

Translation
Mihaela Duță (pages 2-47)
Tudor Vișan-Miu (pages 48-87)

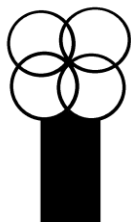
Cover and drawings
Mihai Vișan-Miu

“Babushka. Life story of Maria Mitroi, née Covaliov”

/ Tudor Vișan-Miu

București: Memoriae, 2014

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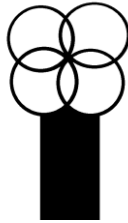
Memoriae

“Because every family has its history”

Life story of Maria Mitroi, née Covaliov

gathered by Tudor Vişan-Miu

drawings by Mihai Vişan-Miu



Memoriae

Foreword

“Babushka” is a collection from the memoirs of Maria Mitroi, gathered from winter 2010 to summer 2011, regarding her life and her parents (Evdokia Pavlov and Vasily Covaliov), then written in a literary style by her nephew, Tudor Vişan-Miu. The drawings were made by his brother, Mihai Vişan-Miu. The first edition of the book was printed in 1 copy on 15 August 2011, in Romanian – being gifted to Maria Mitroi on Assumption of Saint Mary (in the year she aged 80, on 14 June 2011).

The translation into English of a book written into Romanian requires, of course, some justifications – given its implications (being more accesible to like most people of the planet):

I think that the memoirs of my grandmother, Mircea Mitroi, are interesting in a way that would span outside the country for at least four reasons:

- ❖ it tells the story of two Russian families (Pavlov and Covaliov) whose destinies were united at Tulcea;
- ❖ it tells the story of a girl born of Russian blood, but Romanian by everything else, who became fatherless in 1942 during World War II;
- ❖ it tells the story of a wife whose husband was imprisoned by the totalitarian Communist regime, with all their properties taken and no money left to take care of her children and mother;
- ❖ finally, it tells the story of a lovely grandmother who is aged today 82;

As for the style of the book, I note that the first half (pages 2-47) was translated in an excellent way by Mihaela Duţă (who I thank!), and the other half by me, with less patience and ability. For this, I ask the reader’s understanding.

I thank my family for contributing to the creation of this book (brother, sister, mother, father), and send my warm greetings to our relatives in Australia: Dudu, Claudia and Leah.

(foreword by Tudor Vişan-Miu)

PART I:
MARIA VASILYEVNA COVALIOV

“The only wonder on Earth is love.”
– Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy

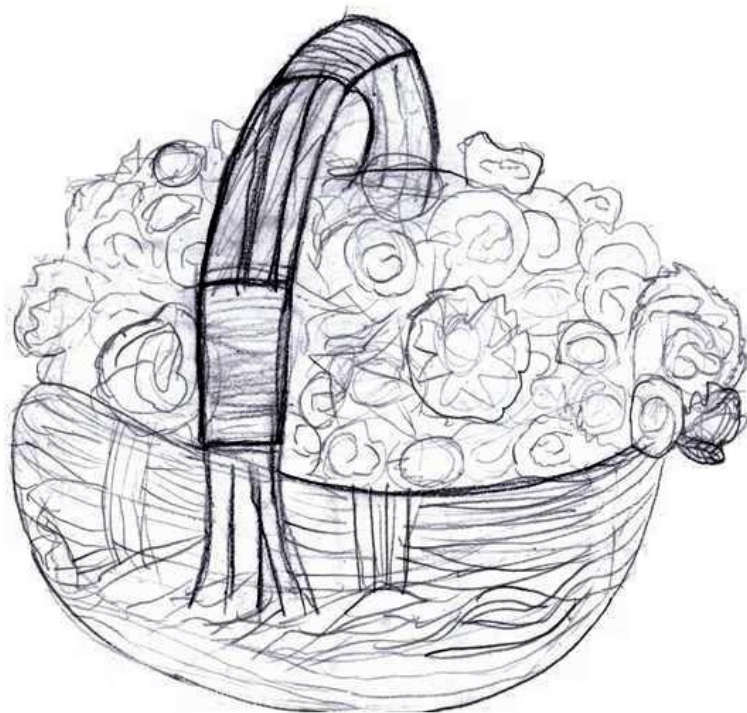
Crossing a Field of Flowers

Maria Vasilyevna Covaliov was born on the 14th of June 1931, on a Sunday, in a rather big house on Trajan Street, in Tulcea, a city from the county with the same name, belonging to Dobruja, a part of the Kingdom of Romania. Her father, Vasily Covaliov, was a soldier and her mother, Evdokia, born Pavlov, can be called “the lady with ample dowry”.

I will only mention the surroundings of my grandmother’s birth in a slight manner in the first chapter: I will tell you that Mărioara’s parents wanted a child very much, which is entirely true, and that they were immensely happy when my grandma was born, which is partly true. It is not their joy that was partially genuine, but the timing: don’t misunderstand me – her parents loved her deeply. However, to them certain aspects that could be controled only by nature were also important... for instance, if their child would be a boy or a girl.

Before I tell you who wanted what and why, how about we ask ourselves what's with the names ending in "-ov"? You see, my grandma's babushka and dedushka came from the cold Mother Russia, then the Tsardom, stretched to the river Prut, of the emperorr Aleksandr II*. I'm thinking we'd better talk a bit about my great-grandparents, by making a leap... into the future (we'll look at the past from its perspective)!

But, my dears, from the beginning of this book until the very last page, take as your guide of the story that follows an old Russian saying: "Life is not as simple as crossing a field of flowers."



* **Aleksandr II Romanov** (b.1818, Moscova – d.1881, Sankt Petersburg) was Emperor of Russia, Grand Prince of Finland

and King of Poland from 2 March 1855 to his assassination. The first years of his reign came after Russia's weakening and humiliation after its defeat in the Crimean war (1853-56). He took measures for the industrialization, reforming and reinforcing of Russia, like: the emancipation of serfs (1861), selling of Alaska to the United States of America for 7 million dollars (1867), reorganizing the judicial system after the French model (1864) and the army and fleet after the British model (1856), introduction of universal military service (1874). He is known as the *Liberator* by the Russian people for the agrarian reform in 1861 (with questionable effects) and by the Bulgarians for his role in the creation of a Bulgarian state de-facto independent from the Ottoman Empire, by involving Russia in the War of 1877-78. Despite he had a quite liberal reign, he was the target of multiple assassination attempts (1866,1879,1880), the one in 1881 being fatal (bombing by the terrorist left-wing group *Narodnaya Volya*, "Will of the people").



PAVLOV'S FAMILY CHRONICLE
(the family from the mother's side)



*(the dialogs are envisaged by the author and they attempt
to gather objective aspects from my grandmother's tellings
to her daughter)*

Bourgeois in Odessa*

(in a notional afternoon, in the Covaliov house)

Mărioara enters the room, does a random thing and, curious as she is, asks her mother:

- *Mother, why doesn't babushka speak Romanian?*
- *Oh, wel... you see, child, she wasn't born here, in Tulcea, in Romania, she comes from far away, from a city called "Odessa", which is in Russia, answers the mother on a narrative tone.*
- *"Odessa"? What were they doing there?*
- *She and her husband were merchants. Life in Odessa wasn't cheap at all, you know. Ana and Andrey Pavlov – these were my parents' names – were wealthy people.*
- *You were also born in Odessa?*
- *No, I was born in Tulcea, on the 1st of March 1894.*
- *On Mărțișor?*

* **Odessa** is a city in today Ukraine, administrative center of the Odessa Oblast, having over 1 million inhabitants. An ancient Greek colony, the settlement was conquered in the Medieval Age by nomadic tribes, the last being the tatars of the Crimean Khanate, whose founder, Hacı I Giray (1441-66), ceded it, in the last year of reign, to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It as conquered in 1529 by the Ottoman Empire, and, in 1789, by Russia, following the Russo-Turkish war of 1787-92. "Odessa" was rebuilt around the Ottoman stronghold during empress Catherine II, "the Great" (1762-96), colonists of different ethnicities settling here. Between 1795 and 1814, the city's population grew 15 times, reaching nearly 20.000 inhabitants. Between 1819 and 1859, it became a free port, housing a great diversity of nationalities (Jews – 37% of the population, in 1897). The city's growth was interrupted by the Crimean War (1853-56), when it was bombed by French and British ships. The damages were repaired, and the growth of trade made it the biggest grain exporter trading port of Russia.

- *Yes, but my name – Evdokia – doesn't come from Baba Dochia, the one who went up the mountain with her goats and froze on top of it, but from the martyr-saint Eudokia of Heliopolis, who lived during the reign of the emperor Traian.*
- *He's called like our street!*
- *Actually, it's the other way around. But, let's move on. I – unlike you, who are all alone – had five sisters and a brother. The eldest was Anastasia, "Nastia" as we called her. The other ones, in order of their ages, were Ana (auntie "Annusha"), Maria (auntie "Masha"), Daria and Paraschiva ("Pasha"). Our brother's name, God rest his soul!, was Simeon. We used to call him 'Senea' and he was... a wonderful brother, like a second father for us.*
- *What happened to him?*
- *Nevermind, I'll tell you later on... now go play, sweetie!*
- *Ok, I'm going!...*

All evil comes upon Russia

- *Mom, what's that a "tsar"?*
- *The tsar was the ruler of the Russian Empire. My parents were born during the reign of Tsar Alexander II (March 2, 1855 – March 13, 1881). My sisters and I, during the time of Tsar Alexander III (March 13, 1881 – November 1, 1894)*. Then came the*

* **Aleksandr III Romanov** (b.1845, Sankt Petersburg – d.1894) was the second son of emperor Aleksandr II. The perspective of his ascent to the throne came only after the sudden death of his older brother, Nicolas (in 1865). The poor education received until then as Grand Duke was completed by study of law and administration under Konstantin Pobedonostsev, who inspired him anti-democratical and

tumultuous times of Tsar Nicholas II (November 1, 1894 – March 15, 1917).

- *Why tumultuous, mummy?*
- *Well, my love, there was no time in Russia's history like the one in these 21 years of the last tsar's reign, during which all evil to come upon the mighty empire... Some were so poor, and others were so rich that they could buy the whole empire.*



nationalist ideas – later becoming his main advisor. Becoming emperor (1881), he reserved some liberal reforms of his father, following a policy of Russification of the multi-ethnic empire, following the principles of his grandfather, Nicolas I. In foreign policy, he replaced former allies Austro-Hungary and Germany with France – signing an alliance treaty in 1894. He extended Russian borders to Central Asia, avoiding any conflict with Great Britain. He is known as the „Peacemaker” because, during his reign, Russia didn't participate to any military conflict. He died of natural causes at the Royal Palace in Livadia, Crimea.

The banquet held on Khodynka field 4 days after the crowning of the tsar (26-30 May 1896), were the poor poors were tempted with a bread, a pretzal, a bagel and gingerbread ended, due to the fear there wasn't enough food for everyoane, with a hysterical stampede and the chrusing of over two thousand people (1389 people died and 1300 were wounded).

Ten days later, on 22 January 1905, the "Bloody Sunday", the tsar committed an irrational crime: he ordered the Imperial Guard to shoot peaceful protesters led by parent luri Gapon, that were marching towards the palace to hand over a petition expressing the discontent of the nation. At the end of that year, Russia lost the war with the Japanese (1904-05), after the disastrous sinking of the Imperial Fleet (in the naval battle of Tsushima, 27-28 May 1905). Antigovernment protests spreaded across the whole empire (1905-06), with strikes, protests, uprisings. The tsar was forced to compromises (limit absolutism, create a bicameral Parliament), and only lucked saved Russia from the bolsheviks: but Nicholas didn't respect his promises, and this costed him his reign and his life...

