

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



The publication of this collection of stories owes its thanks to many people, especially to those extraordinary women who were willing to relive their memories, most of which were almost too painful to retell. We thank them for their courage, honesty, and patience. We hope that this book will honor them and that their plight will be a guide for a better future.

The students in the translation department of Moldova State University were very helpful in transcribing and translating hours and hours of conversations: Ludmila Dulgher, Iulia Cozacenco, Katia Parfentieva, and Olga Bueva. It is significant to note here that two of the students discovered that members of their own families had been exiled, an event that had been kept silent within their families for so many years. Additional assistance was offered by Eugenia Butucea.

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This book, Shattered Destinies, resulted from a project that also includes a video in Romanian with English sub-titles that was facilitated by Nicholas Steffens, Peace Corps Volunteer, and students at Moldova State University. This video is also available through RCTV “Memoria.” The project was supported by Peace Corps Small Grants Assistance as well as by generous friends from abroad.

The beneficiaries of RCTV “Memoria” have experienced traumas in their lives, the effects of which can still be seen many decades later. However, these experiences can be used to fight against repression, social violence and terror. These are “pictures” of the past. It is hoped that they can be used to bear upon the present and formulate a better future.

Permission to reprint or reproduce any portion of this book may be directed to: The Director, RCTV “Memoria,” 26/2 Frumoasa, 2009 Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. Furthermore, additional copies of this publication can be ordered from the above address.

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## P R E F A C E



This book in no way presumes to be an academic document or an historical account of the period of deportations in Moldova that took place during the 1940's as part of a massive and systematic transfer of people living under the Soviet regime to the work camps of Siberia and Kazakhstan. It is, in fact, the reminiscences of a group of women who survived the kind of repressive and inhumane treatment that no-one should have to suffer. Following are their individual stories told in their own words, stories filled with pain but also with hope that those who read these pages will never allow this sort of treatment to happen again.

The survivors of the ordeal of deportation and forced labor that was organized by a totalitarian regime are as "living pages" of the nation's history. They were persecuted, tortured, mocked and stigmatized as "enemies of the people." Still, they kept their self-respect and their sense of homeland. They are both the victims and the eyewitnesses of wrongdoing perpetrated by the Soviet authorities, acts which even today have not been effectively discussed.

As you read the stories of the women in this book, try to imagine yourselves in their shoes, especially you young readers who are hearing this part of history for the first time. How would you feel if you were confronted with loud banging at your door in the middle of the night only to be met at the opened door with armed soldiers and snarling dogs? Your mother is crying, your father has tried to escape with another sibling, and you don't know why your life has suddenly become a nightmare. You are told to take only what you can carry, you are hungry, frightened, you are forced to ride in stifling train cars meant to carry only animals. You don't know where you are going, why you are going, and when you get to the end of your journey, your future only looks darker.

The purpose, then, of this collection of remembrances is to bring to life a period of history so that we, the next generation, will not let this inhumane treatment of our fellow countrymen and women happen ever again. We must recognize that this DID happen so that the lives of those so tragically affected will be validated and honored as true heroes and models of survival against repression, torture, and unjust victimization. Though the voices of these Moldovans may be silenced as age advances, their stories and their memories will be retained in these pages to live on and serve as a guide to the future.

It is estimated that over six million people, including Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, Volga Germans, Chechnians, and of course Moldovans, were designated "enemies of the people" and legally detained as forced laborers in the work camps of Siberia and Kazakhstan. In Moldova alone, it is estimated that from this tiny country 100,000 people were deported, disrupting the lives of many thousands more.

It is worth noting that in Norway, where some 2,000 people were forced into concentration camps during the Nazi occupation, many to perish, school children learn of this period of their history by traveling to Auschwitz to see with their own eyes what hatred and cruelty can do. They understand, through learning about the experiences of their forefathers, that they must not let tyranny and oppression take root again.

If you are interested in reading other stories of and by the survivors of this period, you may contact the Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture "Memoria", 26/2 Frumoasa str., 2009 Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.

Molly Pulver Lamphear

"YOUTH SHOULD BE A BEAUTIFUL PERIOD OF LIFE,  
BUT THIS WAS NOT MY FORTUNE."



## Lidia Bejenaru

Born: 1931, Telenești District

Exiled to: Bureat-Mongolia Region

I will relate to you some of the unpleasant experiences of my youth, a time that should be a beautiful period of life, but this was not my fortune.

My parents, Nicolae and Aculina Bosii, were very diligent people living in the village of Mihailasa in Telenești district. They weren't highly educated, but they were hardworking farmers and we lacked for practically nothing in our household. Our parents always gave us clothes and shoes. We owned a piece of land, of which about 10 hectares were open fields where we grew wheat and corn, and another five hectares were for growing grapes: 3 hectares for wine and 2 hectares for grapes for the table. We had many bees, a large number of sheep (up to 70-80), as well as 2 or 3 cows all the time. There was always ample food and drink. There were three houses in our yard. Much of our produce we gave to the Village Council so that others would not starve during the famine (1946-48). My father had also given livestock and farm equipment as well as land to the newly organized kolkhoz (a collective farm). He even went to western Ukraine to buy wheat so that he could give "postavka" (the delivery of taxes in the form of goods) to the State.

I had finished the second form in the Romanian school because Moldova was, at that time, part of Romania. Then, when the Russians came in the year 1940, they made me re-take the second form in the Russian school where I also completed the third form. The Romanians returned in 1941 and, again, I had to retake the third form in the Romanian school. By the time the Russians came back in 1944, I was only in the fourth form! So I studied two years in the third form and two years in the second form. When the Russians came we studied in the Cyrillic alphabet; when we were part of Romania, we studied in the Latin alphabet. And so it went on from one form to another, and by the time the Russians came for the final time, I was in the fourth form. I completed the 7<sup>th</sup> form in 1948 and then went to a 10-year school in Telenești, at a boarding school, and began studies there.

However, my life changed on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949. On that day cars and military vehicles filled with soldiers drove through our village on their way to the neighboring village. We all thought that war had broken out. Then, on July 6<sup>th</sup> when we woke up, we discovered our house encircled by soldiers. We didn't wake up by ourselves, but at three o'clock in the morning the soldiers surrounded our house and banged at our door and told us to get ready to leave our home. We were to be deported because we no longer had permission or the right to live in Moldova. As it happened, my father was not at home. He had gone to Chișinău on the 5<sup>th</sup> because someone from the district had told him to go to the Home Ministry so that his name could be stricken from the list of kulaks (generally used at that time to refer to a

prosperous landowner). So, it was only my 15 year old brother, mother and I who were at home when the soldiers came.

My brother had been sleeping on the balcony of our newly built house that the authorities later turned into a school; my mother and I were inside. When the door was thrown open my brother tried to run away, but the soldiers caught him and brought him back. They did nothing to him, just brought him into the house. Mother fainted and fell to the floor; I started yelling and my brother joined in. Quickly they brought water, and we sprinkled it on my mother. When she gained consciousness, they told us, "Get ready because you can't live here any longer." Mother asked them: "Why can't we? What did we do that we can't stay and live here? We gave you "postavka," we gave "postavka" three times already. Those who had no way to give "postavka" came to us and we gave it for them, too." They replied, "We won't explain to you why you have no permission to stay here. Just take some food and clothes with you." We prepared the most necessary things to take with us. And when they came back to take us, there was only one car to transport three families, and there was no place for even the people. I said: "Give us another car because we have no place here to load our belongings." And they said: "Take the most essential things with you, get in and don't make a fuss." We got in, took one pillow, a blanket, a bucket of soft cheese, a pan of butter and a pan with lard. The day before we had baked bread and "invîrtită" (a kind of rolled, baked pie stuffed with cheese, cabbage, and potatoes) for all the people that were going to come and help with the farm work. Boys and girls would plough our fields, and then afterwards we would go to their fields – we helped each other. So we took those baked goods as well. Before we left the house, the boys and girls had come with their hoes to help with the farm work, and their cries and yells were joined with ours.

Finally, we got into the vehicle and were taken to the village border. There they had gathered seven families from the 400 families living in Mihailasa village. These seven families included my cousin Gheorghe Bosii, my mother's sister Olga Sanduleanu, Tudora Rotaru, Maria Savitcaia, and Olga Caraus with her two children, and us. Olga's mother-in-law and Olga's husband had escaped together and were not deported with this group. And so we were seven families.

They took us to Bălți to the sugar refinery and showed us the rail cars in which we were to be transported the next day. They were filthy from carrying goods to the refinery, so we chose one carriage and tried to clean it with water. We didn't stay in the carriage that night but instead we built a fire and slept on the ground while the carriage dried. Then we cut some grass to cover the floor of the carriage. Of course the next day everyone wanted to go into "our" carriage. In fact all the families from our village did get into that carriage and also those from Telenești. In addition, there were two Jewish families who were very wealthy and who had owned many sheep. So they loaded us on and we stayed there on July 6<sup>th</sup>. On July 7<sup>th</sup> at 11a.m. they attached our carriage to a train that had about 42 carriages in all.

We traveled for about 21 days, locked in these carriages that had only one small window to let in fresh air. There were two soldiers in each carriage, one at the head and one at the tail of it. From time to time the train would stop on the tracks and wait for other rail traffic to pass; on occasion we would stop briefly at a station. This went on for about two weeks, but we were not allowed to get out of the train at these stations and we had no water. They would not open the doors at these stops, but the train did make stops from time to time away from the stations to let us out

into the fields to relieve ourselves. We had to remain in a circle; we weren't allowed to find a bush or a tree. Some families would go under the carriage, but no one was allowed any privacy. That's how we traveled. What food we had with us we had consumed in two weeks. Even the baked goods that we had brought became moldy, but we ate and shared it with the people in our carriage who had nothing. When we arrived at Novosibirsk, they took us to dining-rooms and they told everybody from the carriage who had buckets, pans, jugs or something of the kind to take them and fill them with borsch and salted fish that was prepared for us. And like this they gave us each a portion after so many days of traveling without food.

After that we stopped at Irkutsk where they took us to the shower, our first in three weeks. We had heard of the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps and when they took us to the shower, my mother feared that they were going to kill us and make soap from our bones like they had in Germany. Mom, God save her soul, told us, "Now they're taking us to our 'final cleansing'," and I asked her, "Why are you saying this, Mom?" and she said, "Well, that's what they did in Germany." And after the bath I told her, "You see, Mom, they didn't make us into soap." "And so we'll live on," she answered.

Then we crossed the border of Bureat-Mongolia, passing through the barricades, and finally arrived at the capital city of Ulan-Uda. Later, we traveled about another 50 kilometers before stopping at a saw mill. There we came to a prisoner-of-war camp where Japanese soldiers were imprisoned. The barracks were made of earth. We were taken to our barracks, separate from the Japanese prisoners, and each family was given 10 square meters to store their bags and to sleep; such a tiny space. But we were exhausted and so spread our covers on the floor. When we woke up the next morning our bodies were covered with bites from the chinch bugs that made their nests in the dirt. Mother, during the night, had been awakened and took a towel to try to brush away the bugs, to no avail. The next afternoon, an official from the commandant's office came to register us. As we were being registered, carpenters came and constructed an enclosure with boards and planks – right where we were sitting. Like being imprisoned.

Each family was given a small room. My brother and I and mother had a tiny room where they also built for us an oven of bricks and two benches from boards. The benches were our beds. We stayed like this for about two weeks. At the end of the first week, my brother, his cousin and two other boys from Mîndrești tried to escape by boarding some railway cars used to transport lumber. They hid among the lumber and got as far as Irkutsk before they were caught. My brother was still considered a minor and was brought back, but the other boys and their mothers were taken to prison. When asked why the mothers were imprisoned, the authorities responded that the mothers had known about this. But in fact no one knew what those boys were going to do. So, my Aunt Olga was sent to prison with her son where she worked at a glass factory, leaving behind three little girls, aged 5, 7, and 9. Mother begged the authorities to let her keep the girls, but the commandant said. "You have no resources to keep three more children." So my little cousins were sent to an orphanage, separated from their family and loved ones.

After we had been at this place (Onohoi) for several weeks without work, all adults were taken to work at the nearby saw mill, but I was sent to school where I began the 8<sup>th</sup> form. The lessons were too difficult for me because I did not know

Russian. I understood what they were telling me, but I didn't know Russian well enough to give the answers, so I left school and began working in the saw mill. My job was to drag heavy iron ties from the factory to the two saw mills. Because the ties were so heavy and difficult to carry, we made a kind of pillow, using sawdust as filler, to place on our shoulders or around our waist in order to protect ourselves. The work was hard and we were dripping with sweat both summer and winter. In winter our shirts, because of the sweat, the sawdust, and the frigid air, became hardened like oak bark. When I got home, it was impossible to take the shirt off and so mother had to cut it from my body. Of course it could not be used again as a shirt. You just cannot imagine the cold! Here in Onohoi we were also required to go to the commandant's office every Saturday after work and sign in to prove we had not left the work camp.

After a period of time, the supervisors observed my work, and because I had completed 7<sup>th</sup> form as required and was a good worker, I was sent to take specialized courses. Here I was apprenticed to work with an expert. I would examine the wood at the saw mill and classify it according to the norms (state standards - GOST) as written in the instructions. This is, in fact, how I learned Russian. I studied day and night and pronounced one word at a time so that I could say it correctly. I would sit and repeat a Russian word hundreds of times until I learned it and spoke it without an accent. The supervisors saw that I studied much better than the other girls and so sent me to study at a technical secondary school. I completed the three-year course in two years. While taking the course, I also worked and was paid about 740 rubles a month. This was a lot of money.

Mother didn't work at this time because she was 57 or 58 years old and was retired. Every morning she would go to stay in "oceredi" (a queue) together with about 200 other people to buy bread. Often she would stay in line until noon. Then, when the bread was finally brought, the men who worked as loaders at the mill would force the women out of the line and take the bread for themselves. Often mother would come home without any bread, but she would fry potatoes and bring them to the place where we worked so we could have something to eat.

After I graduated from college I worked as a master, an expert. It was at this time that my brother refused to pay a "zaiom" (a kind of "loan") that was required by the State. The "loan" was for 250 rubles, but because his salary was only 300 rubles, he could not afford to pay. This was why an official from the commandant's office came and told us, "Get ready, we are taking you farther into the forest; you cannot live here." So it was that we were moved from Onohoi to the thick forest not far from the village of Tegda. We had to leave all our friends from our district, from Bălți and from Telenești, in Onohoi. Some of the friends we had made there included a group of students who had been arrested because they had protested and had been expelled from the University and sent away. In Onohoi we sang and danced and spoke in our native tongue. These were such happy times. But the authorities came and took us farther away yet again. I cried then even more than on the day they took me from my home in Moldova. This time we came to an even bigger forest near Tegda because we were now double enemies. In addition to our status as "Enemies of the State," we were also branded "opasniie liudi" – "dangerous people."

In this new location, there was a need for specialists. Some people from the personnel department of a timber enterprise, "lespromhoz" they called it, came and

said they were looking for workers. I was engaged as a specialist at the saw mill and my brother worked as a motor mechanic. I was not happy in this new place because I knew no one. There were some Germans, Georgians, and Ciuvasi families there as well as one other Moldovan family, a father and two sons. Of course we became friends; you had to, for otherwise you just couldn't live there. They were in the same situation as we were.

In 1952 my brother got married to a girl that he had met in Onohoi, the place where we had first been sent. She came to this new place and lived with us. However, we didn't have a spare room, so I went to the director of the timber enterprise, Mr. Jajev, and I told him that we needed a bigger living space. He agreed and gave us a two-bedroom flat that was closer to the administration office in the village of Tegda. Here there was a post office, a market and a town center. We didn't have those conveniences in the forest.

I ended up marrying a man who worked as a chief at the timber enterprise, "Glavlesosbit." Although he had been at the first station in Onohoi, I hadn't met him there. It was only when he came to our factory for an examination that we first met. I liked him because he was a Moldovan and he was handsome and polite. He, too, was a deportee.

We registered to be married, but the KGB would not give my husband permission to bring me to his work place in Ulan-Uda because I had been punished as a "dangerous person." Nor could he come to my place because he, too, was a deportee. He went to every possible administration office to get permission and, finally, they gave him permission to bring me to Ulan-Uda. Here we had a religious wedding ceremony; otherwise I wouldn't live with him! Sometime after our marriage, my husband was reassigned to Onohoi, the station where we lived from the very beginning as deportees.

I gave birth to our two children there, one in 1954 and the other in 1955, a girl and a boy. Then in 1957 they issued the decree to release us. We couldn't wait to return to Moldova; we immediately packed up our possessions and began the journey home. My husband, however, was a good specialist and his director did not want to release him and refused to give him the documents that he would need to work and to live. But, my husband was determined to be with us so, when we came back to Moldova, he sent a request for his documents to be returned to him. Our friends and his parents welcomed us into their houses, but those who deported us and who were our enemies, they weren't glad to see us back.

My parents were not able to leave until several months later. They needed some documents showing that they had five living children. In those times, a woman who bore five living children was honored as a "heroine mother" and was entitled to certain privileges. But, the Village Council in Telenești did not want to give us the certificate, saying, "We don't want people like these here in our village." So my husband went to the District Executive Committee and managed to get the certificate. It was only then that my parents and brother were able to return.

In looking for work back in Moldova, we never told anyone that we had been deportees because they would not have hired us. In those times it was very difficult for people who had been deported to get jobs. However, my husband was able to get a job because his work book showed that he had been involved in construction of airplane plants and was a highly skilled specialist. A new cement factory was

being built at Rîbnița and my husband was appointed assistant director. He ended his career working with the Ministry of Construction in Chișinău.

Every time I applied for a job, it was necessary to submit an autobiography. I did everything to avoid doing this because I knew it would affect my employment. Once, when I was assigned to work as the bookkeeper at the Academy of Science, there was a KGB agent sitting there and he said, "You have no right to work here!" I asked, "Why? What do you mean I have no right to work here? What's wrong with me?" And he said, "You were deported from here!" I told him "So what? Are there TOP SECRETS here or something? Are there state secrets in bookkeeping?" The head of the academy insisted that I be hired as a skilled specialist, but the remarks of the KGB agent hurt me so much; I was very offended. In 1989 when we were officially rehabilitated, my husband said, "Go now to that KGB agent and show him that you are now rehabilitated, that you now have rights, and that you committed nothing!" I responded, "Let this be on his conscience!"

Even our children suffered for our past. When our daughter tried to become a member of the Komsomol (Young Communist League), they said to her, "Your father was deported!" She was not accepted into the Komsomol. Nor was my husband ever allowed to join the Communist Party. If you were not a Komsomol member or a member of the Communist Party your chances of advancement were limited.

It was not until the children were grown that we told them of our past. I wrote a notebook about everything that happened...everything the way it was. My daughter took that notebook to read it to the women with whom she worked. Afterwards she told me that all the women there cried. She said, "I myself, Mom, had tears in my eyes while reading because you had never told me all the details, about all your sufferings."

Was there anything to gain from this experience? I believe it strengthened my will and made me a stronger person. I experienced so many difficulties and yet overcame them all. If there is anything I would want the young generation to take from my experience it is that they should be patriots of their nation and they should be kind-hearted and not sow distrust and fear. They should love their country and stay close to it in order to build a better future for their children.

