rusia.

The family survives day after day, selling some goods from time to time, a blanket, a watch, a carpet, in order to buy some food or some coal in the winter. Whether you queue at a shop or try it on the black market, you have to be there at the right time and on the right spot, if you want to find something to buy...

The Soviet occupation of Bukovina lasts one year, till Hitler reneges the pact with Stalin and launches operation Barbarossa on 22nd June 1941.

Before it leaves, the Red Army enrolls by force 3,000 young men from the city, among whom Simon and his elder brother David: this probably saved their life.

Sixty-two years later, I met with the Yiddish writer Joseph Burg, who got enrolled as well. Here is how he pictures the event "Things were quite simple: you were ordered to come and so you did. Otherwise, they would come and fetch you: either you accepted and got enrolled – then you were given a uniform and a gun, but no cartridges – or you didn't and were immediately arrested and, at best, deported to Siberia"...

Among the archives left over by my parents, I found a few words scribbled by Simon on a notebook.

On June 23rd 1941, together with many others, Simon is called to the *Residence* and gets enrolled. They all spend the night there and, next morning, are taken to the former nuns' convent in front of the *Volksgarten*. He wants to inform Rusia, who is pregnant; he wants to tell her where he is and that they all hope to stay in Czernowitz. But it is difficult to get out, except for a very short permission, and they

live too far. He knows many young men who are like him in the convent and, finally, he is able to send a short note to Rusia with one of them.

Next day, 25th of June, he writes again to her:

“Yesterday I could quickly inform mother and she will certainly come and tell you where I am: just after the barracks in the Siebenbürgerstrasse in front of the Volksgarten. Maybe you can come today and, if I’m not allowed to go out, I will see you from the window... Also, I forgot to tell you that the rent will be lower now that you are alone: 40 kopeks/sqm and only 3.35 instead of 6.75 for the water; don’t let H. fool you, go and see K. at 25 Rathausstrasse, and if R. isn’t present, try to see S. My Mäderl, be strong and always remember your promise... Pah, my Dear, and take good care of yourself, I want to retrieve you in good health!”

Later same day, Simon is embarked with many others in a train leaving northeast, behind the front.

The electric plant of the city is destroyed and the main bridge over the Pruth River blown up. Early July, the last soviet forces leave Czernowitz without fighting. Communists, students, civil servants and many opportunists having good reasons to fear for their life, use the opportunity and flee.

On 1st of July, in midst of a general panic, Rusia’s sister Alma and her husband Samuel flee as well, leaving Rusia, her parents and her brother Ignatz in the house of the Morariugasse.

Follow a few peaceful days. The remaining inhabitants wait and stay in their homes: Czernowitz is a ghost town, holding its breath. Not a single radio in town: all were taken and destroyed by the Russian a few days earlier.

The Rumanian

During the twelve months of the Soviet occupation of Bukovina, the situation in Rumania had changed drastically.

At first, by late August 1940, Rumania had also to give up the northern part of Transylvania for the benefit of Hungary. A week later, General Ion Antonescu had taken over power: King Carol II did abdicate once more in favor of his son Michel – who is now nineteen and whom the people call “Regile Mihai”, the little King Michel – and left Rumania with Magda Lupescu. General Antonescu did then endorse the title “Conducator”, which is the Rumanian translation of “Führer”, and the ethnic cleansing of the country is part of his program: verbal and physical acts of violence are all over the place. But, most important, Rumania did subscribe on 23rd November 1940 to the tripartite pact between Germany, Italy and Japan.

On the eve of operation Barbarossa, nobody knew that, as soon as 11th June 1941 in Berlin, General Antonescu and his deputy Mihai Antonescu (no family connection between them) had been informed about it by Hitler and Goering themselves; nor was anyone aware that they had been offered to participate with the Rumanian army.

Rumanian troops arrive in Czernowitz together with some German SS units, under command of Generalmajor Ohlendorf. They immediately start the massacre: in the single night of 5th to 6th July, 2 000 victims are killed. The

Rumanian soldiers, with the help of German patrols, Rumanian gendarmes and fanatic civilians, block the streets, drag the occupants out of the houses, kill them on the spot or take the men away to different places, and finally bring them to the banks of the Pruth River, where they are slaughtered and left in common trenchers.

Rusia is eight months pregnant.

The *Morariugasse*, a long street, is blocked with lorries at its ends; there are machine guns. A soldier in front of the house, a German, yells repeatedly ***“All men outside! In line per three!”***

Rusia gets out of the house: the street is crowded, her father and her brother are there already, as well as some neighbors. Soldiers shout ***“An die Arbeit! An die Arbeit!”*** She tries to intervene: ***“But look, my father is old, he cannot do this work!”*** They answer that they take them up to seventy. Her brother Ignatz tries to reassure her: she shall put up the chessboard, so they will play a game tonight when he is back.

Her mother Netti is out as well, but she is almost blind. Her father Joseph David understands what is happening to them. He turns to his wife and tells her: ***“If Rusia has a boy, let him have my name!”*** He knows they are going to die...

They are dragged away.

For months, Netti will believe that her husband is still alive in a labor camp and she will not tell Rusia about his last wish.

Joseph David was sixty-eight and Ignatz thirty-four.

Hundreds of Jews, considered as leaders and intellectuals, are arrested that same day, together with the Great Rabbi Abraham Jacob Mark. They are taken to the Rumanian House on the Ringplatz, brutally questioned and tortured for two days. The Great Rabbi is pushed on a terrace: he shall see how German Nazis put the Tempel on fire with grenades. In order to be sure, soldiers also pour gasoline close to the tabernacle: the sixty-three rolls of the Torah, those that the Greek Archbishop of Bukovina had saved during WW1, do burn and disappear for ever.

Finally, all prisoners are dragged into some woods, not far from the River. There, they must dig a ditch that will be their common grave. They are assassinated on 9th July 1941.

On 30th July 1941, a Rumanian military order imposes the yellow star and a curfew from 20:00 pm to 06:00 am, for all Jews.

The Rumanian are not as well prepared and organized as the German, but their drive for efficiency, combined with the popular anti-Semitic policy of the government, finally led to one of the most cruel chapters of the Holocaust. While the German practiced impersonal and bureaucratic killing, in form of an industrial massacre, the Rumanian performed their Holocaust like a traditional craftwork business⁹.

Countless mass killings occur in towns and villages of Bukovina, but also elsewhere in the Kingdom and in the newly conquered (“liberated”) territories. These massacres are due to Rumanian soldiers and gendarmes,

⁹ “La Roumanie et la Shoah” by Radu Ionaïd, published by MSH in Paris, page 222.

sometimes with the help of Rumanian and Ukrainian peasants, who even episodically anticipate them. The most famous ones are: the pogrom of Jassy, with over 13,000 dead – it was programmed before the start of operation Barbarossa and occurred in June 1941; the massacres of Odessa by end of October same year, with over 35,000 people hanged, shot or burned alive; the ghettos of Golta, a month later, with 70,000 victims; etc.

In addition to these killings, come the slaughters at the transit- and labor camps; plus those of the "trains of death" and mass deportations on way-and-back transports in sealed cattle wagons or by foot on potholed roads. All of these amidst cold and despair, without any food nor water...

All orders of the Conducator and his close advisers, as well as those from the upper military hierarchy, are given verbally or per telephone, never in writing, so as not to leave any trace. And the general explanation given for such treatment being applied to the Jews and Gypsies is that they deserve it as a "sanction for their offenses to the Rumanian people's pride"!

Of course, the victims do not know the actual extent of what is happening: they just see and feel their own suffering and that of the unfortunates close to them.

Comes the ninth month of pregnancy.

Confusion, disorder and fear reign in the town. On 18th August 1941, Rusia is at the Jewish hospital; she lost the waters and is walking up and down a corridor with the help of a friend. People yell and run outside, heels hit the pavement, orders are barked and shots are fired...

I was born that very day around 19:00 pm, still enveloped in the placental pouch: my mother Rusia, who was a bit superstitious like many, told me much later that this was a sign of luck.

The Ghetto

On the evening of October 9th 1941, two infantry regiments surround Czernowitz. The news spreads like fire.

The Mayor Traian Popovici is called to the office of the military governor, and informed that (the from now-on called) Marshal Antonescu has decreed the mass deportation of Cernauti's Jews. He tries a few arguments to oppose, so does General Vasile Ionescu, but in vain. Back in his office, the Mayor faces floods of questions by the Jewish leaders of the town, but he is unable to give any reassuring answer.

Two days later, on October 11th, posters announce that a ghetto is established within a perimeter defined by a few streets in the lower part of the town: all Jews have to move there before 18:00 pm of same day. They are not allowed to take clothes or food along with them; they must remit to the authorities the keys of their homes and a list of their belongings, which become state property; their working permits are cancelled and they face an immediately applicable death penalty if they disobey – or call to disobey – to orders, if they sell goods to Christians or if they are caught outside the ghetto after 18:00 pm.

An immense agitation reigns in the city: 45,000 individuals are bound to move from other parts of the town into an area where only 10,000 are still

living, but which could hardly accommodate even double that figure. People run around, looking for family or friends who could shelter them. Within a few hours, the ghetto is submerged: people crowd up to twenty and more in a single room, everyone tries to find some space for the night, all cellars, mansards and even staircases are occupied. And still there is no animosity: they share and help each other, they exchange information on "who has been seen where" and they want to believe there is a tomorrow...