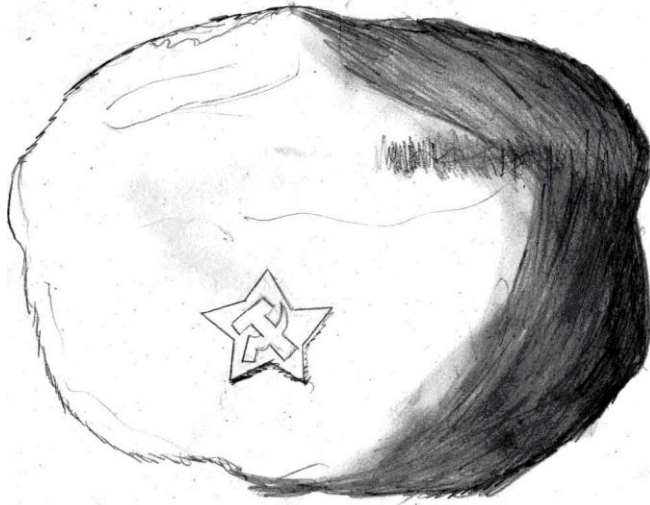
The tsar made many miskates: he came to rule in the shadow of his father and didn't rose up to the demands of his people; he exhibited hyperbolic wealth in face of a population struggling for survival; didn't properly manage the internal affairs and external relations; his decisions were marked by oscillation between indecision and impulsivity; he tried to retain absolute power despite he knew he couldn't lead only by himself ("I don't know to rule", he said in 1894); he married a German princess (Alix de Hesse – Darmstadt) hated by the Russian people; he received at his court the so-called healer, a mad monk named Grigori Rasputin, a womanizer and drunkard, who gained an enourmous influence above him; and, his worst mistake, he made poor Russia join the Firls World War.... Nicolae Romanov made many mistakes, and the errors he sowed during his rule were harvested by those who rose the sickle and hammer...

Whoever wants, moves mountains
(the calendaristic dates are by "New Style")

The Russian Revolution of 1917... what a catastrophe that was! The tsar abdicated, communism was established and then followed a civil war (1917-1922): famine, millions of deaths, broken families, stranded damage.

The riots in February (according to the old style; in March, to the new one), started in Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg), the capital, and as a result of poor supply, they expanded throughout the empire. The soldiers sent to suppress the revolt had deserted, shot their officers and joined the rebellion. When the tsar learned of this, he left the staff to return to the capital but, stopped on his way there (at 280 km from Petrograd), he found out that all ministers had resigned. He had no other alternative: he abdicated from his coach (on March 15th). The next day his brother, Grand Duke Michael, refused to take the throne (March 16th). From then on, the Russian tsarism ceased to exist.

To the Russian reign succeeded a provisional government initially led by a liberal aristocrat (Georgy Lvov) then a socialist (Alexander Kerensky), which failed to deal with the problems which had to do with Russia in the context of the First World War. Thus began the revolution in October (according to the old style; in November, to the new). Revolutionary groups led by Vladimir Lenin decreed removing the Kerensky government, "Military Revolutionary Committee" headed by Lev Davidovich Trotsky took command of the Petrograd garrison and the "Winter Palace" (seat of government) was taken over (November 7th). The Bolsheviks took hold of the power and installed in Russia the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (whose main enemy of the regime was the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy).



The family of the tsar was executed in July 1918, in a cellar in Ekaterinburg, in the Urals, in a bloody and barbaric way: Nicholas II was forced to watch as his four daughters, the former Grand Duchesses- Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia were dishonored and shot. Then came the Tsar and his wife.

Afterwards followed a long civil war, between the white monarchists and the red communists the Bolsheviks won, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR was founded (1922). Russia suffered lots of great losses, but the burden that would come for the rest of the world could not compare "Who wants move mountains": Communism has passed beyond the Urals!

Daria and Pasha

- *Mom, how did you play with five sisters?*
- *Oh,... (smiles and laughs). You see, my dear, I was the youngest of my parents' six daughters. Nastia – the eldest sister – moved to a house of her own and had children when I still was young. I spent more time with Annusha and Masha, but...*

- *What about Daria and Pasha?*
- *Well... sweetie, I didn't get a chance to be around Daria and Pasha very much. The two of them were very close, almost unseparable. One day, our brother, "Senea", took them to Predeal, where the air was so fresh and the grass so green... Enchanted by that view, that place, Daria and Pasha sat on the mountain's plain gras... for too long. Especially Daria. The soil was too cold, she shouldn't have... Little after that she got sick of pneumonia. She died in a few months, all of the sudden. No doctor brought by my parents could save her life. Pasha stood by her bedside the whole time Daria was sick. After Daria's death, Pasha also got sick of pneumonia, they said. In fact, sadness was her disease. She died under our roof in a couple of months. She kept her bed even more than her sister. Simeon never forgave himself for our sisters' deaths. Oh, well... it happened how it was destined to.*
- *What about uncle Senea? What happened to him?*
- *Later, sweetie, I'll tell you later on...*

Simeon, "the second father"

- *Mom, what happened to uncle Simeon? Why is he gone, why haven't I met him?*
- *You are a very inquiring girl... Anyway, I'll tell you: Simeon was my parents' only son, their second child. "Senea" had a big heart and a beautiful kind soul. He took care of our family's groceries shops. We, his sisters, loved him very much. He was like a second father to us after the death of papa Andrey. ... Oh!... (a tear escapes her eyelids and strolls down her left cheek)... mother mourned him from the morning until night time... us, the sisters, suffered immensely. Don't be mad at me, sweetie, but this was why I wanted a boy, so that he would be like Senea. I don't regret it now, that I have you instead, and I am glad God gave*

you to me and didn't listen to my prayers (auntie Masha's boy, "Senea", is nothing like my brother).

A pile of linens

- *Mom, why are there so many bedsheets and tablecloths in our house?*
- *They are called "linens", my dear – they consist my dowry. It's true, it's a lot, and you might like that, but it would have been better if it wasn't like that...*
- *Why?*
- *It shouldn't have all been mine. But, as my big sister, Nastia, and my younger ones, Daria and Pasha died before their time, their parts of the dowry became mine, not Masha's or Annusha's, because they were already married and I was just settling to my own house.*
- *How did auntie Nastia die?*
- *You're so curious!... she left this world a few years ago; she died while giving birth to her last child. She had six children, but so it was that she couldn't deliver the seventh without the price of her own life...*
- *Poor auntie Nastia...*
- *Yes, sweetie, you're right. Now, please stop asking this kind of questions, because I don't enjoy telling you saddening stories...*
- *I will, mother!*

P.S. My great-grandmother went to a boarding school for girls in Galați, where she learnt how to speak French fluently.



Evdokia Pavlov, in her 30s



Evdokia Pavlov, June 14th 1928, with a friend

History of Bessarabia

The “historical Bessarabia” was included in Burebista’s old kingdom of Dacia (82-44 B.C.). After his death, under Roman rule came only the southern part of the territory (in 57), the rest remaining outside of Roman direct control even after the Kingdom of Dacia was fully conquered (in 106). After the Romans retreated from Dacia (in 271), the territory was invaded by nomadic tribes in the III and XI centuries. Genoese travellers built or extended strongholds on the Black Sea shore (eg. Cetatea Albă) and Danube (eg. Chilia, Ismail). In the first part of the XIVth century – after fights against the Tatars (1328-42), the territory was conquered by Wallachian ruler Basarab I (c.1310-1352); the Wallachian rule lasted until Mircea “the Elder” (1386-1418), coming under Moldavian rule in 1365, during Alexander “the Good” (1401-33). In 1484, Ottoman ruler Bayezid II (1481-1512) conquered Chilia, Ismail and Cetatea Albă. *To make a distinction between the Ottoman-conquered Moldavian territory and the one left to Moldavia, two names were used for the first territory: **Bugeac** (from “Bucak”=“boundary land”, in Turkish) or **Bessarabia**.* In 1538, after Moldavian ruler Petru Rareș (1527-38; 1541-46) fought against the Ottoman empire, Sultan Suleiman “the Magnificent” (1520-1566) retaliated, conquering Tighina stronghold – expanding the “Bugeac”. In 1713, the Ottomans conquered Hotin stronghold. During the Turkish occupation, tatars became the majority population in Bugeac. In the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-1812, the Russian Empire occupied most of the Romanian territory. Winning the war, Russia initially demanded at the peace talks domination over both Romanian countries (Wallachia and Moldavia), but, under pressure of external factors, especially the imminent war between Russia and France (their alliance gradually crumbling), reduced its claims to all Moldavia and, in final, only to the territory between Dniester and Prut (from which a part belonged to the Ottoman Empire, but the rest to Moldavia)¹. Under the Russian domination over “Bessarabia”², the Russian Empire made population changes to “russify” the region, deporting Turks, Tatars and over 30.000 Moldavians (that resettled in Ottoman-ruled Moldavia) and bringing instead 60.000 Bulgarians and 150.000 Russians and Ukrainians. Also, the name of cities were russified (eg. Chișinău -> Kișiniov) or Turkish names were used instead of Moldavian ones (eg. Frumoasa ->Kagul, Oblucița ->Ismail, Cetatea Albă

->Akkerman, Tighina ->Bender). *This way, the Russian authorities tried to erase the "Moldavian history" of Bessarabia.*

After the Crimean war (1853-1856)³, through the Treaty of Paris, Wallachia and Moldavia rested under Ottoman rule, while Moldavia received a part of the Bugeac (Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail counties) as a "buffer area" between the Ottoman territories and Russia. After the union of Wallachia with Moldavia (1859) that followed after the Treaty of Paris, the 3 counties were included in the United Principalities, that won independence from the Ottoman Empire through the war of 1877-78, being allied with Russia, but with the price of losing the three territories (Cahul, Bolgrad, Ismail) that gave Russia the much-desired access to the Danube.

The Russian domination over Bessarabia lasted until 1917.

¹ The Treaty of Bucharest from 28 May 1812, signed at Manuc's Inn, violated international law, because the Ottoman Empire ceded territories that didn't belong to it but to a vassal autonomous state (Moldavia), whose territorial integrity the Empire had to protect. This „diplomatical fraud" was possible due to the support given by France (that time, the greatest European power) to Russia, and the ability of the French negotiator Alexandre-Louis Andrault, count de Langeron, who served the interests of the tsar.

² The Russian empire expanded the name of „Bessarabia" from the Bugeac of 1484 and the territories later conquered by the Ottomans (eg. Tighina, Hotin) to the **entire territory between the Dniester and Prut**, in order to justify to the Great Powers the annexation of a territory that belonged to their previous allies, the Moldavians, that aided the Russian armies in the war against the Ottomans (!). For this, they made use of a confusion from the Polish chronicles and later narrative creations, that suggested the existence of a separate province called „Bessarabia" that existed at the middle of the XIIIth century between Prut and Dniester.

³ War in which Russia lost to an alliance between the Second French Empire, the British Empire, the Ottoman Empire and Sardinia. Its causes were multiple: for the British, it was the fear of the Russian expansion to India; for the Catholic French, it was the fight with Orthodox Russia for influence in the Ottoman-controlled „Holy Land". The alliance of the Western powers with the Ottoman Empire was seen by Russia as a treason, but future tsars (Alexander II and III) didn't seek „vengeance".

THE HISTORY OF VASILY (from the father's side)



In Bessarabia

There was a territory between the right side of the river Prut and Dniester which, with some parts conquered by the Ottomans (1484-1713), passed entirely under the reign of the Russian Empire (1812) and, with minor "Romanian disruptions" (1918-40; 1940-44), stayed separated from the "mother country".

My great-grandfather, Vasily Mikhailovici Covaliov, was born on those lands. Ethnically, he was Russian, but, as an adult, he wouldn't dance kazaciok, nor drink vodka. His hometown was a port on the Danube, Izmail¹. His date of birth is, according to his birth certificate, August 15th 1897 (although he would celebrate it on January 1st, Saint Basil the Great's day)². His father's name was Mihail and his mother's, Mary. Opposite to the Pavlovs, the Covaliov family was one with little financial possibilities: his father (Mihail Covaliov) died when his son was still a child, while his mother worked as a maid in the home of a wealthy family.

