



## A JOURNEY TO MY ANCESTRAL TOWNS IN EASTERN EUROPE

### **Kishinev, Orhey, Sorocea, Moldova; Tul'chin, Ukraine; and Bucecea, Romania**

On September 20, 2010 I boarded a United Airlines plane at Washington, D.C.'s Dulles Airport. My destination was the city of Kishinev, sometimes called Chisinau, which is the capital of Moldova. On the atlas map, Ukraine is to the North and Romania is to the South. I landed first in Munich, Germany and then changed planes for Kishinev. My total flying time was about twelve hours.

#### **MOLDOVA**

I came to Kishinev to see the city where my Mother was born in 1899. She and her family left Kishinev in 1903, just three months after one of the worst pogroms against the Jews. At the time, my Mother was only four and one half years old when they emigrated from Kishinev to Pittsburgh in the United States where most of the family of my Grandfather, Benjamin Kvashis, had already settled.

The pogrom lasted two days during which my Mother's family hid in an earthen cellar, under their apartment. A trap door covered by heavy rugs concealed the entrance to their hiding place, and they were not discovered. Many Jews were killed and many lost all their property. At the urging of the American Jewish community, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote a strong letter of protest to the Russian government officials.

Knowing my family's story, I have wanted to see Kishinev for a long time. When I arrived, I checked in at the Elat Hotel where I was staying and took a walk in the neighborhood. Here I was in the city where our family lived so many years ago.

#### **KISHINEV**

Kishinev is a modern city with a population of 592,000 people. It is the capital and largest city in Moldova which has a total population of 4,324,000. Although there are many people who speak English, most of the residents speak Russian, and a smaller number speak Romanian.

When my Mother's family lived there, Moldova was known as Bessarabia. In 1903 when they left, Kishinev had a population of 148,000 including a Jewish community of 50,000. These figures are from the Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol.7, Kishinev, Funk & Wagnals Co., 1904. In 1918 Romania acquired all of Bessarabia that Russia had acquired from Turkey in 1812. In 1940 Russia occupied Moldova. Finally, all of Moldova became an independent state in 1991 when the USSR collapsed. Before World War II, the Jewish population of Kishinev was 41,400. Today Kishinev has a Jewish population of between 1,000 and 2,000. There is now only one functioning synagogue in the city. It is the La Bayitch Synagogue.

Our guide for touring Kishinev was Olga Sivac. She was very knowledgeable of the history of Kishinev, as well as the background of Moldova and its Jewish community. We were fortunate to have her assistance and enjoyed the time we spent together.

Downtown Kishinev has broad streets, lots of traffic, and beautiful parks. It is the site of the Moldovan Parliament Building which is large and stately in design. There are other buildings housing parts of the government, shops, stores and restaurants. In good weather, there are many artists selling paintings, ceramics and other handicraft products in the parks.

One of the interesting features of Kishinev is located uptown where there is a large, spacious, block long flower market which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is a sheer delight to walk by the market, and view the flowers on display in each of the private stalls which make up the market. In addition to the beauty of the breath taking floral displays, the flower market stands out because it never closes. One can buy flowers at anytime of the day or night. It's size, extending the full length of a large city block, also adds to its impact. If you leave Kishinev, one thing you will always remember is the Flower Market.

### **MORE ABOUT MOLDOVA**

The land of Moldova is between Romania and the Ukraine. It consists of hilly grassland drained by the Prut and the Dniester Rivers. The economy is mainly agricultural. Most of Moldova was part of Romania before World War II and many Moldovans speak Romanian. The Soviets annexed Moldova in 1940, and according to the National Geographic Atlas of the World, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed., Russians and Ukrainians settled in the industrial region east of the Dniester known as Transdnistria. After Moldova gained independence in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR, Transdnistria seceded, making Tiraspol its capital. Moldova still does not recognize Transdnistria's independence and works to resolve the conflict.

Moldova has been a Republic since 2009 when a pro-Western coalition took power displacing an old guard Communist leadership. President Mihai Ghimpu took office on September 11, 2009. In his visit to Moldova on March 11, 2011, United States Vice President Joseph R. Biden addressing an overflow crowd in Opera House Square in the capital, Chisinau, stated, "...Freedom is in the air, and democracy is emerging in countries that for generations have known nothing but authoritarian rule."