"I WAS SENT, WITHOUT PARENTS, INTO EXILE AT THE AGE  
OF NINE. THIS WAS AN ACT OF TERRORISM."



### **Lucia Caranicolov**

Born: 1932, Drochia Region

Exiled to: Novosibirsk Region

I was born on 2 March, 1932, in the village of Baroncea near Drochia, which was then part of Romania. Our family name was Scortescu. My father had been an

officer in the Romanian Army where he trained recruits, but his main occupation was headmaster of the village school; my mother was also a teacher. Our courtyard was large and our house was surrounded by trees, flowers, bushes and lilacs. I have beautiful memories of my childhood there until 13 June, 1941. Then my childhood, at the age of nine, came to an end.

My memories of that day are so strong that I will not forget them until I am very, very old, probably never. On the morning of 13 June our house was surrounded by many security guards. I was so frightened. My fear was intensified because in March of that same year when I had just turned nine, my mother was arrested and tried. Why? Because it was ordered by the Stalinist regime that, in Basarabia (now Moldova) as well as other parts of the Soviet empire, all intellectuals were to be eliminated. In my mother's classroom was the child of a man who was paid to tell his daughter to break the window in the classroom. (This man came to my mother and confessed what he had done some years later.) My mother shook the child, but did not hit her for her misdeed. Yet she was sentenced to serve three years in prison in the town of Permi (in Russia). The police came and took her from home and she was taken to Drochia because there were no judges in our village. I remember that I went there with my father, but I wasn't allowed to go and talk with my mother. I was not allowed to even see my own mother. She was tried without a lawyer and without witnesses – arrested, taken, tried, and imprisoned!

After I was rehabilitated I wrote that I wanted to have the documents of my mother's trial. I wrote to Permi, Drochia, to the Ministers. I corresponded for three or four years, but I didn't get any results because all the documents were destroyed. I cannot prove that my mother was arrested and that she sat in prison for three years.

So it was that in the summer of 1941, I remained alone with my father. I was the only child. On that fateful morning in June, I realized something bad was going to happen to me when I saw all the security guards surrounding our house, and I tried to escape. But my father, knowing that I could not stay alone in the village without either parent, told the soldiers to run and catch me. Eventually they did find me and brought me back. People say that all those soldiers came at one o'clock in the morning, like thieves. I don't know because I was sleeping. They came during the night and surrounded the house while we slept. They didn't have cars, so they took horse carts from people in the village which they used to transport us to the train station. My father, because he had been an officer in the Romanian Army, realized that tragedy awaited him. He was so emotional that he forgot to take anything into the cart with us. I was dressed only in my nightgown, with no shoes. Some neighbors saw what was happening and threw my little bed and a blanket into the horse cart. Other than that I had nothing with me. Absolutely nothing! This is a tragedy that cannot be described in words.

My father and I were placed together in a railway car, but when we got to the border with Ukraine all the men were taken off, and I remained alone in the wagon with mostly strangers. During the mass deportations of 1949, families were exiled together, but in 1941 every man was separated from his family and shot. Do you know what they did with them? They were taken into the forest, naked with tags on their hands, where they were shot and put into one mass grave. That was the fate of my father, though I did not find out the facts until much later.

Just before the coming of the security guards, it was rumored that Russia was planning an attack to re-conquer Basarabia. A woman from our village named Ania, a Ukrainian woman, had warned us that if the Russians came they would kill or deport all the intellectual families. She herself had lived in Ukraine during the terrible famine of the late 1930's and saw what had happened there. She told of how the Russians deported Ukrainian families, took their property, and especially how they treated the intellectual community. Of course no one believed her because people didn't trust those who moved into their neighborhoods from afar – she was considered a foreigner.

Later, that same woman, Ania, saved my life. If she didn't exist I wouldn't be here. When we were exiled we were put into the same wagon. After the men were taken off, she and her son were the only ones I knew in the wagon. On the journey, her boy got sick and died. She wanted to get off the train to bury him, but the guards wouldn't let her. They just threw his body into a ditch as the train traveled on – just like a piece of garbage. Most of the people who were exiled in 1941 died. Very few remain.

The conditions of the journey were miserable. In Moldova even our animals receive better treatment. Some of the bread that people took with them turned too moldy to eat because it was so hot. The wagons were like incubators. There was really no interest in saving us. There were some instances, I heard later, where wagons were left on the side of the tracks, locked, and the people inside died from the heat. When we got to the stations along the way, the guards would open up the wagons just to see who was still alive. When people died, their bodies were simply discarded along the railway tracks. But we did not die. We resisted. I don't know how, but we survived.

After a month of traveling on the train, we arrived in Novosibirsk where we stayed another month, again like animals, in sheds. The journey was unusually long because the war had broken out on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and our train could only be moved at night or when the single railway track was free. In Novosibirsk we were forced to sign a document that said we voluntarily wanted to remain in Russia for twenty years. I was only nine years old and I refused to sign that document. Can you imagine that a nine year old would have to sign such a document?

Then we were taken by carts to different villages where we were placed. Ania, I, Mrs. Rotaru (another woman who was from my village), and her daughters, who were older than I, were sent to live with an old woman who had only one room in the village of Vetka. She slept on the bed that was built above the oven and we slept on the floor. Even though it was time to bring in the harvest, we were not allowed work. We were, after all, "Enemies of the State" and were not brought here to survive but rather to die. No one in the village registered us or gave us any documents. The older girls from Moldova sold some of the things they had brought with them, like clothing, and with that money they bought food. But I had brought nothing and so I had to go to the different houses in the village and gather table scraps. The Russians threw out potato peels and the outer leaves of cabbage which I collected and brought home to be eaten. Sometimes we went into the forest and gathered "stevie" (a variety of sorrel), from which we prepared "Zelenuha," which was a thick sauce made from these greens combined with flour.

We lived in this poor village with people who had been exiled from many different countries. Some of the families had men who were able to construct

houses from cutting trees and splitting them in half. Then they pulled off the bark and used a kind of grass to link the wood together, insulating the house with hay. The roof was made from the birch bark which had carefully been pulled from the huge trees.

We lived with this poverty for over a year until we discovered that we could go to other villages and be able to work and live in less poverty. Ania went to one village while Mrs. Rotaru and her daughters and I went to a different village. Another family was also with us, a woman traveling with three children. We moved during the winter to this final outpost that was 100 kilometers from anything. Only in the winter, when the swamp froze over, could you go through the thick forest.

The trip was very difficult. The way was very hard. We traveled two or three days in sleighs that one of the men had paid for. We went through the forest but we needed to sleep during the night because it was impossible to continue going all the time. Both our sleigh and the horse pulling it were small. The sleigh was packed with all our belongings and so most of the people walked. It was very, very tiring. At night, we started a fire – one side of our body was burning and the other side was freezing. On the first night, two of the children froze to death. Their little bodies remained in the woods where the snow covered them – the ground was too frozen to dig a grave. The next day their mother froze to death as well. The only survivors were Mrs. Rotaru, her daughters, the remaining child, a boy, from the woman who had frozen, and I. We went to the first house in this new village where there was a very kind woman who gave us hot milk to revive us.

In that village we found some work, sewing and painting. Because this village was bigger than the first one, I found work for myself. First, though, they tried to put me into an orphanage when they found that I was foreign born and without parents. But I insisted that I be allowed to work in the kolkhoz where I weeded barley and oats in order to make a little money. Mrs. Rotaru, who felt responsible for me, convinced the officials to allow me to stay with her and her daughters. Ania, who was planning to escape and return to Moldova, came to visit this village and wanted to take me back with her, but Mrs. Rotaru didn't allow this. Here it was hard as well, but we survived on black bread, ground cereals, potatoes and sugar beets. The war caused famine in these parts – we had neither milk nor meat. It was miserable.

After three years, my mother was released from the prison but was not allowed to go back to Basarabia. There, in prison, she was asked, "where do you think you'll go?" My mother thought for a while and said, "to Poltavskaia Region" which is in Ukraine. She thought that when she wrote "P" for Poltavskaia, she could then change the "P" to "M" and the "t" to "d" which would read "Moldavskaia" making it legal for her to go back to Moldova. And she did this. When she came back to Moldova, she was followed by authorities from the village and was commanded to go to Soroca, the new regional center. She showed the document that she had altered to the authorities there who noticed that something had been changed. Quickly, she ate the document – otherwise she would have gone to prison again. She was also protected from much scrutiny because the war was taking everyone's attention.

Meanwhile, Ania reached Moldova and found my mother and told her where I was. It was only through this woman from Ukraine that mother found out where we had been deported. At the time mother was staying at my grandmother's house.

Mother said, "I must go and bring back my daughter." Then my grandmother said, "How can you go, you just were released from prison; where will you go?" But my mother was determined to go, so she baked two ovens worth of bread that she converted into rusks. Grandmother collected, from all the neighbors, about 200 eggs which she boiled and made the eggs yolks into powder. During the war, people could travel on the trains without buying a ticket because passenger control was very loose. For my mother, this was the precise moment to travel! Even when she was confronted, she lied and said that she was searching for her mother and children who had been evacuated. She was a smart woman and eventually got to my village.

When she found me she took me back to our village in Moldova. The boy whose mother and two siblings had frozen also traveled with us. It took us almost a month to get back; we had to jump off one train and wait for another if we were asked to show a ticket. Sometimes we would have to wait in the woods for several days before being able to board another train going in our direction. When we finally got home our bodies were covered with a rash and lice. Such a trip! By this time the war was over.

When we were deported, only my grandparents and my mother's two sisters remained. They were dismayed when they saw that all our property was being sold off. Some of our possessions were sold for two or three lei, things that cost hundreds of lei! When the Romanian Army came for the second time into Moldova during the war, my aunts saw an opportunity to escape to Romania. Only my grandmother remained (my grandfather died during this time).

My mother survived because she was from a family of peasants, and she was hard working. She was a teacher, but she was also a skilled seamstress. She survived in prison because she was able to use this skill. You must know everything because you never know what to expect from life. Life is very hard, and it can turn unexpectedly.

When I came back to the village, there was hardly a person for whom I did not write a letter of complaint because I knew the Russian alphabet from my time in Siberia. I am proud that I resisted and that I continue to stand up to the authorities, even though I have never been given any compensation for all that I lost. I believe that this experience completely changed who I might have been. It made me stronger, more daring, and more courageous. Today I "wear" my status of a deported person like a crown.

You ask what we must learn from this. In the first place, I think we have to make public the things that happened – things that here are avoided. We – our citizens, our writers, our politicians, our leaders – must not be indifferent. Indifference is the biggest problem in our society today.

Today, the talk is of terrorism as though it were a new concept. However, what we experienced during those periods of deportation were acts of terrorism. Sending children into exile is an act of terrorism. To take innocent and elderly people and push them into animal carts is an act of terrorism. To be kept hungry, with no air to breath and no proper clothing for the Siberian winters are acts of terrorism. There are so many things to be told, but they must be written down so society won't forget. Perhaps no one will ever take responsibility for these horrors, but it is important that the next generation knows our stories so that this will not happen again.

"WHAT KIND OF LIFE DO YOU CALL THIS?"



## **Ecaterina Cernișova**

Born: 1940, Corestăuți, Briceni Region

Exiled to: Kurgan Region

I was the youngest child in a family with four children, all girls. My mother had given birth to a son, but he died of dysentery when he was only five. When my brother died, my mother cried and tore out her hair because he was the only boy and he could have helped father. My two older sisters got up at four in the morning to help father and mother in the fields. Because I was the smallest, I didn't go with them into the fields but stayed at home with my sister who was only two years older than I.

My father was neither rich nor was he poor. His parents had died when he was seven and he was adopted by a Polish family. When his adoptive parents died, they left father a combine for harvesting wheat. This allowed him to be somewhat prosperous because at that time there were no other combines in that area, and people from the village came to us and asked father to gather their harvest. For this, he was usually paid in produce. Someone gave us a bucket of wheat, someone else a bucket of maize, and so on. We had only four "desetini" (a "desetini" is about one hectare), a cow and four sheep. Still, during the famine of 1946-48, we lived better than others because my father was a very industrious and hard-working man.

On the morning we were arrested, 7 July, 1949, I wasn't at home. I was at my oldest sister's house at the other end of the village. She was already married, being 15 years older than I, and was living with her mother-in-law. She had just given birth to a daughter on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, and I had gone to spend the night with her. Another of my older sisters was also married at that time. At three o'clock in the morning, my father and two soldiers came and told me that I had to go home. So, we went back through the village - father and the soldiers in front and I, still partly asleep, following behind. When we arrived home, my mother and my sister were crying; mother was shouting and saying that they were deporting us. I didn't understand what was happening; I was only eight years old, but I saw that all our neighbors had gathered at our house. We were told then that there were another nine families who, like us, were to be deported. We had only three hours to get ready. Of course we didn't know what to take because we didn't know where we were going or for how long we would be gone.

At that time, the system was this way: the order from higher up said that a certain number of families must be deported from this village and from that village. This order was received by the "Președintele Sovietului Sătesc" (the mayor), and if there was someone in the community that this mayor didn't like, he would write their name on the "black list" since the order only denoted a certain number to be

deported, not their names. Some people whose names were on the list ran when they heard cries in the village. And so, instead of those people who ran, other families were taken because it was ordained that ten families from our village had to be taken. That is how we and the other nine families came to be deported. The most painful thing was that my father fought on the front lines during the World War II. He even arrived at Berlin with the Soviet Army at the end of the War, and in 1948 he was decorated for his courage. Then, in 1949, he is deported and called "Enemy of the People!"

We were given just a few hours to gather our things. Who can think clearly in such moments and take the necessary things if you don't know where you will be taken, why, and even if you'll arrive alive or if you'll be shot? We were loaded into a truck (my mother, my father, my sister of 11 years, and I) and were taken to the railway station in Vascauți. There we were again loaded into railway carriages used to transport animals. Everyone was crying and shouting. The carriages didn't have windows and the doors were closed tightly and guarded by soldiers with weapons.

In the carriages we slept on flour sacks that our parents succeeded to take with us. In the same carriage people were relieving themselves. One could hardly breathe this foul air. Occasionally the train would stop at a station where the soldiers opened the doors to the carriages and distributed food. People gathered this food in whatever containers they had brought with them. However, we weren't allowed to get off the train. We travelled in this way for about 15 days.

Finally we arrived at the station "Lebeagie" in the region of Kurgansk where we got off the train and were told that 10 families were to be sent on to the village of Hudeacova, a small village with no more than 30 houses and located another 100 km. from the regional center of Kurgan. We thought that the houses in Hudeacova were quite unusual because they had flat roofs. We were used to roofs being slanted in Moldova. The local people had not expected strangers into their midst and stared at us like we were wild things. We all were crying from fright, exhaustion, and stress. Mother lamented, "God, where have You brought us? What will You do with us?"

At the beginning, our family lived in a kind of house that was dug into the earth - half of the house was in the earth and the other part was constructed from wood (the Russian word for this type of construction is "zemleanca" which comes from "zemlea," the Russian word for "earth"). People there were sympathetic and gave us some food. After a year, a woman from the village left and we were allowed to have her two-roomed house. In one room my father kept bee hives during the winter and in the other room we lived with hens because the winter was so cold and they would freeze if they stayed outside. My father made a wooden bed from the birch tree for him and for my mother, but my sister and I slept on another wooden bed that was really more like a shelf situated near the ceiling and affixed to the wall. Because this bed was built above the oven, it was warm; however, the houses were made of wood and there were a lot of bedbugs which bit us during the night. In the mornings when we got up, our skin would be red and swollen with bites. Mother used lamp oil on our skin to keep us from being bitten. Even today I keep in my memory this strong smell of kerosene.

Little by little we began to adapt to our situation and to make our own garden. In summer we planted cabbage, carrots, and turnips. We had to bring water from the lake because there was not enough water in the village well. The

lake was at the outskirts of the village and it was my job to carry the water back to our garden. I carried the two buckets of water which hung at the ends of a pole resting on my shoulders; my shoulders became big and round. Because the winter was very cold, fruit didn't grow there. Those carrots and turnips from our garden were, for us, fruit and vegetable both. When my sister sent fruit from Moldova, the whole village came to see it. Although my father, as I mentioned, raised bees, his regular work was in a kolkhoz where they raised horses. Mother, in addition to working in our own small garden plot, worked at a kolkhoz where poultry were raised.

In the beginning of September that first year, I went to school in the third form. There was only a primary school in Hudeacova. That is why, after I graduated from the 4<sup>th</sup> form, I had to go to school in a larger town which was 5 km from our village. I went to school every day by foot, even during winter when the temperature was -40C. There were usually about five or six of us from the village who went to school together. Often, when we were going to school, packs of howling wolves would follow us with their burning eyes. But they were afraid of fire, so we would take a big branch from a birch tree and light it to keep the wolves away from us. During the snow storms, you couldn't see anything at a distance of two meters and very often we got lost, even though the land was flat. In such blizzards, people would break off branches from trees and stick them in the ground every few feet so as not to get lost. One day, the school called to our village and said that my sister and I had started home during a heavy snow storm. When my mother saw that we hadn't arrived, she took the horse and started to look for us and said that if she found us she would never send us to school again! What kind of life do you call this?

The forest was formed from birch and pine trees. In the spring we went to the forest to collect the sap from the birch trees which was used as a sweet, healthful drink. In the summer we collected berries from the glades that were abundant with raspberries and other wild berries. Mother learned to make a very tasty type of pancake using "kostenitsa," one of the wild berries that grew there.

In those days, the 7<sup>th</sup> of November was a grand political holiday commemorating the Great Revolution. On this day, in 1917, the Bolsheviks came to power. The President of the kolkhoz organized a huge feast for this event every year. The people in the village brought food and drink from their own homes and they welcomed us to this special event.

We lived for a year in the house that was left to us by the owner. Later, in 1953, my father began constructing our own house. This was not a wooden house like others in the village, but a house of bricks. Father mixed together clay, water, and straw, and using special forms, he made bricks. The roof was made by putting blocks of sod on wooden beams. In the spring, our roof began to "grow" and turn green. The whole village gathered to see this "wonder." By 1954 we were living in our new house.

What about language? The north of Moldova, where I was born, is mainly populated by Ukrainians and Russians, and I learned and studied from the first form in a Russian school. That is why I speak Russian so well. My mother is Moldovan from the village Hădărauți, but my father is Ukrainian and in our house we spoke Ukrainian. All the villages around our village are Ukrainian villages. My older sisters studied in the Romanian school because our village was part of Romania

until 1940. However, I didn't know Romanian so well because I had most of my schooling in Russian schools, both in Siberia and in Moldova.

Because I grew up in Siberia, my way of thinking is more Russian than Moldovan. I had and I still have friends there. We were called there Moldovans because we were from Moldova, but I grew as a Russian girl being educated in a Russian school and in a Russian culture. I can't say anything bad about these people because they helped us from the very beginning. I still remember them with gratitude. They were not to blame for our misfortune.

In March 1956, we were rehabilitated and I was the first who left for Bălți where one of my older sisters was living and where I graduated from the 10<sup>th</sup> form. My parents stayed until 1957 in Hudeacova in order to sell their property. My father was bitter and was reluctant to return to Moldova, but mother wanted to return to her three daughters who were living there. When they returned to Moldova, they were told that they could go anywhere, but not to their native village. In this way, they settled in the village of Secăreni (near Ocnița) in Ukraine. My father, mother, and sister lived together there without any land to farm. My father died of cancer at the age of 63 and we buried him in Corestăuți, his native village.