A poor true Russian said: "The repleted one does not believe the starving one". This is true, but it doesn't

¹ Today a city in Ukraine with a population of 85.000 inhabitants, the biggest Ukrainian port on the Danube. On its territory existed a Greek colony (IV and V centuries), then a Genovese stronghold (XIIth century), around which in the XIVth century the Moldavians built a small city ("Oblucița"/"Smil"), conquered in 1484 by the Ottoman Empire and renamed "Izmailiye" – apparently after Grand Vizier Ismail, becoming the main Ottoman stronghold in Bugeac. After two temporary conquests (1770/1790), the Russian armies conquered the stronghold in 1809, officially gaining it at the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-1812, through the Treaty of Bucharest, along with all Bessarabia. It was renamed "Tucikov", in honor of Serghei Tucikov, governor of Ismail (1830-36), that transformed the stronghold in a city. In 1856, after the Crimean war, Russia was forced to give Ismail back to Moldavia. The city was included in Romania after 1859, but ceded after the War of Independence (1877-78) against the Ottoman Empire, to the former ally, Russia.

² Probably he did not celebrate 15 August because it was an occasion tied to the name *Maria* (probably not so obvious in Romanian, but probably nu se aniversa la 15 august deoarece era o sărbătoare legată de numele onomastic *Maria* (Assumption of the Virgin Mary), therefore an occasion to celebrate his daughter.

mean that someone with numerous possibilities won't give a loaf of bread to a person who is oppressed by fate! In Vasily's case, he was given more than that: the opportunity to follow a brilliant career.

At the school of cadets

The material poverty does not imply poverty within. Being poor, my great-grandfather was a "handsome, smart and made to be a soldier" boy. At least, that is how a colonel from the Russian army saw him, the father of a boy and the patriarch of a "military family" from Chişinău (where my great-grandmother was a maid).

And then, knowing that Vasily's mother didn't have the necessary means to send him to school, made her a tough proposition for her soul as a mother: to "adopt" Vasily, in the way that if he would have moved from their house in Chişinău, his military studies would have been covered, so that he could become a soldier. Wanting to offer her son the best she could, his mother accepted, but refused that she'd also move from the colonel's house: "I can't be separated from my husband's house".

After attending the elementary school in Chişinău (1905-09), Vasily also attended the school of cadets there, alongside with the colonel's son (1909-16), then the school of cadets in Odessa, to become a soldier in the Imperial Russian Army*.

The year 1917. Autumn. There is a tense atmosphere in the empire. The socialist Kerensky government is leading. One day, the colonel receives a phone call: "Comrade, come quickly to take your children to the school of cadets, because here (in Odessa)

* **Cadet** and **Junker** schools, introduced in Russia in 1732/1864, gave military training for sons of nobles or officers / for militaries of lower rank to become officers. It lasted 7 / 3 years.

massacres are occurring!". The Bolsheviks began to shoot the cadets. Disguised as to not be recognized, the colonel arrived the next day in Odessa took the boys and left as fast as he could. "You see that?", the colonel asked them, pointing to the sea water. The lifeless bodies of their young peers could be seen. "That's what the Bolsheviks do!"

Returned to Bessarabia, Vasily was no longer made to stay in Chişinău by the colonel (probably due to the fear of the ones who, past Dniester, were rising their sickle and hammer).

Moldavian Democratic Republic

In the context of the Russian Revolution, on December 15th 1917, the National Council (former guberniyas Parliament) proclaimed the "Moldavian Democratic Republic", an autonomous republic against a Russia that is in a confused state after the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

In this condition of anarchy, on 14 January 1918, the two divisions of the Russian Army - retreating through Bessarabia - began to rob and kill the local population, occupying Chişinău. Unable to command the region assigned to him, General Demetrius Scherbachev sought help from the Romanian Army, which ended the three days occupation of the Soviets in Bessarabia (16 January 1918).

In 1918, due to Ukraine's proclamation of independence (January 22nd) – any connection to Russia being cut off, the Moldavian Republic declared its independence (February 6th), and after the signing of the truce between Ukraine and Russia with the Central Powers (Treaties of Brest-Litovsk of 9 February / 3 March), the National Council proclaimed the union with the Kingdom of Romania (April 9th- 86 votes for, 3 against and 36 reluctances).

I assume my great-grandfather ran away from Bessarabia during the occupation over Chişinău in January 1918. Anyways, he left his "country" illegally. His mother stayed: she loved her native land too much, consequently her heart, soul and consciousness wouldn't let her leave her home.

Vasily ran to the Kingdom of Romania, probably on the Danube. He couldn't have returned for three months (January 24th – April 9th 1918) even if he wanted to: the frontiers weren't opened. I am not aware of the circumstances, but I do know that Vasily settled down in the nearest Romanian town: Tulcea, where he joined the Romanian Army. After the union, in spite of the opening of the frontiers, he didn't return to Ismail, on the contrary, he tried to bring his mother to Dobruja. But she did not want that. Even if she did, it wouldn't have been possible because of legal reasons (which I am not familiar with).

Clothes for the lady

History tells us Vasily Mariievna Covaliov, soldier, and Evdokia Andreevna Pavlov, bourgeois, met on the streets of Tulcea, got to know each other better, fancied each other and, around 1929, got married, despite the cultic differences¹, Vasily moving together to her family's house (with her mother and the servants).

When he opened the chest with dowry in it, my great-grandfather was stunned by how many linens could a single woman gather in her youth! Although he came from a family in which he "didn't wear clothes made of silk", Vasily became the "head of the family" and the "manager" of the financial, food and real estate resources, as well as the clothing and jewelry belonging to his wife.

Being a reserve² officer of the Romanian Army, my great-grandfather was a respected man in the town. He had a "periodical routine" of going to shops: often, he would buy special clothes for his wife, either from Tulcea

(from a Jewish merchant supplied by clothing factories outside of Tulcea), or from Galați. The most beautiful coat from Evdochia's wardrobe was a very elegant one made of astrakhan³ (bought by Vasily from Galați).

The "Jewish merchant", whose store was frequented by Vasily, was very kind. As soon as he'd see my great-grandfather entering the shop, he would salute him: "Oh, mister Covaliov, I have a dress of the highest quality for the missis!". When asked by his distinguished customer for a certain item (gaiters for his daughter, after 1932, for example) and he didn't have it, like taken by surprise, he would always say: "Tomorrow, no... the day after tomorrow!, I'll go get the best of them for your daughter".

Foreseeing the future, after 1948 (the year of Israel's founding), this Jewish merchant managed to leave the country, and his store was bought by a gentleman named Cudrațov – married to a decent Lipovan woman (Nastia, from a family of merchants), father of two girls (Liuba and Emilia – married to a Romanian merchant). The Cudrațov family lived on Trajan Street, being neighbours with the Covaliovs.

A Romanian proverb says "It's bad when poverty ends up in royal clothing". Still, the orator Cicero notices: "Often a heart of gold lays under ragged clothes". Can the suit and the astrakhan coat cover the body within which beats such a heart? I say yes...



Evdokia in the astrakhan coat



Vasily Covaliov, around year 1928 (FOTO ROYAL)



The same year (date and photograph not specified)



1932: in the garden of house

THE STORY OF THE COVALIOV FAMILY

A boy or a girl? Maria or Anna?

The autumn of 1931. In the house of the Pavlovs, Evdokia finds out that she is expecting a baby. Oh, the joy! Her husband exults, her mother shines radiates happiness! And she is smiling. At 37 years of age, after so many tries, she had fulfilled her wish. She's at the peak of her good mood the whole day. But at night, sitting in the bedroom, she thinks to herself and asks her husband... "I wonder, is it a girl or a boy?"

"I'd like a little girl", Vasily tells her. "Why?", Evdokia asks, visibly disturbed. Vasily doesn't answer, but she already knows the answer: he never met his father, he was close to his mother and he wanted to

"mirror" the mother that raised him into his child. "Vasea, I'd like for it to be a boy", Evdokia contradicts him. "Why, Lidusea?", Vasily questions her dismayed. Evdokia doesn't answer, but he knows the reason: she came from a family with 5 sisters; her only brother, who she loved deeply, died at a young age; she didn't want a girl, because she had had enough sisters, but a boy, to "shape" him after her brother's figure.

Polemics... compromises... "If it's a girl, I'll give you anything in the world, whatever you wish for. We'll make another baby, a boy, I'll bring the best doctors, you'll see...", Vasily stayed her. Because they both knew Evdokia couldn't have another child. In my view, they were mistaken: they shouldn't have cared so much about the gender of the child, seeing as this decision wasn't in their hands, nor in science's, but in only One's.

On June 14th 1931, in the house of the Pavlovs, after a difficult birth, a sweet baby girl was born. "Lidusea, it's our little girl! You gave me a little girl! Lidusea, I love you! Everything in the world be yours!". But after the ordeal of childbirth Evdokia wasn't happy. On the bed on which she gave birth, she didn't want to see the child. She regretted her whole life that moment, her momentary refusal of maternal affection...

Until late at night she sat and thought to herself: "So what if it's a girl? It's not her fault. Could it have been her decision? No. What was given to me by God, that's what I shall have." And the, or the next day, or before midnight that day, she held her daughter in her arms. "How should we name her?", Evdokia asks Vasily. "I thought we could name her 'Maria', like my mother". "How so? Why not 'Ana', like mine?". "Well, Lidusea dear...". "I gave a daughter to you, Vasea, why won't you let me choose her name?".

Polemics... compromises... "I got a, that's what I wanted. When we got married I would have been willing to take my wife's name, so that our daughter's origin from a rich family could be known. My mother didn't let

me do it, but I would have done it... That's all I want, a little girl, and I'll name her how I please!". And then, Vasily went unannounced to the town hall and registered his daughter as "Maria". He was mistaken again: it would have been easier to name her "Ana Maria", to have the names of both her grandmothers. But Vasily didn't understand that, nominally speaking, he estranged his daughter from her mother: my grandmother carried both the family name and the first name of her mother, and the middle name with its "-evna".

My great-grandfather loved his daughter deeply and had a special relationship with her. "Papa" (in Russian, "father") is what my grandma called her father. Vasily always tried to be there for her, to show his affection for her, to bring her everything she wanted, while Evdokia rarely displayed her affection and was severe in concern to discipline. Both of them loved her equally, but showed it in different ways.

What more could I say? As count Lev Tolstoi (1828-1910), one of the greatest novelists of the world, married to Sofia Andreevna, father of thirteen children (five of which died), put it, I conclude: " When you love someone, you love the person as they are, and not as you'd like them to be".

Childhood in Tulcea

In my grandmother's childhood the "setting" is almost everytime the town Tulcea, and the three figures that are present most of the time are Vasily, Evdokia and Lucica.

"Papa" is the father Maria loved like no other person: when my grandma did something bad, he never scolded her, but only tell her, on a gentle, but firm tone, not to do it again. Instead, her mother would slap her or pull her pigtail for every one of her blunders. Between papa and mother was Lucica, some sort of a governess without any degree. The granddaughter of a maid who cleaned around the Pavlovs house, she wasn't more

than 12 years old when she was hired, at the request of her grandmother, by Evdokia, as a maid, since she couldn't go to primary school. A great housekeeper, very respectful, Lucia was dear to everyone in the family, being treated as an equal (she sat at the table with the family, she received clothes and accessories as gifts, she was spoken to in a familiar, friendly way).