In respect to religion, 98% of the people belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church (Christian). It should be noted that this religious denomination allows the priests to marry.

### **MORE ABOUT KISHINEV**

We visited the La Bayitch Synagogue. It is the only remaining functioning synagogue in Kishinev. The exterior was concrete which had been recently painted an attractive light yellow color. The interior had also been redecorated. Instead of long wooden pews or benches, those who attended sat at one of the wooden desks that were lined up in neat rows. The interior walls were painted a light shade of yellow and most of the trim was white. There were attractive chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Outside, in the rear of the building there was a sukkah decorated for the holiday with fruit and other decorations. This synagogue was originally constructed in 1888, and was known as the Glezer Schul. Recently, the La Bayitch movement has taken over its operation and renovations have been made.

Our guide for touring Kishinev was Olga Sivic. She was very knowledgeable about the history of Kishinev and the background of the Jewish communities in Moldova. We were very fortunate to have her assistance and enjoyed the time we spent together.

We visited the old Jewish Hospital in Kishinev. It consists of many buildings on a campus. Some of the buildings are run down, particularly on the exterior. What was once a busy and very significant medical complex is now only partially in operation. We met several Doctors who served on the staff. They related something about the current set up. A number of the buildings that were not in use were in great need of exterior maintenance work. 1954 was the last year that the Maternity section of the hospital was in operation.

The Jewish Hospital was established from 1812 to 1816. It was once a leading medical center which served Kishinev and other nearby communities. Now most of the facilities are not in use. They do medical imaging and operate a number of medical laboratories. In addition, there is the Avodah House where the elderly are cared for.

Historically, the Jewish Hospital played an important role during the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. Many Jews

fled other parts of the city and took refuge at the Jewish Hospital. A number of firemen and engineers formed a brigade and successfully defended both the Hospital and the many Jews who sought refuge there. They prevented the Cossacks and their accomplices from entering the Jewish Hospital facilities and protected the Jews who were taking refuge there.

After leaving the Jewish Hospital grounds, we drove to the old Jewish Cemetery of Kishinev. It was evidenced by the establishment of the Chavurah Kadisha in 1774. However, in 1959 the oldest part of the cemetery was destroyed due to a program of municipal construction.

During 1941 and 1942 the Nazi Army killed thousands of Jews at the cemetery, and throughout the city. They announced that the city was free of Jews. They buried some Jews alive. With few exceptions, the Jewish community of Kishinev was lost during the holocaust. It was an unparalleled tragedy. A 1997 publication of the Jewish Cultural Society of the Republic of Moldova entitled, "Ashes of Past Beat Into Our Hearts - Holocaust" by I. Levit demonstrates the difficulty of calculating the number of thousands of Jews of Kishinev killed by the Nazis and their accomplices.

The old Jewish Cemetery of Kishinev is very large and expansive even without the old portion which as was previously noted was destroyed by municipal construction. As we walked through parts of the cemetery we were impressed by its size and age. Many of the old tombstones still had photographs or drawings of the deceased attached with protective coverings. There was an old synagogue at the cemetery that was still standing but was in great need of rehabilitation. There was also a monument erected after the many Torahs that were damaged during the 1903 pogrom were buried at the cemetery.

After leaving the cemetery we visited the remains of the Jewish Academy founded by Rabbi Trilson in Kishinev. The remaining walls of the major structures of this center of scholarship and learning were very impressive.

## **THE CITIES OF ORHEI AND SOROCA IN MOLDOVA**

We visited the cities of Orhei and Soroca. At one time both of these cities had significant Jewish communities. Orhei was about 35 to 40 miles north of Kishinev, and Soroca was 85 to 90 miles north of Kishinev.

We saw the synagogue in Orhei which had recently been renovated. The walls of the synagogue were covered with concrete and there was a medium sized blue Mogan Dovid (Jewish star) above the door. The exterior had recently been painted gray.

Orhei is a small community. Most of the downtown shops and offices are two story buildings located on one main street. There were a number of monuments on the Main Street including one commemorating the Jews lost during the Nazi holocaust. 1,288 persons were deported from Orhei from 1940 to 1941.

