

Efraim Felix Sherf

Memories of My Father's House

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Introduction

Zeev Walter Ellenbogen
Jerusalem, May 15, 2006

My dear Felix,

I was most satisfied to hear of your decision to write your memoirs.

In my view, the memoirs of Holocaust survivors such as ourselves serve a number of fitting purposes:

- They are a memorial to our parents who raised and educated us;
- They provide our descendants with information about their origins;
- They are a source for research into the atmosphere and the experience of the Jewish society in which our parents' homes existed: "A wonderful world that no longer exists," as I defined it in my memoirs;
- They document the events of the Holocaust that we underwent;
- Regarding those people such as us, who joined the immense "Armada" of Holocaust survivors who migrated to Israel, these memoirs are a source for research of the clandestine immigration in the period preceding the foundation of the state of Israel, which made a decisive contribution to the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the establishment of the independent state of Israel.

In this act of yours you join the small, but commendable, "club"

of people from own town of Gura-Humorului, who have written their memoirs. Despite their common ground, each of them, like you, has a unique story of his own.

My friendship with you and with your older brother Mapi has continued for decades, from our childhood until our old age. Therefore I know your personal family history well. I therefore did not expect to encounter surprises in your story, but nevertheless you managed to surprise me by revealing an aspect of your personality that I was not aware of: your inclination toward poetry.

I am impressed by your poems, both original and translated. Well done! This is also an opportunity to wish you good health and many more good years together with you wife Carmela.

*Yours in friendship,
Walter*

Dedications

I dedicate these lines to my dear parents, Clara and Akush Sherf of Gura-Humorului, as a memorial to their esteemed memory; supportive and warm parents, lovers of culture, books and poetry who raised a family and founded an exemplary home, which faded and passed with our expulsion to Transnistria.

Mother was the daughter of Rosa and Moshe Sherf. Grandmother Rosa was a learned woman, with a high level of knowledge both of mathematics and of German and Yiddish culture: Heine, Goethe, etc. Grandfather Moshe was a Vizhnitz-Otynia Hassid, the owner of a hotel and inn in Gura Humorului; an honest, God-fearing man, who was never once photographed in his life. I did not know him and I have no picture of him: my brother Mapi-Moshe is named after him. Grandfather Moshe was present at the open operation of the Rabbi of Otynia, an operation that was carried out without anesthesia, while the rabbi held a Torah scroll.

Father was the son of Dvora and Ephraim Fischel Sherf. (They were not related. Father was a Cohen, of priestly descent, and Mother was not.) They were pious people, with Jewish and German culture, who moved from Storojinez Iordanesti to Gura Humorului. Grandfather Ephraim Fischel, after whom I, Ephraim Felix am named, died in 1928, a few months before I was born, in Gura Humorului, in a summer resort, when father moved from

Orsova to Constanta to serve as Foresta-Romana's export manager, his most senior management and professional job, in this port city, near the Black Sea, this beautiful city. Grandfather Ephraim Fischel attended the "Scheiberish Shul," a synagogue established by the Scheiber family, Grandmother Dvora's family. Professor Chaim (Litsa) Scheiber-Sheba, the head doctor of the Hagana and head medical officer in the IDF, Director-General of the Ministry of Health and director of the Tel HaShomer Hospital, which is named after him, was also a member of this family.

My parents were brought to rest in the eternal city of silence—the immortal city, the Kiryat Shaul cemetery in Tel Aviv. Father died in 1961, aged seventy-three, and Mother died in 1981, aged eighty-six. Their grave is plot number 11-5-14-27-28.

This memoir is also dedicated to the surviving members of the Jewish community of Gura Humorului in Israel and to my good friends from second grade in elementary school, to which I arrived at the age of eight. This was a let down, as far as I was concerned, from a Jewish-Hebrew school managed by Rabbi Zalman in Constanta, Galati, to a state elementary school in Gura Humorului managed by the anti-Semitic principal, Sachliano, and from a spacious apartment with all facilities to an apartment without a bathroom and with an outside toilet.

On the other hand, my best friends, seventy years later, are my school friends from second grade and also a number of special friends from Aiud—the *Hachshara* (preparation) for migration to Israel, and afterwards in kibbutzim, villages and cities in Israel.