From this "painting" of her childhood we can't forget the aunts (Anusha and Masha), the other servants (the laundress "Babushka" Varvara) or the godparents, the Cocas (who were also godparents at the wedding of the Covaliovs), "Nanu" and "Nana" (how their goddaughter, my grandma, would call them). They were both Romanians, but of Greek origin. The husband was Chief of the Financial Administration in Tulcea. The two of them were the parents of three girls, Tanța, Maria and Geta (the first two, the eldest, were maids of honor at Vasily and Evdokia's wedding). The Coca family, apart from Geta, frequently came to visit the Covaliovs, on holidays and celebrations (June 14, Maria's birthday; January 1, Saint Vasily; March 1, Saint Evdokia)...

The grandmother from the mother's side, Ana Pavlov, is present everyday. She only spoke Russian, and this is my grandma's second language. I don't think Marioara knew then what deeds her grandmother had done in Tulcea alongside her husband, Andrei Pavlov: building the house on Traian street, founding the Molocan Church (which was on the same street), financing the construction of the "Eternity" cemetery (shared by orthodox and molocans; the Jews and Baptists had their own separately, nearby). How she would've wanted to live a few more months to see her granddaughter at the kindergarten. But, no matter how many drugs she took (although she disliked them), she couldn't extend her life: she died in July 1937, being buried in the town's cemetery, on the molocan side.

P.S. Maria Covaliov went to the Kindergarten no.1 (1937-38), from near the National Bank.

About the Molokan Cult

The Molokans (also calling themselves “truly Spiritual Christians”) were a protestant cult that appeared in XVIth century Russia that rejected the dogmas of the Russian Orthodox Church. From 1765, the followers of this faith started calling themselves “molokans”, because they drank milk (*moloko* in Russian) and ate dairy products during fasting – thing forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities in Russia (according to Molokan faith, fasting is necessary, but it implies abstinence from all kind of food – as the Savior did).

The beginnings of the faith cannot be precisely found in the past, but an important starting point was Simion Matveici Uklein’s (d.1810) mission of evangelization, who organised the Molokan communities and brought thousands of followers to the new faith. The initial persecutions over Molokans ended in 1805, during tsar Alexander I (1801-25), who gave them freedom of faith – period during which the community grew considerably, and new persecutions starting with Nicholas I (1825-55) couldn’t stop their spread, the Molokans reaching over 50.000 members at the end of the XIXth century. Progressively, Molokans migrated from the center of Russia to the Eastern fields (1811-14), reaching Molochnaya river (1818) [today southern Ukraine], Bessarabia and even Dobruja. Today there is a big Molokan community in the United States of America (over 20.000).

Molokan followers only admit the Bible in terms of belief. According to their faith, the Church of Christ existed only to the Ecumenical Councils, that falsified the biblical teachings. Wanting to recreate the “true Church” (based only on the Bible), they rejected Orthodox Tradition, worship of icons, wearing the cross, the worship of saints. They have their own, purely spiritualized vision over the sacraments, without material items (eg. baptism without water, the sacrament of the word – not of the bread). Historically, they rejected imperial authority, opposing to feudal rule, war and military conscription. Their gatherings are organized in simple, undecorated buildings. The services are held by presbyters, who read from the Bible and teach, psalms and canticles also being sang; the service ends with brotherly and sisterly kisses and a blessing.

Source: - “*A History of Russian Christianity*” - vol. III: “The Synodal Era and the Sectarrians (1725-1894)”, Daniel H. Shubin, 2005 – chapter 132: “The Molokans”, pp. 70-80 and following. The 24 points of the Molokan faith formulated by Simion Uklein were included in the book (pp.74-77) from “*Raskolniki i ostrozhniki*”, Feodor Vasilyevici Livanov, vol. 2, chap.12.

The elementary school of girls no. 1

...was thought to be the most select institution of primary education in Tulcea. Located on the Emperors Saints street (today, Nicolae Bălcescu), it was pretty far from home, but, considering its prestige, we can say distance wasn't a problem.



First grade ('39). Celebration of the Union of the Romanian Principalities, the *Blue Danube* festival



Maria Covaliov, third grade (1941)

Both photographs are dedicated to "papa".

My grandmother's teacher's name was Elena Ionescu, a calm and gentle professor, married to another teacher. Each year, on May 21st, for Saints Constantine and Elena's day, my grandma would bring her a big bouquet of *boule de neige* (white flowers resembling snowballs). The principle of the school was Ms. Iosub Virginia.

Another person from elementary school who my grandmother didn't forget is an old decent cleaning lady, mother of three. About her, she remembers that on March 1st the woman would always tell them that when the sun comes up, they should hide their trinkets from the sunrays, so they don't "blacken", as the Romanian folklore says.

The school was next to the police station (near which the girls weren't allowed to go), the two buildings being separated by high metal fences and a small field. Maria remembers she and her classmates would make a lot of noise, so the policemen would pound the metal bars of the fence with their bayonets to silence them..

Every week, two of the students, chosen by the principle, had to take part in the service held at the "Saint Nicholas" Cathedral, one of them saying "Our Father", and the other one the orthodox creed. Sometimes, my grandmother was one of these girls...

Visiting Izmail

Everytime he had the chance, Vasily returned to his native town (by ship, on Danube) to see the woman who gave life to him. Sometimes, he would take my grandma with him. My great-grandmother also spoke Romanian and she had a relative who lived next to her house, Matrona, a dairy merchant in Dobruja (including Tulcea).

After a visit (without his daughter), Vasily went towards the harbor. On the way, he was followed by a stray little dog, of whom he couldn't get rid of – the animal not wanting to go away even when they reached

the harbor. However, the ship's staff didn't let him take the dog on board. The sailors tried to catch it (so it wouldn't get on the ship), but the dog managed to trick them and get on the ship. "Now it's on board. Do we still try to catch it?", asks a sailor. "Leave it! I'll take it with me.", says Vasily. He took his new companion across the Danube and brought it home.



The first reaction, my grandmother's, was of surprise and enthusiasm towards the idea of keeping the dog. The second, Evdokia's, was of apathy ("Vasea, why do you bring a stray dog in our home?"), followed by acceptance through compromise.

This dog (whom Vasily called "Titi") loved my great-grandmother very much. It was the first one who felt when he came back home, running to the yard to welcome him.



April 6th 1939

TULCEA'S FILE

Avramide

On the Saint Nicholas street (currently Progresului street), next to the "St. Nicholas" orthodox cathedral, there was a house which got every passer's attention, through its dimensions and the luxurious exterior aspect. Built at the end of the previous century¹, the house, considered the most beautiful building in the town (and for the pompous interior decorations), belonged to the Greek-Albanian industrialist Alexei Avramide (born in 1857), one of the richest business men in Tulcea of those times ("prosperous local entrepreneur, owner of mills, workshops, factories and lands").

You know how children are: with their eyes on the rich people of the community. Actually, the whole community is with the eyes on its rich people! And Avramide was one of the wealthiest: he had a sumptuous house (on the street of which people passed even only to see it) and he owned multiple companies – on the shore of the Mushroom Lake a lumber factory and a water-powered mill (Isaacei str. No. 196); (in the Niculițel-Isaccea area): a vineyard (where a villa was built). Married to Elvira Șnaidt, "old Avramide" was a father of six – 4 boys and 2 girls. When he died (1941) a great number of Tulcea's citizens gathered around his house to see his funeral procession. My grandma was also

¹ Projected and built under watch of two Italian experts, brought in Tulcea by Avramide in 1897. The furniture was brought from Vienna. Previously, the Avramide family lived on Basarabilor street (no.51), until 1895, then on Mircea Vodă street (no.27).

² The visit took place before the Mixed High School (1948). The muster of the house was Albert (died 1947) or one of his brothers, possibly Alexandru.

there out of curiosity, her aunt, Masha, having been friends with Avramide. His fortune was divided in 1926, when the businesses were undertaken by Adrian (the eldest son) and the house was inherited by Albert.

During high school my grandmother once visited this house together with her classmates and their class master (Virginia Grădinaru, History teacher). How it happened: the group of girls is heading towards the Avramide house. They aren't allowed to enter. Mrs Grădinaru talks to someone and they're immediately granted access. The owner of the house¹, Avramide,

¹ The visit took place before the Mixed High School (1948). The master of the house was Albert (died 1947) or one of his brothers, possibly Alexandru.

HISTORY OF THE AVRAMIDE FAMILY

AVRAM and Rengina had two sons: ILIE and ALEXE (b.1857, Ioannina, Turkey, today Greece – d.1941, Tulcea). *Born in Greece, Alexe came to Tulcea only with pocket money. Hired at a inn at 15 years, he became its owner and started to prosper.*

Married (July 28 1890) Elvira Șnăidt (b.1868, Karlovac, today Croatia - d.?.; parents:ANTON,Ludovica), had 6 children: ADRIAN (Febr.1 1894,Tulcea-Nov.9 1963,Galați) – not married; he continued the family business; senator of Tulcea, member of the National Liberal Party ('38); closed at Văcărești prison (1952-53), then kept under house arrest (-1957); at the moment he was imprisoned, he had no occupation or properties (communists took him all); ALEXANDRU, *building engineer* (Nov.6 1895,Tulcea-Jan.8 1953, Piatra Neamț, at hospital) – married ('38) Vergenia Petruș (-'39); ALBERT ARISTIDE CONSTANTIN, *agronomist* (1897, Tulcea – Dec.9 1947) – married ('38) Marcela Levendi (b.1911-d.Sept.20 2004; *remarried after 1947 with Hristoforatu Dionisie, 1898-1988*), had no children but adopted Chilina Reva (at 2/3 years); PAUL CONSTANTIN, soldier (1899,Tulcea-1920,Bucharest,pneumonia); OLIMPIA (d.1920, pneumonia); HARITI – married to lawyer Ștefan Duca (Galați); had 2 children;

[from the article "From a Family's Chronicle: Adrian Avramide (1894-1963)", Daniel Flaut, Ligia Dima, Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice, year VIII, no.1-2/2012, pp.49-68; table with family members: p.65]

apologizes for not informing the guards correctly and the trouble caused. At the sight of the house's interior the girls are amazed: "What luxury! What splendor!", "Girls, don't touch anything, or you'll break it!", Mrs Grădinaru told them. "No, they can touch, feel, put their hands on anything, I trust they won't break it.", the master of the house said to them. And so it was.

After '44, the Avramide house became the headquarters of the Greek Democratic Comitee and, after the nationalization ('48), it was turned into a museum ('49-50), called "Danube Delta". Alexandru Avramide was arrested on March 10th 1952 and in the last two rooms of the house which he still owned, the School Inspectorate started running its activity (1952-53). The museum continued developoing, becoming the beautiful place open to the public that it is today. It's a shame people can enjoy such a 'jewelry' only after being taken from the hands of the ones who built it!

Mushroom Lake

"The mushroom"... this word brings my grandmother back a lot of memories, not only of culinary nature, but also hydrological (and fun). I'm talking about the Mushroom Lake, located in the north-east of the town, after the Isaccei street, separated from the Tulcea Branch of the Danube river by a strip of land. Like any other stretch of stagnant water, this lake freezes (in the winter, at temperatures of -0°C). What use does a frozen lake have for a community? Well, the purpose isn't for energy anymore (in the winter it can't support the Water Factory, nor the Avramide mill), but for entertainment (skating).

There was once a talented skater on the Traian street: my grandmother! With a pair of skates she got from her aunts, Mărioara would "slide" with her "special shoes" on the ice in front of her house (her mother didn't let her go too far) and, contrary to her mother's

interdictions, on the ice of the Mushroom Lake (Evdokia wasn't aware of her daughter's presence there at the time) – where she would skate during the winter, at 7-9 years old, surrounded by other lovers of this sport. The discouragement came when the ice broke and a little boy fell into the lake. Although he came out and was fine, his mother grounded severely... Sleigh rides were forbidden to Mărioara: the inclination of the street would be explored only later by my mother and her brother. Snowball fights were also banned (my grandma was frail). Walking on snow dressed in thick clothes was permitted since 3 years old.