Soroca is on the border between Moldova and Ukraine on the Dniester River. During wars and times of difficulty, people from Ukraine would seek safety in Soroca. The current population of Soroca is 38,500. Our guide was Olga Sivas. She knew the area well, and was very informative. If you look across the Dniester River you can see the Ukraine. This has helped to keep it a busy trading center.

Soroca is well known for its castle like structure known as the Fortress of Soroca. It was constructed by Nickolae Bulat in 1536. First it was built as a wooden fortress. Construction of the stone and masonry fortress took ten years.

Many people settled in Soroca to escape the wars in the Ukraine. It was not difficult to cross the Dniester River.

Soroca developed into an educational and cultural center for the Jewish people. It was a center for literature

and music. There were three Jewish libraries whose collections were well known in Europe. There were also a number of professional schools.

The Seltzer brothers created a mineral water plant in Soroca which became well known and was a very successful enterprise.

Today Soroca is the Roma or Gypsy capital of Moldova. The Roma now own a lot of property including many impressive homes. We drove by some of their neighborhoods in Soroca and found that the Gypsies were not friendly to strangers. I was curious about the definition of the term "Gypsy" and found that Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition, defines Gypsy as one of a wandering Caucasian race coming originally from India. We did not get out of our car in these neighborhoods.

We visited the old Jewish cemetery of Soroca which was well maintained. It provided evidence of the size of the former Jewish community. After walking through the grounds of the cemetery, we began our drive back to Kishinev which took us about two hours. It was a long drive and for most of the trip it was dark.

### **MORE ABOUT KISHINEV**

The following day we visited the Jewish Public Library where Olga Sivac was in charge. She showed us their collection and introduced us to members of the staff. In the same building there is The Jewish School. The building that houses both the Jewish Public Library and the Jewish School is located in downtown Kishinev. It was located at 4 Diordita str.

We watched Elena Sokolova's dance class for pre-school youngsters. They seemed to be having a good time. We also saw where the art classes were held and viewed some of the children's work. It was impressive. The classes that we visited had a lot of teacher involvement with the students. The rooms were filled with artwork on the walls and bulletin boards. There was an inviting atmosphere in the classrooms. We enjoyed seeing the collection at the Jewish Public Library and visiting the classes at the Jewish School.

Elena Sokolova accompanied me to pick up Michele at the Kishinev Airport. She was due to arrive at 6:20 p.m., but the plane was late and did not arrive until a little after 7:00 p.m. We took a taxi back to the Hotel Elat. Michele checked in and then the three of us took a cab to join Iulia Tucinskala and her friends at the Moishe House where she lives. They had invited us to join them for Shabbat dinner. Most of those present spoke English as well as Russian. A number of the girls invited their boyfriends. The group was made up of college graduates who were working in various professional fields. Victor Miller joined us, and we all had a very pleasant evening.

The following day, Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, Elena Sokolova joined us to show Michele some of the highlights of the Jewish Community in the city of Kishinev. Her boyfriend, Paul, who was a Law School student also joined us. We walked to the center of downtown. Outside one of the buildings, a band was playing, and we stopped to listen. One of the large cosmetic manufacturers sponsored the band concert and a beauty pageant that was held indoors. We watched the contestants who were wearing formal gowns arrive, and enjoyed listening to the band concert.

There was a brass band with thirteen musicians. They played marches for the most part. The instrumentation included three trumpets, two trombones, two bass horns, one tuba, one clarinet, one flute, one bass drum, one snare drum and one cymbal player.

We stopped to see the interior of a very old church. Inside the church walls were gilded in gold and painted figures adorned the walls. The exterior was classical architecture with a colonnade of six columns and a beautiful steel dome.

We walked through a beautiful park. There was a large, aesthetically well designed water fountain which was one of the highlights in the park. The beds of flowers were well cared for and added their vibrant colors to the setting. We also visited a Bird Center, and a second park which was located further from the center of town. One of the things that caught our attention when we were walking through the parks were couples and

their attendants who came to the parks after their weddings to take photographs of the bride and groom. Since Saturday is a popular day for weddings in Kishinev, there were a lot of couples taking photographs.

After lunch we went to the old Jewish section of Kishinev and visited the Jewish Synagogue again which is now operated by the Chabad Lubavitch. This is the only Synagogue that is still operating in Kishinev.

