

Max C. Goodman

I was born in Romania, in the city of Radauti in the Bucovina province. The province, formerly part of Austria, became part of Romania in 1918. My father, a veterinarian and horse breeder, was well off; and I and my sister who was two years younger than me had a happy childhood. Some anti-Jewish laws were enacted in Romania in 1938 and 1939 but they did not affect us; but life changed unexpectedly in June of 1940.

On June 28, 1940, the Soviet Union occupied the Romanian provinces of Basarabia and North Bucovina. A rumor spread that Jews in these provinces attacked the retreating Romanian Army and so, as a revenge, Romanian soldiers and bands of the Iron Guard were killing Jews. My father was returning home from a business trip and on June 30 was pushed out from a train moving at full speed. Two months later my father died from his injuries. I was only 16 years old. Rioting was spreading through Romania. On September 6, General Ion Antonescu, supported by the Iron Guard, assumed dictatorial power. Romania soon joined the Berlin-Rome axis. In October German troops entered Romania. Within weeks Romania had adapted all anti-Jewish laws in Nazi Germany. Jews were persecuted in many different ways. I was expelled from school after I had just finished the tenth grade. Our horses, roughly thirty, were confiscated and our stables were occupied by the army. Our home was “nationalized” and we had to pay a high rent to live in our own home. A Jewish labor office in town was formed early in 1941 and from March until September I had to report for unpaid work on roads and fields.

June 22, 1941 – the German armies invaded the Soviet Union with the Romanian army participating in the invasion. Romanian forces reoccupied Basarabia and North Bucovina. On the southern front, German and Romanian units reached the Dnjeper River by August. In September, Germany agreed to transfer to Romania the administration of a territory between the Dnjester

and Bug Rivers. On October 8, the Romanian government annexed this territory and called in Transnistria. Within days, 150,000 Jews from the provinces of Basarabia, Bucovina , and the district of Dorohoi were deported to Transnistria; most of them to their deaths. This was the beginning of the Romanian Holocaust.

On October 12, 1941, the expatriation edict was issued in our city. Within 24 hours, all Jews had to deposit their money and other valuables in the national Bank, pack as much as they could carry (but no more than 20kg., or 45 lbs.), take along food for three days, leave their houses intact with the keys in the doors, and assemble at the railroad station to be transported and resettled in the “new territory”. My mother took our valuables to the bank, but not all our money. We packed what we could, wrapped the money around my 14 year old sister, and left for the station.

There were 9,000 people assembled to be deported.

We were pushed into cattle cars, 100 people to a car. The European railroad cars are much smaller than American cars, about one quarter the size. We were packed in like sardines, young and old, children and sick people forced out of the hospital. Four trains left our city. After two days our train arrived at a place called Atachi, at the Djester River, a distance of 150 miles from our home in Radauti. The train trip was hell. The worst thing in those sealed cars was thirst. Two people in our car committed suicide. When we arrived, we were pushed out by Romanian gendarmes from the cars. It was raining, mud up to the knees. People ran to the muddy river to drink some water, and two were shot before my eyes. We were still better off than the people from North Bucovina and Basarabia who were marched by foot to Atachi from Edineti

concentration camp about 50 miles away. They had been forced from their homes in August and kept in Edineti at a stadium under an open sky. Hungry and clad in rags, they were moving around in our midst in almost unconscious motion. The Romanian border police plundered the deportees mercilessly. Peasants from the surrounding area came during the day to sell food at exorbitant prices and at night to loot. After two or three days a primitive barge ferried us across the Dnjester, but not before the border police had confiscated all our documents and any valuables they could lay their hands on. A lady had some earrings on; she was not asked to take them off, rather a policeman ripped them from her ears. Across the river, in Moghilev-Podl'sk, Romanian soldiers and Ukrainian militiamen preyed on the deportees. We were driven to some dilapidated barracks with no electricity, no running water, and no latrines. Newer and newer deportees were pouring in. I believe that the new installed Romanian authorities did not know what to do with us. In the meantime, people were starving to death. Early in November we were told that we will be moved out from the barracks to places in the interior of the province, about a thousand people at a time – all by foot. My mother, my sister and I ended up in such a convoy with the destination unknown. Out of Moghilev was a steep hill. We were not allowed on the freeway, only the unpaved, muddy service road. Many people could not master climbing the hill and were left there to expire. We passed by places like Shargorod and Nurafa, and after several days ended up in a little town called Djurin. The province was once the heartland of the Pale of Settlement and was dotted with little towns – shtetls – still inhabited mostly by Jews. Djurin was such a little town. It was inhabited by about 1,200 people before the war, but the place was empty before the deportees arrived there.