Mother, who was also 63 when my father died, continued to live in Secăreni, and every Sunday she walked the 18 kilometers to my father's grave and also to visit her daughter who lived in Corestăuți. She did this until her son-in-law proposed to the mayor that he have a meeting to decide the fate of our family's confiscated property. At this meeting it was decided to allow mother to buy back her own property with 750 rubles. Imagine, working a whole life to build a house and in one moment someone comes and takes it from you, sends you away to the end of the world for no reason, and finally places you in the position of re-purchasing your own house! They knew how much we suffered from being deported, and yet this is the way we were treated. When mother bought back her house, it was in bad condition. Before being deported, father built different structures for poultry and storage around the house, but everything fell into disrepair. The roof of the house was in such bad shape that when it rained, water flowed into the house.

My sisters helped my mother make repairs, and she lived there for another 23 years. It was very difficult for her because she was already a pensioner and her pension was very small because she didn't have the required number of work years. When we were deported she was already 49 years old and when they counted her pension they included only the seven years of work in Siberia. In order to have a sufficient pension, you must work at least 20 years. My mother's pension was 7 rubles and 20 kopeks. How can you live on such a small pension? To survive, she bartered fruit for milk and bread.

After graduation from the 10<sup>th</sup> form, I came to Chișinău and entered the College of Trade and Commerce. It was very difficult for me in my student years because I didn't receive help from anyone. I stayed in an apartment with two rooms where ten students lived. After graduation, I got a job as a shop assistant, but I didn't work there for long because I felt that commerce was not the domain that I liked. In 1961 I left that job and applied to the State University, Department of Economics. I strove to be a good student and I was given a scholarship which helped me a lot. The amount of my scholarship, however, was not enough to provide breakfast and even today I am not in the habit of eating a morning meal.

In 1989, we petitioned the district of Ocnița to be compensated for the property that had been confiscated from us in 1949. However we were only given 4000 lei. The law was to give back compensation for property lost, but the most compensation that anyone could receive was 7000 lei, even if the property was worth more.

I worked so many years for the good of the people, and it is very painful that in 1999 the Parliament annulled the compensation amount given to deportees. Those compensations were kept only for invalids. I went to the Center for Human Rights and voiced my complaint there. Why do the ex-prisoners from the German concentration camps receive large compensation in Euro from the German government and we, who were deported and had a similarly difficult life and who had to begin our lives again from nothing, receive no compensation. And until today, we are the poorest and we are ignored.

In looking back, I believe the most negative aspect of the deportations was the fact that our property was taken from us without compensation. Can there be any positive affect in forcing people from their home? From their village? From their country?

"YOUTH SHOULD BE A BEAUTIFUL PERIOD OF LIFE,  
BUT THIS WAS NOT MY FORTUNE."



### **Teodora Ciobanu**

Born: 1942, Chișinău

Exiled to: Kemerovo Region

Although I am a positive person and try to think only on the good side of things, it is impossible to forget the bitter times of the past. I try not to dwell on that time. Yet, all of my childhood was spent in those times of difficulty, of famine, of poverty, of unbearable cold. I am happy that I survived such difficulties because if man does not experience such times in his past, it is harder to meet life's problems in the present and in the future. I believe that one's soul is strengthened during these times. This experience has made me more compassionate towards the poor man in the street, to the children who don't have parents.

I was the youngest in a family of thirteen children. My three older sisters were born in 1920 (Vasilica), 1922 (Varvara) and 1924 (Maria). My oldest brother, Vasile, was born in 1927. Then came Alexei (born in 1929), Anișoara (1931), Ion (1933) and Nicolai (1935). My brother Tudor was born in 1939. Three children died during the famine of 1947.

My father was arrested and sent to prison in 1944 as a political prisoner. He was not involved in politics. How could he have been? He had 13 children to care for and did not have the time for such things. But during Stalin's regime, there was fear, distrust, and jealousy and someone falsely betrayed my father. I'll tell you what happened. Father's main job was as a railway worker in Chișinău. However, in

order to feed his large family he also tended a field with potatoes, wheat and maize. One day, my father went to the mill with his ox cart and sacks of wheat in order to turn the wheat into flour. There was a villager who wanted to grind his wheat without staying in the queue. My father told him, "Why do you push, Bolshevik, without staying in the line. I can stay and wait and you cannot?" The next day my father was arrested. There was no discussion nor was he given the opportunity to answer any questions. Nothing. The militia came with rifles and took him together with the cart and the oxen, the cow, the plough, everything from the house – even the curtains. We remained with nothing. This happened because he called that man "Bolshevik." We never saw our father again. Later, we heard that he had become ill and died there in prison even before we were deported. This was how it was during those times.

After father was taken away, we suffered greatly during the great famine of 1947. As I mentioned, three of my brothers died from hunger; mother was distraught that she could not save them. My oldest brother, Vasile, stole a loaf of bread in order that the smaller children at home might have something to eat. However, he was caught and sent to prison for five years in Russia. Then, in 1949, we were deported.

Although some people may have known or suspected that they were going to be deported, we did not. If we would have known, we would have gone somewhere – to the cellar to hide, to the countryside, anywhere. My three oldest sisters were then residing in Romania and we could have gone to them. But we did not, and so the soldiers came at three in the morning on 6 July, 1949, with their rifles and their dog. My older brother asked them, "Why are you deporting us?" The soldiers pointed their guns at the heads of my brother and sister and told them if they asked one more question they would be shot. Mother began crying and said, "Let's do what they tell us to do, otherwise they will shoot us." Anișoara and I rushed to the garden, accompanied by the armed soldiers; we had time to gather only a basket of apricots and some cabbage from our garden. We took two of the cabbages with us and the other two we gave to our rabbits that were kept in the cellar. That was all we took with us on our trip to Siberia! This was such a tragedy.

We were taken to the railway station and were loaded onto railway carriages. There were a lot of people there, crying and shouting. We stayed for half a day there till they gathered more people. Some people had been waiting there for two and three days. I don't remember very well because I was only seven, but I do know that I was very frightened. Then they locked the doors and the train started. They didn't tell us where they were taking us. We were crying because we thought we would never come back. In fact we thought that they were taking us somewhere to kill us and to throw us into a hole.

For a month we traveled by train. The situation in the railway car was horrible because it was a carriage for animals. During the long, one-month trip, in our carriage a woman gave birth to a child and an old man died. Can you imagine, on one side is a dead person and on the other side is the new-born child. The smell in the carriage was quite awful because it was summer and it was hot. We didn't have enough to eat and when the train did stop we were given stale porridge made from barley or oats. This food made us sick, and many people had diarrhea and vomiting. It was very difficult.

Finally we reached the taiga where all you could see were thick forests and tall trees. We were left there with about seven other families, like abandoned animals. Some of the families had taken hammers, saws, and axes from their homes in Moldova, and so they began to build, there in the forest, a long room from logs that they cut. Here we were settled, mother with her children in one corner, another family in another corner, and so on. We lived there for the remainder of the summer and into the autumn until it began to snow. When the snows began, some officials from a different region came and my brothers told them that we were dying from cold and hunger. So they came back with a vehicle and took us to the village of Barit-Pothoz in the region of Kemerovo in Siberia. Here they put us into a building which was used to store wheat. It was cold here as well. In the morning when we got up, we were covered with snow that the wind had blown through the holes in the walls. I don't know how we survived.

The clothes we had brought with us were not thick enough to withstand the bitter cold, but at least we had something to wear. I was seven years old and it was time for me to enter school. I wanted to go to school very much, but I was so thin that the teachers didn't want to accept me at school; they were afraid that I would die there, on the desk. I was only skin and bones, but I kept insisting, crying day and night, that I wanted to attend school. One day I went to school with the other children and I hid under the last desk in order that the teacher would not see me. This lasted a week, and one day when the teacher asked the children about their lesson, I couldn't keep quiet any longer. I stood up and answered the teacher's question. The teacher was shocked how I, a Moldovan girl, could answer the question in Russian. And from that day on I was enrolled into the first form. At first we were not treated very well at school. Parents and children both called us "fascists" and "gypsies." But later they saw that we were obedient, that we didn't fight, and that we were hard workers and good students. We Moldovan children studied well even though we had to learn and study in a foreign language, Russian. The teachers were amazed and used to tell the Russian pupils, "How is it that the Moldovans, who came here not knowing a single word in Russian, are studying so well and you, who were born here and whose native language is Russian, don't know Russian well enough even to write a dictation without mistakes? How can they and you cannot?"

Although the temperature could get as cold as -50C and -60C, we were not sick because the air was clean, dry and fresh. The only thing that bothered us was our lack of proper clothing and footwear. When we went to bring water or wanted to go sleighing, our hands, face and feet got frostbite. We had only one pair of warm shoes (pîsle) that we wore in turns to school. First my brother Nicolai would run to school, then another child at school who had warm shoes would bring back to our room that pair of shoes and Tudor would run to school until all three of us finally got there. Sometimes we didn't have the patience to wait and ran to school through the knee-deep snow wearing only our stockings.

My mother worked on a kolkhoz where calves were raised. We children helped her when we weren't at school, but most of our spare time was spent in the potato garden because my mother was also tending the fields. Sometimes we worked digging potatoes, turnips, and carrots and other times we went at night to the fields to guard the potatoes and the wheat. My older siblings, Alexei, Ion, and Anișoara, worked all day, but the three of us who were younger went to school and

only worked in our free time. Every week mother and all of us children had to go to a special place in the village to register. Each of us had to sign a special form. This was to assure the authorities that we had not run away.

Although most of my memories of those times are not happy ones, I do remember that we had some celebrations that interrupted the tedium and harshness of our lives. One of the holidays that was observed was the 7<sup>th</sup> of November celebrating the Russian Revolution. There were about 16 nationalities at our school – Koreans, Chinese, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, and so on. Children from each nation would climb upon the stage and sing a song from their country. I represented Moldova and sang, “Mariță, Mariță” and “M-a trimis mama la vie.” The Moldovans in the audience would begin to cry.

We tried to celebrate Christmas and Easter. Mother would get the ingredients to bake a pașca (special bread) for Easter. For Christmas we went into the forest and cut a fir tree to decorate with toys we made from paper. If she had the ingredients, she would bake placinte (similar to pies or tarts). For most celebrations, we would put a pot of boiled potatoes and pickled cabbage on the table. Even though we didn't have meat or bread, we used what we had. My brother, Alexei, had an accordion that he would play while my younger brother and I danced. Mother was a jolly woman and sometimes dressed up with moustache and a broom. Our neighbors enjoyed coming to our place and everyone danced, sang, and took pleasure from those few, happy moments. Although our lives were hard, we still tried to keep our Moldovan traditions. We supported each other.

When Vasile was released from prison in 1951, he found out through the Red Cross that we were in Siberia, and he came to join us there. Then, when Stalin died in 1953, we were called to the regional prosecutor's office and told that we were free to return to Moldova. To tell the truth, we children were reluctant to leave, but mother wanted to return even though she was told that none of our property would be returned to us.

So, we returned to Moldova in 1956. In the first days, our relatives and neighbors were happy to see us. But in 1956 there was a small famine and everyone was struggling to put food on the table. There wasn't enough wheat to make proper bread and so we ate bread made from a kind of pea. These were hard times for everyone. We lived for two days at the house of one of our neighbors, and on the third day we tried to enter our old house. Two Russian women were living there and they didn't allow us to enter but instead drove us away. They went to the militia and claimed that we had entered the house by force. The militia came and took us away to prison where we spent one day and one night. Mother was released the same day and returned to our house only to find that the Russian women had thrown several sacks of our clothing into the middle of the yard. When we returned the next day upon our release, we found mother there sitting on the sacks and crying. Again we tried to break the lock on our house, but again the militiaman came told us never to return. Mother said to us: “My dears, let us scatter in different parts and find work and places to live because if we try to enter our home one more time we will again be deported.” And we did so.

I went to earn my own way by taking care of a relative's child, and for this I received a plate of beans and a piece of mămăligă (a kind of corn meal that is a traditional dish in Moldova). My brother tended the cows in the pasture and my mother worked in the garden of these same relatives. For two years I lived this way.

When I reached the age of 16, I had to get my documents and, when one of my brothers got a plot of land, we began to build a little house where we then could be registered and receive the documents for residency and work.

Now I was able to find a proper job and went to work at a manufacturing plant. I, a weak, miserable, embittered child worked at a machine as huge as a house to earn my piece of bread. I also had to pay for a room to rent because my brother's family had grown too large for me to stay there. It was very difficult for me. At the same time, I went to evening school where I finished the 7<sup>th</sup> form and then continued on at a vocational school to learn dressmaking. Later, I was hired at Steauă Roșie, a garment factory, which was my second home. I liked working there. Every time I went to work I forgot about all my troubles. Even though the other girls who worked there were helped by their parents who brought them food from the countryside, I still managed to pay for transportation, food, clothing and a place to live by counting every kopek and ruble.

I often wondered why we were selected to be deported. Here is what I think. During Stalin's system the mood of the people was such that if it two neighbors didn't get along well they would go to the authorities and denounce one or the other with the threat of being deported. These were the times, not only in Moldova, but everywhere, including Russia. When we returned home we found out who had us arrested. It was one of our neighbors who wanted to get married and who wanted a room in our house in which to live. Mother told her that she had many children and no spare space. Shortly after this confrontation, the neighbor did get married and went to the authorities and told them that mother had children in America and in Romania. The inference was that we were not to be trusted. This way she was able to stay in our house when we were deported to Siberia.

After returning to Moldova, one of my sisters living in Romania managed to get a visa to visit us. We hadn't seen her for 25 year, and when mother saw her, she fainted. Mother was never allowed a visa to visit her daughters because she was "an enemy of the people."

I hope my experience can teach young people not to be afraid of difficulties; life is made not only from roses, but from wormwood, too. Of course I can't forget those days of suffering and hardship. I think about the events I have experienced, how we almost died of hunger, how we ate only peels of potatoes, frozen potatoes, roots of weeds, and mushrooms, how we froze from the cold. Life is a fight, and you have to fight using your head and your hands in order to succeed. I believe that you can achieve results and overcome difficulties only through work and doing good things. I am firmly convinced of this. Nothing good comes from bad. So why not go to bed calm, thinking that you did a good thing today? Everyone has difficulties today; you must know how to overcome them and wait because tomorrow it will be sunny. This is how I understand life and how I withstand the pain of the past.

"EVEN OUR CHILDREN SUFFER BECAUSE OF OUR PAST."



## **Eugenia Ciuntu**

Born: 1927, Balatina, Glodeni District

Exiled to: Kurgan Region

I was born into a family of hard working people. My family name was Gherman and I was the youngest of six children. We had a big farm that included cows, oxen, sheep, horses, and poultry and we were forced to pay high taxes, especially during the famine in 1946-8. During those times the Bolsheviks would come and sweep up every grain of wheat from our house and from our store room. Our family suffered a lot during Soviet times because we were hardworking and industrious.

In 1948 I married in the village of Balatina, near Bălți. My husband came from a well-educated family who were repressed and persecuted in 1941. Their home was only 100 meters from the River Prut, and they had a boat which they used to cross into Romania to visit relatives there. For these reasons misfortune fell on the head of my future family. My father-in-law was an accountant at the bank, and in 1941 he was arrested and taken to Bălți. In that period most of the intellectuals were arrested, killed or expelled from Basarabia. In fact this seemed to be the goal, to destroy the intellectuals, especially men, and leave only the weaker women who wouldn't oppose joining the forced collectivization that was being imposed by the Soviet state. Thus, my father-in-law was arrested and shot.

The year after I married, we heard rumors that large deportations were about to occur because many farmers opposed the collectivization of their lands. Already there had been the example in Ukraine of farmers being shot or exiled for refusing to join the kolkhoz. The goal of the deportations in 1949 was to frighten and force the farmers to accept collectivization.

Then our time came. Soldiers came to our house at three o'clock in the morning on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1949, and arrested my husband and me. My husband's mother and sisters had already been arrested and were at the railway station. After our arrest, we, too, were taken to the railway station and loaded into railway cars used to transport animals. I asked the soldiers where they would take us, and they said we would be taken to Siberia. I began to cry and didn't want to get on the carriage. A young soldier at the railway station was crying with me.

There were about 20 families in each carriage. Besides the bad smell of animals that had been previously transported in these same carriages, was added the unbearable smell that resulted from people who were forced to relieve themselves there in a corner. Then we became infested with lice. The train stopped once every 24 hours so that we might be given water, but we only received a ration of brown bread on the third day of our journey. Luckily we had brought some potatoes with us. During the trip two children and two women died, but their relatives hid the bodies from the soldiers so that they could bury them as Christians when they arrived at their final destination. It was very hot and you can imagine the stench that overwhelmed the carriage.

After about 15 days we got to the town of Kurgan where we were told to get off the trains. We waited there all night in the rain. In the morning some authorities came and told us to release the bodies of the people who had died, but we refused and hid them again. Then we were loaded into trucks and taken to different kolkhoz. My family and some other families were taken to a small village with about 30-40

houses and only one shop. Here barracks were built for us to live in. The local people avoided us because they were told that we were “enemies of the people.” They didn’t want to help us with anything; they hid from us and locked their doors.

Among us there were little children who needed milk as well as the four corpses that needed to be buried. However, to dig graves, we needed implements. Luckily for us, there was a Ukrainian living there who had been exiled earlier and who knew the local people. He said to them, “Don’t be afraid of these people. They are not enemies; they are as you. During the war I fought on their land and during the lași-Chișinău operation, I was hurt and people from the village of Sculeni helped me, gave me food, and took care of me. Let’s help them however we can.” And then the local people were more open with us. They brought milk for children and we began to sell them some of the things we had brought so that we could have money to buy food. We buried the dead and then we were taken to work.

It was the time of year to cut grass and make hay, so the women were taken to cut the grass while the men were taken to the forest to fell trees. The local people liked the way we made haystacks, and from nearby villages people came and asked some of us to go with them and show them how to make them. They also liked the way Moldovan women were spreading clay on the walls of the house to keep in the warmth during winter. It was a new thing for them and they asked our women to do the same with their houses. For this work they gave us food and it helped us survive. For the work in the kolkhoz we were paid about 80-100 rubles per month. Although the bread was cheap during those times, our family was large and my mother-in-law didn’t work. So the money we received was enough only for bread and sometimes a bit of barley for making porridge.

We knew a little Russian from the soldiers who dug ditches during the war and we didn’t have language problems. While living here, though, we continued to improve our Russian. We have a saying, “if it is necessary, even the bear in the forest will learn.” Only the Russians who live in Moldova now don’t want to learn it even though they have lived here for a long time.

We lived this way for seven years. We lived for two years in a small room in the barrack that was full of lice and dirt, and then we were able to build our own house because a hardworking Moldovan builds a house wherever he goes. The local people began to respect us because we were clever and industrious. Still, we were considered “enemies” by the State. Every week we had to sign an official register saying that we agreed with their conditions not to engage in political actions against the Soviet power and not to try to run away. In fact there was no possibility to run away because we were without documents.