Antonio Cuchembell

An interesting character from Tulcea was Antonio Cuchembell, a native of the town with Italian origins, "the man without a nose". There were multiple rumours about how he lost his olfactory organ, most stories being based on his relationship with a woman and the "misunderstanding" caused because of it with another man.

A version, the most likely, which travelled by the so-called scandal mongers' ears was that Antonio was found making love to a man's wife in his own house, caught in the act, and enraged, during their scuffle, the man bit... his nose. Another version, a less likely one, supported by his intimate circle, was that Antonio was in love with a beautiful single woman, that shared his feelings, which caused the envy of another man, who disfigured him during a confrontation.

The house on the Traian street

Built around 1880-90, by the couple consisting of Anna and Andrei Pavlov, on a land surrounded by a wooden fence, the house on the Traian street was very big, with a

parlor, a living room, a winter kitchen, two bedrooms, a pantry (with a summer kitchen) and a Swedish sauna.

The meals were served in the living room.

The first bedroom belonged to the parents (Evdokia and Vasily) and had furniture ordered from Galați. The second one was my grandma's, which she shared with her grandmother, and had furniture made by the carpenter Ciumachenko.

There wasn't a dressing-room. In exchange, each room had a wardrobe in it.

The Swedish sauna next to the Russian bathroom was there due to hygienic and therapeutic reasons, being available only the ones "of the house" (and not to guests); it was demolished after it stopped working.

The pantry was a deposit for food, being in the "basement" (across from the bedrooms). The summer kitchen was for baking bread and cozonac (sweet bread).

The garden, with flowers and fruit trees, was tended by a gardener, employee of the town's greenhouse.

After 1942, the Covaliov family started renting the living room and my grandma's bedroom, being left with the kitchen and the "parents bedroom".

The house was sold in 1964.

THE CHILDHOOD

Tall cousins, husbands and parents

(this chapter also concerns the period
after my grandmother's childhood)

Evdokia was the youngest of the sisters and the last one to get married and have a child. The eldest sister, Anastasia, married young a Russian businessman, Efim Vladimirov, and had six children. Ana, married to Vasiliev, had three. After Nastia's death, Efim married her sister Masha, and had a child.

My grandmother's cousins were tall, all of whom were married by the time my grandma was still in primary school. You could say they neglected her, since she was the youngest of their kin. This is true, but it wasn't their fault: what serious talks, as to an equal, could you have with a little girl who could have rather been their daughter, instead of their cousin?

Uncle Vasiliev passed away before his time. Not long after his death his children left Tulcea. The elder boys, Constantin "Costea", economist, and Ilie "Iliuşă", engineer, settled down in Bucharest. The first one, being single, regularly visited his mother, Anna, and his aunt, Evdokia. The second one, a family man (husband, father of a boy), would rarely come back to his home town. The daughter, named Maria and called Masha, went to the university and became a professor. A while after her marriage in Tulcea, her husband, professor Mateescu, became a school inspector and was assigned a job in Cluj, his wife moving with him. They had two daughters.

Uncle Efim was a strong man, a molocan christian, a little arrogant, but a householder who, having a modest origin, managed to open a successful business: a cotton ropes factory (for fishing boats) and a shop that sold fishing items (rods, hooks, bait). According to his will, the rope factory was left to middle son's (Andrei), the shop to the eldest (Victor) and the house to his wife (Maria Andreevna, born Pavlov).

His sister, was married and named Adolfov, mother of two, a girl (Xenia) and a boy (who left Tulcea). She might have accepted Nastea, but she never got along with Masha, nor did the mother. This is how the quarrels in the family started, between the "Adolfov women" and Masha, who also involved my grandma, Covaliov, and her mother. It is sad when there are feuds instead of harmony in families!...

My grandma had the feeling that the Vladimirovs were a bit stuck-up. Maybe it was just an impression of

hers, seeing as they were all tall... Or did she just feel like that because she was small? No, they were definitely above the average size person.

The eldest of the Vladimirovs was **Victor**, as tall as his father. The fishing items shop was left in his care. He was married to a Russian woman from a wealthy family, Tania, who came from Tighina (Bessarabia). "A woman of unique beauty", my grandma said about her. Unfortunately her destiny was to give her last breath bringing to the world a son (sadly, her body wasn't strong enough to give birth and the lack of appropriate medical conditions cost her her life). The boy, named Efim Victorionovici and called "Baby", born in 1932 (he was a year younger than my grandma) carried with him the heavy burden of having been born at the expense of his mother's life. Given in the care of his aunt, Elena (who loved him very much, like he was her own son), "Baby" also had to suffer his father's death, during his adolescence, who was stricken by a serious illness...

Elena Efimovna was married to the industrialist Petru Sezonov, "Petea", the owner of a mill and an oil maker¹ (inherited from his father, Alexei), who came from a big baptist family of the Sezonovs (spread today across the globe). Petru had a sister, Lidia (who was a painter). Her husband being baptist, Elena undertook his religion. They also had child, Efim Petrovici, called "Cici" (a nickname that came from "Efimcic"). Elena didn't let her boy around any girls. She didn't even liked him being close to Maria Covaliov, his aunt (!) who was three years younger. When he came to visit her, his mother wasn't pleased at all, she even made a number of scandals to my great-grandmother about it, so that Maria would stay

¹ The first mill was at Tulcea, at the intersection between Traian street with Liberty street. The second was at Babadag; it subsequently defected.

away from her little "Cici" (when you think about it, it was his fault, not my grandma's). In the end, we have to understand her: she loved her son very much and she would've wanted him to keep her company more, not to chase girls on the streets... Her husband, "Petea", wasn't like this at all. You could have called him "grumpy", but the more appropriate term would be "reserved", or as my grandma said, "with exceptional manners". He spoke little, he didn't give off the impression of emotivity, but he was honest, kind and generous. For instance, when my great-grandmother went around Easter to ask him for some flour from the mill to make sweet bread, he didn't even hesitate: he immediately delivered to her a few kilos and refused any payment for them, because "we are family". Anyway, my grandma listened to her aunt's requests. The years passed, until they became young adults, time during which she stopped seeing him so much, but every time she'd see him across the street she would stop and wait for him to cross the street so they could talk. In the end, he went to study medicine at the university and became a doctor in Vatra Dornei. He never got married. The reason is because "he waited for his dream woman, perfection embodied. Unfortunately, he was kind of sour and not charming enough to be courted by a princess"¹... The misunderstandings, which now would seem ridiculous to us, were left in the past when my great-grandmother became ill and her inferior limbs started to paralyze. Whilst my grandma was at work (employed at the Department of Education, with a strict schedule), Elena would always come to visit her aunt and occasionally bring her some cake.

Another cousin was called **Andrei**. He was appointed the administrator of the rope factory after

¹ I found this from Răsvan Cristian Stoica, nephew of Pavel Sezonov (primary cousin to Petea).

Efim's death. He had a slight vision problem, so he wore a pair of "pince-nez" (glasses put on the nasal bridge). His wife, Olimpia, was of Bulgarian origin, the sister of a nurse married to a Romanian doctor. Andrei was really close to his cousin. For example, he insisted that she wouldn't call him "djádja" ("uncle"), in spite of the big age difference between them. Their son, born in 1942, was named Olimpiu¹, after his mother. Andrei invited my grandma to play with their son, whom they called "Baby", she being happy that she could make him go to sleep without too much trouble.

If my grandmother respected Andrei the most, this can't be said about **Alexandru** "Sasha". He was hired as an accountant – a job obtained only through his father's connections, as "Sasha" hadn't even graduated from a university. He had the awful addiction to alcohol (although, according to my grandma, he was a "stylish drunk", dinking 'strong drinks' only in 'high-profile' places)... besides this, he had a weakness for women: he got married at 50 years old to a nurse, rather from domestic considerations than anything else, moving to

¹ **Olimpiu Vladimirov** (b.9 January '42, Tulcea), geologist, poet and publisher. Graduate of "Spiru Haret" High School ('57-61) and Faculty of Geology- mineralogy department of the University of Bucharest ('62-67). Author of over 20 works (his own or in collaboration) regarding geological research, with the purpose of showing the useful minerals in the county's area. Literary debut in '58 (at 16 years), with lyrics in "Steaua" magazine (no.9). Organizer of the events tied to poet Panait Cerna (1881-1913) [annual and five-yearly homages, the literary club ('67-'78), National Poetry and Essay Contest ('75-2006)]. Director of the County Center for Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture in Tulcea. WORKS: *Insula Albă* – anthology of Dobrujan personalities (2003), with Marian Dopcea; poetry volumes *Confessions* (80), *Mark* (2006), *Identity* (2008).

her house on 14 November street, after the "Spiru Haret" highschool.

The youngest daughters were **Maria** Yfimovna, called "Mazi", and **Clemaņa**. Being in "transition" between youth and maturity as wives and mothers, they didn't treat their cousin, by grandmother, in the most appropriate way. My grandma's impression was that "Mazi" didn't had a nice looking or a comfortable temper. Also, Clemaņa wasn't a too friendly nature, but she had a beautiful face. Maria Yfimovna married lawyer Dorel Teodorescu and movev together in his house on Bunavestire street, together with biology teacher Rodica, married Leonte, his sister. They had a boy. Clemaņa moved to Bucharst in her youth, and my grandmother didn't learnt anything more of her: how she lived, if she became wife or mother.

Nastia died young, after Clemaņa's birth. As I said, Yfim remmared with her sister, Maria Andreevna, and they had a child. Despite she greatly desired to be a mother, Masha wouldn't want to have a boy.... Finding the gender of the child she carried, Masha was pretty upset because, as she confessed to Evdokia, "I won't eat bread and milk from him....". After all, her unrest proved true: the boy was named **Simeon**, after the brother of her mother. Called "Senea", he inherited the awful vice of alcoholism (which "Sasha", his half brother with who he never understood, also had), but lacking "style": he got drunk in "common spaces" - pubs, eateries, visitingm anywhere he could. To discipline him, his father forced him to follow military service (althrough the Molokan cult was against such service), but Senea gave up, for reasons unrelated to religion but to lack of discipline. In the end, he marred Milca, the milliner of my great-grandmother (she made her hats) and her sisters. As she later confessed, she didn't married with him due to love, but because she felt pity of him, despite she was older and widow (her former husband was a tailor). Not few times Milca or Masha came in Evdokia's house with

obvious traces of violence, to find shelter from a man that they loved, but feared him when he “lost his mind” due to alcohol.

The nationalisation of 1948 affected all the members of this big family. Ana’s house near the townhall, Yfim’s house (left to Masha) in the center of the city, the Vladimirov family’s house on Griviței street, the house and mill of Petea Sezonov, the house of Olimpia’s parents, all were taken into the property of the Romanian Popular Republic. Ana moved in a flat near “Princess Ileana” High School, Masha moved on Babadag street (until marrying Milca, Senea lived with her), Peter and Elena moved in Viktor’s former home, “Sasha” temporarily moved from the family’s house to the new house of Elena (until he got married), and Andrey’s family moved in a flat on Isacței street. A later, a rumor appeared that Senea, member of a bourgeois family greatly affected by communism, was a “denunciator” at the security of the state. I can’t sustain this, but it may have been, since “Senea” didn’t have a job in a system in which working was mandatory.

As time passed earth took them all: Viktor (’40-’50), Mazi and Dorel (’60), Sasha (’70-’80), Andrey (’80-’90), Senea (’94) and Elena (’90-2000). The Teodorescu husbands were buried near Vasily’s grave, my grandmother often coming to rip the weeds and put a flower at their grave. As for Simeon Yfimovici, grandma, while in Bucharest, couldn’t take part – for her regret - at the funerals of a cousin who, with good and bad, was still blood relative.

The stepbrother

Ivan Andreevici Pavlov, born in Odessa, was the son of Andrey Pavlov and of a woman that died young (later, Andrey married Ana, having a son and six daughters).