DJURIN

The inhabitants had either left with the retreating Russian army, were killed by Einsatzgruppe D, or were in hiding. About 4,000 deportees were brought to Djurin. The place had no electricity, no running water, no outhouses. It was controlled by an Ukrainian militia installed by the Germans. You had to bribe the militiamen to get a roof over your head. We ended up with 16 people in a little house, about 400 square feet, which would be our home for the next two and a half years. There was only one water pump in town with drinkable water and people had to stand in line to fill their containers and pots. To wash, we had to use rainwater or snow in the winter. The town was a marketplace and peasants from the area would bring their products. We fortunately still had some money and other people would exchange clothing for food, but most of the people were destitute. Winter set in, 1941/1942 was a very cold winter with a lot of snow. People were freezing and starving. Romanian gendarmes took over at the end of December. The place was declared a “Jewish colony”, a combination of a concentration and a detention camp. Families were not separated. We had to wear a yellow Star of David on our clothes. A Jewish committee was installed to rule the camp, but it’s main mission was to deliver workers when required.

Spring 1942 brought a typhoid fever pandemic. There was a hospital building in town with twelve beds, but at least one hundred people were isolated there at a time. There was no medication available and people were falling like flies. Two doctors I knew died treating the sick. In that first winter and spring, one-third of the deportees perished. Early in 1942 I was sent to work in a slaughterhouse adjacent to the camp, run at the time by the German military. I was kept there as a bookkeeper. Shortly thereafter the Germans left, but I was kept to work there.

Every morning, they used to clean the place of blood, piece of meat, skin and bones. It was thrown out and people used to fight over these remnants like dogs. Unbelievable what people will do when they're starving. At first, when requests for laborers came, people volunteered in the hope they would get to eat. In some labor camps people were given food, while, however, in other camps people were starved to death and very few returned. So when there were requests for laborers, people were hiding. When the camp leadership could not muster the required number of men, the Romanian gendarmes and sometimes Germans from Organization Todt used to enter camp and catch whoever they could get their hands on. In between such "man hunting", people were trying desperately to adjust.

One day in 1942, a German captain entered our camp and offered to contact relatives and acquaintances in Romania. Some people gave him addresses and he returned with money and medications. Later on other "couriers" found their way to our camp with help. A butcher shop was set up in early 1942 where people could occasionally buy meat. A food store was later set up, but the majority of deportees had no means and were starving to death. There wasn't a day without several corpses in the streets. Not until the end of 1942 was a kitchen set up to serve a meager meal once a day. Also at the end of 1942, an orphanage was set up to shelter about 100 children.

Although I had designated work, I was twice rounded up and taken to labor camps; once in September of 1942 to work at a beet sugar factory in Derebczyn, and again in August of 1943 to work at peat bogs in Tulcin. It was hard work at the sugar factory but at least they provided us with food. In Tulcin we had to dig peat by hand while standing in the frigid marshes and there was hardly any food. I came back from there in October of 1943 half dead, it took me a long time to recover.

At the end of 1943 the war was going badly for the Germans and their Romanian allies. Antonescu realized that the war was lost and, to save face, decided to empty the Transnistria camps. In December of 1943 the deported Jews from Dorohoi were repatriated, raising hopes that we might soon follow. We feared, however, that the retreating Germans might liquidate us first. In February 1944, the orphans were taken back to Romania.

Our camp was in a valley, about a mile from the highway. Early in March we witnessed the German retreat. Day and night tanks and vehicles of all kinds filled the highway. Only once some harmless looking soldiers entered our camp looking for food! On March 19, 1944, Russian army units entered the camp. The next day German airplanes bombed the camp, causing several casualties. My mother and sister survived. After a couple of weeks we left Djurin for home, but the Soviets did not let us cross the border to Romania. We spent another year in a DP (displaced persons) camp in Briceni, today it is known as Moldova. We returned to Romania in May of 1945.