The Wagner house in the Morariugasse holds a few dozen refugees.

By the end of the day, a wall is in place: it crosses over the main streets, closing up the area and allowing just for a few wooden doors. And at night, fifty-five thousand Jews are locked up in the ghetto.

The first deportations start on 14th October. Within ten days, 30,000 Jews from the ghetto are thrown into cattle wagons of twenty different trains. The destination is beyond the Dniestr River, towards an Ukrainian province called Transnistria, which is today under Moldavian control. Forty to fifty deportees per wagon; many die during the transportation; many more will die on the roads and in the camps, from famine, extreme tiredness and cold.

The Mayor Traian Popovici is shocked and tries once more to oppose the deportations. He argues that, for the time being, the Jewish technicians are an absolute necessity in order to keep all public services operational, like the sewage maintenance, the water cleaning factory, the electrical and telephone networks, etc. Finally, on November 15th, Marshal Antonescu approves that 15,600 Jews be allowed to stay in Cernauti as "experts" of some specific fields; in addition 4,000 others may get temporary permits that Popovici is allowed to sign alone. These approvals are based on economic reasons and, therefore, one should be able to prove at any time the validity of the selection. At the request of the Governor, the Mayor Popovici and General Ionescu – the only two personalities of the regime to oppose the deportations – accept to proceed with it. They get the leaders of the Jewish community to prepare lists of people who will be allowed to stay, and also organize a team of fifty members, entitled to deliver the thousands of residence permits.

Thanks to Traian Popovici's insistence, almost 20,000 Jews from Czernowitz were, at least temporarily, saved from deportation and probable immediate death. Israel named him among the Righteous.

Much later, in 2009, members of a discussion group on Internet called "Czernowitz-List", managed to convince the old-fashioned and reluctant nationalistic municipality of the city to acknowledge the deeds of this Rumanian Mayor... The group paid for a memory-plate to be affixed on the house he lived in.

*By the time the ghetto is established, Rusia's baby is two months old. In spite of the difficult situation – "it might even get worse!" – it is high time for the *Britt Mila*, the circumcision. Rusia's brothers-in-law – among whom the Ukrainian husband of Clara whose movements are not restricted – help to find a *Mohel*, a ritual circumciser, who will take the risk and accept to proceed secretly with the forbidden operation and ceremony.*

Finally, this takes place in two tiny rooms, in the presence of forty people. Like many mothers in such circumstances, and the more so because of the dramatic events she experienced, Rusia is overwhelmed with emotions and she fears for her baby. She stays with the women in one room, while the men take the baby and proceed in the next one.

Everything goes well, despite the extremity of the situation.

Towards the end of 1941, less than twenty thousand Jews holding residence permits remain in the ghetto. Among them, a certain number of clandestine, like Netti and Rusia with her baby: they have no qualification of any economic interest and totally lack the means to buy a residence permit, which quite a few were able to do.

The ghetto restraint is then abolished, but all other constraints imposed on Jews remain, in particular the yellow star and the three daily hours they are allowed to circulate. The living conditions are extremely difficult. Those who try and go back to their homes, find them plundered and devastated, if not quite often destroyed and burned.

The Mayor Traian Popovici is considered to be too close to the Jews: in January 1942, he is removed from his post. Fear grabs the 4,000 Jews holding his temporary permits: they are not safe any more.

The Rumanian establish labor camps where many of the remaining Jews are forced to go. Conditions there are very bad although less terrible than in Transnistria, as they are allowed to return from time to time to Cernauti. But the smallest problem might have dramatic consequences.

In spring 1942, the Morariugasse house is plundered and put on fire: Netti goes to her eldest son Maximilian, while Rusia and her baby find refuge at Simon's brother place, Isidor.

Deportations start again on 7th June 1942: this time, it's mainly the holders of "Popovici permits" who are concerned, plus all the insane pensioners of specialized homes, as well as the nurses and people who take care of them.

On 17th August 1942, soldiers arrest Netti Wagner, together with her son Maximilian and his second wife Sali. They are dragged to the railway station and into cattle wagons leaving for Transnistria.

Maximilian is thirty-eight and Netti, who is almost blind, sixty-six. Survivors from this convoy will tell much later that she was thrown out from the train as it crossed the Bug River on a bridge. Nobody ever heard again of Maximilian and his wife...

Rusia not Welcome!

Rusia fights desperately for survival: she is a clandestine with her baby, all her relatives are gone, most are dead or have been deported, and she has no news from her husband.

At Isidor's place live also his wife and daughter, his mother Mina and his oldest unmarried sister Etká. As long as Isidor is around, Rusia is treated correctly. But Isidor is then as well caught and deported with his wife and daughter – the child will die there, while Isidor and his wife will survive.

There remain then, in that little place, the other three women and a baby.

Etká, behaving like a tyrant, exploits her mother Mina, whom she calls *Mutter*, and tries it as well with Rusia. She needs her ease, she cannot stand the baby crying, she fears having a clandestine at home, and she wants to lease the second small room to a young Rumanian...

Rusia tells *Mutter* to react, but the old woman answers, "*My hand has five fingers (her five children) and whichever one you cut, it hurts!*" And she fastens two days a week, praying for the safe return of Simon...

Rusia has nobody to whom she can complain, so she writes about her pain in a small notebook, addressing her lines to Simon.

I still have that notebook, as well as many others...

Finally, Etká pushes practically Rusia and her baby onto the street...

By the end of 1942, Jews may circulate in town only three hours daily, between 10:00 am and 13:00 pm.

Still, Rusia must absolutely go out, looking for food or for a different shelter for the day, selling a few old belongings, etc. She is left-handed and carries her baby on her left arm, thus hiding the yellow star. When stopped by a patrol, she shows an ID document of one of her brothers. The names, typically German, soften the soldier: "*That's your husband? He is at the front?*" She answers positively. Her tresses and her perfect knowledge of German do the rest: she can go on.

Simon's youngest sister Clara and her husband live outside of the ghetto: he is not Jewish and may thus circulate at any time on the streets, possibly even find some work and ensure them a bit more decent life condition. From time to time, Rusia comes to their place to wash herself and the baby, and to find some relief.

On 31st January 1943, the German troops surrender in Stalingrad.

By that time, there are only 15,000 people left over in the ghetto, of which 1,000 have a special working permit.

I know that we were often hidden, but I don't know exactly how and where, neither do I know how we survived. One day Rusia told me that we spent some days in a chicken yard.

On another day, I explained to her that I have "a static image" in my memory, that of a big fright and a terrible noise, and that we are under trees; she holds me close to her chest and runs... Her answer was that such a situation happened more than once. Clearly, on that particular day of 1943, her own fright added to mine did brand in an indelible way the nearly blank memory of the baby I was by then.

Already in those years, a few Jews from the camps and ghettos did escape and succeed to reach Palestine at the outcome of terrible trips per land and sea. Rusia told me that she enlisted with her baby for such a clandestine trip. But that, at the last moment, she changed her mind: later, she heard that the ship on which we were to embark did sink and that nobody survived.

By late summer 1943, some Rumanian understand that the wind has turned and that the odds look bad for the German and their allies. It takes six more months for Marshal Antonescu to order the general repatriation of all deportees. But it is already too late: after having recovered Transnistria, the Red Army enters Bukovina on 18th of March.

The German troops do not try to resist and flee.

Again, a few days of inter-regnum.

On 29th March 1944, the Soviet troops enter Chernovtsy. Some survivors remember this as a sunny day, with the soldiers in open trucks on the Siebenbürgerstrasse, throwing candies to the children and yelling "Malchik! Dyevochka!", young boys and girls!

On 4th April, the red flag can be seen on top of the town hall. The Soviets are there, but without compassion and with their brutal communist methods.

They will stay till the independence of Ukraine, till end of 1991.

Simon

Simon understands progressively in 1941 that he will be away for more than a few weeks. He feels terribly lonely and he also writes some words in a notebook, addressing them to Rusia...

At first, he is appointed to the infirmary; close to the front line for a few months, he carries wounded soldiers on stretchers. He sees how soldiers leave for a battle with a gun plus a bottle of vodka, but no cartridges "*Just get some from a dead German!*" He is shown how to jump into the excavation made by the last bomb in order to escape the next one; and, when an alien plane shoots on his convoy near a corn field, he runs along the field instead of trying to hide in the forest of stems. He loads and unloads trucks, carrying up to 100-kg-bags on his back. He is taught how to arrange a fire under trucks' diesel engines, so that they can start in winter...

Stalin doesn't trust those recruits from Bukovina who speak German: he orders they shall be sent eastwards, as far as possible from the front line.

Like many, Simon is sent to Alma Ata, by then the capital of Kazakhstan.

One day, he thinks of a way to get discharged from the army: he is shortsighted and decides to learn by heart each line of the infirmary's poster used in ophthalmology. He then complains that he doesn't see well with his old glasses. And when they test him, first without his glasses and then with incredibly thick ones on his nose, he roughly guesses through the fog the level of the line they point at and tells by heart the corresponding line!

He is discharged.

As he cannot return to Czernowitz, he applies for a permit to reside in Moscow and, being acknowledged as a very good professional furrier, he is lucky enough to be offered a job there.

In Moscow, he creates new models of high quality and taste, which some stars of the Soviet movie industry like: he gets new orders and progressively makes a living in the Russian capital at that period of the war. He is in his thirties, a charming and successful man – possibly even with women, although his conversation comes often back to his wife and possible child left over in Czernowitz.