After we built our house, we sold what we had and bought a cow. In 1953, I gave birth to a daughter and we were very lucky to have the cow and to have milk to feed my child. While we were in exile we kept corresponding with my parents, and after two years we began to receive packets with food. In April 1953 my father visited us and later my sister came as well. The trip was very expensive but the wish to see their granddaughter and niece was strong. My biggest desire was to bring our daughter back to Moldova and I thank God for eventually helping me. However, my husband was forced to work in the frigid and damp conditions of the taiga and caught the flu which later turned into bronchial asthma. He never fully recovered his health, not even when we returned to Moldova. After suffering for many years, he died in 1980.

In March 1953, when Stalin died, the guards around us disappeared, but nobody told us anything. Then we heard that the Russians had begun to liberate prisons and we decided to ask what was going on. In November 1953, when my husband went to clarify the situation, the officials asked him, smiling, "What, you don't want to freeze one more winter? Now you are free and if you don't want to stay here any longer, we'll make your passports and you can go home." My husband couldn't wait to tell me the good news so he phoned to the village (there was only one telephone) and told me, "Jenica, we are free and we didn't even know it. We'll get our passports in a month." But the procedure with the passports lasted longer than just one month and we didn't receive them until February, 1954. As soon as we got them we started our journey home, not waiting for spring because we were afraid that something could interfere and we wouldn't be able to return home. We and some other families traveled to Kurgan, 120 kilometers away, in an open truck. God helped us to get home and not die of cold on the road. When we got home we began everything from zero. Our confiscated property was not returned to us, but my parents who had not been deported helped us build a small house.

The deportations affected every aspect of our life. We couldn't continue our studies in order to have a better profession or job because we still had the stigma of being a deported person. Our health was affected also. We wrote to Moscow to ask why we were deported. Was it because we dug ditches shoulder to shoulder with Russian soldiers or because my mother-in-law washed and cooked for Russian soldiers? The headquarters of the Russian Army was in the house of my parents-in-law, and all the food from the garden was used to prepare food for the soldiers. We were peaceful people and welcomed them, but the Soviet system destroyed our life.

When we returned home we bought a house from a Russian family in the village of Balatina, but for a certain reason the former owner of the house wouldn't leave us to live in peace in that house. We couldn't bear his continuous provocations and so we decided to sell the house and purchase a plot of land from the local mayoralty on which to build a new house. But some people working in the mayor's office made trouble for us, and so our request for that plot of land was denied as was our request to buy another house in the village. Then my husband, desperate, went to the procurator in Glodeni (the regional center), and there he came across some good men who telephoned to the mayor's office in our village and told them that the law adopted after Stalin's death said that all the deported people had the right to receive back their properties. Although our property was not returned to us, we were able to buy a small house from a woman who returned to Russia.

I worked at the kindergarten as a teacher until it was required to have a pedagogical education. Since I didn't have the mandatory credentials to teach I was transferred to another kindergarten with 200 children where I served as head cook. It was the best kindergarten in that district!

My husband worked at the mill. Later, when he couldn't work any more because of his poor health, he began to take photographs. This was a skill that he learned in Siberia. We tried to move into Chişinău where he would have greater opportunities to use his talent, but that was not possible. In order to have the right to live in Chişinău, you had to own property there. Of course we could not do that without obtaining work. Our daughter completed the 8<sup>th</sup> form locally, but for her to

continue her education we sent her to a college in the nearby town of Lipcani. At the college there she met good people who advised her to tell no one that she was born in deportation because it would cause problems for her. Even our children suffer from our past.

All my life I have tried to do good things for people and I feel good when helping others. In 1993, after Independence, I moved to Chişinău to be nearer my daughter, who is now a professor at the State University. I met an elderly woman living in our block of apartments who had fallen on hard times. She had diabetes and first one leg was amputated then the other. She lost two sons and suffered a lot and there was no one to help her. I took care of her for five years, although she wasn't my relative. Helping her made me feel good. She died recently and I miss her. Now I would like to take care of someone else because I am healthy. Man mustn't be selfish and think only of himself. We must help each other. I believe that we learned this lesson in Siberia where the Moldovan families supported each other and helped one another survive, not only physically but emotionally as well.

"MY BROTHER-IN-LAW WAS FORCED TO BETRAY ME."



### **Lidia Ermurachi**

Born: 1927, Anenii Noi District

Exiled to: Irkutsk Region

I was born in the village of Mereni in the district of Anenii Noi, the sixth child in a family of nine children. My parents were typical Moldovan farmers who were good caretakers of their land. We had everything that we needed to live well until the War (WWII). On 13 June, 1941, the deportations began – and only nine days later we heard that the War had begun and that the Russian Army was beginning its retreat from Moldova. The army commandeered carts and horses from the villagers to transport their munitions. My father helped with his horse and cart as far as the River Nistru. He returned without horse or cart, only with his whip. My oldest brother was serving in the Romanian Army and so remained in Romania.

In 1944, Romanian authorities allowed people to cross the Prut River and go to Romania because we were warned that there would be fighting in this region and it was feared that everything would be destroyed. And in fact it was this way. My father decided to go because my brother was living in Romania, and he thought it would be easier to establish there. My mother, a brother of nine years old, and I remained here to take care of the house, but father left for Romania with my two married sisters as well as three of my unmarried sisters. They were allowed to settle in a part of Romania that was not too populated and where there was not much industry or economic progress. My father built a house that was constructed half in the earth and half above the earth. He arranged for the children to stay there and then he returned home that same year.

In 1945, the War ended and there was joy everywhere. People returned to life. My father bought other horses and we went into the fields to work the land. I remember as though it were today how my father felt that something would happen to us, and he taught me how to work the land. It was being said that Russians would return, and he told me that Russians are not as they were before, but that now would come the Bolsheviks (Communists). He knew the character of the Russians because he fought in 1917 in the October Revolution, but he was not involved in politics. In fact he had no education; he was a simple farmer. However, one morning a man came and told my father that he must go to the Village Council. Even today I remember how he went out through the gate, and I never saw him again. Mother, seeing that father didn't come back, began looking for him in the village. She heard from some of the villagers that many other men were also ordered to go to the Village Council and hadn't returned home.

I had completed the seventh form in school when the Russians came. But they said that their education program was much better, and they forced us to repeat the seventh form using their methods. Because the school in Mereni had been destroyed by the battle that raged there, I had to go to Chişinău to repeat that last form. Shortly thereafter, the school was repaired and I was allowed to finish the form in Mereni. After I graduated from school in 1945, I went to Chişinău to continue my education at the College of Trade and Commerce. I had hoped to study Medicine, but the College of Medicine was transferred to Tiraspol and I wanted to stay in Chişinău. Mother was not able to help me with money, but on Saturdays, when I returned home, she would give me food to take back. I was in the Moldovan group, but we studied all the subjects in Russian and it was very difficult for me. Most of the students were from Chişinău and they knew Russian much better than we who came from the villages; however, most of the teachers were patient with us and helped us.

One day, during a break, I went out and saw a truck filled with people passing by. I heard someone shouting to me, "Lidia, Lidia, your father is here with us in the truck, but he is too sick to sit up." I realized that this was one of our neighbors who had also been taken away at the same time as my father. Two months had passed since the day that my father had been arrested, and this is the first time I had heard anything about him. So, my father wasn't sent far away at all; he was tried and taken to prison in Chişinău. Now we knew where my father was, and mother could send food back with me on the weekends even if she herself could not come to Chişinău.

Why was my father taken? This is what I think. Those who had authority at the local level were the people who decided who would be taken from their homes. After the war, when all the houses and offices were being repaired, and because our house was next to the Village Council, my father was always being called to help. In those days, most people were simple, hardworking farmers who stayed in their communities to work the land. Some who were less industrious joined the militia and were sent to different communities to work as police and security officers. One day, one of these militia men who was not from our village came to my father and demanded, yet again, that my father take his cart and oxen and help with some reparations. My father said, "Go to your own village and give orders there." He refused to help this time because he had to work his own land in order to

provide for his family. In this way, he made enemies, and his name was written on the *Black List*.

When mother or I went to take food to the prison, we were not allowed to have contact with or even see the prisoners. We had to leave the food with a guard. The prisoners, because there were so many, were taken across the street to an outside area to eat. There were so many that they filled the entire street. They were wearing wooden shoes that made a horrible clatter on the street, a sound that haunts my memory to this day. Later we found out from some of the men who had been taken with my father that he died on the 25th of December 1945, but we never found out if he had been shot or if he had died from illness.

In 1948, when I graduated from college, it was very hard to find a job in my specialization, and so I was sent to work in a store as a shop assistant. In those times, the best work positions were taken by the Russians who had been brought to Moldova to spread the Stalinist ideology. I worked there until 1949, until that fateful night.

Everything began with the horrible barking of a dog. I went to the window and saw some soldiers entering the neighboring yard. I was living in Chişinău in a hostel with some Russian girls who also were members of the Komsomol (Young Communist Party). They probably understood what was happening as they stayed and looked out the window and whispered to each other, but they didn't tell me anything. The next day I went to work and during my lunch break I went to my uncle's house in Chişinău. When I got to his house, no one greeted me other than his little dog. This was unusual. In his house were his neighbor and two other women who were making an inventory of the things in the house. Only then did I understand what was happening and I began to cry. My uncle's family had been arrested the night before. Only his younger daughter escaped due to the fact that at that moment she was not at home but was studying medicine and was practicing in another town. Later she was expelled from the University. The same night my mother was also arrested, and I was taken that next day.

I left my uncle's house and returned to my work. I didn't have many customers, and so I was looking out the window. Suddenly I saw a car approaching the shop. It stopped in front and two soldiers and two civilians got out. The two soldiers and one of the civilians came into my shop. The other civilian disappeared. Later I found out that that man was my brother-in-law. He told me that the soldiers said to him, "If you don't show us where your sister-in-law works, we'll take you." He then asked me, "Are you angry with me that I brought the soldiers to your place of work?" I answered, "No, because if my mother had been deported alone she might not have survived." Fear is a destructive element of totalitarian governments and this is why families turned against families and neighbors against neighbors. In some situations it was simply a feeling of ill will towards others and even jealousy that turned people against each other.

When the soldiers entered the shop they asked me if I was Margine, Lidia, and I said that I was. A lot of people crowded outside. The manager of the shop came and gathered some food for me, but I told her that I was not going to take anything because they were going to shoot us at the outskirts of the town. Then she told me that they wouldn't shoot us but would take us to Siberia. She was a Communist and knew all. The Communists were informed about the deportations.

I got into the back of the truck where two soldiers sat. I asked, "Why do you aim your rifles at me? I am not going to run away?" They responded, "We see and hear everything, but cannot do anything. We just obey orders." They took me back to the hostel to gather my clothes where the two Russian girls were. One soldier asked them if they knew anything about my father and they answered that they did not know. Then he told them that my father had been arrested and that they were living with the daughter of an "Enemy of the People." After I gathered my luggage, I got back into the truck and the captain asked me if I wanted to go with people from the town or to go with my mother. That was when I learned that my mother was also arrested. I responded that I wanted to be with my mother.

We were taken to the railway station in Chişinău where we were loaded in carriages for animals and began our trip at one o'clock in the morning. There were a lot of people in the carriage – different nationalities and different ages. There was even a Jewish family from Orhei. Mother, my brother and I found a place on an upper bench next to the small window. It was a good place for us because we had fresh air. The carriage was so packed that people had to sleep sitting up. We traveled this way for about a month. In Novosibirsk we bathed for the first time and our clothes were taken to be disinfected. Then we continued on for another 117 kilometers to a place near Irkutsk where we stayed for two nights in barracks that had been built by German prisoners of war. When we were being unloaded, a soldier approached me and asked my name because he wanted to write to me in our new place. But the captain saw him and began to shout at him. It was forbidden for the soldiers to talk to the "enemies of the people" and he was put into prison for 15 days.

These barracks were in a swampy forest that was full of hungry mosquitoes. We were bitten so badly that our swollen faces were almost unrecognizable and our arms and legs were bloody from scratching the bites. Because of this, the authorities there gave us netting which we put over our heads to protect our faces from these swarming insects.

From here, people in our train were divided into different groups and sent to various kolkhozes to work. The group I was in was sent by ferry across the River Ciuna-Uda deeper into the forest. You could only see the sky if you looked straight up. The winter here was very cold, below -60C. If the temperature dropped to -40C, we still worked cutting trees, but if it got colder than -60C, we didn't have to go into the forest to work. Men cut down the large trees and women cut the branches from the trees. My mother was more than 50 and she didn't have to work in the forest. Instead, she was a housekeeper for the engineer and his family and looked after their children. I was given a measuring tool, a pencil and a piece of paper. My job was to measure the trees and register this information.

The first October, I got sick. My legs became red and swollen and my joints ached. I couldn't bear to stand up and could only roll from one side to the other. For 45 days I was sick while my mother treated me with compresses made from sand that she heated and then put into a piece of cloth. When I recovered, I was put to work as a dispatcher where I scheduled the transportation of lumber from the kolkhoz to the factories.

I remember the day of 5th March, 1953, when Stalin died. I was on the street with my friend talking when we heard the news over the loudspeakers. Not far from us was a Russian woman. When we heard the news, we continued our

conversation, but she began to cry. When she saw that we were not crying but continuing our conversation, she shouted at us, "Look at the enemies of our people. Stalin died, but they continue to enjoy themselves." In order to avoid any unpleasantness, we left.

My uncle was deported to the region of Kemerovo. He found out our address and wrote a letter to us in 1954. He told us to write a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs in Moldova to ask them to liberate us. We did this, but the answer that came was that our family was deported according to the law. Then, following the advice of my uncle, we wrote the Minister of Internal Affairs from the Irkutsk region and we got a paper that gave us the right to go home.

In 1956 we returned home, but I still remember how the official in Siberia was shouting at us, "Forget about your native land; you'll never return there. You must stay here. This is now your home!" When we got the papers giving us the right to return home, I went to him and showed him the letter. We got our documents in order, bought tickets, and returned to Moldova. My good friend Ana, though, remained because her father and her three brothers who drowned were buried there. I continue to correspond with Ana and keep all her letters that even today I get great pleasure in reading again and again.

When I returned home, I felt unbounded joy. But still things were not easy. My brother, then 16, died only one year after we returned. I was 29 years old without a place to live or a job. When I went to seek a job in an enterprise, the director looked in my workbook and saw that I had worked in Siberia. He asked me, "What did you do there? What did you go there for?" I told him that I had gone there to make money, but he didn't believe me and so I was not hired. He knew I was deported. Then, I went to the organization where I had worked before being arrested. Here, the manager asked me why I had returned. I answered that this is my country and this is where I want to live.

I sometimes talk to my children about the life I had there. But they respond, "Mother, why do you tell us about these hard times. Do you want us to have the same life as you?" I don't think that today's youth has an interest in the past. They haven't heard about the deportations and don't even know the meaning of the word. This is one reason that our stories should be told.

"ALL MY DREAMS WERE SHATTERED IN  
ONE SINGLE NIGHT."



### **Silvia Gangan**

Born: 1934, Otaci District

I was born in Cernoleuca, in the District of Otaci, to a family of very educated people. My father had studied in Romania and, when I was born, he was headmaster of the local school. Later he was transferred to a school in Livadeni. My mother was the only child of a wealthy family. She died when I was only two and

a half years old, and I don't remember her. I know her only from pictures. I remember that my grandmother took me under her protection. I was her only grandchild. My grandmother suffered a lot because of my mother's death since she was the only child, and soon she died too. I remember very little from those early years.

I was staying with my other set of grandparents, my father's parents, when, in 1949, soldiers came to arrest them. On that night, we were all in bed when suddenly the neighbor's dogs started barking. The gate was locked, as usual, but the intruders entered into our yard and began beating on our door. It sounded like the end of the world was upon us. My grandparents had already heard about other families being arrested and, realizing that the soldiers had come for them, told me to jump through the window from the bed above the oven where I was sleeping. This I did and ran to the neighbor's house. They were poor people and were frightened because they also risked being arrested. I stayed with them that night and later my father came to take me to his house.

You might wonder why my grandparents didn't run away or move to another village when they heard from their neighbors about the arrests. But where would they go? How would they live? My grandparents said. "If it is God's will for us to leave, we will leave. Everything is in God's power." They were exiled to Novosibirsk.

At the time, I didn't know why my grandparents were arrested. It was only later that I read from their documents that they were considered "kulaks." They owned nine hectares of land that they tended from early morning until late at night. They never just sat on a bench doing nothing. They worked all the time because they had a large farm with cows, horses, bees, a combine, and so on. I remember that they locked me in the house alone telling me not to open the door to anybody. Such was the fear and distrust of those times.

I was living with my grandparents during the famine of 1946-48. They had a secret corner in their oven where they hid some wheat. When authorities inspected houses in order to confiscate the wheat, they literally swept the storage areas between the ceiling and the roof for any small grain of cereal or wheat that might be found there. They took everything. But they didn't think that something would be hidden in the oven. I remember how we hid wheat and carried it to our neighbors who had nothing to eat. That's why I didn't suffer as much from the famine.

For one year after the arrest and deportation of my grandparents, I lived in Livadeni with my father and my stepmother. After my mother's death, father remarried, most of all for me. But I never felt that I had a mother. My stepmother treated me very badly. Everything I did was wrong and I had no one to complain to. When my father was arrested and later condemned, I felt very lonely. My stepmother made me feel as though I didn't even exist. She did nothing for me. I felt like I was a stranger in her house. She had a daughter and my situation was similar to that of Cinderella. My stepsister did bad things and then claimed that I had done them. There was a large walnut tree that I used to climb and there I prayed to my mother to protect me.

In Livadeni, I finished the 7<sup>th</sup> form where I was the best student. I liked to study very much and I planned to continue my education. I wanted to accomplish many things, but my dreams were shattered when, one night in August of 1950, my father was arrested.

I remember hearing the car approaching; we called this vehicle “the little black car.” Three military men entered the house and shouted to my father to put on his clothes and go with them. The soldiers had guns and treated my father as though he were a criminal. Criminal! How could he be? He spent all his life at school. He was a wonderful man and never did anything wrong to anyone. He taught me to do the right thing, to be obedient, to love people, and to believe in God. Yet he was put into jail and then sent to a prison in Siberia. Father wrote many letters to Stalin pleading his innocence. However, he was released only after Stalin’s death. My father by this time was seriously ill because he was taken into an underground work camp in Irkutsk where hazardous chemical products used in warfare were being produced. These chemicals were very harmful for those who worked with them, and only people who had been condemned were put to work in this plant. There was little concern whether these prisoners died or not.

I don’t remember what my father told me when he was taken away because I was very frightened. I only remember that he told me to be calm because he wasn’t guilty and he would come back “tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.” He was very calm because he knew that they had no cause to take him.

In the early 1940’s, when the Romanian Army and the German Army were here, my father was school headmaster. As a result of his education and his position in the community, he was made mayor of the village. While he was mayor, I remember that, with serious risks, he hid in our little storage shed some Jewish people who were going to be taken by the Germans. My father, the mayor, was not supposed to hide them. But he was a good man. He would send me to take food to those people. He was mayor for only a short period and never caused anyone to suffer. On the contrary, he helped many people to escape death. Later, when he received his notice of rehabilitation and was declared “Not Guilty,” it was said that he had been arrested, not because he had broken any law, but solely because he had been mayor during that period of time when Romania occupied the area. By the time he was released from the lager (Russian prison), six years after his arrest in 1950, he was 60 years old, a sick and shattered man. The joy I felt upon his return was tempered by the despair at seeing him so changed – he was skin and bones and his spirit had been destroyed.

