

ASSOCIATION OF THE ROMANIAN JEWS

VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

HOLOCAUST:

SURVIVORS RESPOND

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2nd Edition revised and complete

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Bucharest, 2008

Miriam Korber-Bercovici – Survivor of Transnistria

Extracts from the original diary, written in the ghetto

What memories do you have about the moment of departure?

[...] October 6, 1941...

...at 9:30 PM, my father arrived home with the terrible news of our evacuation. But nothing was yet certain. It was Friday, and rumor had it we would be evacuated on Sunday. And that's how the evacuation fever started. Weeping, grieving, packing, one over the other, without rime or reason. We had no idea what lay ahead. It was a dream – at least so it seemed, and we could not imagine what the future held in stock.

On Saturday, the shops closed and the clandestine sale and giveaway of things started. The peasants, townfolk, neighbors and strangers barged in like birds of prey, and within one morning we had purged the house of the most beautiful things.

At three o'clock in the afternoon there was a rumor that everything has been cancelled for six months. Anxiety and insecurity overwhelmed up: Were we leaving or not? My mother and father grieved about selling or giving away our things. I felt sorrow, too. Still, we had our doubts, we couldn't trust the rumor. We had finished packing, but it felt as though we were just going for a trip. We could not imagine being totally displaced from our home. At night we went to bed as usual, and that was the last night we slept in a bed. Sunday at six o'clock in the morning we found out we were leaving.

We were beginning to realize the gravity of our situation. Still, we weren't even close to suspecting the magnitude of the disaster we were being thrust in. At 11 o'clock, carts and carriages started heading toward the train station at the far end of the village. It was the first image of our exile. The long, muddy road,

riddled with carts full of sacks and parcels, children and elders. On foot, alongside the carts, walked the youngsters. The gipsies had a definite advantage. They had horse-carts, whereas many of us didn't.

We left Campulung behind us and finally arrived at the train station. The atmosphere here was even more terrible. Tears, wailing, luggage, shrieks – as we embarked in the train-cars usually destined to transport livestock. The straw was removed from the floor of the cars, and in we went. 38 persons in a train-car, among which four men over the age of eighty and a paralyzed child. On top of everything else, we feared our cars would be boarded up. Bread was distributed at the train station. Supposedly, we were headed for a town deep in Basarabia, Atachi, where we would be settled and have a means of livelihood. At eight o'clock in the evening, we left the railroad station with the second transport.

We spent the first night sitting on the luggage, as though we were on vacation, not fully grasping the sadness of our situation. Come Monday, we were eating stale meat on the train, drinking dirty water, but still laughing and arguing with our elders. We were building castles in Spain, hoping we would get work and food, and learn to farm the land. We passed Cernauti, heading into the heart of the steppe. How vast the steppe expanse, how unlimited the skies above it!

Among the many wails, I witnessed a wonderful sunset. Tuesday morning, November the 4th, we arrived at Atachi. We were kept outside until 6.00 P.M. and then, 'move it, kike', we were shuttled by cart into town. Under way we saw thousands of people. Hundreds of houses, but my God, what houses! All hanging in ruins, missing roofs, doors and windows – the homes of the Jews killed prior to our arrival, whose names were written in charcoal on the walls. That night we shared a room with other 30 people, among which the pharmacist Garai. It was without a doubt the worst night so far...