Occasionally, whenever he meets refugees coming like him from Bukovina, he asks whether they have heard of his wife, a Wagner girl who should by now have a child, his child, about such age...

One day, a refugee reacts: he saw a Wagner girl alone with her child in Alma Ata – that is close to the Chinese border, about 2,000 km from Moscow. A few days later, the news is confirmed – but it's Alma, Rusia's sister, and she has a son!

Simon sends another telegram and next day, on 28th June 1943, Alma answers with a letter. She tells about the happiest day in her life when she got his telegram after those terrible years of pain and sorrows. She tells what happened when she left Czernowitz on 1st July 1941 and how she has no news from anyone in the family; nor has she news from her husband for almost a year. And she mentions that on 8th May 1943 she gave birth to a boy. She is alone with no means, works in a tailor's atelier of a village and earns very little. How is he? Can he help? ...

Simon does his best and finally obtains the travel and residence permits for Alma and her son, plus a third person, upon Alma's additional request. He travels personally to fetch them. Surprise: Alma's husband Samuel is back and he is the person who will profit from the third permit!

By autumn 1943, Alma with her son Edy and husband Samuel are in Moscow and live there together with Simon.

Simon doesn't give up hope and continues to ask refugees from Bukovina whether they have seen or heard of Rusia...

In the weeks and months that follow the Soviet's return to Chernovtsy, refugees start to come back. Some had gone before the Rumanian took over; others come back from the camps; and some had been enrolled in the Red Army. But many other refugees, not originally from Czernowitz, also try it there. The Soviets, who have already in mind to annex the province, use this excuse to impose restrictions, in an attempt to limit as well the return of survivors of the former population. Besides, the overall situation in Czernowitz is extremely difficult, especially in respect of food: supplies are scarce and rationed, and the army gets always priority.

It also happens that some refugees try it with Rusia. I faintly remember a fit of anger of my mother on a sunny day: we are at the Pruth River, in company of a man who insists to teach me how to swim...

Whenever possible, Rusia questions refugees about her relatives and about Simon. And when she gets a possible positive answer, she asks for an address and sends a postcard.

On one lucky day of late spring 1944, a miracle happens: Rusia has written to someone in Moscow who supposedly met Simon. He actually did! And ten days later Simon gets the letter.

According to those who knew him at that time, Simon reacts as crazy: he laughs and cries, he dances, runs around, goes on the streets and stops people with children, asking how old they are: *"I also have one, you know! They are alive and it's a boy!"*

He sends a telegram; they exchange letters; they are immensely happy...

And suddenly doubts take hold of Rusia: Simon has a situation in Moscow and he meets with movie stars; Alma and Samuel are with him and Alma has a son. Whereas herself, she is alone and in deep destitution; she does all she can to

preserve her child and survives only thanks to expedients. But, most important, she feels diminished at the outcome of the ghetto. Rusia mentions her doubts to Simon and probably even offers him to let be. Desperate and unable, as usual, to speak out his feelings, he writes in his notebook:

***"My dearest, my wonderful little Mäder!!
Didn't you notice that, for me, nobody else counts? They can go to hell! I wanted to be on a desert island, with nobody around, and I thank the providence that allowed me to find you back before my total decline. In spite of the distance I see you in front of me. Do you hear me? Nobody ever appreciated you as much as I do! I was immensely happy when I first heard about you, many years ago. Don't give up, it's the whole of you that I chose and every morning I wonder how did you sleep.
My darling, my unique, the hope to see you again makes me stronger (...)
Do write me often, it's like a balm that sustains me."***

It takes weeks for Simon to obtain the necessary permits for him and for the Weissmann. He resigns from his job, sells a few goods, buys many others, including toys, and there they are in the train with a huge number of boxes and suitcases, heading for Czernowitz.

The exact time of the train's arrival is not known in advance. Rusia leaves her child with some friends and heads for the station: she will come back later to fetch it.

***It's on the street, that famous street going down to the railway station in Czernowitz, that I got first sight of my father.
I still can see it clear and sharp like a movie in my memory. I am with Rusia and some other people. My mother says: "That's your Daddy!" and I run to jump in his arms. He is tall and a bright smile enlightens his face. He wears a moustache, which is a surprise for me, but I recognize him.
I say "Papile came down from the picture!" from that picture that I know, where they sit together, so close to each other, where they look into the camera's objective, where they look at me...
We were happy.***

And that is how, on a beautiful day of late summer 1944, Simon and Rusia found back another – and that is how, at last, I met my father.

III

A New Era

Chapter 9

From Czernowitz to Bucharest

In August 1944, things change drastically in Rumania: a united national government is formed in Bucharest, King Michel has Marshall Antonescu arrested and the Rumanian army turns against Germany. A few weeks later, on 12th September 1944, Rumania signs an Armistice Agreement, according to which it gives up Bessarabia and Northern-Bukovina for the benefit of Soviet Republics of the USSR

In Czernowitz, the majority of the population is now composed of brand new inhabitants: they are Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbek and others. All are attracted by the fame of Bukovina, a province that conceals land with high quality soils and where you find plenty free housing opportunities, both being left over by the former population: in fact, practically all that is needed for newcomers to start a new life after the war.

The living conditions are still quite difficult. Simon cannot find work as a furrier and must accept different insecure and exhausting outdoor works. The little money he brought from Moscow goes quickly; thereafter they will have to sell some clothes and other goods in order to buy food.

The town's food supply doesn't come in regularly, while the military, together with those who have a permanent job, may get at it in priority: feeding one's family is a daily problem for many. The famous "bricks of bread" are so black, that opponents to the regime ironically say that the authorities add tires and shoe-soles to the wheat to grind. As for butter, you can only dream of it. Still, most people are happy to have survived that terrible war.

I don't know exactly where we lived during that period, but it certainly was in the old Jewish quarter of the lower part of the town: I remember it as a ground floor, at some end of a big interior yard; I regularly crossed that yard, carrying as I could a heavy basket of water – which looked huge to me – because we didn't have running water inside.

During the following winter, it's in that yard that Simon taught me how to roll big snowballs and make a snowman: we then rigged it out with a broom and a carrot for the nose. He also fixed an old and battered saucepan lid for me: using it upside down on the snow, it became a sled at my size...

With his luggage, Simon did also bring from Moscow a few gray astrakhan skins, enough to confection fur collars for Russia and for me; and, as there was a bit left over, he also made a "chapka", a fur hat for me: I was well and warm dressed that winter.

Playing warmly dressed in the snow and being surrounded by the love of a complete family of my own: what wonderful memories for a three years old child in the after-war Czernowitz!

The war isn't over yet, but its end is getting closer. Rumors and news of all kind circulate and people eagerly listen to any bit of information. In January 1945, the Red Army takes Warsaw and liberates Poland; in February, it's the Yalta Conference, where Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill discuss the after-war order for Europe; etc.

In Czernowitz, by the end of February, a train transporting Jews from the Auschwitz camp liberated by the Soviets makes a stopover at the railway station. These are survivors originally from Western Europe. The train will stay there for three weeks, waiting for the necessary coal to pursue its way to Odessa. From there, the survivors would be brought by ship to Marseille, and thereafter by train till they get home – in as much as they still believe to have one.

It is now clear for everyone that the Soviets intend to annex the northern part of Bukovina. Knowing by experience what this means, the whole family fears the brutal soviet regime and its sinister political police, the NKVD: those who will stay in Czernowitz, will sooner or later be earmarked on its listings!

They all decide to try the exit permits to Rumania that the Soviet easily deliver for the time being, provided one can pay. They will go to Bucharest, the capital that Simon and Rusia knew so well before the war and where it should be easier to start a new life, now that the fascists are defeated.

Collecting the necessary money isn't easy. So, they start to sell whatever may still be sold among the remaining goods and clothes. In addition, they have to accept all kind of hassle, house search and other humiliations, and are only allowed to keep the bare minimum along the trip. Finally, starting spring 1945, the family travels to Bucharest on separate trips.

I am on a coach with Simon and Rusia, when a breakdown or a flat tire brings us to a halt at night, in middle of nowhere on the countryside. People are worried; the driver gets out, followed by some passengers willing to help him. I cannot see anything outside. A passenger has a big lantern that they switch on. Pushed by curiosity, I use the surrounding confusion to also step out of the coach and to edge my way amidst the adults. It's cold and crowded. I'm impressed by the lantern's light, it tears darkness apart near the place where the men work to repair the breakdown. Before I can reach them, Rusia catches me and takes me back into the coach... Just a small memory of a child on an emigration trip.

After the Yalta Conference, the Communist Parties of the countries liberated by the Red Army prepare themselves to take over power. In Bucharest a communist demonstration causes clashes that lead to the death of eight people. Shortly thereafter, the Party installs its men by force in most of the town halls and prefectures. Follow three weeks of anti-communist demonstrations, till the Soviet – their army being omnipresent – do "resign" the government and replace it by another one, openly pro-communist. It doesn't take long for the latter to decree a land reform on 23rd March 1945,

which causes the anger of all landowners in that largely farming oriented country.

This is the atmosphere the family finds when it arrives in Bucharest.

Samuel starts again some businesses, Isidor wants to open a fur shop – he will do so, in a cooperative form, under the communist regime – and Simon looks out for a job in a furrier workshop. But times are difficult and the fur business, in particular, isn't economically viable.