After father’s arrest, I went with some of my cousins to pedagogical college in Bălți. The school year had already begun so I went to the headmaster, whom I shall never forget, with my certificate of completion from the 7<sup>th</sup> form showing I was the best student. I told the headmaster my story and he sympathized with me and allowed me to enroll. He gave me a scholarship and a place in the student hostel. This was the only way I was able to complete college; I lived only on the money from this scholarship.

The first year of college was the most difficult for me. I made a lot of friends and I was loved by my classmates. I tried to study as I had done before, but this love to study was destroyed by the pain that I was carrying in my soul. It seemed to me that I was in another world, that this was the end of the world. I was distraught and suffered from loneliness - my father and grandparents were exiled in Siberia “forever.” I had support from no one. I was completely distraught. I was alone. I think that children who were deported together with their parents had an easier life because they were with their mother and father.

I divided my scholarship so that I could buy a slice of bread to survive each day. In the student hostel I lived with another 30 girls in a single room. During the weekend their parents came to visit them and brought them food, but no one came to visit me. This was painful for me, so I covered my head with my pillow and cried. On holidays and vacations I went to my step-mother because all my things were there, but she wasn't happy to see me. She did, though, give me "pesmeți" (rusks) to put into my small suitcase and take back to the school so that I had something to eat. I don't know how I survived. I don't know how I got from day to day when I think how hungry I was during that period of time.

Later, my grandparents told me how they were taken into the cattle cars without food and without water. Even they don't know how they survived those times. When they got to their destination, they were left on a field not far from the forest. They were told that they must stay there to live and work. They were left to provide for themselves. So, people began to dig holes in the earth and to cut limbs from the trees in order to build a kind of house. In one of the nearby fields, potatoes had been growing, and after the harvest some potatoes still remained. People went into the fields to look for those potatoes that remained. This was what kept them from starving. After a few years, those people managed to plant gardens and provide for their needs, but still life was very hard because no one cared about them. There were no doctors and many people came ill and died for lack of care and because they were not prepared for the conditions that they faced.

My grandparents returned sometime after Stalin's death, in 1956. Of course their property had been taken, but they had some relatives who helped them and gave them a house to occupy in another village. I had already finished pedagogical college and had been teaching for one year, but I wished to continue my studies. I mustered up the courage to ask my grandparents for help so that I could continue studying, but they were old and sick and their lives had been ruined. Of course there was no way they could help me, so I studied as an extension student while teaching at the school in Codova in the region of Drochia. For this teaching job I received an income from which I had to pay for my housing, food and other necessary things. The small salary was hardly sufficient, but I had the will to survive.

The schoolchildren loved me very much, and I also loved them. After I finished my lessons, the whole class would accompany me to my residence. I shoed them away, but they kept following me home. People from the village called me "mother hen" whenever they saw me with the children. I still love children, and I like to work with them. I see in them the most beautiful thing in this world; I see in them sincerity, love and my family. They were all these things for me. I began to teach math at the special school for handicapped children; I liked to teach them and they liked my math lessons. I will not forget how they would eagerly raise their hands in order to answer my questions. They didn't like any of the other subjects, just mine. Everyone was amazed how much they liked math, but I was teaching math through games and this allowed them to understand better and be more responsive.

When it was time for my son to go to school, I thought that it would be better for him to study in town. We had an uncle in Chișinău who proposed that we come and live in his house, so we moved to Chișinău in 1966. The deportation of my grandparents and the arrest of my father had caused me to have many troubles.

Everyone looked at me and calling me “daughter of a kulak,” and I suffered a lot because of this. My sufferings diminished, though, when I came to live in Chişinău because no one was interested here about who my parents were.

Even though I knew my career would suffer, I refused to join the Communist Party. After all, this was the party that had destroyed my life and walked over everything that was sacred for me. They destroyed my grandparents, my father and they took the fruits of their labor.

Sometimes I think, “Why me?” I, who all my life was honest and did no wrong to anyone, why was my family destroyed? Why?

What can I tell the next generation? I tell them they must re-claim their country from corruption and indifference, from liars and thieves. They must fight for a country where people are free – free to breathe, free from fear of being taken in the night, free from hunger and starvation. They must fight for a society where humanity is valued. I want to say to the young generation that kindness and humanity must win in this world

“EVEN MY NAME WAS STOLEN FROM ME.”



### **Antoneta Gordea**

Born: 1941, Donduşeni Region

Exiled to: Tiumeni Region

The story of my life, the life of my family, parents and relatives, is inseparably linked with the history of my long-suffering fatherland Basarabia, or Moldova. I was the last child of six born to my father and mother, Mihail and Elizaveta Rotaru. It was autumn of 1941 during World War II that I was born in the Ukrainian town of Sochireni. This was the closest hospital, and mother had to go there to give birth because she was suffering from pre-birth mastitis. This was an omen of times to come – of a life lived in foreign lands, away from my beloved Moldova. Thus began my life as Antoneta Rotaru. Gordea is my married name.

My father and mother, though uneducated peasants, received six hectares of farm land in 1924. At this time, my town of Scaieni in the region of Donduşeni was part of Romania; this land was called Basarabia. My mother and father and all their children worked hard to make the farm productive, and by 1940 my parents owned 30 hectares of farmland. It was then that Russia occupied Basarabia and proclaimed my parents “kulaks” – exploiters – and we children were sons and daughters of kulaks. This label has been following us all our lives. Instead of taking pride in the work ethic of our parents, we were called “Enemies of the People.” We were humiliated, we were forced to pay the highest taxes, and still they called us “exploiters.”

By 1949, my older brothers and sisters were married and lived apart. That is why only my father, mother, and I were arrested. My memories of that day, 6

July 1949, are the memories of a child, for I was but 7 years old. In the morning of that ominous day, I woke up and saw disorder in the house and the worried and tear-stained faces of my parents. In the yard were many people, including soldiers with rifles. It was a sunny morning, a bit cool as it usually is in the early morning – how could I know how harshly my destiny would change.

My morning task in the household was to take the cow to pasture, and so I immediately ran to my cow to give her some food. The soldiers in the yard burst out laughing and said that there was no need to do this any longer. My niece Raya who was my same age, ran up to me as they put us into the cart to take us to the train station, saying, “Neta, who will take your cow to pasture now?” Little did she know that all our cattle would be taken to the kolkhoz and that she, poor child, would die exactly six weeks later from poliomyelitis?

My father, always thrifty and industrious, fell into a deep depression. He blamed himself for our troubles; he thought that maybe he mistreated us, didn't buy us nice clothes and presents, made us work from dawn till dusk so he could buy more land and cattle. His only desire was to be a good farmer and a good father so that he could increase his property and leave it to his children. But all this collapsed in front of his eyes and his family was proclaimed “enemies of the people.”

We were exiled to Siberia in the region of Tiumeni to the village of Viculova. Father's work, when we went to this strange and distant land, was to bring milk from the collective back to the village, a distance of 5 kilometres. During that first winter there was a severe snowstorm and he died from the cold. His body still lies beneath the permafrost of Siberia. In this way, mother and I were left alone. She was 51 and I was eight. How could we earn a living? How would we survive? There was the language barrier, the severe Siberian winters, crowded living conditions.

In our barracks there lived three families. The boards of the floor served at the same time as bedroom, kitchen, table and desk. Mother worked in a kolkhoz and there you were obliged to work a certain number of days (make “vihod”) in order to get 200 grams of flour per working day. But even if mother worked hard, she could not get more than 6 kilograms of flour in a month and that was not enough to survive. That is why she also began going into homes to work for people, just to put a few potatoes on our plates. She washed for families there, built their ovens, spread clay on their houses - something they didn't know how to do.

I also worked in the kolkhoz when school was on vacation, pulling flax from which sheets were made; I made sheaves from the wheat; I did anything that was required of me. After a few years, we both worked for a learned woman who wrote petitions to Moscow on our behalf that said we had no blame, but positive answers never came. Only after Stalin's death and the power weakened did we have the chance to be set free.

Mother had a frying-pan there, a round, large pan that had seen quite a lot of use even before I was born. It became very dark, and in the end it was half burnt because we didn't have enough oil to pour over the whole pan surface. We poured only a tiny bit of oil to which we added some onions if we had them and lots of potatoes. On the potatoes we added a little more oil just to give flavor. Then we had some tea. This was our food practically every day, and bread.

Bread was doled out according to ration cards and you had to wait in long, tiresome lines for your portion. Mother would go out at night and wait in line for

hours in her thin, fur-lined coat that was not heavy enough for the bitter winters. Then early in the morning she would come get me to wait with her because you could only receive your portion if you were there in line. I remember once, before a particular holiday, they gave white and brown bread. So we came home with two loaves, Mother with the white bread and I with the brown bread. We sat down together and I said: "Mom, please give me just a small piece of your white bread." She said, "Here, take this piece." And after that I ate another piece of bread, and another, and before we knew it we saw we had eaten half the bread, piece by delicious piece. Even bread was never enough. Imagine!

From the dairy we were able to get only the "obrat" or milk that has had all the cream skimmed from it. I would go with my small bucket and wait until the milk would be brought and processed through the separating device. Then, we would be able to buy the skimmed milk – even that was not given for free. And that's what it was like.

The first year was the hardest. I didn't know the language and had trouble in my first year at school. I did not have proper clothes for the frigid Siberian winters and I was often sick. Then my father became ill and died. The psychological stress of those times turned into depression that has plagued me throughout my lifetime.

I didn't want to enter the first form, but, starting with the third form, I came to enjoy studying and was a good student. My mother pushed me to study and to learn this new Russian language. I remember how I learned one word "svisteti" – "to whistle." I was in the first form, and one boy whistled; then the teacher asked, "Who whistled?" I thought: "What is this "whistled?" The boy replied, "I did." And I understood, "That's what it is!" This is the way I learned the language. I also had a Russian book called, "Tale of Three Bears" – a fairy tale. It was very difficult for me, but I learned it by heart and read it to my mother every day. Finally my mother remarked, "Somehow you read only one story," and she got on me to read others. By third form, I had a good teacher who was interested in everything, and so I began to like school and in the end I completed the seventh form, from a Russian school of course. When I was in the fifth form, my mother began coming to the parents' meetings even though she didn't understand Russian very well. Still, she came and supported me and we were respected.

But even as they praised me on the one hand, on the other they took away part of my identity. They changed my name! My family name is Rotaru, but in school they changed it to Rotari. Then, when I told them I am called "Antoneta," they said, "We don't have such a name. You'll be Antonina!" Can you imagine – even my name was changed. And, furthermore, they shortened this new name, Antonina, to "Nina." When I required the school leaving certificate after tenth form, they asked for my birth certificate and there it was written, "Antoneta." But they had changed my birth name to Antonina. So many changes. Just imagine!

Even my family in Moldova suffered. One tragedy after another occurred. My brother couldn't apply for jobs in the village or in the kolkhoz and instead had to go to a neighboring village five kilometres away by foot to find work. And then my niece, the child of my brother, died of polio. One of my older sisters had tuberculosis and was not taken with us. Instead the authorities threw her from the house and left her on the street. First she stayed with an aunt, then another sister, but they all had families and times were hard. In the end they found a tiny room for her, but she died at the young age of 31. When my parents were there, they were

able to purchase the needed medication for her by selling a cow or other produce. She needed large doses of antibiotics. But when we were deported, she received only 200 rubles as a teacher and could not afford the medication.

Another brother who had finished the commercial lyceum in Bălți was hired as an accounting clerk in the office of a kolkhoz. Here, though, he had difficulties with the Ukrainians in charge. They wrote to the KGB office in the region headquarters that a kulak's son was working at the administration office of a kolkhoz. So, people would come from the office and tell him to go home. But there was one Ukrainian accountant there who was understanding and would tell my brother, "Dima, go home and stay there a week or two and then, after this commission ends, you'll come back to work." This happened several times until after Stalin's death. Finally they left him alone a bit. So, you see, our lives and the lives of our family were destroyed by this oppression and stigmatization.

During Stalin's time, it was impossible to go home. Mother used to tell me about life in Moldova with tears in her eyes. She would say, crying, "Sweetheart, we weren't enemies...we hadn't killed anyone, we hadn't broken apart anyone's family. We worked so hard. Why did it happen to us?" This was my education about those times.

For people to say now, "Those were very good times," I cannot judge them. But for us, those were not good times. We longed for our home, for our family, for our land. Every street in my village was washed with my mother's tears. Then, in the autumn of 1955, an official came to our place and said to my mother, "Vițica, do you know that a document came and you are now free?" Well, my Mother couldn't believe her ears; that paper was received in May, and they brought it to us only in October. In ten days...it was October, it was cold... but in ten days my Mother sold all the potatoes that we had, about two tons because potatoes were our main food. And she sold everything we had in the house...we took only my books and two cases with some belongings.

When we did come back we were allowed to return to our village, but they would not restore to us our house. First they had made the house into a medical aid post, then a maternity hospital, then a kindergarten. Someone in the village offered us a shed to stay in and later the state gave us a house that was dirty and filled with rats. Several times my mother tried to enter our own house by force, but each time she was dragged away by her arms and legs. One time, as they were relocating the aid post, a door was left open and mother entered with a pillow and a blanket. I was in Bălți studying at the college there at this time. The chairman of the village council came with two deputies and again dragged her by force from the oven upon which she had climbed. And she told them: "You can kill me here, but this is my house! I built it with my tears and my blood, and this is *my* house! Kill me right here! Take me to the cemetery and bury me, but I won't come out of here! I have nowhere to go. I cannot go to my children. They have their own families." Finally, they said: "Let her stay!" So she remained in a part of the house, the greater part of which served as a kindergarten, and the house remained the property of the kolkhoz.

As I said, my whole life changed on that fateful day in July. Not only was I not born in my village, but for practically my whole life I did not live there. When we returned from Siberia, I attended the college in Bălți and then was assigned to work in another locale for three years. I married a man who was a graduate of the

Institute of Medicine. He was taken into the army and served there for 25 years. First we went to Krasnoïarskii Krai, in eastern Sibirsk, where our first child was born. Then he was transferred to Nikolaev, in Ukraine, where our second daughter was born. Finally, my husband was transferred to Hungary where he was a surgeon at the military hospital there. For twenty-five years we lived away from Moldova. My children grew up knowing only Russian. My parents were Romanians, I don't know who I am, and my children are, in some ways, Russian.

Of course it was not allowed to go to the church during Soviet times! They didn't allow children to march through the village at Easter and Christmas. We Moldovans have a tradition here: on Christmas and New Year children go into houses singing colinda (similar to Christmas carols) and we praise Jesus Christ: "Three kings from the East/ With the star we start our journey/ We are leaving for Jerusalem/ To find out news about Jesus Christ." They didn't allow us to practice our religious traditions in Siberia; they didn't respect religion. Even the school was against this, Good Lord! The Soviet position was strongly against the church because Lenin said that religion is opium for the people. They destroyed here in Moldova almost every monastery! But today, we are able to go to the church and practice our religion. For me this is very important. It helps me survive the pain of the past.

I suffered greatly from depression that had begun when I was in Siberia. It was only when I went to my native village, to my mother's, my grandparents', and my great-grandparents' graves and stayed there for several days that the earth gave me back my strength. When I returned, I felt better. In the summer I still return to the village of my husband's family to work in the garden, to plough, to plant seeds, and to harvest. Then, I come back only in October, replenished both spiritually and physically.

"IT WAS WRITTEN THAT WE HAD NOT COMMITTED ANY  
CRIME-WE SUFFERED FOR NOTHING."



### **Valentina Hamurari**

Born: 1928, Chişinău

Exiled to: Kazakhstan

In 1941 my father was working as a mechanic on the railway engines in the depot at Chişinău and was supposed to go on a business trip. However, on the day he was to leave he was told to go home and that the trip would be made at another time. But the next day, at 5 o'clock in the morning, we were awakened by soldiers with rifles who ordered father to dress and get ready to leave. He was going on a trip of a different kind – he was being sent to the GULAG in Siberia.

My father was born in 1902, mother in 1910, I was born in 1928, my brother in 1932, and a third child in 1938. My mother was pregnant with her fourth child when we were arrested. She later gave birth to that child in the railway carriage.

On that morning in 1941, the soldiers told our family to gather the things that we thought were necessary and get onto the cart. Everyone cried. My father was a simple worker. Why was this happening to us? My grandmother, with whom I shared a bed for all of my 12 years, was disconsolate. We were taken to the railway and loaded into carriages for animals. There were a lot of families. The men were loaded onto one train while the women and children were loaded onto another one. During that one-month trip we were given only rye bread to eat. Oh how hungry we were! If we were very fortunate, we might be offered food and water by people at the stations we passed through.

People on the train were very distressed and sad. When my mother gave birth, we didn't even have water to wash her or the infant. Finally we arrived in Kazakhstan, women and children mostly, without men. The train didn't even stop to unload us; we were simply pushed out of the carriages like pieces of lumber. It was horrible. We stayed a day without food, water, anything. We didn't know what would happen to us. We didn't know where they were taking us nor did we know where our father had been sent.

Then came carts and we were loaded, a few families at a time, and taken to a base. This base was called "Base No. 8," and there were some Ukrainian people living there who had been brought earlier in two trains. Another train had brought mostly children who were taken to an orphanage. My infant brother that was born on the train died within a month because mother didn't have milk to feed him. The only food we were given was bread. Each adult was given a card for 600 grams of bread a day and children were allowed 250 grams. This was all our food.

At "Base No. 8" each morning at six o'clock someone from the kolkhoz rapped at our door and sent mother to work. Usually she went to the fields to gather cotton and work the land. I stayed at home with my younger brothers. Sometimes I went into the fields to look for food or I went begging from house to house for something to feed our family.

We lived in barracks, three families to one unit. In our barrack lived an old woman, my mother with her three children, and another woman with her teenage daughter. Her husband had lived there for a short while, but when the woman gave birth to another child, he was sent to work somewhere else. She had nothing. She was, however, on good terms with the family of the director of the base and was able to get food from him from time to time. One day, she told me to go with her to the director's house where she had seen some bread in the kitchen. She opened the window with a knife and I climbed up to enter the house through the open window. Just at that moment I heard the director's voice, so I closed the window and hid, praying that he would not find me. When he left, I took the bread and gave it to the woman and ran away. The next day there was quite a disturbance when it was discovered that someone had broken in and taken the bread. Even though the woman had been on good terms with the director, if we had been discovered, he could not have saved us from being punished. But, this woman was bold and desperate and proposed that I go with her one more time for bread. Mother didn't allow me to go saying we would die of hunger first. So the women took her daughter instead and together they went to steal some bread, but when they approached the director's office they were discovered. The girl ran away but the woman was shot and killed.

During the war, "Base No. 8" was converted into a prisoner of war camp for German soldiers. Here they were brought and most were shot. We were moved about 1.5 kilometers away, but still had to work the fields where we saw the arms and legs of the German prisoners sticking out from their shallow graves.