Introduction

With awe and reverence, I begin this memoir. I wish to describe the meteoric rise of my late father, who began work at the age of sixteen as an apprentice in the forestry and timber organization, Foresta-Romana, a company that produced, marketed and exported timber in Romania. At the age of eighteen he was already *Depotleiter* (depot manager); in charge of the commercial inventory of the company's timber and he continued in senior management positions in Csíkszereda-Miercurea Ciucului and Orsova, and was sent to Bulgaria to promote timber exports, a field in which he was an expert of the first order. In Galati he was deputy managing director of the district, he carried out all the work with exceptional diligence and expertise, and he was also Foresta's biggest depot manager in Romania. As Galati was a port, he was also the organization's export manager, a role he filled successfully and with indefatigable talent in Constanta, from 1928—the year of my birth, until 1933, and he specialized particularly in the customs regulations, where he always found loopholes that enabled him to pay less customs in the order of significant sums of money that amounted to several millions for the organization. He had a very high salary

(17,000 lei) a month and also a pension fund (imagine a pension fund at the beginning of the twentieth century in Romania, what social benefits existed in those days?), as well as a four-and-a-half room apartment and a guest room, which by the way was always occupied with relatives, a doctor at the company's expense for the entire family, water, electricity, heating, and a taxi for business travel. What industrialist in those years had such a high monthly or annual salary?

The pictures from that period in Father's life reflect his greatness as an international expert on timber management and export—a happy and very intelligent man who loved books and poetry and was also a poet himself, He wrote love poems to his fiancée Clara Sherf, who became his wife of some forty years and the mother of his children; our late mother. She was his helpmeet, who ran their large house with the help of a nurse, a cook and a laundress, as well as participating in the raising and educating of the children. Both our parents frequently visited our teachers at school to follow our progress in our studies.

Father died in Israel, where he migrated after years of suffering and deprivation in the horrors of Transnistria in the years 1941–1945. He arrived in Israel in July 1948 from Cyprus, a sixty-year old Holocaust survivor who had lost thirty-eight kilograms. As there was no timber industry in the arid Jewish homeland—there were no forests, because trees do not grow in sand—he found work and a living after the foundation of the state of Israel on the fifth of Iyar, 5740 (1948) in the Ministry of the Interior in Tel Aviv, in the Dan district, where he issued identity cards to the population of our newly independent state. Later he was employed by the

Oxygen Center in Tel Aviv as sales manager and the owners of the company immediately recognized his managerial talents, his pleasant manners and his command of many languages (he spoke with each new immigrant in his own language). Who found work in Israel at the age of sixty to sixty-five? He thus established a home in the new state of Israel that was a source of pride and joy. An honest and accomplished man, who lived up to his principles, he was very industrious and was always perfectly dressed in a matching suit and tie, a hat, a coat and well shined shoes. His integrity was reflected in his handsome face and wise eyes, which were always laughing, and his impressive personality. To our distress, Father fell ill with heart disease, heart failure and kidney failure, at a time when the medical profession did not have today's advanced equipment at its disposal. The ECG was the only appliance for determining heart functioning or heart disease; in those days life-saving, life-extending equipment was unheard of. He died on Elul 11, 5721–August 1961. He was survived by a wife to whom he was married for forty years. Mother cared for him with great devotion and his illness left her exhausted. She was left the widow of her sensitive, warm, supportive and loving husband and companion. Mother and we children could not be comforted and we knew no peace. His spirituality and his concern for our education must be noted—we learned Hebrew, and Father instilled in us a love of learning and of foreign languages, Father chose our books—that is the man he was, and he had a command of languages: German, Yiddish, Romanian, Hungarian, French, English, Bulgarian, Ukrainian-Russian, ancient Greek and Latin—a language he taught us in

high school.

When my father lay in the Donolo hospital in Jaffa, on his sick bed, the head of the department Dr. Marmur, who was from Transylvania and was years younger than him asked him, "Are you Mr. Akush Sherf? Were you the manager of Foresta in Transylvania, whose name goes before him in this country?"

I hope and believe that this memoir will be a memorial to my late father, and will faithfully represent a man whose path in life was both a bed of roses and strewn with thorns.

May you rest in peace in the world of silence and immortality.