In November 1945, a big demonstration in favor of the King takes place in Bucharest. But then, nothing happens: the Soviet leaden weight is there. At the elections, which are organized a year later, the communist hold most of the polling stations: the block they control gets almost 80% of votes.

Simon, Rusia and their son live in a tiny outhouse, at the end of an interior yard on Spătarului street. That outhouse looks small, even in the eyes of the child, and they use as they can the singlest corner of it; for some time, they even share it with a laying hen that Rusia bought on the market, in order to regularly have some fresh eggs for her son. At night, they sleep on folding cots, which they open every evening and fold in the morning. In winter, they have to clear the snow in front of the door in order to go out: sometimes they have fun, showing the child how to wash its hands and face with fresh snow.

Yes, times are hard and we know what hunger means: in August 1947, for my sixth birthday, friends of my parents offer me a Charlie Chaplin walking stick, plus a small tank that rolls and throws sparks when you wind up a spring with a special key. Rusia comes to see me and says, "Those are your toys; you may do whatever you want with them. But, if you agree, we can sell them on the market and buy some food with the money. It's up to you to decide!" Of course, I feel terribly important and decide that we shall sell my toys. But that story is engraved in an indelible way in my memory, to such extent that, even today, I find it extremely difficult to throw away any leftover food and always finish what is in my plate.

Isidor and Regina live in an apartment, on the second floor of a building next to a small garden. Towards the end of that garden, a carpenter has a small workshop.

I do often spend hours in that workshop, watching the carpenter's work, when Simon and Rusia leave me with Regina during the day. There is also a dog, black and one-eyed, which will bite my buttock because I'm bothering him outrageously, and a "good cat" that will never scratch me.

Isidor is close to his fifties, he has put on weight and doesn't look anymore like a dandy; Regina also changed: the labor camp and the loss of their child left a deep mark on both of them. They adopted a young girl, called Pepica, from the labor camp. She will immigrate later to Israel, together with Regina, where she will settle and marry.

On a quiet summer day, Simon makes a whistle with an apricot pit. I watch attentively the different steps of its making: you first have to clean the pit; then you wear down an edge of it, by strongly rubbing it on the rough stone of a staircase step, till you can easily fit a needle into the slit; and finally, you must

scrape out the pulp with the needle and clean the interior. And here you have a whistle that is used in blowing laterally on the edge of the slit. Simon gives me another apricot and tells me to go on making my own whistle with its pit: and that's how I spent hours, sitting on the first stone step in the garden, rubbing and rubbing that pit to wear it down... It's only many years later, already an adult with my own children, that I remembered this anecdote and realized that Simon's main purpose was to keep me busy for hours and allow some peace for Regina.

Another time, as I'm left with Regina while my parents and Isidor are gone for the afternoon, I finally get bored at the carpenter's. I turn to the garden, but the dog isn't there. I climb on a tree, get bored again and finally go to see Regina: she gives me a slice of bread that I eat. For a while, I play quietly in the apartment: my parents will soon be back. But they don't, so I tell Regina that I'll wait downstairs at the door. It's getting dark, and still no parents in view. So, I go to the iron gate of the garden and wait there. A man on the street sees me and asks what I'm doing there.

- *I'm waiting for my parents, but they don't come!*
- *Maybe they are at home. Do you know where you live?*
- *Yes, of course!*
- *Do you know how to get there?*
- *Yes, of course!*
- *Maybe you should go, they might be at home, worrying about you.*

I don't know the address, but I know three ways in town starting from home: one to my grandma's place, whom I call Baba and to whom I sometimes bring coal in winter; another one to Isidor's shop; and finally the one to this apartment. But I'm scared to go home alone and to cross streets, now that it's practically dark outside.

- *If you want, I will accompany you: give me your hand.*

I give him my hand and we walk under my lead. As soon as I spot our yard's gate, I tell him we've arrived. He goes in, talks with some neighbors and comes back to me.

- *Your parents aren't back yet, but you may wait in the yard.*

I thank him and he goes.

It's already dark and the door of the outhouse is locked. I wait.

After a while, I recognize my parents' voices at the gate, they speak loud and vehemently. I rush at them, happy to have them back... but they are angry! They have been looking for me everywhere, at Isidor's, in the garden and on the neighboring streets, then at Baba's and at the shop, and finally on the route home. I'm a bad boy!

They dress me for the night, give me a hunk of bread and push me outside in the yard:

- *As you don't obey us, it means that you don't want to stay with us anymore. Take that piece of bread and go!*

Desperately, I cry:

- *But no, I want to stay!*

Neighbors, aware of the game, come and implore my parents' leniency, asking them to keep me. A dog, which also lives in the yard, comes close and howls along with my cries.

- *Look, even the dog is imploring you. He promises he won't do it again!*

Of course, my parents kept me, but I certainly experienced that night the biggest fright of my life.

Among the children with whom I played, there was a Rumanian boy whom my parents mentioned as an example to follow whenever I came back muddy at home: "Nu vreau sa ma murdaresc!" he said, I don't want to get dirty.

And there was a little Rumanian girl who lived in a house on the same yard. She was learning French – I don't know why – and trained herself counting in that language as she went up and down a few stairs. I couldn't understand why, in that foreign language, the figure "four" – "quatre" in French, which she pronounced "Kaater" – is linked to a big tomcat: that is, if one, two and three in Rumanian are very close to their equivalent in French, the figure "four" is "patru" in Rumanian, whereas "Kater" in German means a tomcat. And, at that time, I only spoke German and Rumanian, plus a bit of Russian.

Chapitre 10

From Bucharest to Paris

The communist intensify their pressure: the King must abdicate, so that Rumania can become a "people's republic". Should he resist, the head of government threatens to execute 1,000 students. Finally, on 30th December 1947, Michel of Rumania agrees under duress to abdicate and leaves immediately on exile.

Not surprisingly, the communist, lead by Gheorghiu-Dej, win the following elections.

Later, Simon and Rusia will often mention, with an unhappy look, the names of Gheorghiu-Dej and Anna Pauker: the latter was Jewish and got appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The transformation into a people's republic accelerates: the Constitution is suspended in April; nationalizations occur in June, as well as planned economy and farming socialization. In July, a few leaders of the Peasants' National Party are arrested, just before embarking for America...

Meanwhile, discussions go on at the UN in respect of the Middle East. On 29th November 1947, its General Assembly adopts the plan for a division of Palestine.

The rush of European Jews for Palestine – be they camps' survivors or others, in a clandestine or legal way – increases drastically. And, a few hours before the British mandate expires on 14th May 1948, the independence of the state of Israel is proclaimed.

Follows the Arab invasion and the new state's first war for its existence.

Simon and Rusia are listed at the *Joint*, the *American Jewish Distribution Committee*. Since its inception in 1914, this organization assists Jewish war refugees: it takes care of survivors, lavishes help to the destitute and cooperates with the *Red Cross* and similar humanitarian organizations. It has no Zionist allegiance and, thus, doesn't take an active part into the ongoing upheavals in the Middle East.

Thanks to the *Joint's* lists, many refugees are able to retrieve family members and old friends at the outcome of the war. Therefore, Simon and Rusia hope to get news of their kin, in addition to a semblance of material help. It's the contrary that happens: very good and close friends of their young years in Czernowitz, Moshe and Elsa Wiesner who emigrated to Venezuela before the war, retrieve them through that means in summer 1947!

Happiness is great. They correspond: Simon and Rusia describe their situation, they would like to leave, but not for Palestine, they are not Zionists. But in order to leave, you need an exit visa: those are only delivered drop-wise, after plenty hassle, job loss – as much as you have one – and controls of all kind. But, above all, in those times of tense migratory movements, you must be able to show the benefit of an entry visa into another country, meaning that that's where you have to start with.

Moshe does his best to get such document. At first, he obtains a “certificate” dated 28th November 1947 and signed by the Head of Immigration at the *Land and Colonization Department of the Republic of Paraguay*. Legalized a few days later by the Ministry of External Relations, it only authorizes the National Consulate of the Republic in Genoa to view the personal documents of Simon, Rosa and Karl Rosner, as well as those of Samuel, Alma and Eduard Weissmann... all farmers by profession!

It's a first step, but it's insufficient, as it doesn't mention the granting of an entry visa. Moshe insists and, a few months later, arrives a certificate from the *Immigration Service of the Republic of Nicaragua*. It is dated 12th April 1948 in Paris and signed by the Consul General of Nicaragua in France, certifying that “*he has in his possession the necessary documents to grant an entry visa to Nicaragua*” for Simon, Rosa and Karl Rosner; and, what is more, “*the concerned individuals must personally come to the consulate in order to fulfill all formalities prescribed by Law*”!

On the Paraguayan certificate, we all become farmers. But I also notice that Rusia is suddenly four years younger than in reality: I believe that the age limit, in order to be eligible to the relevant Paraguayan immigration program, must have been forty. Rusia was to reach that age within a few months, meaning that by the time we could get there, it might have been too late. Today, this trick amuses me, because Rusia told me once that, in order to get their Rumanian exit visa, Simon had to be much older than his real age, and that he didn't dare to go out for weeks, fearing some agent keeping an eye on them would see how young he is!