The old Gymnasium for Boys formerly located on Alexandersky Street, where my Grandfather, Benjamin Kvashis, was a teacher, was no longer in existence. I do have a drawing of it' and was hoping to find it, but apparently the years have taken their toll.

## **KISHINEV DEPARTURE**

On Sunday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, we met our Romanian guide and driver, Ciprian Slemcho, known as Chip. We left Kishinev behind us. It had been a good visit and we knew we would miss all the good friends we had made. Victor Miller left us and made his way back to the Ukraine. Chip would be with us for the next eight days, until we ended our journey in Bucharest and returned to the U.S.

Chip's home was in Suceava, Romania. His English was excellent and he was knowledgeable about the area. His personality was engaging and he had a good sense of humor. He drove us in a comfortable Volkswagon Stationwagon.

We drove from Kishinev to Soroca. We stopped briefly at the Fortress of Soroca so Michele could see it, and then drove along the Prut River until we reached a crossing to Ukraine. We took a barge across the river. Ukrainian officials checked our passports, and Chip filled out the necessary forms for us.

## **THE UKRAINE**

Ukraine has a population of 47,793,000. In comparison with other countries, it is a little larger than France. The Carpathian Mountains rise in the West and the Crimean Mountains in the South, but the heartland of Ukraine is the rich flat land that extends for more than a thousand miles and is known as the "steppe." Once called the breadbasket of the Soviet Union, Ukraine also has huge deposits of coal and iron that supply its heavy industry.

The Cossacks, a militant group, arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They fought for independence and engaged in a multitude of pogroms against the Jews. In 1903 when they attacked the Jewish community in Kishinev, my Mother's family decided to emigrate to America.

From 1920 most of the Ukraine was ruled by the USSR. Joseph Stalin, fearing Ukrainian nationalism, killed the intelligentsia. Through his policy of collectivization, when there was a famine in 1932 and 1933, it took at least five million lives. During the Nazi occupation of World War II, Ukraine lost 7.5 million people.

Ukraine suffered the world's worst nuclear disaster on April 26, 1986 when the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, 80 miles north of Kiev, exploded. Many thousands were killed or disabled as a result of the radiation leak. The plant was finally shut down on December 15, 2000.

With the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, Ukraine became an independent nation. It's present government is a republic.

The languages spoken are Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, Polish and Hungarian.

Religiously, three quarters of the population are Ukrainian Orthodox.

The capital, Kiev, has a population of 2,611,300 (2001)

The major economic factors include coal, iron, manufacture of transportation equipment, chemicals, agriculture and oil production.

We visited only a small portion of the Ukraine in the southwestern part of the country. In order to see Tul'chin where my maternal grandfather, Benjamin Kvashis, was born and grew up, we obtained lodging in Vinnytsaya for a few days. We also visited Chernivitsi which was one of the highlights of our trip. Chernivitsi is not only a very picturesque city, it is the home of Chernivitsi National University. The city has many beautiful vistas and also is the center of a lot of commercial activity.

Driving to and from these cities, we passed miles and miles of agricultural land.. There were vast fields of wheat and other crops as far as the eye could see, but very few visible people. The economy was depressed, and most of the people we saw went about their business without a smile.

### **VINNYTSAYA, UKRAINE**

We had accommodations in Vinnytsaya simply because it was conveniently located for visiting Tul'chin. We stayed at the Versal Hotel where the food was excellent and the service was good. They had marvelous cheese blintzes for breakfast. Each unit had two floors with a kitchen on the first floor and a bedroom on the second floor. The exterior of each unit was constructed like a log cabin.

On Monday, September 27<sup>th</sup> we met two people who would assist us in getting acquainted with the city of Tul'chin, Ukraine where my Grandfather, Benjamin Kvashis was born and grew up. Larisa Desiatko was known as someone who researched and studied the local history . Julia Golovakha was an excellent translator of Russian and Ukrainian, and her English was very good. They were both hired by Harold Hoffman of Atlantic Tours of Bucharest to assist us in Tul'chin. They met us in Vinnytsaya, at the Versal Hotel.

### **TUL'CHIN, UKRAINE**

The five of us got in the station wagon and Chip drove us south to Tul'chin. Our first stop was at a public high school in Tulchin. Arrangements had been made for us to meet the principal who was Jewish and would tell us about the Jewish community. Unfortunately, at the time set for our meeting, there was an emergency at the school and our meeting was canceled.