Ivan owned three hectares of vines at Sarica Niculițel, bought by his father, where he produced good wine (he often invited there his niece, Maria Covaliov). His main residence was in Tulcea, on a nice house on Bunavestire street, with a big garden, filled with flowers, and a long alley; Ivan was in good terms with Moruzov¹.

“Djádja Vanea”², as my grandmother called him, didn’t know how to express his affection towards children. He was married with a “golden hearted” woman, but his wife died when his child was born, who also died after her.

¹ **Mikhail Moruzov** (1887, Zebil village, Tulcea county – 27 November 1940) was the creator and head of the Service of Secret Informations of the Romanian Army (1924-40). Son of priest Nicolae Moruzov and Maria. Although a poor student (graduated only 3 high school years), had a great memory, exceptional analytical sense, was a good organizer and knew well many languages (Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Tatarian). Passionated by crime fiction, started his “activity” as student when, in 1907, discovered a plot of Bulgarian irredentists gathered in “Saint George” Church (he was hidden under the shrine) and presented a report to the Information Office of the Romanian Army. In the war of 1916-18, he served the Army’s Information Service and foiled the plots of the Russian army. In 1917, he created the Special Security Service, and in 1915., the Secret Service. He had a daughter, Aurora-Florina (unmarried). He had an important philanthropic work: schools, dispensaries, the “La Strejărie” complex near Cocoș Monastery etc. At Tulcea, raised the National Health House in Piața Nouă, the present High School of Arts (former girl school) and the new building of the Russian church. After the abdication of king Carol II on 6 November 1940, he was arrested and replaced with Eugen Cristescu, then assassinated by the extreme-right legionnaires in the “Jilava Massacre”.

² No reference to “Uncle Vanya” play by Anton Chekhov (1897), whose protagonist is Ivan Petrovitch Voynitsk.

Towards the end of his life, Ivan proposed his sister, Ana Vasiliev, tenant in a flat on Gloriei street, to move together with him, so she wouldn't pay rent (housekeeping was to be done by a maid). Ana accepted and lived with her brother until her death, following him a short time thereafter (she was buried by her children, from Ivan's money).

A big Russian family seen by the youngest daughter

(other Russian relatives of my grandma living in Tulcea):

Natalia was the daughter of a primary cousin of Ana Pavlov. Wife of a carpenter, Ivan, a nice, good came. Lived with her family on Trajan street. Had two girls:

– **Malvina**. Very beautiful. Cashier at a pharmacy. Married an economist in Galați. Resigned from the old job but, having no children to take care of, rehired elsewhere, on a job found by her husband.

– **Elvira**. More indecisive than her sister. She married with the wrong man, a Bulgarian driver not with the best looking or manners, divorcing a short time thereafter.

Ivan. Brother of Natalia. Father of many girls.

– the eldest had a son, *Samuel* "Sami". Her family, of Baptist faith, lived on Trajan street. During high school, Sami left Romania in the United States (probably due to the tension of World War II).

– **Daria**. The youngest. In the 50s, cashier at the commercial mill "Ștefan Gheorghiu" (subordinate to the chief-accountant, Mircea Mitroi). Married twice, first a Russian (having a daughter, Olga), then a Greek, Enache. *Olga*, raised by her Russian father, followed private tutoring at home, until the communist regime forced her follow public education, at the Mixed High School in Tulcea.

Dimitrie was another far relative, who grandma called "Djádja Mitea". Who was he? Sadly, she remembers only his name and nothing more.

From his huge Russian Dobrujan family, Maria was the youngest “niece”, and her relatives, from grade I cousins to the farthest, didn’t have her attention and didn’t told her storied of their lives. For this reason, she was “outside”. Other relatives, uncles and old fathers, died before she was born. For this reason, I ask the relatives that don’t appear in this book to forgive me for omitting them, and that hey will be lost in time, as their name will be cleaned from the gravestone by the wind. As for those already mentioned, I ask them not to grieved if any word in this book isn’t right, because any error comes not from the intention of forging the truth, but from the inaccuracies of my dear grandma’s memory (or from her storytellers!), in which she now looks after half a century, time in which they rested as an untouched room.

Diary

Bad-tasting “white liquid”: In Tulcea there were many milkmen having sheeps, goats or cows (eg. Mimoza husbands), that walked in the city with a cart loaded with milk cans, announcing their product (eg. “we have milk! we have milk! we have milk!”). Although very nutritious by calcium, milk wasn’t on my grandma’s taste. To make her drink it, her parents put in the “white liquid” a few drops from the “browny-blacky” drink (coffee).

“Make me a doll”: Evdokia had the skill of making dolls. Finding this talent of hers, my grandma sometimes came to her and asked: “Mother, make me a doll”. And she did, over and over, her daughter keeping coming to ask (the others she gave to her friends => Evdokia called Maria too generous and wasteful). One day, Vasily pointed out Maria her behavior wasn’t nice. Thereafter, grandma came to her mother and said: “Mother.... can you, please, make me a doll?”. Evdokia laughed and started working.

The Jewish family beyond the alley: Beyond the alley on which the Baptist Church was located lived the Jewish

family of Iancu the smith, who had two girls: Eliza and Eva, “luxury” tailor, and a boy. Persecuted in the 30s by the local population due to being Jewish (“Liza” couldn’t finish high school), they moved in Israel in 1948 (a rumor appeared that their ship sank).

The Jewish *pasca*: On Pesach (Hebrew Easter) *pasca* – a kind of sponge cake - was prepared. My grandma aided the cook at the kitchen and can tell you, suspecting readers, that it didn’t include Christian blood of flesh!.... My Grandma invited her friends to eat *pasca* “from the Jews”, to the annoyance of their parents; her mother’s reply to the complaints she received was: “Let this be our sin, if not other”.

The “visit” of the King and Prince Heir: In the 20s, returning from Galați, King Carol II and Prince Heir Mihai of Romania passed through Tulcea. The Romanian soldiers lined in a column and the population gathered behind them. Being a reserve officer, Vasily participated as a civilian, but found her daughter a closer spot. Maria had 4-5 years, and the future King was 10 years older.

Emilia Căldăraru: In the same neighborhood, on Vasile Lupu street, lived Emilia Căldăraru (b. August 7th 1931), son of a soldier, from a Baptist family. Graduate of “Spiru Haret” High School (1951) and of the School of Literature and Literary Criticism in Bucharest (1954). Poet and writer, debuted in “Pogorici” magazine (1951) with the story “*Stiopa, son of Delta*”. Wrote 17 volumes of poetry.

“You don’t get pie”: My grandmother had to follow the few but rigid rules of her mother. One was to not say “zău”*, and other to not cratch her skin. As a punishment she was either scolded, either hit, either she didn’t receive something she wanted (eg. after lunch, Evdokia served everyone with pie, excepting her daughter,

* The reason for this interdiction was the origin of the word: from latin *deus* (God), and its meaning (“Swear on God”).

because she had made something forbidden; in the evening, Evdokia finally gave her part of the pie, reconciled, and Maria was unlearned of the wrong habit).

Swinging the leg at the table: While at the table, grandma had the habit of swinging her legs. Lucica repeatedly warned them that “by swinging your feet, you hit God and swing the evil one”. Receiving this lesson, Maria unlearned of doing this.

The cherry in the ward: To run from being hit by her mother, Maria climbed a very tall, old cherry (20 meters / 65 feet tall), hiding there a whole day or even until morning, her mother desperately searching for her many hours. Having to go to school, she climbed down, being caught by her mother, who didn't hit her, but told her to get ready from school and firmly said “we'll talk when you come home”.

“Beating is torn from heaven”: After many years of scholding, in her youth, Maria asked her mother: “Mom, why did you beat me when I made something bad”? “Maria, my dear, God gave me a single girl and nothing more: I wanted you to be a lady, not someone that people would point at as a bad girl”. At old age, grandma concludes: “Children are bad when they are young”. Still, from her times to mine, the “rod of words” was more educative than that of wood

The malaria epidemic

In the 30s speared in Tulcea an malaria epidemic (transmitted by female mosquitos), from the Danube Delta zone. The population avoids mosquitos and does anything to move them way. The fear was towards the possible fatal ending of the disease.

Stang, Maria receives the infection. The immediate symptoms is a sudden, strong fever. It could have been followed by worse (anemia, flu, and in severe cases coma; it can result death). Knowing the risk, Evdokia and Vasily, fearing her frail daughter was sick,

took her to hospital. The malaria is identified, Maria being given treatment. Thereafter, she cured.

Inheritance

The Pavlov home. 30s. On her death bed, Ana Pavlov. In the house, her daughters: Evdokia Covaliov, Maria Vladimirov and Ana Vasiliev. Hirst, the owner of the house. The others... more than guests: ... claimants of a part from the house. "Give the house to Lidusea", said Simeon before dying. "Babushka Ana" listened him, giving it to the youngest (Evdokia), mother of the youngest niece (my grandma). Masha, vehement (Annusha, only present): claims something without any base. Vasily comes, called by Lucica: hits Maria and shouts to her: "As long as I live under this roof, I don't want to see you in this house. Get out!".

Inheritance: cause of family discord.

The alarm sounds

1939: Invasion of Poland. Start of World War II.

1941: The beginning of the German-Romanian campaign against the Soviet Union.

Before it – 1940: the Craiova treaty forces the Bulgarians from Dobruja to resettle in the Quadrilateral, and the Romanians from there to settle in Dobruja.

2nd year of primary school. Together with her parents, grandma lead a Bulgarian colleague to the harbor. They say goodbye and wave, while the ship goes... "What a tragedy! Bulgarians had to leave their homes and lands...", and this from the ambition of tsar Boris III to "clean" the same of his father's defeats, star Ferdinand*.

*The Second Balkanic war (1913), with the lose of the Quadrilateral, and the First World War (1914-18), forcing to the pay of huge war debts.

Again: 1941: The beginning of the German-Romanian campaign against the Soviet Union.

Before it – 1940: The Soviet ultimatum for Romania to surrender Bessarabia. The territory is abandoned by the Romanian army, being occupied by the Red Army. The Izmail where lived Vasily's mother, Maria, falls under Soviet occupation. By the eastern campaign above the Prut (1941), the territory is released. She remains.

Again: 1941: The beginning of the German-Romanian campaign against the Soviet Union.

The alarm starts to sound in Tulcea, announcing coming bombardments. The people build shelters (the Covaliovs are forced to dig one in the middle of the garden, spoiling the flowers) and hid there after the alarm sounded. The bombing of the first home (near 1942) proved the need for this program.

Gambling

40s. House of the Covaliovs. The parents argue: Vasily took two rings and a necklace from the family jewelry box, to pawn them and, with the money received, play poker; the jewelry was to be inherited by my grandma. "As much as this child loves you know, she will hate you.

Gambling. Alcohol consumption. Single moment of infidelity. How could a loving father, a nice man, a disciplined soldier go such things? Psychological reason: stress. Second Lieutenant in the reserves of the Romanian army, my great grandfather isn't sent to the front due to his Russian origin. The fear he would be arrested, his family remaining alone, triggers the behavior inconsistent with this concern: "refuge" in gambling, wasting his wife's money and his monthly pay for being a military. Debts were accumulating. Not being understood by Evdokia, preferring the company of his gambling compades, not being capable to bring his mother to Tulcea, a combination of guilt and negative

feelings – all these finally let to the fatal thought, “They will be better without me”.

Livor mortis

November '42. The Covaliovs home. Evening. Maria sleeps with her parents in the bedroom. She sees Vasily raising from the bed. Doesn't give importance to this. After a while, he returns.

Morning. Maria wakes up. She hears a strange sound coming from her father. “Mom, there is something not right with papa”. Evdokia wakes up. She goes near the bed. Her husband has his throat cut, full with blood. He is immediately taken to hospital for an emergency.