As soon as they get the Paraguayan document, Simon and Rusia start the necessary steps of procedure. First, they must have their Rumanian citizenship confirmed in accordance with a new law: this is achieved in December 1947. They must also accept a series of controls, including at the place they live; they must prove they don't owe any debt to the State or to a national company; they must declare their foreign currencies or, if they don't have any, declare that they have no bank account abroad; they cannot take along any jewelry or monies in excess of a ridiculous small amount; the nature and volume of their personal belongings allowed for export is strictly limited, and they must have that inventory approved in Bucharest and checked at the border; etc.

In addition, the cost of the trip must be paid in advance: it's an *International Committee for Jewish Refugees and Camp Survivors* – possibly the *Joint* itself? – that takes this over.

Finally, on 17th August 1948, Simon, Rusia and son cross the border with Hungary at a station called Curtici. In fact, they were already there a day before, as stated on another document allowing them to export 2,000 cigarettes of a Rumanian brand: Simon did smoke, but he certainly didn't take those 100 packs for his own use. He probably hoped to be able to swap them against some basic goods, once in the west.

The trip to Paris lasts over a month.

In Vienna comes a first “*transit camp*” – in fact some big apartments, each of them divided and shared between a few families. Simon meets a cousin of his, named Soniu Alper, who lives in a small house with a garden in the suburbs of Vienna.

Three or four weeks later, it's a second camp in Austria, this time in Salzburg; and, thereafter, Munich, in Germany.

In all these camps, I remember curtains hanging across most rooms, so as to delimit a semblance of private space for each family.

The situation changed as we arrived in Munich: Simon meets an old friend of his from the time they were both apprentices. The man lives in an apartment of a building that survived the bombing, but it is surrounded with plenty ruins – I had a feeling that most of the city was like this.

Simon is allowed to spend a few days and nights with his family at that friend's place. During the day, I play outside with a few other boys and we decide to go for an inspection of the ruins. That's where I found the remnants of some military equipment – I don't remember what it was – and I rush home to show them triumphantly to my parents: they got terribly angry – this I remember – and I was not allowed to return to the ruins!

By end of September 1948, they finally cross the border and arrive in France.

My only memory of our first days in Paris is a dramatic one. We are in a big hall of the police headquarters or, maybe, at the local police of the railway station: Rusia cries, sitting on our big cardboard suitcase with reinforced corners – I still have it in the cellar – and Simon, holding some documents in his hands, tries desperately to communicate with an employee. The documents he waves do certainly include the famous certificate of the Consul General of Nicaragua. I don't know thanks to what miracle we were finally allowed to stay.

Today, I'm convinced that Simon and Rusia had no intention to pursue their trip to Nicaragua.

It's only when I reached the age Simon had at that time, that I really understood the degree of despair and courage – possibly also of reckless thinking – which motivated my parents, completely destitute, to undertake that trip towards the unknown, towards a country where they had absolutely no connection, and the language of which they didn't speak.

But that country is France, the symbol of Liberty in Europe!

Chapitre 11

La France

France, the Homeland of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights!

I often noticed that, even nowadays, France still benefits of a very positive emotional image in respect of human rights, as well in Jewish as in non-Jewish circles. In particular, wherever I was posted in Europe and Africa – and certainly the more so in Eastern Europe – I many times heard that famous and envious say "Happy like God in France!"

Following our arrival in Paris, we live in a tiny room on the first floor of a hotel in the *Rue Grange Batelière*. There is a washbasin and a mirror, but in order to wash ourselves correctly, we go twice a week to the municipal public showers. The cost of the room is covered by some humanitarian organization for refugees and we eat at a canteen of a soup-kitchen, not far from the *Folies Bergères*.

Shortly after our arrival, Simon and Rusia decide I should go to school: according to them, I showed big enthusiasm ***"Really? I'll go to school and learn a lot of things?"*** During the first quarter, not knowing French upon my arrival, I become the punching bag of other children: at the beginning of each break, they grab the beret that my parents want me to wear – a stereotype of a Frenchman – and throw it one to another. Of course, I try to get it back and insult them in the three languages that I know. But I quickly recover the upper hand and get the second price of my class at the end of first year. Besides, as I don't have school on Thursdays at that time, Rusia takes me to play for the afternoon in a small garden, where I quickly organize my own "gang" of boys.

I still remember with emotion, two of my teachers: those were times when most teachers still cherished their vocation without any second thought, and I owe a lot to those two, especially Mr. Maupertuis.

For the summer 1949, Simon and Rusia send me to a summer-camp near Dreux. One evening they get a phone call at the hotel: ***"Your son has a peritonitis of the appendix. He has only three hours to live, if we do not intervene: do you agree that he shall be operated?"*** Yes, yes! Is their panic-stricken answer, as soon as they understand what's about that call.

I spent a few weeks at the hospital in Dreux, with penicillin shots every three hours for fourteen days. Twenty years earlier, as there was no antibiotic available, I won't have survived.

Rusia is allowed to stay at night on a camp bed in my room at the hospital. She also shares my meals, especially as I am not allowed to eat anything. One day, two artichokes appear on the place of honor on the tray: it's the first time in her life she sees any. She starts trying to eat the leaves, but they are too tough, so she takes them off. Come the needles: how can one eat these? She finally wraps everything in a newspaper, with the intention to throw it away in the evening. Just imagine the auxiliary nurse's face when she came to fetch the tray: not a

leaf, no leftover at all! Later, Rusia will become a big artichoke's lover and eat them often.

All these years we are refugees, our only ID documents being residence permits that we have to renew regularly – at the beginning every month, then every three months, and so on.

At some time, Simon and Rusia tried to immigrate to the USA: I remember having passed a few tests in that context, including that of the Rorschach stains. Their application was finally agreed, but conditioned to their commitment to live for at least ten years in a small town of some State – possibly Ohio? – whereas Simon and Rusia's objective was, of course, New York: they didn't follow up.

Simon is looking for some work, but his lack of knowledge of French is a big handicap. And then, on a lucky day of 1950 on the *Rue Richer*, he bumps into an old friend, Jacques Teller, whom he knew as a furrier in Rumania before the war. Jacques did immigrate to France in the 1930s and settled in Amiens; he did spend the wartime in Bordeaux and is now back to Amiens with his own workshop.

Jacques is married and has a son called Patrick, quite younger than myself, who will become in the early sixties the youngest bachelor in mathematics of France. Unfortunately, Jacques' wife will die before that consecration: she is afflicted with the same joints degenerative illness than Edith Piaf.

Many years later, the relations between the father and the son will get bad. Finally Patrick will have his father put under supervision: Jacques will then often call Simon and Rusia to open his heart.

Jacques is well aware of Simon's talent. Further to their retrieval, he gives him some work and this will progressively improve our situation. We first moved into another hotel on same street, within a bit bigger room; then, by autumn 1952, Simon finds a small apartment to rent, showing hardly 40m²: it is located on the first floor of a dilapidated building *Rue d'Enghien*, close to the furrier's quarter. There is no comfort, toilet is on the landing, but we have our "own home".

That's where Simon and Rusia will live till the end, first with me and then alone. In 1980, I acquired a comfortable apartment for them close to my place. But they refused to move. A new routine got into place: they did spend the weekdays Rue d'Enghien, among their souvenirs and habits, and came every weekend to the new apartment because they would see us: "You don't replant old trees!" Simon said.

In October 1952, I jump one class and enter a public high school: on top of the change in tempo, I'm once more confronted to disorientation and struggle for integration. This time I have no language problem, but the communication with others is still difficult, because they all know from before and groups are already in place. My integration takes longer to materialize, but some friendships formed at that time are still alive today.

I never encountered any anti-Semitism from the others, nor from the teachers at high school. Except maybe once – but I still have doubts – from a very nervous teacher of German: it happened in the early sixties and he wrongly claimed that I hit him during a dispute in class. I went with him to the

principal's office and let him explain his story before giving my own version: I had just refused to obey an injunction of his, which I considered as bullying, a behavior of which he was customary. I got no sanction. In the following week, we were told that this teacher had health problems and we never saw him again.

All together, I spent ten years at that high school – including the classes preparing to the competitive entrance examinations to the scientific *Grandes Ecoles*, a typical French system – before successfully joining the *Ecole des Mines de Paris*, one of those *Grandes Ecoles*. Actually, like many Jewish mothers, Rusia would have liked me to become a medical doctor, but it's the engineer that Simon would have liked to be that I chose.

In the summer 1953, Simon travels to Israel, in order to see his mother Mina one last time: she immigrated there with Isidor and Etki, and she will die in Beersheba shortly after that visit. On his way back, Simon gets stuck a fortnight in Marseille, due to a general strike of public service workers.

Simon and Rusia had little interest for politics. Only some events concerning Jews, like the Rosenberg affair in the USA, or the Finaly children affair in France, did catch their attention.

This also happened when Stalin died in March 1953: I remember big headlines in the evening newspapers. Simon did buy a newspaper from time to time – whenever he did, it was from the same poor wretch on the street, because he "preferred to help this one, rather than those who sit and wait warmly in their kiosk" – and that evening he brought one back home. Discussions went on till late that night, and I must confess that I didn't understand much of what was said .

In terms of religion, Simon and Rusia were no churchgoers: they went to the synagogue only for big holidays, maybe even only once a year for Kippur. They nevertheless enlisted me at a religious education course in 1954, at the big synagogue of Paris, Rue de la Victoire: the objective was to prepare my Bar Mitzvah. I learned to read Hebrew – I since forgot – and permanently argued with the Rabbi about the reality and logic of what he tried to teach me. But finally, I did my Bar Mitzvah in spring 1955, in the presence of the Great Rabbi Kaplan and Cantor Berlinski.