The city of Tul'chin is very old. Long ago there was a tunnel from Tul'chin to Nemerov that was big enough to accommodate horse drawn carts.

Today Tul'chin has a population of 30,000. Before World War II it had a Jewish community of approximately 7,000. Now the Jewish population is diminished. There are only 145 Jews in Tul'chin. Most of the Jews who live there are of modest means. Many live on their \$100 dollar a month government pensions. Currently, the city has no functioning synagogue.

We visited the oldest member of the Jewish community at his home. His name was Yurkovetsky Nauam Ovshyevich (his father). He was 93 years old. We spoke to him with the excellent help and assistance of Julia, our translator. He spoke to us about his memories of the difficult times during World War II. He said Stalin protected them from the Nazis. Members of his family joined us for our meeting. They were very hospitable to us. Two of his sons and a daughter now live in California. He said Stalin had saved them from the Germans during World War II. He smiled and seemed pleased with our visit.

In the afternoon we met the head of the Jewish Community of Tul'chin, Rita Schweibish. She said her maiden name was Waïneblat, and that now she was 74 years old. She told us about her experience during World War II and the Nazi occupation . Her parents were killed by the Nazi troops when she was 5 years old.

She was placed in an orphanage, but was never adopted. She grew up and later married, and now has two sons and four grandchildren all living in Tul'chin. She related details of the horrors of the holocaust. It was an amazing series of tragedies that befell the Jewish community. She introduced us to two other women who were holocaust survivors and members of the Jewish community of Tul'chin.

After saying goodbye to Rita Schweibish and her friends we drove to the edge of town to see the Palace of Duke Potatskiy which was originally constructed in 1796 and later was rehabilitated. It is a large spacious estate that is now owned by the government. The owners escaped to France shortly before the Nazi Army arrived. The main building houses the Nowa Technical School, and has been completely renovated. Other buildings are in a rundown condition and are awaiting renovation.

We met and spoke with a young music teacher who was awaiting her class. She spoke excellent English, and it was very pleasant and refreshing to hear about her music class. She was a vocalist, and at our request She performed some classical music for us. She then persuaded our guide, Chip, to sing a religious melody he knew.

Originally the owner of the Potatskiy estate had thousands of employees or tenants. It was a community by itself. The estate had its own church or chapel which we visited. Now the main building which has been fully renovated serves as a Technical School. We met a music teacher who spoke with us.

On the way back to Vinnytsaya we stopped at a memorial to the death of more than 10,000 Jews during the Nazi occupation from 1941 to 1944. The Nazi camp was called Pechora. Many Jews from Poland were forced to convert to Catholicism in Poland and then were brought to Pechora where they were killed. 60,000 more Jews were killed in the town of Oman, not far away.

We saw the remains of Hitler's headquarters in Vinnytsaya and visited a museum. All the buildings had been demolished. All that remained were huge gray stones under which were more stones, the only visible remains of Hitler's Bunker. The whole area was desolate. What remained marked a tragic and terrible bit of history.

We also passed Metsvish where the Bal Shem Tov had lived so many years ago.

We visited an orthodox synagogue in Vinnytsaya and stayed for services to celebrate Sukkot. The congregation was very cordial and welcomed us with open arms. However, most of the people spoke Russian. There were only a few English speakers. After services, they invited us to join them for dinner.

## **CHERNIVITSI, UKRAINE**

We drove from Vinnytsaya to Chernivtsi on September 28, 2010. It was about 150 miles west, and was both a delight because it is such an attractive city, and it was a real contrast to Tul'chin and the rural areas in southern Ukraine.

Although Chernivtsi is in the Ukraine, it is very near the Romanian border. As a border town, it has always been a busy trading center, and when we visited it was certainly a busy place. It is one of the most picturesque cities of the Ukraine. Much of its appeal is the marvelous integrity and unifying characteristics of the architectural design of its buildings and the attractive layout of its streets and open spaces. It has been described as a miniature Paris.