Recall: grandma's allegorical dream. Her father stood in the courtyard. Major Fuhrmann, his superior and gambling comare, together with a soldier, a few feet near him: “When I will say ‘hit’, ‘hit!’”. After a while, he orders: “Hit!”. Vasily is hit with a pole and cut in half; Maria tells Evdokia her dream, which sees it as a bad sign.

At hospital, major Fuhrmann accuses Evdokia of crime. “A man so right, so happy can't kill himself!”. Vasily pacing. He could not speak. The two approach. Towards Evdokia he shows his palm, then, with his pointer, points towards him. “I did it”, he seems to say. That night, under his own roof, in hsi own bad, with his family besides him, he cut his throat with the razor!

Grandma through this was an accident (he shaved in bed and cut himself). She goes to see him: pale as chalk and cold as ice. She faints. Her father... poor papa. was dead...

Postmortem

1942. Grandma had 11 years. Graduates 4 primary classes. Fatherless, she cries daily. Tired, she gets sick and loses a year of high school.

Evdokia, widow, sells most of her jewelry and clothes. She rents a part of the house.

Tity suffers greatly. He waits his master to come. Cries endlessly. Doesn't eat or drink. In the end, he dies.

Major Fuhrmann is sad. He helps Evdokia with the funeral, then disappears from the life of the family.

Maria, Vasily's mother... there is no pain greater than that felt by a mother that loses her child! Cries, desperation, the last walk to the cemetery then... emptiness. Together with Matrona, she returns to Bessarabia, where she lives her last days (Evdokia and Maria lost any contact with her after the Soviet reoccupation on 24 August 1944).

Why had my great grandfather committed suicide we don't know. Taking your own life, for whatever reason, is a great sin. I hope Vasily had a good reason (but I know such thing doesn't exist!) to leave his wife a widow, his dog with no master, his mother without a son and his daughter without a father...

P.S.: After Vasily's death, Evdokia reconciled with sisters Masha and Annusha.

YOUTH

Renting the house

40s. In Tulcea there are many German soldiers. The Russian civilian population is pretty uneasy. The garrison forces the Covaliov family to host German officers of different grades (from second lieutenants to major) that pay them rent.

Beside Germans, the Covaliovs hosted the family of a Jewish soldier from Poland (1940-48), Nadia and her daughter, Tamara, from Chişinău; the Golubovs, lipoveni from Vâlcov, Bessarabia, with two daughters, Xenai and Tatiana 'Alea" ('41-'64). In the house was spoken Romanian, Russian, German and Polish.

The financial situation of the Covaliov was pretty shaken. Loyal, Lucica remains in the service of the family, despite knowing she may not be paid (“Don’t worry, *tanti Lidusea*, I’ll bring money, there’s no problem!”). In the end, she is paid in jewelry and clothes. She left the Covaliovs after being engaged, then married, with an engineer from Bucharest, moving with him in the capital.

On 23 August 1942 starts the battle of Stalingrad: 200.000 deaths from the Romanian side, 400.000 from the German and Russian side. Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), Russian psychologist, who didn’t live to see these events, said: “In essence, war is a savage way to solve life problems, in a manner shameful for whole humankind”.

Depending on scholarship

Grandma started high school in 1943, at the High School for Girls “Princess Ileana”¹. Because her mother didn’t work and earned money only from rents, Maria had to study very well to take her scholarship, the main income of the house. For this reason, she had not to take any average of grades on every trimester lower than 7, at all disciplines.

Most of the teachers understood her, but didn’t give her a special treatment. Still, the Maths teacher, Xenai Adolfov, a brilliant mathematician but a maliciously person, persecuted her due to arguments with her family (stated above), and the Romanian language and

¹ Created in 1897 as a girl school, renamed “Princess Ileana” in 1927. Became mixed school in 1948, uniting with the boy school. Renamed “Spiru Haret” in 1971. Became Dobrujan College in 1996.

literature teacher, Măndița Grigorescu, born Caraman, persecuted her due to her Russian origin².

The Latin teacher, Elena Dumanschi, was the “protector” of my grandmother (her mother, Mrs. Costinos, was Evdokia’s embroideress)³. Her husband, Mr. Dumanschi, taught German at the same school, until 1944.

The French teacher, Victoria Hariton, wife of an engineer, was Russian⁴, also teaching Russian after the Soviet “reform” of the Romanian education system.

The natural sciences teacher, Rodica Teodorescu, married Leonte⁵, was relative by alliance with my

² Wife of a soldier (Nicolae Grigorescu), she may have had pro-German orientation, despite being a supporter of the National Peasants Party (rival to Antonescu regime). The school’s headmaster in 1931-33; 1937-39; 1945-48.

³ Mrs. Dumanschi graduated “Principesa Ileana” school in 1931 as valedictorian.

⁴ Despite exceptionally speaking French, she had, in the first year of teaching, difficulties with Romanian. For this reason, she took Maria Covaliov as a “translator” from Russian to Romanian, making connexion to French; despite this, Mrs. Hariton didn’t give her any special treatment, evaluating her at French as all others. She recalled a Jewish teacher that was not paying sufficient attention to hygiene (eg. wore the same unwashed pair of shoes every day!).

⁵ Rodica (b.22 January 1913, Alexandria, Teleorman county – d.2002) was sister of lawyer Dorel Teodorescu, married with “Mazi” Vladimirov. Lived on Mircea Vodă street. Graduated “Principesa Ileana” High School (‘23-30), the Faculty of Sciences-University of Bucharest (‘30-34). PhD in Biological sciences (‘47). Substitute teacher at Sulina (‘36-38), Biology teacher at the graduated high school. Faculty lecturer. Worked as assistant, head of activity and head of station at the Station of Fish Research in the Danube Delta Institute (‘41-73) and as researcher. Her specialized works (‘42-73) were appreciated in the country and abroad. Married Vasile Leonte and had two

grandmother; a gentle teacher; for a year, she was replaced by Maria Pantelimon, more distant and colder.

The geography teacher, Larisa Pop, wife of an engineer, was “like a puppet from a box”: elegant in clothes and beautiful by face.

The class teacher, Virginia Grădinaru, who taught history, was wife of a priest, mother of two boys; kind.

The manual labor teacher, Eugenia Flor, also taught at the Industrial School; old, wife of a lawyer, mother of a soldier, she had “hair white as snow, shining as silver”. The homeworks she gave to Maria were made by Evdokia; Mrs. Flor, realising this, decreased with indulgence the grade of Maria with a point (from 10 to 9). The music teacher, Niculina Moruzov, was headmaster of Primary Mixed School no. 2.

The orthodox religion teacher as a former military priest. Being gifted, the pupils could rest many minutes after the bell rang to hear what he still had to say (unlike the other classes, when, after the bell rang, started moving and growing impatiently). Religion was abolished from education in 1945.

Other classes were Physics and Chemistry. Grandma didn't have to make sport due to heart problems, standing in the schoolyard during this time (she didn't learn at other classes so she wouldn't annoy her colleagues).

Grandma tried for 8 years to win her scholarship. Never had she tried to get grades in another way than the right one. She rarely missed from school, due to health issues (eg. fever) or... going to papa's grave in the Monday of the Dead.... *requiescat in pace*.

daughters, Eliza and Anca (married Dascălu). After retiring, moved with her husband to Pitești [cf. “Istoria Ihtiologiei Românești”, G. Vasiliu, Gh. Manea, Bucharest, 1987, pp.196-7; excerpt received from Mr. Ion Năvodaru from the Danube Delta National Institute of Research-Development].

At tea and cookies

While going home from school, grandma paid a visit to her aunt, Annusha, who moved with rent to a flat on Gloria street, near the school, after the nationalisation of the house near the town hall (1948). Maria was sent by her mother to check how Nusha did, keeping her company at least 10 minutes – to her pleasure, also because she was served with tea and warm cakes from the oven. One day, Maria saw at the entrance of the flat policemen and medics. Her first fear was that something happened to Ana. Actually, there was something wrong with a neighbor, a old Hungarian woman that didn't speak Romanian, who my grandma saw during every visit. She wasn't married and didn't had children, in the biological sens of the term: her "child" was a cat that she greatly love, who gave birth to 4-5 kitties. To feed them, she didn't eat sometimes even for days (only, at most, the remainings from the cat meals). Ana told her this wasn't normal, but the old woman wouldn't listen: after all, she loved the cats just as they would be her children, and a mother can not eat to feed them. One night, the Hungarian woman felt sick and remained in bed a few days. While she couldn't move, the starving cats ate her carotid and other parts of her body. She was found dead by the flat owner. Maybe this story was exaggerated but, hearing it, my grandma started seeing cats as selfish animals, (cruelly) caring only for their belly .

Tutored by Răileanu

Mrs. Răileanu, wife of a brilliant mathematician*, lived near "Princess Ileana" School, on Vasile Lupu street.

* **Adam Răileanu** = author of the geometry textbook for high school, headmaster of "Prince Carol" High School between 1935-39, a very short, hunchback man.

She was in good terms with my grandmother, inviting her to her home. "Let's drink a tea", she told Maria, who refused. "Then let's study maths". "No, Mrs. Răileanu, please, I don't want to, maths aren't nice!". "True, but they are useful! Don't upset your mother!".

P.S.: The wife of the Răileanu husbands, Emilia, married Mititelu, became Physics teacher.

Changing sides

23 August 1944. At the Royal Palace, marshal Antonescu is arrested, king Mihai I publishes the "Proclamation to the nation", the Romanian army ceases fire against the Red Army and turns against the German troops. Through this action, Romania shortened the war with 6 months (as URSS leader Joseph Stalin considered), the Second World War ending on the European continent ending in May 1945, after 6 years of bloodshed.....

The feeling? Not of happiness... the Soviet Union extended its influence to central Europe, including in Romania, the Soviet troops occupying the whole territory and imposing a communist regime, step by step... The gladness of the German-fearing Russian natives when sides were changed became a contempt and a fear towards the Soviets who, unlike the Germans, behaved abominably towards the Romanian population. Maria and Evdokia were far from glad when the communist came (or "thiefs" as she called them, for the nationalisation in 1948 and those that followed, together with robberies like "*Davai ceas, davai palton*" = "Give me your watch, give me your coat").

The change of sides led to a change of attitude of some teachers. If until then Mrs. Adolfov changes her name in Mrs. Adolf so she could remain a teacher, after '44 she returned to her original Russian name.

And if in the period Romania was allied with Germany Mrs. Grigorescu behave badly towards her Russian pupil, Maria Vasilyevna, belonging to the “enemy nation”, after the change of sides, she started having a benevolent attitude. Still, the fact that from ignoring her she started responding to her salutation with “good day, my dear” inspired Maria not admiration, but confusion and mistrust. What answer should she give? “Good day, miss teacher!”. With “Mrs.” and “Mr” you couldn’t answer: “Good day, comrade teacher!”*.

Escaping nationalisation

1948. At Tulcea, 7 firms and tens of houses are nationalised. Due to systematization led to the disappearance of some streets and destruction of some buildings. People threw from away from their homes objects of religious (Bibles, psalm books, icons), monarchical or political (from the National Liberal or Peasants Party) nature. Evdokia had to throw away the “Realitatea ilustrată” collection, of over 1 meter length, gathered by the monthly subscription made by Vasily, with references to the interbellum and the royal family.

Still, the Covaliov’s house wasn’t completely nationalised, only the summer kitchen being occupied by the Russian soldiers (period during which grandma lived together with Masha and Babadag street, due to Evdokia fearing the Soviets), continuing to rent rooms (especially to Golubov family) – this due to the intervention of two Russian state officials, friends of her, and of an employee as the prefecture, brother of the fisherwoman to whom Evdokia was kind in the “better days”.