Happy and proud of their son, Simon and Rusia organized a reception for their friends in a Jewish restaurant on the Grands Boulevards.

Meanwhile, our civil status improved: at first we got an ID document from the *French Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons*; in addition, our residence permits were granted longer validities. Later, we received travel permits into which visas could be stamped,: this was a kind of passport, valid for all countries except the country one came from – i.e. Rumania in our case.

Simon and Rusia then decided to start the procedure for naturalization: per a decree dated 19th May 1958, Rosner Simon, Rosner Rosa born Wagner and Rosner Karl did get the French citizenship.

Rusia maintains an important correspondence over the years and retrieves many friends of Czernowitz and Bucharest, all over the world: in Israel, in the USA and in Europe, of course, but also in Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Australia and even New Zealand.

In May 1958, Moshe and Else Wiener, who helped us to get out of Rumania, come to visit us in Paris. Moshe is seriously ill and has difficulties to walk. They take Rusia to Israel for a few weeks: this is the first time she travels per airways. During their stay, Rusia and Else meet a few friends from their childhood – the group of girls from the *Morariugasse*!

A year later, Simon finds another friend, David Reif, a furrier established in Regensburg Germany, with a fur shop in Berlin; his wife Paula is a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau. They invite us for New Year's Eve to Berlin: that's how I got first sight of Berlin before the wall.

In June 1962, Rusia embarks in *Le Havre* on the liner *France*, to meet another group of friends in New York.

Starting same year, I move into a small studio, two floors above in the same house than Simon and Rusia: this gives me some independence and I participate to its rent and to the cost of living, first in giving private evening courses and, later, still a student myself, by acting as a teacher of mathematics and physics in a private school. Of course, Simon and Rusia still keep an eye on me: they worry about my relations and the girls I go out with, and I'm sure that they watch out for my return late at night behind their closed curtains.

In May 1963, I pay a first visit to Israel; but there, I find it impossible to escape, even for half-a-day, meeting the relatives and friends of my parents! At the age where a young man still wants to assess himself as an adult, such take-over behavior bothered me. Clearly, Israel is an exciting country with marvelous realizations, everybody is kind to me – but it's exactly those capture attempts which made me upset. In addition, the atmosphere is far too oriental for my taste.

I always resisted recruiting movements, be they secular or denominational. For example, I was roughly twelve when I went to a meeting of the Hashomer Hazair, that Zionist movement for young people: they never saw me again. Same applied to those Bukovinian evenings Simon and Rusia attended from time to time. Today I can say that, already at that time, I strongly wanted to preserve my freedom of appraisal and my "esprit critique" of the world in live in. I certainly understand that the Israeli feel besieged in their own country, surrounded by fanatics (and they also have their own ones!) who only dream of striking them off the map: in that, some may consider that they suffer from a complex of Massada. But I cannot accept that they refuse my right to criticism on the sole argument that I do not live in Israel.

I returned a few times to Israel as a tourist, and I will probably go there again: it's a country bursting with history, and I'm emotionally and intellectually attached to it. But I'm too much of a French and European Jew, and I know I wouldn't feel at ease if I had to live there.

In the late 1960s, Rusia starts giving private courses in German and, simultaneously, she learns English by herself. As for Simon, he tries to start his own business, but soon enough he must recognize that he is not gifted for it. In the summer, they regularly spend a vacation in Austria, for a month and more, in a hotel of *Bad Hofgastein*.

In November 1968, I marry Martine F., the niece of Doctor Kraft. Everybody is happy and we have a big wedding with over two hundred guests. But we will divorce a few years later, amidst some quite incredible context. This failure left a heavy mark on me and I'm convinced that it also contributed to deteriorate Rusia's health.

I then got wed a second time in 1977 with Marie-France, whose father only was Jewish. Reticent at first, Simon and Rusia finally accept the situation and are even happy about it, as they do appreciate my new mother-in-law, but also because we quickly give them two grandsons.

In the meantime, as I had grown weary of the mainly technical content of my job, I resigned and went on studying for an MBA at INSEAD. Having obtained my diploma, I joined a big and old French banking group, with which I will then do the rest of my career: from posting to posting, I will come to the International Department and finish as a specialist for restoring order in its foreign subsidiaries.

I only rarely noticed, in particular towards the end of my career, some anti-Semitic attitudes from my colleagues and superiors. It couldn't be more than simple attitudes because, in the hushed circles of a bank, a frontal attack on such grounds is simply unthinkable. Especially, when the concerned person shows only positive results and there is nothing to blame it for! The fact that I am Jewish – which I never did hide – possibly contributed to limit my career development.

As I was posted abroad in Africa, and in Eastern and Western Europe, I did spend much time with expatriates of different origins. I noticed that the French expatriates quite often show extreme-rightwing (conservative) political views and negative attitudes in respect of foreigners. Moreover, they have a tendency to stay among themselves, meeting only occasionally expatriates from other countries, not to mention the locals. As for the spouses, they usually insisted in my presence on what they heard or did on Sunday on the way back from the mass. Being a locally important notability, I didn't react in general; but it happened more than once that I intervened with a big smile "Some would consider that I am an immigrant worker!" or even "As you know, I'm Jewish!" A stream of denials then instantly followed.

Between 1982 and 1985 I'm posted in East Berlin. As I can cross the wall and freely circulate on both sides, I'm able to benefit of the rivalry between the two Berlin: all cultural programs are of high quality and I probably never went so much to concerts, to the opera and to the theater than during those three years.

On the other hand, it's by observing the life conditions of the East Germans – in Berlin, but even more in smaller towns and villages of the country – that I understood how lucky I was to have escaped the communist regime while a child.

It's an East German, once he understood he could trust me, who told me the following story: A man wants to buy a shirt. He enters a shop and asks, "Do you have shirts?" "No, is the answer, here we have no shoes. No shirts are in next-door shop!"

And this other story from my cousin Edy Weissmann, who already lived in West Berlin at the time:

Two men are put in prison in a socialist country. A third one is already in the cell. He asks them why they got arrested and imprisoned.

- *I arrived everyday late at work, says the first one. So they told me "Sabotage!"*
- *And I, says the second one, I arrived everyday early at work. So they said "Espionage!" And you, why are you there?*
- *Oh, me? I arrived everyday in time at work.*
- *Then, why did they arrest you?*
- *Well, they said, "Where did you get that beautiful watch?"*

It's in a West Berlin hospital that I had a surgery operation in October 1984, for an aneurysm on a brain artery. Miraculously, it just shortly bled and didn't burst: the symptoms were so typical that the doctor could easily diagnose the aneurysm, leading to a timely operation. I decided not to inform Simon and Rusia in advance, hoping that everything will go well and that I will be able to tell them later in Paris. So we did.

But, when we met them a few months later, I found out that they also voluntarily omitted to keep us informed about Simon's health: he had been operated over a year ago from the prostate and didn't feel well, with permanent pain in his legs, pelvis and back, and he had difficulties to walk. I met the surgeon, who confirmed that he had a cancer and that all that could be done was to delay the final outcome. In principle, Simon and Rusia were not informed about the reality of his affliction, but I'm convinced that Simon, at least, suspected it.

Back in Paris, we meet regularly with my parents. One day, as I am walking with Simon on the street, I quicken my pace and then, turning round, I apologize. "No problem!" he says, "When you were a boy it's me who had to slow down. Now, it's your turn. But don't stop, carry on, my son!"

Simon died at the hospital on 1st December 1986. The evening before, as they were at the new apartment, Rusia called and asked me to come over: Simon was in a very bad way. The doctor decided to send him to hospital and I followed the ambulance with Rusia in the car. After registration, she stayed with him in the room, while I went to see the doctor on guard. I told him that I was aware of his cancer and that, above all, whatever his treatment, I didn't want him to suffer. He didn't answer.

*As I was about to leave for the night, I tried a few reassuring words and finally said to my father "See you tomorrow!"
His glasses off, he turned round, his eyes looking so deep in the thinned face.
He looked at me, an intense look without a word, but everything was there: his fear of death, his love for us, his regrets for leaving us...
I kissed him and went home, overwhelmed.
This last look of his will haunt me till the end of my life.*

Early morning next day I received a telegram and went to announce the terrible news to Rusia. She collapsed in my arms.

Ten months later, my wife gave birth to our daughter, that granddaughter Simon had hoped so hard for, in the last years.

We stayed in Paris till summer 1990. I knew what loneliness meant for Rusia and did my best to see her at least once a week, when I was not away on business trips. Thereafter I got permanently posted abroad as managing director of foreign subsidiaries: first in Lagos, Nigeria; then came Rotterdam, in the Netherlands; then Kiev, in Ukraine; etc.

Rusia's health condition declined progressively. I called her every week and went to see her whenever I happened to be in Paris. She still spent the weekdays at the old *Rue d'Enghien* apartment, going to the new one only for the weekend. And she often dreamed of Simon coming back to talk with her. We arranged for a woman to spend time and be with her everyday, to help her shopping and to cook for her; after a while, Rusia started complaining, expressing fancy grievance upon that woman.

More than once, she also told me that "bad guys" were after her, following her on the street till the entrance door of the house. And, as she was convinced that I am a

member of the French secret service, she asked me to scare them like hell, so that they shall stop bothering her. I finally told her that I did so.