Chernivtsi's streets stretch up a gentle slope from the Prut River. There is a dense street network intersected with a thoroughfare leading to the central square. Austrian, Bukovynian and Czech architects contributed to the design of major buildings in the city. In 2008 Chernivtsi celebrated its 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Chernivtsi National University is housed in an attractively architecturally designed complex. It was constructed from 1864 to 1882. Its chief designer was Josef Hlavka, a well known Czech architect who lived from 1831 to 1908. It features Byzantine and Romanesque architecture. Many of the roofs are decorated with designs made of colored glazed tiles which catch your eye when you walk through the campus.

Today the University has some 20,000 students. Fortunately, the University provided us with an English speaking tour guide who was very helpful and made sure we had an opportunity to see the highlights. We briefly attended one of the English language classes which was well attended. However, the common language at the University is Ukrainian which is similar to Russian. Many years ago the theological seminary building included space for Orthodox Christian Theology and for Jewish Theology. This is no longer true today.

It has functioned as a University since 1875 when it began with three divisions, Divinity, Law and Philosophy. Now there are sixteen departments, and as mentioned above, 20,000 students. Visiting the University was a real treat.

In Chernivitsi we saw other places of interest including the old Jewish cemetery which dates back to the late 1700's. It is one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe, and is now undergoing major rehabilitation. There is an old synagogue at the cemetery in need of serious repair and reconstruction.

The streets of Chernivitsi are dark gray cobblestones in curved line patterns. Many of the buildings demonstrate the influence of Austrian architecture.

A final point of interest in Chernivitsi was the Jewish Museum of History and Culture. We learned that today only 1,000 Jews live in Chernivitsi. However, before World War II, there were 50,000. Some well known members of the Jewish community were Rose Auslander and Paul Celan who were both poets. Before World War II there were twelve synagogues in Chernivitsi.

We also visited the local synagogue. It was very well maintained, had blue and white ceramic tiles on the front and attractive wooden shutters and doors. It's steeple was covered with copper that had a weathered green color and was capped with a Mogen David, a Jewish star.

## ROMANIA

Romania is now a member of the European Union and its economy is improving. The population is 22,247,000. 90% of the people are Romanian, 7% are Hungarian and 3% are Roma or Gypsies.

Before World War II, there were 800,000 Jews living in Romania until the Holocaust destroyed a significant portion of the Jewish community. During World War II, at least 300,000 Jews were killed. Only about 6,000 Jews now live in Romania. Marshal Ion Antonescu was a pro-Nazi leader of Romania whose administration was responsible for the deaths of the Jews during the war.

"Historians have documented several pogroms in Romania, including one in June 1941 in the northeastern city of Iasi, where as many as many as 12,000 people are believed to have died as Romanian and German soldiers swept from house to house, killing Jews. Those who did not die were beaten, put on a train in stifling heat and taken to a small town. Of the 120 on the train, only 24 survived." New York Times, 10-9-09, P.A-6.

The major religion in Romania is Eastern Orthodox.

The economy is based on the manufacture of machinery, textiles, footwear, auto assembly, mining, timber and agriculture.

## BUCECEA, ROMANIA

We crossed the border to Romania after departing Chernivitsi and drove to Bucecea.



Bucecea is a small town with a population of approximately 1500. It appears that there are no Jews living in Bucecea today. That was not the case in 1887 when my Grandfather, Elya Terner, departed for Montreal, Canada where there were relatives, the Poyaners. A year later, in 1888, he emigrated from Canada to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States.

We visited the old Jewish Cemetery in Bucecea, and met two men who took care of it. The man in charge was Vasile who is 36 and holds two other jobs. His assistant was a man by the name of Costel. In the time we were there we found no gravestones of the Terner family. There were Walnut trees growing in telemetry, and the men were picking up Walnuts from the ground and giving them to me. I soon had a dozen.

The cemetery is neatly fenced in by an 8 foot concrete barrier. There is also a small synagogue on the premises. The exterior had been recently painted. It is gray in color, and has a Mogan David, a Jewish star, on its gray steel door. From the size and age of some of the tombstones, one can surmise that Bucecea is a very old Jewish community with a significant number of Jews who once resided there. Adjacent to the cemetery is the home of the caretaker. A sign on the fence by his home declared, "Str. Salciilor."

We took Vasile and Costel to a local bar for a beer. Vasile said he would see if he could find any Terner gravestones, and would be in touch with our guide, Chip.

The bar was called Pupas Turistic.