At this new site we were again placed in a room about 18 meters long where we lived with a woman and her son and two sisters. We had no table, no chairs, and we all were sleeping on wooden beds. To be softer we filled a few sacks with hay to serve as mattresses. Mother had some earrings and a little cross necklace which she exchanged for some dried bread and a few kilograms of corn. We sold everything we had so that we wouldn't die from starvation. We were all sick and malnourished; our legs were swollen. My brother seemed to be only bones; he didn't have any flesh on him and he suffered from a sore on his throat that was so infected that it poured pus and blood.

Some of the local people raised sheep and when they were making cheese, we went and asked for the whey. Others worked on tractors and trucks, and for them a woman prepared food in a large cast iron kettle. After they ate, the cook would occasionally give us the food that remained. I was also getting up at 3 a.m. to stay in a queue at the shop to get bread. The daily norm for mother was 600 gr. and each child was allowed 250 gr.

The place where we lived was like a desert and wild dogs came to our window and frightened us with their howling. In spring I used to go long distances to try to find food. My brother and I would go and gather turtles from the sand where they had gone to lay their eggs and then take them home in a sack. First, we would dig in the sand with our hands to find them and then we put them on their sides where we split the shell with a knife and hammer, removing the flesh to take home to cook. They were very tasty. If we found eggs, we ate them immediately so as not to starve. Sometimes during the night hedgehogs would walk on the road and we also gathered them. We burnt them till the needles would disappear and then peeled them like pigs. They had fat under their skin in which we used to fry the tortoise meat. For winter food, we put the meat in jars with salt. We also used the fat in preparing soup made from a weed that grew wild in that area ("orache"). All the time we lived there we longed to return to Moldova and to cook a pan of beans and mămăligă and to eat until we would be full. We were starving there.

Mother worked for sixteen years picking cotton. When the cotton was ready to be picked everyone worked, from the youngest one to the oldest one. The cotton was planted in rows of 1-2 kilometers in length and everyone worked hard to gather in the crop. Anyone who knows about this plant knows that the cotton bolls are hard and sharp and cause your hands to be cut and swollen. This was difficult work for everyone, especially the children. Every year we got sick from malaria, which was very common there, and also we got trachoma. Our eyes became red and we couldn't open them in the morning. When the cotton flourished we all had problems with eyes. There was no hospital, but there was a man who had medicine and took care of us. Because there was no hospital and no doctor a lot of people died.

When the war ended things became calmer and we were given bread more regularly. In summer we were able to gather some maize and wheat and save it for the cold winters. The weather here was very changeable. In the summer we suffered terribly from the heat, and in the winter we didn't have proper clothing to keep us warm. One such winter, I found an old pair of boots that had no soles, so I

wrapped them with cloth and was able to use them to keep my feet from getting frostbite.

By the end of the war I was 17 years old and big enough to work and earn my own bread. I worked as a baby sitter, brought in wood from the forest, gathered hay for the animals, and I cooked for my family. A school was built and I worked there for a year as a cleaner and a cook for the school director. The small income that I made allowed me to buy some clothes.

In 1950, when I was working at school, the teachers helped me to obtain my passport by making a false birth certificate. Of course I couldn't say that I was deported, but instead wrote that I had been evacuated. While I was in the queue waiting for my passport, I talked to an old woman who was also waiting, and I told her my story. She said to me, "I see you are a good girl. I'm working at a kindergarten and they need a cook. I'll speak to them to hire you there." I received my passport and was hired to work at the kindergarten some distance from my mother and brothers. I missed them very much, but it was also here that I met and married my first husband.

In 1956 mother got word that father had been liberated. For 16 years and 9 months we knew nothing about his fate nor he about ours. In his liberation papers it was written that he had not committed any crime. We still don't know why he was kept in gulags for so long. Nor do we know why we were exiled because we had not committed any crime either – we suffered for nothing.

Father was told, upon being freed, that if he wanted to return to Moldova he had to find his family. By one way or another, he found mother and they telegraphed me that they were returning to Moldova. By that time I was pregnant, but I returned to Moldova as well and lived in the region of Lipcani in the village of Pererîta with my parents-in-law.

When we returned our neighbors and relatives told us that grandmother stayed at the gate waiting for us and cried. She couldn't bear the separation and died in 1944; my grandfather lost his sight from sadness. After my mother returned in Moldova, she fought for about a year to have her house returned. There were three families living there at the time; however, she prevailed and got the house back. By then I had remarried, and my new husband, mother and one brother lived together.

I lived in Kazakhstan from 1941 until 1957, from the age of 12 until 28. For sixteen years my family and I suffered. My father was in the Gulag as a prisoner and the rest of his family were exiled to Kazakhstan to be forced laborers. It was written that we had not committed any crime – we suffered for nothing. So why were we exiled? What were we guilty of?

I have two children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren. I pray that they will never have to suffer as I did.

" I WAS ONLY SIX YEARS OLD - A FRIGHTENED CHILD."



### **Eugenia Mihalachi**

Born: 1942, Durlleşti, Chişinău

Exiled to: Tiumeni Region

I was born Eugenia Roşca, the only child of my father and mother, but one of nine children as a result of their previous marriages. My father had four children by a previous marriage and my mother also had four children by a previous marriage – yours, mine and ours! I live now in Durlleşti, near the place of my grandfather, Costache Roşca, on the banks of a small brook by the same name. In fact, these lands are even now called the “place of Costache Roşca.”

At the time of deportation, our family was called “kulaks” because my father had about 15 hectares of farm land and 2 hectares of forest; he also had a combine that he shared with some neighbors. We had a big, beautiful house and my family worked very hard; we were good caretakers of the land. My father loved working the land.

Though my mother was not an educated woman, she was very inquisitive, and she was the one who found out that we were going to be arrested on that day in July of 1949. When we got word that the soldiers were coming to take us away, my father and my sister ran away into the field where they worked. I was taken to a neighbor’s house. My mother stayed home with one of my brothers, who worked as a militiaman. My brother thought that his presence in his militiaman’s uniform would deter the soldiers from taking my mother. Nevertheless, they seized my mother and didn’t care at all about who my brother was.

Mother began to scream and to cry. I woke up from sleeping at the neighbor’s house and heard my mother’s cries. I began to shout, “I want to go home!” However, it was not until later in the morning that the neighbor, fearing also for her own safety, brought me to the fence and then let me go home. By this time mother had already been taken from the house, but a Russian soldier took me to Ghidighici, a station just outside Chişinău, where my mother had been put into the railway car used to transport cattle. When I got to the train station, some man who owned a little store there came out and offered me some sweets. What child doesn’t eat sweets! I took them and kept them in my hands, but, before I had a chance to eat them, they had melted. I weep today even thinking about this. Other than that, I don’t really remember too much because there was so much emotion. I was only six years old.

I do remember that mother took with us one pillow and a down-filled blanket that she later exchanged in Siberia for a bucket of potatoes. She also managed to take a large piece of carpet. When she put into her luggage a special implement for stirring “mămăligă,” (the traditional dish of Moldova) my brother threw it out, thinking she was being foolish, but she retrieved it. What she hadn’t brought, though, was a pan in which to prepare the mămăligă! At these times, you don’t think very clearly.

Meanwhile, my father and sister, who had been hiding in the fields, gave up and came to the station in Ghidighici. They were immediately arrested, but were put

in another wagon with a different group. (My brothers, being older and having their own families, were not arrested.) Thus we began that dreadful journey. The doors and the one single window of the cattle car were closed and it was so hot – it was July. If someone wanted to rest and lie down, that meant there was no place for others to even put their feet. We looked like matches in a package – children, pregnant women, the elderly, everyone. People were sick, there was only a bucket to use for a toilet – it was inhuman. Finally, as we got further into Russia, the window and doors were allowed to be opened so at least we had fresh air.

When we got to the end of our journey, father and sister were taken to a different place than mother and I. We lived in barracks with other families and were given only a wooden plank, like a shelf, on which to sleep. My mother worked in the forest cutting wood. Do you think a woman from Moldova knows how to use an axe! Mother was handy with a pitchfork, a knitting needle, in the kitchen, but she had no experience with an axe. But this is what she was forced to do, so this is what she did to avoid starvation. After a time, my father and sister were allowed to come to live with us. They, too, worked in the forest. Their work was supervised by a commandant, and every evening the workers had to sign in from the forest to assure the authorities that no one had escaped.

The cut trees measured about one meter in diameter, and when nightfall came, we children would climb up on the stacked cords of wood to wait for our parents. One night, I couldn't locate my mother, and then I saw her being dragged by another woman back to the camp. It turned out that she had eaten poisonous mushrooms in the forest and almost died. Food was so scarce that any opportunity to get nourishment was taken.

Our people were not used to working in the forest and the daily norms that were required to be met were too big. Since they were not able to meet them, they were given very small wages. We had no money, and many died from hunger that first year. My cousin's wife died in childbirth for there were no hospitals here. As she was nearing death, she said to us, "My infant son will join me soon." Forty days after we buried her, her infant son also died. There simply was no milk to keep him alive.

The first winter was so cold in the barracks. There was one stove in the middle of the room, but that was insufficient to warm such a huge space. In the evenings, after working in the forest, people came back to the barracks in wet shoes which made the place even more damp and uncomfortable. I remember that my father tried to make a pair of warm shoes from the piece of carpet that mother brought. He was able to put together pieces of this heavy material into something similar to peasant's sandals, using ribbons to hold them together. With these simply-made peasant sandals he went into the snow and ice-covered forest to chop trees. Although my father wanted to use all of the carpet for making shoes, mother insisted on keeping a portion of it as a keepsake for her two daughters.

We were not given proper clothes to wear and the only food I remember eating were potatoes that mother had received in exchange for her down-filled blanket. One woman that mother knew gave me a radish that is called "brukva." I have never seen it in Moldova – it was sweet and delicious. In this small village the local people threw out frozen potatoes or peels near our barracks which I picked up to be eaten. I remember also that my mother and I suffered from night blindness

because we didn't have enough vitamins. We were given cod-liver oil that helped us recover.

One Christmas we received a parcel from Moldova. In the parcel we found a piece of pork fat ("slanina"). On Christmas morning my parents washed themselves and, crossing themselves, sat down to eat. They cut this piece of fat into small portions and, crossing themselves again, said, "Thank you God that we have something to eat on this Christmas Day." So, on this special day, each of us had a very thin slice of delicious fat to eat.

After a time, my parents together with other relatives built a house. Altogether we were seven: four in our family, my mother's sister, and my father's brother and his wife. To keep warm during the coldest winter nights, the seven of us slept in one single bed.

One day, a man from the village of Lesnaia convinced our three families to go with him and find work in his village. I don't know why the adults agreed to follow him – I was only a child. But, he told us that we would live better there and so we agreed to go. It was winter and two sleds were brought to transport us and our belongings. Other families from Barașca also joined us, and those sleds were filled to the brim with belongings and children. The sleds were pulled by a farm tractor. It was extremely cold and we were in the middle of the forest when the tractor broke down. It was terrible. We didn't have proper clothes or shoes and the children and pregnant women suffered the most. The leaders went ahead to the village where they got horses to pull the sleds, and we were loaded and started off once again until we came to the new place. However, many children died on the trip – they froze to death.

This village of Lesnaia, where we lived a better life, was also where I attended school. I began school here in 1950 but had to repeat first form because I couldn't speak Russian. Of course I had to learn it to be able to succeed in school. I remember going to school those first winters. I didn't have shoes to wear, so I went to school in some military footwear that my mother found. These shoes were huge in comparison to my little feet, but I wore them every day to school. Nor did I have proper clothing for temperatures that dipped to -50C. Mother tied me up as tightly as she could in a warm shawl and sent me off.

I had good school friends and even continue to correspond with some of them to this day. On the street where we lived there were only Moldovan families and the street was called Chisineovskaia. One of my friends who re-visited this village recently told me that this street still goes by that name. Wouldn't I love to go back there and see it one more time!

In this new place, the adults worked as farmers on a kolkhoz. Here we were able to build houses for each of our families. My father had learned carpentry, and he built our house of wood. Life was much better here; we had more money and were even able to buy some chickens and a little pig.

One day, my aunt had a stroke. I think this was in 1952 or 1953. All the adults were working in the field and I was at school. She was paralyzed and couldn't take care of herself. So, after school, it was my job to care for her. My friend from across the street (she and her family had been deported from Anenii Noi) and I would take her out for a walk and help her with her needs. My uncle, who had a goat, told me, "If you take good care of your Aunt Nastea, I'll give you a baby goat." I was so excited when the she-goat had her baby and so impatient to get it. I

told Uncle Simion, "I'll give you this black chicken if you'll give me the kid with the black muzzle." From this kid, I bred 15 milk goats. We had cheese and milk and life was better. Sadly, my Aunt Nastea became blind and finally lost her mind and died in Siberia.

I returned to Moldova by myself after finishing the 7<sup>th</sup> form. I was 15 years old and traveled as far as Moscow with some school friends who were from Suruceni. Then I continued on by myself. I was worried that I would not recognize my brothers whom I had not seen for over nine years. So, when I got to the station in Chişinău, I waited to be the last person off the train hoping that my brothers would be alone waiting for me. And this was exactly what happened. I left the train and noticed a man who was searching the platform. Then I took out my photo and recognized that man as my brother Gheorghişa. I ran up to him and hugged him and he yelled at the other brother to come, saying, "Lilian, come here! It is our sister!" So this is how I became reacquainted with my brothers. My mother, father and sister came later that same fall in 1958. My father was an old man when he left Siberia, over 70 years old.

When families were released, they were told they could work anywhere in the Soviet Union but not in Moldova. So of course we could not work legally in Moldova because we did not have documents. This was very hard for us. My father went to work on a kolkhoz near Odessa where I joined him. However, my mother refused to leave Moldova saying, "I won't leave this place even if I am pelted with stones; I'll eat ashes, but I am staying here!"

After working for a time, I obtained a work book from local authorities in Ukraine. This document allowed me to return to Moldova. I found work in a shop with a sympathetic woman who knew that I had been deported. Later I worked for many years in a garment factory and then in a factory where dolls were made.

In Moldova, we were only able to get a place to build our house because mother worked in a kolkhoz here and because she was a very strong-willed person. During a special meeting, the kolkhoznic (workers) were supposed to be given their assignments for land on which to build their house. Everyone went to that meeting, every single kolkhoznic. The requests were filled, one after another, but, in the end, my mother's request was not considered. Finally, as the meeting was ending, a man said to my mother, "Madam Sofica, what are you waiting for?" She rose up from her chair and asked, "Why didn't you discuss my request?" Apparently, someone had taken the request and put it aside so no one would find it. The man then said, "Yes, yes, here it is. I have found it. People, what do you say? Are we going to give to Stefan Roşca a place for a house? What do you decide?" And all of them responded, "Yes, he should get it, he should get it!" All of them said that, and then my mother began to cry and to say, "Thank you, good people! Thank you!" So, that is how we got our place and where my parents, again, built a house. My mother died in 1975 when she was 75 years old, and my father died in 1979 at the age of 96!

Before leaving to work in Ukraine, I tried to get a birth certificate in Moldova to replace mine that had been ruined in Siberia. The mayor of our town, a Russian who had been appointed, refused to give me the certificate. Later, after I returned from Ukraine, he told me, with begrudging respect, "Roşca, do you know why you kulaks were taken?" Because you were good caretakers and good workers. You showed it there (in Siberia). When you came back you have proved it here as well!"

And do you know that every single person who came back here (to Durlești) has built a house!

Now, I am retired and take care of my husband who is blind. I have a daughter and two sons. It gives me joy to see my children and six grandchildren – solace after years of suffering. It has been a very hard life.

" I HAVE LIVED WITH PAIN IN MY HEART ALL MY LIFE. "



### **Larisa Naduc**

Born: 1942, Chișinău

Exiled to: Kemerovo Region

On the 6th of July, 1949, at four a.m., two people came to our house. Father had just returned from his night shift at work and the rest of the family was asleep. We were awakened by very loud knocking at the door. Father asked, "Who is knocking?" The answer came, "Document control!" When we opened the door the two men barged in. Mother recognized the uniform of one of the men as that of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This stranger had entered our yard the day before and asked if we had an apartment for rent. Mother answered that she had a big family and there was no free room left. He also asked her what time her husband returns from work each day. This visitor from yesterday declared that our family was being arrested. For my parents it was a terrible shock.

Ironically, father had requested a change in work not long before we were deported. He had found a job that paid more and so asked for his work documents. However, his boss said, "Wait a while. There will be some changes!" Of course this boss knew that my father's name was on the "black list." Even before this, my mother was summoned to the mayor's office to report about the activities of our neighbors, but she responded that she did not know anything. Then, those same neighbors were called to the mayor's office and asked about our family's activities. They turned out to be betrayers. These were times of distrust, fear, and intimidation.

Father was dumbfounded. Mother burst out sobbing. We children also began to cry. Father's questions, "Why? What for?" were answered, "You will find out there." They did not explain to my father where "there" was. Father said, "Shoot us here on the spot. I will not go anywhere." But these words had no effect on the "guests." They said there was little time and that we had to take our things quickly. Our parents had become so unsettled that they were throwing everything they saw into the truck. Grandmother began to help mother dress us children even as my brother struggled to run away. He didn't get very far because our yard was completely surrounded. Some of the people from our village were hired as guards. We thought they were our friends; we had never quarreled with them.

One of my father's brothers (the middle brother) was also deported, but the youngest brother was already in detention having been arrested for the second time in 1947. His first arrest took place in 1940-41. He was married at the time and his

family had taken refuge in Romania. My opinion is that my father and the middle brother suffered and were arrested because of the younger brother's activities.

Soon we found ourselves in the truck – my parents and four children. Because of serious health problems, my oldest brother had been sent, in 1941, to a sanitarium, and after we were deported we lost contact with him. The four of us children were between the ages of thirteen and one year old. I was seven years old. The baby was crying and crying. The officer asked why the baby was crying, and mother answered that he needed food and drink. As we left our home mother added, with contempt, "Now you can occupy our house. It is empty."

We were brought to the railway station where many people had already been gathered. When new families came they were loaded onto railway carriages that had been used to haul coal. They were dirty and without windows. The whole day people were arriving and were pushed into the carriages. Towards evening we saw grandmother. She had been looking for us for the whole day. She brought a dry Easter cake and 25 rubles; that was all she had.

I do not remember when the carriage started off. I do remember, though, how hungry we were during the trip because our parents had very little food. The baby went on crying and my younger sister also burst into tears. Other children started crying as well. Mother was so anxious because of all of this that she fainted. We were all so afraid, especially my father. He kept repeating, "Lenutsa, don't leave me alone. What will I do with the children?" When she came to her senses she could not understand for a long time where she was.

After a week or so, the train stopped for the first time and we were given a loaf of brown bread and some water; however, no consideration was given to the large size of our family. It was so hot, dirty and stuffy in the railway cars that the baby's skin broke out into a terrible rash. He continued to cry and cry and could not eat the brown bread that we tried to give him. Finally, mother soaked some of the stale Easter bread in water and he ate it. He was also made to feel a little better when he was brought to the door of the carriage. There was a chink in the door where a bit of fresh air touched the baby's painful skin. This helped him go to sleep.