In 1993, my wife must follow a treatment for breast cancer: it's terrible news and we do our best to face together the difficulties of this period. The treatment is quite painful, but she overcomes thanks to her strong will for survival. As for Rusia, I believe that this event was certainly an important shock as well.

Rusia's memory declines, but she doesn't give up: she takes notes on any piece of paper she can get hold of and still goes on doing crosswords in German. From time to time, she doesn't recognize me or believes that I'm Simon. One of her doctors then tells me that we might possibly do some tests to find out whether she suffers from Alzheimer's illness: we didn't, but it's quite possible he was right.

Comes the time where she shouldn't be left alone at night anymore. It is impossible to accommodate a permanent aid for her in the old apartment and she absolutely refuses to move to the new one: we cannot but try and find a managed home for her. I am posted in Kiev at the time, so my wife does her best to find a suitable one in that rapacious environment of such homes profiting of old people's distress.

Rusia is still conscious, but often mixes people, dates and places. She is weakened and embittered, permanently asks to return to the old apartment, refuses to eat and becomes scrawny. In January 1998, a drip is put in place. The doctors in the managed home think of feeding her via a permanent opening in her esophagus. I try to discuss with them: is there any hope of recovery? I don't want her to suffer in her rare moments of consciousness! But it's like talking to a wall.

With all the affection I'm able of, and despite the contradicting feelings that torture me, I write a letter to the head of the managed house: I explain what my mother has gone through and how she suffered during the wartime, and I insist that, in the absence of any hope of recovery, I don't want them to apply a life prolonging procedure of which she might get aware.

Rusia went on 10th January 1998.

At the time, I still believed she was born in 1912: this is the date I got engraved on the tombstone where both my parents rest. I think it's better to leave it unchanged.

Simon Rosner

07.02.1910 – 12.01.1986

A kind and generous man

Whom all appreciated

And whom all his kin miss

Rosa Rosner, born Wagner

07.01.1912 – 01.10.1998

An energetic and fragile woman

His Mäderl, my mother, our family link

To a vanished world

They both were from Czernowitz...

Chapitre 12

A few others, elsewhere

Thanks to Rusia's efforts, and despite the ravages of the war, she and Simon were not cut-off from other Czernowitz survivors abroad: she maintained important epistolary relations and, with time, they managed to retrieve many friends, as well as a few family members. Some lived far away, like in New Zealand; with others, it's the family connection that was distant; but a few were close, either geographically or in terms of family.

Ferdinand (Ferdl) Israel Beck lived in the UK

Our family connection to Ferdinand Beck is a distant one: his mother, Rosa Niederhoffer, is a niece of my great-grandmother Regina Lackner (born Picker), as well as a sister-in law of my grandmother Netti Wagner (born Lackner). Rosa Niederhoffer married a Rudolf Beck and they lived in Vienna, where they ran an international transportation business. They had two sons, Ferdinand and Hans.

Ferdinand Israël Beck – or *Ferdl* as we called him affectionately – was born in Vienna in March 1922. He was a tall and slender man, always quiet and soft by nature. He didn't speak much; but, when he smiled, his face lightened up as if the sun came out: in that, he was like Simon. His soul was that of an artist and he made himself alone, beyond the upheavals and sufferings of the war. He escaped the Holocaust because, one week before the war declaration, his mother told him to take his bicycle and go. He never told me more: it's only at his burial, in March 1999, that I heard the rest of the story from the synopsis that his third wife Muriel read at the cemetery:

« (Ferdl) arrived in UK aged seventeen. His pocket contained 75 cents; he had a knapsack upon his back and a very old bicycle with no gears! With a German passport (for Austria had none of its own at this time) and speaking only German, he was a "suspect" and, thus – as he said with a big grin on his face – "A guest of His Majesty" at a prison, until they were sure that he was not a spy. He lived in a small room shared with another refugee, and their camp beds were for sitting-on, sleeping-on and also a place to use as a table for learning English. The "gas-ring" was for cooking and warming, and also for the bucket to wash his few clothes. He asked for nothing else. After working on the land at Thame in Buckinghamshire, he became a very good botanist and wanted to work all his life with plants. The farmer, however, put him in charge of a horse: he spoke no English at the time and the horse no German – this was a recipe for disaster. Later he was offered a job at Hayes, Middx, loading 5,000 cases of backed beans onto a barge, every day and six days a week. For this work his salary was 75 p/week – but everyone was in the same boat!

He started to think about a career, being artistic, but his destiny was to join a few friends in a venture of button-maker. Armed with his youth and optimism, he worked over many years – his workshop was his home – and began the process to be innovative and creative. He built a reputation of honesty in the “rag-trade” and was respected. His buttons were not mass produced, by and large he was used by the big fashion houses to make bespoke hand-made-buttons: each new season, colors were a secret and all buttons were made to specific and secret details; he had also to dye the fabrics, materials and cords to the exact color, which in itself was a work of art. Biba, Chanel, Courrèges, etc. were his customers.

After a lifetime at his chosen work, he retired and the sale of his factory gave him the capital to give back – what he once didn’t have – to others who, like him in those days, suffer misfortune to be without their homeland and family; and above all, to educate themselves and succeed. Hence the Ferdinand Beck Fund that he created.

As well as the Fund and the people he met from this activity, he was no mean scholar in oriental works of art and was skillful in restoring bronzes and lacquer works of great antiquity, which had had some misfortune in their lives over the centuries. He was a silversmith, a potter and, above all, a very quiet and caring human being.

Ferdl was a great walker, a cyclist and a camper all over Britain and also in Israel: he was particularly fond of desert life. »

It’s in the early 1960s that I met Ferdl and his brother Hans for the first time. Ferdl was then married to Sally, his first wife: she was a bit plump, always kind, cheerful and dynamic. Unfortunately, she died in the late 1970s during an open-heart operation.

Ferdl’s second wife was called Nonni and came from South Africa. With time, she became a real nightmare for him: she was a vegan, wanted to live miserly, and even forbade him his passion for Chinese antics. At one of our brief visits, he did wait for her to go out, before he could take us upstairs to the attic and show us some of his antics wrapped up in newspapers and stored in scattered boxes. They divorced.

Finally, he married Muriel a few years later, with whom he traveled all over the world. They understood well despite their different characters: Ferdl spoke little and was rather retired; whereas Muriel is an English chatterbox who’s seen it all before, and who doesn’t let anyone step on her feet. But she likes nice things and full light and accepted his Chinese antics; she even encouraged his collector side: they attended auctions at Sotheby, went to the flea market, had contacts at the British National Museum, etc.

They once came and visited us when I was posted in the Netherlands.

Ferdl showed me the statutes of incorporation of his charity fund and asked whether I would accept to be a director, which I refused at the time. He also told me that he wants to bequeath his antics collection to me.

- *You have plenty of time; you and Muriel should just enjoy life!*
- *We have largely enough to do so, and I want to “give as long as my hands are warm!” as my mother said.*
- *But why me? Talking of family connection, Edy and Debbie are identically related to you!*
- *Because you and your parents never asked for anything; because you never despised me and always treated me correctly; and because I know that you and your wife like my antics collection and that you will not sell and disperse it at auctions.*

***It's true that it was always a pleasure for me to discuss with Ferdl, and I certainly did respect him even more for being a honest self-made man.
And that is how come that I have many beautiful Chinese antics decorating my bookshelves.***

As for Hans, Ferdl's younger brother, he was in Vienna at the beginning of the war. Arrested in summer 1940, he is successively interned in different labor camps in Germany and Bohemia. He will be twice in the famous camp *Theresienstadt*: that is the one the Nazis arranged by the end of the war as a window – with a post office, a Jewish orchestra, a bank and an own specific currency signed by the *Eldest of the Jewish Community*, etc. – in order to let the world believe that the Jews and other internees were well treated.

Hans survived: he was twenty-one upon his return to Vienna in 1945; but these years in the camps marked him for the rest of his life.

In 1954, he moved to Zurich and worked till retirement as an electronic engineer for the Swiss group *Oerlikon*.

Eduard (Edy) Weissmann in Germany

I already mentioned a few times my cousin Edy who lives in Berlin. Here is how he arrived to Germany.

In 1948, Rusia's sister Alma stays in Bucharest, together with her husband Samuel Weissmann and her son Eduard, called Edy. In fact, they might have used the same way out as Simon and Rusia. But, in spite of Rusia's insistence, they chose to stay: Samuel put forward that his business is going well and that he earns correctly his life. And, in addition, none of them wanted to leave for a country, the language of which they don't speak.

Edy is quite talented in music and, after graduating from high school, he enters the Music Conservatorium and learns to play the cello.

Life in Rumania is difficult and it happens that the family regrets it didn't follow Rusia's advice to leave for the West. In the fifties and sixties, Simon and Rusia send them parcels from time to time, with food and other goods.

In summer 1963, Rusia pays a visit to her sister in Bucharest: Alma and Samuel are unhappy and complain that they would like to leave. A year later, the two sisters meet again, this time in Budapest and at the Balaton Lake in Hungary: Alma explains that they will start with the emigration procedure, now that the regime did open a small window for immigration to Israel. Of course, their objective is not to establish there, they want to go for Germany, but in order to obtain the exit permits, one has to mention Israel as the final destination.

For over a year, Samuel and Alma do get a good taste of the hassles Simon and Rusia had known in the forties. But Samuel, using some business connections, is able to arrange for much better welcome conditions than those my parents encountered.