We saw Bucecea, the home of my grandfather, Elya (Elias) Terner. It is a small community that is largely agricultural. My grandparents and great grandparents lived there. One of the things the Terners did was make candles for the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church. The Menzers may have also lived there. Rachel Menzer was the wife of Elya Terner. They met in Montreal, Canada in 1887 and settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States in 1888 where they had seven children including my Father, David Terner.

We then departed Bucecea and drove to Radauti where we had lodgings at Gerald's Hotel. They greeted us with a pleasant welcome, and a glass of wine on the house. The hotel had an excellent staff including a fine chef, Irfan Ostunsoy. There were several English speakers on the staff as well as the chef. The hotel had been recently constructed, was modern and was very comfortable.

On September 30, 2010 we departed Radauti and drove to Suceava, our guide's hometown. On the way we passed many cabbage farms, and a wholesale cabbage marketplace. We saw many farmers with their horse drawn carts taking fresh cabbage to the wholesale market. We had arrived just in time for the harvesting of cabbage.

## SUCEAVA

The population of Suceava is now 117,000. It has a paper factory, an ice cream plant and many other commercial enterprises.

We visited the Orthodox synagogue which dates from 1870. There are now only 67 Jews in Suceava. Eight of these are survivors of the Holocaust. Before World War II, however, there were 45,000 Jews living in Suceava which was 40% of the city's population.

The synagogue is an attractive building, very well maintained. The front façade was decorated with blue and white ceramic tiles, and there were recently varnished wooden shutters and doors. Its dome was covered with copper that had aged with a green color, and was capped with a Mogan David.

We met Professor Golda, the President of the Jewish Community. He spoke to us until he had to leave to teach a class in physics. Members of the congregation who were present, included some English speakers who were both friendly and hospitable. They were all present to celebrate the Sukkot holiday. It was an

enjoyable visit.

### **BOTASANI**

We drove to Botasani to see the State Archives. Officials there told us it would take at least six weeks to obtain any documents. They told us that if our guide, Chip, would check on anything for us he would need a Power of Attorney.

### **IASI**

We then drove to Iasi. It looks like a thriving city. It is busy and there is a lot of business and commercial activity. Most of the buildings are well maintained. It is also home to a major university.

There are now some 400 Jews living in Iasi. Before World War II there was a Jewish community of 32,369. The Synagogue is located near the University.

We departed Iasi and drove to Bucharest. However, we stopped at Bacau to get a Power of Attorney drawn up for Chip, The Notary Public was Blagen George. We also had to hire an official translator to read and stamp the document. That made it official.

### **BUCHAREST**

The majority religious group in Romania is Christian Orthodox. 87% of the population belong to this denomination. They allow the priests to marry, but not the Monks.

The population of Romania is 22 million. 2.5% of the Romanian population are Gypsies. 6.6% of the population are Hungarian.

On the way to Bucharest we passed a busy wholesale grape market. Grapes are an important agricultural crop in Romania. Other major crops include wheat, corn, barley, sugar beets, sunflower seeds and potatoes.

We stopped briefly at a memorial building dedicated to all the Romanian soldiers who were killed during World War I.

Bucharest, the capital of Romania, has a population of 1,942,000, almost two million people. It is a busy major metropolitan area with lots of traffic and a great deal of commercial activity. The traffic moves very rapidly through the streets and thoroughfares. The taxi drivers often break the speed limits. Driving in downtown Bucharest is definitely a challenge.

We saw a number of synagogues in Bucharest. The Sinagoga Mare which is being rehabilitated was originally constructed from 1670 to 1671. It's concrete exterior walls are being painted a modest shade of yellow with white bordered windows.

Another synagogue, the Choral Temple, is also being rehabilitated. It's facades are artistically designed with red and tan bricks which form neo-Moorish patterns. It was originally constructed from 1864 to 1867.

In addition, we saw Temple Unirea Sfanta, originally constructed in 1850 and reconstructed in 1908. It's facades were striped in light yellow concrete and light tan bricks.

We attended Saturday morning services in a beautiful old synagogue originally constructed in 1846 and reconstructed in 1903. It's concrete facades were painted light yellow and were trimmed in white/ It was orthodox and a male choir performed during the service. A sign on the front of the building announced: Pre

Vecinics Amintire Sinagoga Mare. Here women sat in the balcony. The prayer books were all Hebrew, without any translation. I was able to follow the service most of the time.