The conditions in the railway cars were dreadful. In addition to the noise and heat, the car began to smell bad because people, out of necessity, went to the toilet right in the corner of the carriage, covering themselves for privacy with a bed-sheet. A lamp was on both day and night in the carriage. People slept on the floor and on the benches. On that trip, one of the women gave birth in our carriage. There was, of course, no medical help, but another woman in the carriage acted as a midwife and helped in the birth of this infant. Amazingly, the child survived, and at the first stop, mother and child were moved into another carriage, separated from her husband and other child. Armed soldiers stayed at the door of each carriage. At the stops the doors were opened to let in some fresh air and to give us food and water, but no one was allowed to get out of the carriage.

At the end of a month, we arrived in Tashtagol in the Kemerovo region. Some of the families, together with ours, were loaded once again onto a truck and sent to the taiga village of Kachura. I was struck by the picturesque surroundings. On both sides of the road were mountains covered with huge fir trees. The villagers began to come up to us and ask if we had anything to sell. Because my parents had neither money nor food, mother had to sell some of our clothing. With this money

she bought potatoes and milk. There was nothing else there. At first we, and others who came with us, lived in the village community center. We slept on the hard floor and cooked outside on fire, even when it was raining. It was already autumn there and beginning to get cold. Things were not much better when we were settled a bit later in wooden barracks infested with bed bugs.

At first father worked felling trees, and then, when they found out that he was a metal worker, he was brought to the mechanic's section. Gold was being extracted from the river in this area and father was called on to fix the gold extraction machine ("dragă") when it broke down. Because the machine was in operation 24 hours a day, it broke down often, usually at night. Father had to go to work in any weather and at any hour.

In the first winter, mother got sick. The village medical attendant told father to take her to the doctor. Father took her to Tashtagol where mother was admitted to hospital. She had problems with her heart. That year I was supposed to go to school in the first form, but I did not. I had no proper clothes to wear and also I had to look after the two small children. My elder brother went to school, father went to work, and I remained at home to keep house. I was so afraid that mother would not come back from the hospital. I often cried, burying my head in mother's dressing gown so that nobody would see this. In a month mother came back, but she was very weak. Only in spring did she begin to feel better.

Spring and summer passed very quickly. Winter began again and brought more troubles. At the beginning of the winter father, hurrying to work and walking on thin ice, fell into the water. He was saved by some miracle. Then in December my older brother got sick. His arms and legs hurt. He could not walk. He was taken to the hospital on a sleigh and was treated for rheumatic fever. Even though he was in the hospital nearly six kilometers away, mother visited him almost every day, walking through snow up to her knees. When brother returned home at the end of April he was diagnosed with heart disease.

We received letters from our grandparents. In one of them it was written that after our departure grandmother wanted to take something from our house, but was forbidden to do so. The house was sealed up. She just managed to pick up our sandals and toys in the yard. The neighbors described how she was walking around our house, kissing its walls and sobbing, "Where are my children? What were they taken for?"

The years passed. It was very difficult for us to adapt to the Siberian life - long cold winters, difficult living conditions. After the famine of 1946-48 in Moldova everyone was weak, especially children. We often caught colds and were sick. Besides the colds some children contracted scarlet fever, mumps and other diseases. It was very difficult for our parents. They did their best to help the family survive in such circumstances. In 1953 grandmother wrote in a letter that grandfather had passed away without seeing his grandchildren once again. Grandma remained alone. In her letters she wrote that she had appealed to different authorities and asked to have her children returned because they were innocent. But no one ever responded to her pleas. Finally, in the middle of March 1956, we were released. We immediately began to prepare to go home, not waiting for the summer. My parents did not want to stay there a single day longer. Mother sold some of our chickens so that we would have money for the journey. My older brother, Jenia, was at that time studying in Stalinsk. There was a stop there and we

saw him. He was so thin and undernourished. Mother always said: "Why did I sell those hens for a song? Why did I not bring them to my son?"

When we returned to Chişinău we had troubles again. Though we were given the papers providing for the restitution of our confiscated property, we were not given anything back. A military officer had settled in our house. He worked for the government and knew the liberation of deported people had begun, so he bought the house from the State for five thousand rubles. Just a few months later he resold the house for 22 thousand rubles and left Chişinău. Father brought this to court several times, but every time the judgment was against him.

Before repressions our house had been new with a nice garden. All the rooms were furnished. There had been a good rain that spring and we had planted many vegetables that were beginning to look healthy. But all the crops fell to the new owner. In autumn they dug out the potatoes that had been planted by our mother's hands. Grandmother was looking through the fence and crying. She was not allowed to take even a single potato.

For the first year after our return to Moldova, we lived in grandmother's house in one single room. Here we did our homework, here mother washed us, and here we slept. My parents tried to get an apartment for us, going from one official to another. Every time they were told that no new apartments were being built and none were available for us. Father said, "Give us even a dilapidated apartment. We cannot live like this any longer." But that request, too, was denied. Finally, one of our relatives who worked as a security officer advised mother to go to the ministry and ask to speak to a particular woman there. This she did and was told to go back to her house and wait a bit. Sometime later, my family was given a flat. This flat was in a four-story bloc near Adventure Park. When we moved into this flat, we still had the sewing machine that we had taken to Siberia. Although we couldn't return from Siberia with many things, another possession we returned with was a piece of carpet. One of our friends who worked in the museum asked us to sell this piece of carpet to the museum for display.

I was in the sixth form when we left Siberia. We returned and I was sent to school in Chişinău where I completed seventh form. This school was considered to be one of the best, but we had almost no money and the uniform that I wore was made of a course material ("stambă" - a type of printed calico). All the other girls wore nice woolen uniforms and had proper stockings. Of course I felt embarrassed and humiliated. Not only was my outer appearance shabby, but I felt inside that I was of a lower cultural level than they. I had had limited opportunities to experience cultural life in the taiga. Furthermore, I felt the stigma of being an "enemy of the people."

I began working in a knitting factory even before starting my studies as an external student at the university. Because only the Communists had the possibility of continuing in a career, I joined the Communist Party. When I went to join the Party, I had to appear before a committee that asked me, "What do you intend to do in the future?" My response was, "I am going to continue my studies and become an engineer." They were so pleased with that answer that they did not pursue other questions about my past. After graduating from the university I worked my way up in the factory, ultimately with the position of chief engineer responsible for training new workers. I always hid the fact that my family had been deported. I never told anyone that I had been deported. At one time, when I was working in the office of

documentation, I looked through the documents of other people and I saw that there were people working in this organization who had been deported. One woman wrote in her autobiography about this. I wanted to talk to this woman, but somehow I never managed it.

I, myself, had been too afraid to write in my own vita that I had been deported. I was afraid because I remember that during a meeting at work, one of the workers had been fired from his job and another worker said that it was good that this person was fired because he had been a "kulak." That was why I was afraid to let it be known that my family had also been labeled "kulak." There was usually a "special department" in every work place that knew everything about the workers and their lives. One older man in this position at my factory did, I think, know that I had been deported, but he felt kindly towards me and never exposed my past.

We lived with pain in our hearts all our lives. But I think that others also lived with their own fear and guilt. Once, upon our return, that same neighbor who had been asked to go the mayor's office and report on our family greeted my brother in the street. My brother did not return the greetings. Shortly thereafter that neighbor hanged himself. People said that he did this because he felt guilty for his past actions and the harm he had done to others.

I believe that language has had the biggest influence on my life. I had to learn Russian in Siberia. When I returned, I studied in Russian; I worked in a Russian environment. One day at work, a woman spoke to me in Romanian. When we tried to have a conversation together, we were told to go into the corridor, like outcasts, and we were not allowed to speak in front of the other workers.

Why did such trials fall to our lot? Trials that undermined our health, led to the replacement of our mother tongue by Russian, and caused the loss of our property. We also lost our identity; we were like a people without a homeland. Russians called us Moldovans and Moldovans called us Russians. My brother, whose health was undermined by his time in Siberia, passed away at the age of 36. My father died two years later. Brother often asked the question, "Dad, what were we condemned for?" Father could not answer. He simply did not know. There were no explanations.

"WE WERE CALLED 'ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE'."



### **Elena Poustovan**

Born: 1929, Drochia Region

Exiled to: Kurgan Region

I was born on the 29th of October, 1929. Almost twenty years later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1949, the sufferings of my family began. Our property was confiscated and we were arrested and deported to Siberia in the region of Kurgan, to work on a pig farm about 45 kilometers from Sadrinsk. Deportation was for us a psychological

and physical trauma that would never disappear. Those who haven't had this kind of experience can't understand what it is like to work a lifetime and then have all the results of your hard work be taken away in a minute.

On the day we were arrested father was 57, mother was 51, and I was 20 years of age. We were driven away from our house, being guilty of nothing; nor were we allowed to take anything from the house. Still, what could you take with you in only two hands.

In my early years, father, mother, an older sister, and I lived in Tarigrad, but then we moved to Drochia. Here we had only two hectares of land, but our house was pretty and we had a big garden. My parents worked very hard and our garden was well tended. When someone passed by our property, they usually stopped and looked with admiration. In some peoples' gardens weeds grew, but my father tried to make his neat and beautiful.

Father had completed the 7<sup>th</sup> form which was considered quite excellent for those days. Mother was without any formal education and was a good caretaker of our home. In Tarigrad I had a boyfriend, but his parents wouldn't allow him to marry me because I was too poor. How could we, therefore, have been considered "kulaks?" One of my father's brothers had served in the Romanian Army, and when the Russians came they arrested him and sent him to Vorcuta in Siberia as a political prisoner. Perhaps this was the reason for our arrest.

In 1940, I was studying in Iași, in Romania, when the Russian Army invaded Basarabia. Before this, my father had told me that he would seek asylum in Ramnicul Sarat (Romania) if the Russians came, and so I followed the soldiers on their retreat. I arrived in Ramnicul Sarat and went to the mayor's office to see if my father's name was on the list of refugees from Moldova. His name was not on the list, but I saw the name of one of our neighbors and I went to stay with his family. I stayed a month with them, but I felt uncomfortable staying longer and went to the mayor's office again and asked for employment. They arranged a job in a hostel for the elderly where I worked during the summer vacation. In the fall, I continued my studies in the lyceum. In order to have anything to eat, I knitted sweaters for my teachers. It was a hard life, but I stayed two more years there to study.

My father looked for me and wrote to me to return home. I was afraid of the repressions that I had heard about. But my life alone was too hard; I didn't have proper clothes or shoes, and I was also worried about my parents. I was afraid that they might be deported because of me, so I returned home in 1944 and continued my studies in Bălți.

At the school in Bălți I was behind the other students in trigonometry and algebra and so had to take some preparation courses. At that time, bread was given out to those who had special cards, and a girl and I sold one of our cards to have money to pay for our extra lessons. After all these difficulties here, we were deported to Siberia. This is the life I had.

In Bălți, I heard that kulaks would be deported, but I told my father that we didn't have to worry because we didn't have any significant amount of property and we had no one working for us. Nevertheless our names were written on the "black list." Father was advised by a friend to leave the house before the soldiers arrived because if he was not at home, the rest of the family would not be deported. That was one reason we didn't take anything with us; we thought we would be released.

When the soldiers came to arrest us, mother and I were taken to the train station and loaded in railway cars that were used to transport animals. My sister was not arrested and deported because she was married and had a different last name, and father was on the run. When it became more and more likely that we would not be released, father got a letter to us as we waited at the station and asked us what he should do. We told father not to come with us but to wait until we got to our destination and then we would write to him to advise him what to do. While we waited at the train station, the soldiers wouldn't allow relatives to approach the carriages. Instead they beat them and sent them away. How I wish I had filmed those horrible, heart-wrenching scenes.

On the fourth day the train started on its way traveling mostly during the night. During the day, the train would stay on a dead line at the outskirts of a community, far away from anybody or anything. I think it has already been told how terrible the conditions of the journey were, so I'll only add that some of my worst memories are of that long trip to Siberia. I do remember, though, how terrified I was without father and not knowing where we were being sent.

For the first two weeks, upon arriving in the district of Sadrinsk, we all lived in an old church and slept on the floor, sick, dirty and depressed. When the authorities told us we would be exiled here forever, we began to cry. Those memories cause me pain even today. In two weeks we were told to unite in groups of two families and build houses for ourselves. The only time we had to undertake this construction was after a full day of work had been finished. Our salary was miserable and only those who worked were allowed to receive the 500 grams of bread that was the daily allotment. There were lists in the shop, and the bread was apportioned according to them. The necessary changes were made to the lists every day. Children and old people who didn't work couldn't get any bread. However, it was here that we were able to get word to father to come to us, which he did three months later.

In the autumn of 1949 and the spring of 1950 I worked in the fields with the tractors. I had to measure how many hectares were ploughed and how much gasoline was used each day by each tractor. I had to walk long distances through the woods and swamps, and because I didn't know the places where I needed to go, I just followed the noise of the tractors. This was a very stressful job for me and I was thankful that in the autumn of 1950 I was allowed to study at the Institute of Agriculture in Kurgan while my parents continued working on the kolkhoz some distance away. I had really wanted to continue my studies at the Medical Institute, but that Institute was in another region and I only had the right to study in the region of Kurgan, where the only possibility was the Agrarian Institute.

Even in the Institute we were stigmatized as "Enemies of the People" when people found out we were there because we were deported. I was lucky, however, to have a good director there; he behaved very nicely to me. For the first six months I didn't have a scholarship but still had to rent a room. Father hadn't received any salary for three or four months and it was very difficult for me.

During the third year at the Institute, I was sent for my practicum to the slaughter house and meat processing factory in the district of Kargapolia. There were seven of us who had been deported in the group that went there, six boys and I. When we arrived at our site, we were all hungry and went to the canteen to eat while our teacher left us and went to the director's office to see how our activities

would be organized. At the canteen, a local Russian student bought a bottle of vodka and proposed that I and the other students in my group have a drink with him. We refused, but when the teacher entered, she saw the bottle on the table and took us out without allowing us to explain or even to eat our food. Then, the Institute organized a Komsomol meeting to discuss this incident, and two of the deported students were expelled from the Institute for one year. As “Enemies of the People” we were provoked and blamed for all bad things that happened at the Institute.

Because I didn't know Russian very well, it was very difficult for me to express and defend myself. I remember that I had a professor who taught us how to care for sheep. He always mentioned to the class, “Don't forget that there are enemies among us!” - referring to me and the other six students who were deportees. And I suffered a lot and I was angry with him.

In order to receive a diploma from the Institute, I had to bring my diploma from the Lyceum. By the fourth year I was beginning to get very worried because the dean told me that if I did not show him the lyceum diploma, I could not graduate. I cried and did not know what to do. After a series of problems, I received the document from Bălți, but there were only marks of “3” – it had been altered. Although I had made better marks, I was pleased with even these low marks because if I hadn't got this document, I would have had to go as an external student in order to obtain a new certificate of school completion,

At the end of the practicum, we had to go to Kurgan to receive our scholarship money and then return to the place where our parents were registered. Somehow I wasn't able to get off the train in Kargapolia and was arrested because as an “enemy of the people” my movement was restricted. I was taken to the district center about 50 kilometers away where I spent three days and nights in prison. I was released only on condition that I would serve my punishment in the town of Sadrinsk near my parents' work site. When I arrived in Sadrinsk, I was again taken into custody to serve my sentence. The effect of this kind of treatment was psychologically punishing and marked me for the rest of my life.

Once, my father wrote to the district newspaper explaining that workers were not paid fairly for their labor. The editor sent my father's letter to the section of internal affairs. He was brought to the internal affairs office and warned that if he dared to write one more letter of complaint they would destroy all our family to serve as a lesson to others.

I was very close to my father and suffered terrible sadness when I received word at the Institute that he had died. I was told that he had bought salami (“liderscaia”) that must have been rotten and he got food poisoning. Because the hospital was 45 kilometers from our home and there was no one to help him, he died in just a few hours. We buried him in Sadrinsk.

It was on August 10, 1954, that mother was told we were free. I was in the fifth year at the Institute and mother had to wait for me to finish my studies for one more year before returning to Moldova. But, after graduating from the Institute, I was sent to work in Kazakhstan and I took mother with me. It was very difficult there. Later, my mother returned to Moldova and I was alone. The kolkhoz in which I was working was a poor one. There were some small houses covered with straw, and in winter, when we didn't have enough food for animals, we took the straw from the roof to feed them. I worked there five months. After my mother returned to

Moldova I felt very lonely. I missed my home, especially after watching the film "Leana," made in Moldova, which showed the hills, the trees, and the valleys of Moldova. But I didn't tell this to anyone.

When graduating from the Institute you were obligated to work wherever they sent you for three years. I was worried that, if I left this job and returned to Moldova, it would be a problem for me with the authorities. But an official from the district felt sorry for me because I was just a young woman far away from home. He told me that the laws had become more lenient and that times had changed and no one would look for me. So I packed my luggage and made my way back to Moldova.

Before deportation, my mother was a housewife and had no work record. That is why, when she returned from deportation at the age of 55, she didn't receive a pension. Her work book from deportation showed that she had worked only four years, and she needed five years to receive even a small pension from the state. Other people went and bought documents that proved that they had worked for the required period of time, but she was an honest woman and couldn't do this. I told her that I would take care of her because I had already graduated from the Institute and I had a job. By now I was 29 years old and it was time for me to get married, but it was very difficult for a former "enemy of the people" to have a family.

I decided to do scientific research and found a job at the Institute of Veterinary Science in Cricova. However, I didn't have a residency permit to live in Chişinău, and at that time this was a big problem because Cricova was part of Chişinău. I went many times to the mayoralty, but each time they refused me. The Russians came from anywhere and were allowed to have flats and permits to live in Chişinău, but I who was born here could not get permission to live in Chişinău. Finally, we managed to get a permit to live in Chişinău with the help of a judge. I am still thankful to him for helping us. I think he was one of us – a former deportee.

Later, we were given the official rehabilitation paper and the right to compensation for the property that was taken from us when we were deported. We received 7,000 rubles and put this money into the bank. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this money devalued. By 1992 it was worth only 7 lei and I couldn't buy even a bottle of oil.

In order to understand us, the deportees, I always tell people to imagine that you are 50 years of age, you have an apartment, you have a car, you have furniture, and it seems that you have everything. Then someone comes during the night and takes you into Siberia and leaves you without anything. Suppose that six years later you will be released and you come back but you are a "foreigner" and no one returns anything to you from what you had. You stay here and cannot arrange for work, you are afraid to write or talk about your mistreatment. That is not a life I would want anyone to have.

"THIS 'STAIN ON MY CHARACTER'  
HAS FOLLOWED ME ALL MY LIFE."



## Ana Rusnac

Born: 1939, Soroca

Exiled to: Kurgan Region

The city where I was born, Soroca, is located in the north of Moldova on the banks of the Nistru River, and from 1918 until 1940 this area was part of Romania (from 1812 to 1918, this land was under Tsarist control). But, in 1940, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact was signed between the Soviet Union and Germany and in this Pact was a special clause that affected Moldova. According to the Pact, Moldova (also called Basarabia) would become part of Russia. This document played a tragic role in the lives of our whole family.

In 1940 when I was only one year old, the most horrible event happened. The Russian Army, with troops mustered from Ukraine, occupied Basarabia. Romania did not put up resistance because of the fear that Russian troops would continue south and invade Bucharest. So, on the 28th of June 1940, the Russian Army entered Soroca and in a short time after that, on 12 July 1940, my grandfather was arrested.