In spring 1966, they finally leave Rumania and arrive in Italy, where they are supposed to embark on a ship to Israel. They quickly call Simon and Rusia, who have already inquired and know how to get them out of the programmed course. Once more, Simon will fetch them, this time from Italy, and they will go to Germany and settle in Dusseldorf.

I was already working since previous fall. For my summer vacation, I decide to take Edy on a Tour de France plus Belgium by car, and we finish paying a visit to cousin Ferdl in London.

Ferdl wants to help Edy to pursue with his studies and to prepare for recruitment auditions of big European orchestras. He buys him a second-hand cello – I remember that its price was roughly five times my monthly salary at the time – but Alma and Samuel will complain in private that Ferdl could have done more...

A few months later, a friend of Simon and Rusia, Cilly called Hulea, gives them a letter she received from her cousin in Germany. That cousin is furious after Samuel and Alma: he explains that he helped Samuel to transfer out of Rumania quite important amounts of money, waiting for their arrival to Germany; but now that they are there, Samuel behaves very ungrateful and, above all, he insists that Simon and Rusia shall not be informed about his businesses, so that he and Alma can go on crying misery and still get help from the family.

From then on, the relations between the two sisters got bad and worse. Nevertheless, Simon and Rusia always liked and praised Edy, who is not responsible for his parents' behavior.

Edy goes on studying for some time with a well-known professor, virtuoso Pablo Casals, and a year or two later he is recruited at the RIAS orchestra in Berlin.

In 1973, he marries Gabriele Gold: her family is also from Czernowitz and her stepfather a famous biologist. They will have a daughter, called Nadine, who perpetuates the musical trend of the family and becomes a talented opera singer.

Like most artists, my cousin Edy is driven by his emotions. And, when he performs with music, poems or stories, whether cheerful or sad, he excels in sharing his feelings with others: in that he is a "great guy" and a wonderful entertainment partner.

He masters about five languages, including German and Yiddish, and knows a lot about Czernowitz. But, whenever he speaks seriously about it, only sadness and dramatic nostalgia show up.

On the contrary, I believe that this vanished world deserves more than nostalgia. We cannot change History, we shall never forget, but we should be able to forgive and do our best to understand what it actually was in order to learn from its unique humanistic experience.

Also, although my cousin Edy was not born in Czernowitz and lived there as a child for only a few months, I consider that he certainly is more of a Czernowitzer than myself.

Carl Heinz Rosner in the USA

At the outbreak of WW2, Simon's eldest brother David is back to Czernowitz and, a year later, he is also enrolled by force into the Red Army.

David's three sons – Carl Heinz, Wolf and Elie – stayed in Hamburg with their mother after he divorced her. As soon as 1938, she is allowed to enter Sweden as a refugee, but can only take her youngest son with her, because he is less than six.

She leaves the two others in Hamburg at an orphanage, hoping to be able to fetch them later.

The boys are still at the orphanage at the start of the war and they stay there till 1944, when all other children have long been deported: the institution's manager did protect them by putting forward their Rumanian nationality. But, when the Rumanian ally turns against Germany, they are finally taken and sent to *Buchenwald*. They will survive there and overcome as they can during the last months of WW2.

When the Americans liberate the camp, they are respectively aged sixteen and fourteen: soon thereafter, they meet their mother and younger brother Elie in Sweden.

The eldest Carl Heinz resumes school and studies at the Institute of Technology in Stockholm. After graduation, he is accepted into research teams at the Uppsala University and at the Royal Institute of Technology. Then, in the early 1950s, he leaves for the United States. He is a tall young man, very slender and a bit shy.

His two brothers will also leave Sweden: Elie for the USA, where he will marry Elsa, a Swedish young woman – they will divorce in the 1970s – who will give him two sons with blond hair and blue eyes. As for Wolf, he will settle in Israel and work there as a mechanic; but, from then on, he will only use his Hebrew first name Joseph. With time, he will turn ultra-orthodox and his wife will wear a wig and not give her hand to another man.

When my children were born, I informed Joseph like all friends and family members. He didn't reply for my first son; but then, instead of a congratulation answer for the second, I received a letter stating "It's not enough to give a Jewish first name to a child, in order to make him a Jew!"... I decided to cut-off any communication with him.

In America, Carl Heinz is a relentless worker: he graduates as an electrical engineer and joins in 1955 the research labs of *General Electric* in Schenectady. His team will carry out the first magnetic field of over 100,000 gauss. He then publishes articles on the superconductivity phenomenon, gets an MBA with evening courses and, finally, becomes a manager at the group's R&D division. Joining various professional associations, he gets well known over time and appears as an authority in his field of activity.

Meanwhile, he marries Frieda Zeidschnur, a survivor from Poland he did meet in Sweden: they will have two daughters and a son, all living today in the USA.

In 1971, Carl Heinz starts his own business *Intermagnetic General Corporation*, which manufactures equipments based on the superconductivity phenomenon; these are mainly specific products used for energy savings, for intense magnetic fields, etc. His clients are industrial companies, research centers and hospitals, as well in America as abroad. In 1992, he is distinguished as the *Manager of the Year* in the manufacturing sector. In order to pursue the development of his business, already listed at the stock exchange, he accepts a partnership with a Canadian investment fund and moves to Vancouver. But after a while their views diverge: he recovers the shares and returns to Schenectady. And, when he finally retires, he cannot stay idle: he starts a new project, this time with medical imaging equipments for the early detection of cardiovascular diseases in hospitals...

For many years, Carl Heinz won't let any German product enter his home and he will also refuse to speak any German. His daughter Elizabeth, who is a poet and writer living in California, tells in one of her pieces how surprised she was the first time she heard him speak that language at a restaurant in Hamburg:

« ...

- *I still don't understand why you never let me learn German when I had the chance?*

He sighs and looks at (her).

- *Because you would have started speaking it around the house. You would have wanted to practice the language, and you would have wanted to learn more about Germany and its culture. Eventually you would want to come here, and you would like it here. You would come here and like it and perhaps want to live here for a while.*

He tells this story as if it were the only possible plot.

- *So here we are. It's a lovely city and I do like it here. You seem to like it too.*
- *You see? Now, do you understand why I didn't want you to come? »*

Although this anecdote sounds terribly serious, I can hear the contradiction of some Jewish humor in it...

Epilog

*This hour is my hour...
and I dedicate it to Memory.*

Reading through the lines above at the outcome of this remembrance exercise, I notice that I didn't use the words "fate" or "destiny".

Being a good unbeliever, I cannot accept the idea of fate, nor do I believe that everything is determined in advance. I do not believe in the existence of a supreme power above us that would sanction, or drastically limit the consequences of our free will.

On the other hand, I now have a feeling that many of the characters mentioned in this book, lived their lifelong in a way strongly related "to their own fate" – in the strict literary acceptance of that word. What they possibly missed was to realize the actual extent of their fate within the limits determined by the prevailing environment of their time.

At the presentation ceremony of my Légion d'Honneur, I wasn't yet aware that I would later write this chronicle. But my recipient's answer prefigures this exercise.

After the usual courtesy formulas, I came to say the following.

« ...

This hour is my hour... and I dedicate it to Memory.

Memory of the Past, to start with my parents.

It is of good taste to mention one's parents on similar occasions. As for me, it is neither tradition nor good taste, which drive me: it is the emotion. An emotion that grips the chest of the only son I was, with what I know of the history of my family, and with the memory of the sacrifices that my parents so naturally carried out, without even thinking of it, so that I could live a different life than the one they had known... My parents, who would have been so proud to be there today, on such an occasion.

To my father and mother I say: this medal and this acknowledgement are yours!

Memory of the Past, also, with my "friends for fifty years": you, whom I met in sixth grade at the Lyceum and who became my brothers and my family in France for so many years.

Memory of the Past, as well, with all those I admired and who taught me so much. You were the spiritual parents of a part of myself, for some during my childhood, for others when already an adult, in both my private and professional lives.

Today, I want to thank you, even if you cannot hear me.

And Memory of the Present, to start with my wife Marie-France.

When we met, I had already struck out any positive development for my private life. It's thanks to you, and even more so, that we have been able to build a family and a home of which we can be proud. And it's together that we struggled and made the most of it; it's together that we traveled; it's together that we conquered new horizons each time. And it's together that we confronted the happiness and misfortunes of life.

To you, my partner, I say: This medal is yours!

And you gave me a new family, to start with "Belle-Maman": as I often say, I wish to every man to understand as well with his mother-in-law as I enjoy understanding with mine! This new and enlarged family that "Beau-Papa" envelops into a Provencal sunshine, and of which the new generation symbolizes so well the children of the "Good Book"!

To you, Marie-France, I again say: this medal is yours!

Memory of the Present also, with all my friends and colleagues at work. In a few months, it will be thirty years that we reciprocally accept and appreciate each other. Sometimes, this was a difficult exercise for me, but always an exciting one, an exercise having its tense and satisfactory moments, as well as its times of common efforts. Together, we represent our Great Firm in the world. And, if I sometimes have a feeling that I gave a lot, I know that the reverse is also true.

...

To all of you, friends and colleagues from the past and the present, I say: Thank you!

And finally, Memory for the Future, for my children.

May this ceremony, and the recognition it represents for me, the son of immigrants and an immigrant myself, remain in your memory.

To you, my three children, I say: always give the best of yourself, live consciously, and this medal will be yours!

Thank you for your attention.

Monaco, 17th June 2001 »