## **THE PALACE OF THE PARLIAMENT**

After leaving the synagogue, we drove to see the Parliament Palace in Bucharest. After the U.S. Pentagon, it is the second largest building in the world. It consists of six floors and twenty one sections. The built on surface of the building is 330,000 square meters. Here, in the Palace of Parliament, the International Conference Center, a member of A.I.P.C. (the Association Intenatiionale des Palais de Congress) carries out its activities. The various halls are named after great personalities in Romanian history. It is said that if one fails to visit this building, one may never understand Bucharest or Romania.

The architecture of the halls and meeting rooms is very beautiful and spacious. Although the exterior of the building is not thaat impressive except for its size, the inteior is absolutely breathtaking. The design is an aesthetic masterpeice. Hanging chandaliers are gracious and beautiful. The meeting rooms are each unique, warm and inviting in different styles. Several rooms and hallways have skylights composed of glass and intricate metal decorative designs which are aesthetically pleasing. We were impressed with how tastefully the interior rooms, hallways and staircases were designed. It is simply magnificent.

The exterior is more attractive at night when it is illuminated by lights of varying color and intensity.

The Romanian leader of the government during most of the construction was Chachesque. With this project he certainly left his mark.

## **MORE OF BUCHAREST**

After leaving The Parliament Palace we visited a large park on a lake which featured a spacious outdoor exhibit of the houses in which Romanians lived in various sections of the country over the centuries. For the most part, the houses were reconstructed from the originals, and the result was a historical treat. It was known as the Village Museum.

## **LIPSCANI STREET**

Lipscani Street is located in downtown Bucharest, and is full of privately owned small shops selling everything from clothing and toys to souvenirs. Each of the shops was covered with a royal blue awaning to protect the owners and their customers from the weather.

This was the most popular commercial street of old Bucharisst. It's name came from the merchants who were trading German goods from Leipzig, and later, a much larger area. One of the early references to this appeared in 1589. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century it became the major axis of the trading quarter. Through the years it has survived in various forms. When we were there, it could best be described, as a busy, crowded and rather merry commercial area.

## **RESTAURANT PESCARUS**

We spent our last evening in Bucharest at the Restaurant Pescarus. We ate in the Salon Dining Room. It's walls were finished in highly varnished strips of very light colored wood. Although this restaurant is not known for it's cuisine which is just average, the orchestra which specializes in Romanian folk music and the costumed folk dancers they accompany are extraordinary.

The entertainment features Romanian folk music with a few current tunes mixed in. They had two excellent vocalists the evening we attended. Since those in attendance that evening included a group of Israeli tourists, the orchestra accompanied a vocalist who performed some well known Israeli songs such as "Jerusalem of Gold," and other melodies.

There were six folk dancers, three men and three women, all dressed in Romanian folk costumes. Their performance was excellent, and the music provided by the orchestra kept the audience regularly engaged in foot tapping to the beat.

The instruments used by the orchestra of six musicians varied during the evening but included violins, piano, tenor saxophone, flute and an ancient instrument called a panpipe.

It was a delightful way to spend our last evening in Bucharest which we enjoyed sharing with our guide, Ciprian Slemco or Chip.

### **DEPARTURE FROM BUCHAREST**

We arose on October 3, 2010, the day of our departure, and had breakfast in the Hotel Ibis where we were staying. We were joined for breakfast by Chip and Harald M. Hoffmann of Atlantic Tours in Bucharest who had made arrangements for our tour. We then packed and were off to the airport with Chip. After a snack of Romanian apple strudel and tea, we said farewell to Chip and checked in for our flight on Romanian Airlines to London's Heathrow Airport. We changed planes in London and flew United Airlines to Washington's Dulles Airport.

Our trip was a great adventure. It was something I had wanted to do for a very long time. Having my daughter Michele Turner join me was a special treat. To walk the streets of Kishinev, Moldova where my Mother, Rose Cramer, was born; to see Tul'chin in the Ukraine where my Grandfather, Benjamin Kvashis grew up; and to find the small community of Bucecea in Romania where my Grandfather Elya Turner lived, was an experience I shall forever treasure.

B. Turner  
11, 2010

Benjamin  
December