Why was he arrested? He had a small mill with a motor that employed a few people to whom he gave a salary. In the late 1930's, there was a terrible famine in Ukraine during which several million people died, and many people came across the nearby border to look for work in Basarabia in order to survive. Because my grandfather gave jobs, he was considered by the Soviets to be "a danger to society." He was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison, and I never saw him again. In fact, I am able to remember him only from photographs. He spent one year in the Soroca prison, and then in June of 1941 he was sent to the Gulags of Solicamsk in the Ural Mountains. According to documents we later received, grandfather died there on 21 November 1941, and his place of burial is unknown. He only lived one year and a few months after his arrest and only five months after being sent to the Gulag. He was a kind person and was from an ordinary family. He was guilty of nothing.

Of course all his lands and property, including the mill, were confiscated. My grandmother, though not arrested with him, was left with nothing. She moved in with my mother and father, but her heart and her spirit were broken and she died five years later in 1946.

My grandparents had three girls (including my mother) and a boy. My mother's oldest sister was called Ana and I am named for her. She was a very strong and intelligent woman. After finishing high school in the Russian language (during Tsarist times, all education was in Russian), she went to Odessa to study medicine, but then the Civil War broke out and she left. Later, she studied French in the northern town of Hotin because most of the books she would need to complete her medical education in Iași (in Romania) were in French and Romanian. She became a family practitioner.

My mother wanted to study in Paris, so in 1929 she went there with her sister, Melanie. My Aunt Melanie finished her education there, but my mother fell ill and returned home. She was the youngest in the family and my grandfather doted on her. He gave her a portion of land from his four hectares and helped her build a house near his. In 1934 my mother married. My father received his education in Iași where he studied agronomy and then began work as a teacher at the technical-

agricultural college in Soroca. When I was born mother was managing her parent's house as well as ours.

After World War II, troubles began again. In 1946, the Soviets wanted to take our house through "nationalization," as it was called then. My father tried to keep the house which we already shared with another family. At about this time, father was also having trouble at the agricultural college where he taught. Near the college was a garden and farm machinery, and everything was managed very well by my father. There was also a house where an agronomist who tended the garden lived. My father and mother did their best for the college. They gathered plants for herbariums and preserved in bottles different sorts of grapes for exhibits for students. Under my father's supervision was also a nearby farm with a variety of pigs and cows. When the Soviets came, a new director replaced my father. He began to steal everything. He also drove out the agronomist who had been living in the house and settled there himself. My father tried to stop that and lost his job at the college. This is an example of the destructive nature of totalitarian regimes.

Then my father was assigned to teach at the Pedagogic Institute in Bălți. Reluctantly, he moved there and we weren't able to see him very often. Ana's husband wanted to improve his education in order to get a Russian diploma that was required at that time. So in 1949 my father and uncle moved to Bălți together, one as a teacher and another as a student

Thus it was that just before we were sent away from our homeland we lived only with mother and the family that had been settled in our house. One evening, the woman who lived with us warned us that we had been put on the "Black List" and that we would be arrested during the night. She was a kind person and her six children were our friends. She said that we should hide in the forest and she would tell the soldiers that we were not at home. We took warm clothing and stayed in the woods near our house all night. We could hear the soldiers' dogs barking and people crying. It was a horrible night. We were so afraid of being found. But the woman who lived with us and who had warned us did what she had promised, and because she spoke Russian, the soldiers believed her.

We knew that our arrest was inevitable, but this gave us time to pack some of our belongings. In the morning we returned to our home and mother started packing everything she could, carpets ...everything. I was ten years old and my brother was twelve. We tried to help our mother, but we were terribly stressed and frightened. Aunt Ana from Rublenița also came to help us because she knew mother was not strong.

Mother packed some warm clothes and bed linens...all we had. She took photos, documents, utensils. She even took a sewing machine thinking she might be able to make extra money! We didn't take any food because we had very little in the house. At that time we were eating only fruit and vegetables from the garden. The woman in our house said that we were allowed to take 150 kilos according to the law. But the Soviet soldiers didn't tell this to people that were being deported. They said only to take our official documents and to get into a lorry. People weren't informed and they went away frightened and poorly clothed. When we were still in Soroca mother told us to go to the garden and look at it for the last time. I remember how I cried because I would never see it again.

All documents (passports, work books, residence permits, birth certificates) were taken from us and we were loaded in a lorry that went through Rublenița

where my aunt, who had insisted on going with us, joined us. After that we were sent to Florești to the train station or to Drochia - I don't remember exactly - where we waited all night, sleeping on our luggage. Then we were loaded into train carriages used for transporting animals. There were a lot of children. Almost half of the people were children. Families were big in those days. Most of the men had died during the war (World War II) so there were mostly women, children and old men. But we children didn't play with each other during the journey. There was so much tension in the air. We were just so frightened about where we were going. How could we play, laugh, enjoy ourselves when our mothers were crying?

It was very suffocating in the carriage because the small window and door were shut. Mother asked for the one tiny window to be opened and the guard responded: "Maybe you want a sanatorium here!" I remember how, at one station, I got out of the carriage and lost consciousness from hunger and from the burst of fresh air. At the stops we were guarded, like criminals, by soldiers. People went to the loo under the carriages. Can you imagine how humiliating it was for people to have to go to the toilet all together, children and adults? I was so ashamed. Indeed, the things I saw then I'll never forget in my whole lifetime.

No one knew where we were being taken. Nobody told us anything. I remember how mother, through the window, was asking from the people at the stations the name of the regions we passed through. She wanted to know where we were being taken. We were told that the region was called Voronej, so mother then knew that we were not going to the North. We were being exiled in Kurgan near the Kazakhstan border.

We finally got off the train in Shadrinsc. There were managers from all the collective farms in that area at the station. They selected us like we were slaves at an auction and put us in carts to take us to the big state farm where wheat was grown. We were settled in a warehouse there where we lived with six other families, sleeping on the floor.

Later we moved into a very small, one-room house where we and one other family lived. They slept in one corner of the room and we stayed together in another corner. During the day, the grown-ups were taken to work. My brother was also taken even though he was only twelve years old because it was harvest time. Everyone worked hard, yet no one was paid. I remember how I wrote a letter to my friends in Soroca, but I couldn't send it because mother hadn't money for a stamp. My aunt was sent to Shershenino in the Baturinsk region to work as a medical assistant where it was possible to live at the medical aid post. We were allowed to move there to be with her. There was a room for medical examinations and a room with a "soba" (a form of heating) where we lived. In that region people were kind. Our neighbor gave us fruit from her garden. We also were allowed to take fruit even if she wasn't at home. This may seem insignificant, but to us it was the difference between hunger and a little satisfaction of appetite.

My father was not taken when we were, so he went to the dean of the pedagogic institute in Bălți where he was teaching to ask permission to visit us. The authorities took him immediately, without any time for him to get warm clothing, and sent him to Petuhovo in Kurgan where there was a technical-agricultural college. My father was given a job there as a farm manager. We found out he was there through his brother, who had already been sent to Petuhova. We got permission to be transferred there and Aunt Ana was also allowed to leave with us. Earlier she

had tried to return to Moldova to be with her husband, but that had not been allowed. When we got to Petuhovo, by train, again our documents were taken from us, but at least we were now all together.

We still didn't have proper winter clothing and so mother took the cotton stuffing from the mattress and sewed some felt boots, which we wore with galoshes. People in Siberia and in the cold climates wore these boots, called "valenki," to protect their feet from the snow and ice, but we hadn't money to buy proper ones.

My brother's schooling in Soroca had been in Romanian, but later we both attended the Russian language school. This was difficult for my brother since he was already in 7<sup>th</sup> form, but he did his best. Even after being sent to Siberia, he completed school at age 16, one year earlier than his peers. In our days when I hear from Russians who have lived in Moldova for 50 years saying that they can't learn Romanian, I don't believe them. They just don't want to.

My brother finished school in 1953 (when Stalin died) and went to Omsk to try to enter the Institute of Road-Transport. He passed their entrance exam but wasn't allowed to become a student there because he was "a son of the people's enemy." So he went instead to the Agriculture College where father was then teaching. At the age of 20 he enlisted in the army. Father was worried about his son and asked the military commissioners not to take my brother, but he insisted on going there because all his friends served in the army. He was sent to serve in Vladivostok. He did his best for the Soviet power. That was the situation.

Although we didn't receive our "rehabilitation" papers that allowed us to go back to Moldova until 1960, I came back in 1957 and entered the University. I was enrolled only because I didn't tell anybody that I was exiled. During my third year at University, the best students were going to Bulgaria and because I was one of the best students, I hoped to be selected. We had to pass medical exams and then submit a very lengthy and detailed autobiographical paper. I passed the medical exams and then asked if I had to mention the fact that I had been exiled and had not yet received rehabilitation papers. The next day all the University knew about my past and I wasn't permitted to go to Bulgaria. There were a lot of situations like this. I was stigmatized. Even the people I thought were friends avoided me because everyone wanted to have a good career. I also was avoided by men. They were looking for well-off women but I had nothing but "a stain on my character." It has followed me all my life. Everything was taken from us, and after all that we were publicly humiliated with the epithet –"the children of the people's enemies." All my life I have lived with the feeling that I have done something wrong.

Although we were exiled on July 6, 1949, documents showed that 1952 was our date of exile, a decision made nearly three years after the actual date of our exile! Later, father found out that we were put on supplementary lists, so from the very beginning we weren't supposed to be included in the lists of people for exile. In 1960, we were rehabilitated with the right of restitution of our confiscated property. But still, even today, I cannot regain my property. These are just words. Our house had been made into a kindergarten and we were told it would be inhuman to take the school away from the children.

Well, was it not inhuman to take everything from innocent people and send them to the ends of the world? My parents and my grandfather made their fortune

by working hard and they lost everything. And we, children who were guilty of nothing, were forced to suffer a horrendous youth in Siberia.

Communists don't admit their fault. That hurts very much!

"WE WERE UPROOTED AND EVERYTHING WAS  
TAKEN FROM US."



### **Valentina Sîsoeva**

Born: 1937, Florești District

Deported to: Irkutsk Region

I was born in 1937 in the village of Gura Căinarului in the District of Florești. Before the war that broke out in 1941, I had a very beautiful childhood and my memories of it are complete and full. Although I was only about two years old, I remember many things that even amazed my mother.

My father was the youngest in his family. His father was a musician, but both his parents died when he was only two and a half. He was taken with his two brothers to their mother's village where a childless couple adopted my father. His new mother was Ukrainian and his father a Pole. Their family name was Pashirski – a beautiful name. Mr. Pashirski was a blacksmith and my father went to work for him when he was ten years old, if not younger. My father was a jack-of-all-trades and could do just about anything with his hands.

When he was 17, father went to Mărculești where he worked as a mechanic at an oil mill (sunflower seed oil) that was using a new kind of engine. With some of the money he earned at the mill, he bought an engine and was able to make a sort of combine. During harvest time, he also worked to thresh the grain – he worked almost 24 hours a day. He was, as you can see, very clever and resourceful even though he had only a fourth grade education, and because of this he had a better life than some other people in the village.

When I was born, the area where we lived was part of Romania. My mother's brother served in the Romanian Army, and when the Russians came for the first time in 1940, he was imprisoned. Later, in 1943, my father had to escort the Romanian draftees to Romania. At that time my brother was studying at high school in Bălți which was evacuated to Tîrgu-Jiu in Romania. My father had told mother to get all the children (we were three at that time) and meet him in Buzău, Romania. My sister, who was suffering from malaria, was also in Bălți in a hospital. Mother was too late to get my brother, but my sister and I and mother began our journey to Romania. As we were trying to pack our things into the train, our jewelry was taken out of my hands (mother had given it to me to hold while she helped a neighbor), and so we had no money. We finally managed to get to Buzău with the help of some soldiers and spent the winter of 1943 in Romania where my youngest brother was born.

Then, in 1944, we returned to our village, but our home had been confiscated and all father's tools and all our property, even a bronze statuette, had been taken. Our relatives had managed to hide some of our dishes, the very ones

we took with us to Siberia. At this time, we moved to the villages of Zarojani and Căinari where we had relatives. I studied at the Russian school in Căinari, but I was not very good at spelling the language.

In 1947 there was a terrible famine in this area and many, many people died. It was so horrible that people hid even a tiny sack of wheat from one another. But they didn't have a mill to make it into flour. My father took a meat grinder and by changing the mechanics of the grinder he could grind the wheat into flour. These hand-mills he would exchange only for wheat, and that is how we were saved from starvation.

After the famine, father rented a house in the village of Cutinești where he worked as a blacksmith. He always had work and we always had food on the table. He owned two plots of land, and on one of the plots he put in an orchard and built a house with a cellar for his father. Then, in 1948, the family moved to Bălți where my brother and sister were studying. Father was engaged in some kind of business there and was given a plot of land on which to build a house. He had bought all the materials, and my brother and sister had worked very hard with my father to dig out and lay the foundation. I was busy babysitting my little brother then. While the house was being built, father had put up a little shelter for us to live in. Then, just as the foundation had been completed, July 6 came, and so did the soldiers who were to take us to the train station to be deported. This was in 1949.

From that moment on, we belonged to the poorest population. All our property was taken from us and never restored – the building materials for the house, the house in the village, two plots of land, the blacksmith shop, two sheds, a sheepfold, the livestock. Everything was taken from us.

When the soldiers came to take us, we didn't know that at the same time all over Moldova people were being arrested. We thought that they came to take only our family. I shall remember that day for my whole life because that day was the first time that I suffered from a terrible headache. Those headaches are the main problem of my health even now. It was such a splitting headache that would not go away.

People from the north of Moldova were brought to the railway station in Bălți. As we were brought there later than others, our trip turned out to be a bit more positive. We were practically the last to enter the railway carriage and, as such, we stayed near the doors where there was a little air. The carriage was like a jail cell and had been used to transport cattle.

For most of the journey the doors were kept locked and opened only when we were allowed out to answer the call of nature. The procedure of allowing us out of the carriages to relieve ourselves was this: each soldier attached to the carriage would shout the order, "Women to the right, men to the left" or vice versa. However, on occasion the soldiers would get confused and one carriage guard would shout, "Women right, men left" while the other carriage guard would shout, "Men right, women left." You can imagine the confusion and embarrassment! Because of my age, this was a shocking and distressing experience. In few words, this is what lingers in my mind.

When we arrived at the Volga River, the train stopped just before crossing the bridge. The doors were opened and left unlocked for the first time and we could see the beauty and the grandeur of the Volga River. Immediately several

young men took this opportunity to take flight and they jumped out of the carriage and escaped. The soldiers didn't go after them because if they had, others would have taken that same chance to escape.

It was a long trip and the first thing that we all desperately needed when we finally came to Novosibirsk was a shower. It had been almost two weeks, if not more, since we had had a chance to wash ourselves. It was a hot July and we had been closed in those dirty cattle cars for such a long time.

From Novosibirsk we went on to Usole-sibirskoe. Here, in Usole-sibirskoe we stayed for about a month with people from other countries, including many from Lithuania. We stayed in tents in a small encampment. Then we traveled on closer to Irkutsk. In Pangna we were loaded onto barges headed north on the Angara River. I was impressed with the natural beauty of this new land. The Angara is about five meters deep, big enough for barges to travel, and yet it is so clear that you can see small stones on the bottom. The water flows from Lake Baikal into the Angara. It is pure, but very cold. I was enjoying the beauty, when I heard the screams of a child. It happened that a boy had been playing at the end of the barge where the huge anchors are attached to large chains. Somehow, the boy's leg got caught in the chain just as the barge was turning and the leg was being crushed. The leg had to be amputated and the child became an invalid. Such events linger in one's mind.

The barge took us to the village of Zaiarsk where a railway track was being laid to make it more efficient to bring gold from Iakuta and Bodaibo. We were to be taken by truck to one of these places, but father, being a master craftsman, asked to work on the railway and stay in the village of Zaiarsk. The authorities didn't want to let him stay there because he had a family and there were no other jobs. Furthermore, they would have to provide us with a place to live. But, in the end, they allowed us to stay, and of course later they didn't want to let him go!

First, we stayed in barracks with other deportees and former prisoners. Here, for the first time, I saw the taiga and I was impressed with the beauty of the Siberian flowers. After the first winter there, some bosses from the huge machine production plant in Irkutsk came to look for workers. This plant produced machines for extracting gold from the river. They wanted to hire my father, and he took the job there because he wanted us to continue our education.

I was very weak in the Russian language, but I was good at math and at geography because these subjects were easier to show answers. My 7<sup>th</sup> form teacher in Zaiarsk was not a good teacher so I had to repeat the 7<sup>th</sup> form in Irkutsk, where I excelled. When I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> forms, my father didn't want me to work, but I needed clothes, and so I worked during the summer holidays. In those days, our lives were difficult. I still today cannot look at red borsch without thinking of the way we lived in Irkutsk. The only ingredients we used were potatoes, cabbage and red beets. We had no greens and no meat to put into the borsch. In general, those were very hard years.

I finished school and took the exams in order to enter the Institute for Medicine, but I failed. In truth, I had not failed. Later, I discovered that I had passed the exams with two "fours" and two "fives." The authorities simply did not want to allow me to enter the Institute of Medicine. So I began studying harder. I enjoyed studying and remember the years at school as the happiest of my whole life.

It was 1954. I studied in the 10<sup>th</sup> form for the second year in order to help my brother with the final exams and to help him write the composition that was required to complete the 10<sup>th</sup> form. He had good knowledge, but a rather poor grammatical correctness. And so next year we both graduated from school and he began to take the exams to enter the University.

I now had two school-leaving certificates. One set of documents I used to enter the Institute for Medicine and another to enter the University's Department of Physics and Math, in order to help my brother there. Again, I helped him at the University by writing his composition that was given a "five!" This was in 1955, and we were still waiting for our documents to allow us to return to Moldova. However, another reason I stayed on was to continue my studies with my brother at the Medical Institute and at the University. Finally, I had to choose between the Medical Institute and the University and I chose to continue at the Medical Institute.

It was in my fifth year that I met my future husband, a Russian man from Siberia. He was a student of geology and we met at a party - it was love at first sight. Before I graduated from the Institute in 1961, we married and because of him I was given a free diploma. We were sent to the region Krasnoiarsk to a place called Krasnoiarsk 45 where there was a secret plant that processed uranium. Even today our health suffers from that work.

Krasnoiarsk was built in the taiga on the Kama River. It was beautiful there. Besides the beauty of the landscape, there was not a single old house; everything was newly built, with all the living conveniences. At first only exiled people and prisoners worked there alongside soldiers from a military unit. They were the ones who built the houses and created the town. It was here that my first child was born. I stayed at home for two months and then was hired to work in the area of sanitary inspection. I worked as a microbiologist in the laboratory.

Although I didn't like this work at first, I became a specialist of the highest category and until recently worked in that field. We lived there for five years until 1966. Finally, my father convinced us to come back to Moldova.

There were many positive events that I associate with deportation. I received a high education, I met my husband, and I appreciated the beauty of the Siberian landscape. However, on the other hand, we lost everything we owned; we were left with nothing and didn't understand why it happened to us. It was destructive to our morale.