The “confiscation” wasn’t stopped, but rather delayed, and it came not as an universal measure, but a

* The communists didn’t want to use the „bourgeois” term Mrs and Mr., but rather the egalitarian „comrade”.

particular one, and not on the house but on the properties inside, in year 1958.

Distinguished daughters of Tulcea

Grandma met most of her colleagues at school but also in town, inside the community. For example, Cristina “Tuța” Tarabulea was classmate and also neighbor (three houses above on the same street), and Macrea Mimoza, another classmate, was the daughter of some cow owners that sold milk, who she knew before (Mimoza married in 50s lieutenant Mârț, from a German father).

From her classmates, the most brightful future had “Gina” Biava, daughter of Italians (Ricardo Biava¹ and Maria, born Zampieri), an ambitious girl that became maths teacher and headmaster of the school².

From another class was Florica, son of Mrs. Măndița, who was the smaller sister of Mioara Grigorescu, a brilliant pupil that became a linguist³, wife

¹ Graduated of 3 years at the Faculty of Polytechnics, he brought the first cinema projector in Tulcea (1910).

² **Virginia Antoaneta DIMA** (10 June 1932, Sulina), graduate of “Princess Ileana” High School between the best students in the country (‘43-51) and the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics in Bucharest (‘51-57). Teacher of maths at the graduated school (‘57-88), assistant (‘59-63) headmaster (‘63-88). She expanded the schoolgrounds and trained students in cultural activities (eg. founded the biannual school magazine in 1967, the school fanfare in 1969). She won the name of “Spiru C. Haret” for her school (17 May 1971), that, through the “Prince Carol” Boy School, is the oldest Romanian secondary school in Dobruja (founded 14 November 1883).

³ **Mioara AVRAM** (4 February 1932, Tulcea - 12 July 2004, Bucharest), graduate of “Princess Ileana” High School (‘49) and the Faculty of Philology of Bucharest University (‘49-53). PhD in philology at the “Iorgu Iordan-Al.Rosetti” Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy (‘51). *She had an*

of phonetician and etymologist Andrey Avram (b.1930), mother of three children: Alexandru, Andrei and Peter.

The Theoretical High School for Girls

30 December 1947. Under threat of 1000 monarchist students being killed, king Mihai I signed the decree of abdication from the throne – moment that marked the full establishment of the communist regime in Romania.

To erase any memory of the Monarchy, the name of the “Princess Ileana” School was changed into the Theoretical High School for Girls. A short time thereafter, following the “reform” of education ('48), the school was disbanded, the students continuing their studies in the “Prince Carol” School of Boys, renamed the Tulcea Mixed School. At first, the girls learnt in the morning and the boys in the evening, but this situation changed, the students getting to learn in the same time. “What a chaos”, grandma remembers.

In the last year of school, the maths teacher, Mrs. Adolfov, broke her leg, being replaced by a more gentle teacher – to the liking of my grandmother. Also, in the second year of school (1945), Mrs. Grigorescu became headmaster replacing Mrs. Olga Berbec, born Hreniuic (German teacher), being replaced as a teacher at Maria’s class (due to lack of time) with a net teacher, Petre Niculescu. A gentle, king man, Mr. Niculescu wasn’t teacher until the last year, becoming in the meantime a school supervisor and being replaced with someone else (more moderate than Mrs. Grigorescu).

important rol in the analysis, standardization and popularization of various aspects of Romanian grammar, especially in spelling. In her last years, she insisted on collaborating with linguists of Moldavian Republic for having the same linguistic rules. An important work is the very-accesible “Grammar for all” ('86). Collaborated with linguist Alexandru Graur for the national dictionary (1982).

Still, I insist to say that Măndița Grigorescu had earned the respect and admiration of nearly all the students she had, knowing “to develop the taste for the beauty of the Romanian language and literature in a time during which the greatest Romanian writers were erased from the curriculum”. Graduate of the Faculty in Iași (1927; student of literary critic and historian Garabet Ibrăileanu), she was a teacher for which, in 30 years of teaching (1928-1958), the 50 minutes of the classes were insufficient, wanting to say more. For this reason, I don't want to give a wrong impression on the teacher that wasn't a bad person, but didn't had the strenght to resist the “madness of war”.

Maria Covaliov graduated high school in 1951, after receiving scholarship year after year.

An unfulfilled dream?

After graduation, Maria could go to college. She had “healthy origin” (Russian origin, fatherless, spoke Russian), excepting the “burgeois” origin of her maternal grandparents and the military career of her father (aspects unknown to the authorities).

Due to her musical talent (acknowledged by three representatives of the Democratical Women's Union of Romania at a school audition), she could go to the Faculty of Performing Arts in Bucharest. Evdokia wouldn't let her, having a prejudice towards actors / singers, personal needs (despite operated of rigs - infection at toes - Evdokia made an incurable gangrene, requiring care) and wanting to keep her daughter home. Maria listened. Did this meant an unfulfilled dream? No.

Near 1951, grandma met again Petre Niculescu (her former Romanian teacher), then the head of the education and culture department of Tulcea. Kind, he did a favor to his former student, hiring them as secretary to the education office of the town hall, to which teachers belonged. “He gave me a fine job”: work at the office, not

too difficult, but seriously made, interesting by the stories of unusual events told by office colleagues (the best part of the job of people who work with papers at a desk).

Maria worked as a secretary until 18 December 1953, when she engaged.

Historical note:

In the **Soviet Union**, on 5 March 1953, Joseph Stalin died following a stroke, his position as leader of the USSR's Communist Party being taken by Nikita Khrushchev, who initiated a series of "destalinisation" reforms in USSR and other communist states.

PART II. MARIANA MITROI



Mircea and Maria Mitroi on April 14th 1954, Tulcea; back in the city after the winter in Bucharest (February– March 1954), four months after they got married (18 January 1954).

HUSBANDS AND PARENTS

On the streets of Tulcea ...

1953. On a street in Tulcea. Maria Covaliov was with a friend, Eugenia "Jenny", employee of the town hall, going to see the Galați itinerant theater. Mircea was with a friend, accountant Toma Jurea.

When he saw Maria, he liked her and, meeting Jenny at a party, started talking to her. They met a few times thereafter, once at the cinema (stood on the same line), then on the street (he led her home). She gave Maria the impression of a balanced man.

Near end of 1953, Mircea came to the Covaliov's home, with a bouquet of flowers and together with a subordinate at the "Ștefan Gheorghidiu mill", Daria, cousin of 3rd degree with my grandma (previously named). In her, Evdokia's and Masha's presence, she asked her to marry him, besides the difference of 15 years between them, she accepted, and her mother agreed. *They married at the beginning of year 1954.*



A day in January

Mircea Mitroi and Maria Covaliov married at the town hall on January 18th 1954, in a cold day of winter, on Monday. Grandpa moved to the Covaliov house on Trajan street. Her husband having a big salary as chief-accountant, grandma quit her old job after engagement (December 18th 1953), to dedicate herself to raising the future children and housekeeping. I want to remind you the difference of 14 years and 6 months between them, and also that Mircea didn't like the Soviets, but took a Russian as his wife ("But you are different", grandpa told him). Still, he didn't accept the other Russian relatives.

A few time after they got married, Mircea had to go to Bucharest to present the financial report of the firm. To not let his wife alone such a short time after just getting married, grandpa took her with him. At Bucharest, they caught the "Great winter of 1954" (the worst of the century, starting in February)* and, due to wind and snow, found themselves blocked in the capital for two months (end of January – beginning of March). Mircea fulfilled his own financial duties as well as those of his colleagues from Tulcea that couldn't reach the capital, while Maria lived in the home of Mircea's ex-wife, Maria "Mina" Arsenescu from Bucharest. *The Mitrois returned in Tulcea in March '54.*

P.S.: In 1954, Lixandra Mitroi paid a visit to her son at Evdokia's house in Tulcea; he wasn't home, being in a supervision at Iași. Lixandra was greeted by her daughter-in-law, Maria. At first, she didn't realise that woman who "wanted to see Mircea" was her own mother-in-law. Inviting her inside, she introduced Lixandra to her co-mother-in-law, Evdokia, with whom she understood perfectly. Grandma remembers Lixandra was so funny that she and her mother were dying of laughing. Mircea came home the next day and was very glad to see his mother.

* In Bucharest, snow-drifts reached 5m height, the doors and windows being blocked by the snow, and the wind reaching the speed record of 126 km/hour.

The four Mitroi

On December 3th 1954 was born the beloved son of the Mitrois, Dudu Mircea. On May 25th 1958 was born their beloved daughter, Mirela. This way, Grandpa had what her mother once wished most: a girl and also a boy.

My grandparents greatly loved their children. Mircea made plans for the far future, gathering bottles with wine after every annual harvest from the grape vineyard, having in mind to give them to Dudu when he would age 18. Unfortunately, any planification of the Mitrois was crushed: my grandpa couldn't be at my mother's birth or see her in the first 6 years of her childhood. "Why?". Because once existed a man named Stalin, that formulated the principle why with the future Soviet block was led: "He who is not with us is against us". If only he had listened to Dostoyevsky, more realistic: "Love is a priceless treasure by which you can gain the whole world", or understood Tolstoy, more optimistic: "Mothers, you hold in your hands the salvation of the world": children.

6 HARD YEARS

Enemy of the people

Spring 1958. Maria Mitroi, carrying her daughter, is called was wirntess at the town hall, in the "Romanian state against Mircea Mitroi" law suit. The official accusation was a misuse of funds by Mircea at the commercial mill. The real motive was his opposition towards commuism, in favor of Americans and Monarchy; his opinions were expressed to a lipovean¹ who he was in conflict, who became an important official of the state.

¹ Population of Russian origin settled in the Danube Delta since the XVIIIth century. Their main activity is fishing.

The prosecutor wins against the defense (more virtual than real, paid from my grandpa's money). In May, the judge passed the verdict: "Mircea Mitroi is found guilty of a misuse of funds and sentenced to 17 years of forced labor at Poarta Albă prison", followed by a strike of a hammer, that fell hard....

On 25 May was born Mihaela Mitroi¹. A few days later, a group of communists led by the prosecutor came to the Mitroi house with the official purpose of confiscating the properties of "enemy" Mircea Mitroi, but who really wanted only to steal Evdokia's properties, for which they had no right. The "thieves" took everything they had: the table, the chairs, the bed, the painting, the jewelry box, half of clothing and shoes (actually, they "let" – forced – Maria to choose between two pairs of clothes or shoes, renouncing at one of them). The declaration of "objects taken" was inaccurate and false.

Maria Mitroi remained alone with two children, a paralysed mother, most of her properties confiscated, without a permanent income, and the remaining money spent to pay the lawyer for the (failed) appeal against the sentence in autumn. Married to a "enemy of the people", Maria couldn't hire anywhere, being asked to divorce. She opposed. She loved her husband too much to leave him alone, in such a difficult moment... But how could she let her children starve? What to do? Who would come in her aid?....

² Mariana wanted her daughter be named "Mirela" but, asking Maria Negrea to register her at the townhouse, on 29 May 1958, she declared her, by mistake, "Mihaela". The Negrea family, living on Tratain street, were helped by Mircea to build their home and, in returned, helped by grandmother while grandpa was arrested, taking her, Evdokia and her children to eat. The husband, Nicoae, was a driver. They had to kids: Paul, graduate of the Military School, and Geta.

The good brothers

End of 1958. Maria Mitroi receives food, water and everything she needed from Mircea's brothers, Ispas and Marin, from their farm in Iulia village, Izvoare commune, by personal "delivery" at home (made by Marin). Their help came as a "heavenly manna" from my grandma. The Mitrois in Iulia supplied her and morally supported her for four years (autumn 1958 – August 1962). They didn't do it as "Do ut des" ("I give you, you give me") but "Do ut do": "I give you just to give you"...

P.S.: "Masha" Vladimirov died in 1962, the funerals being arranged by Evdokia; her son, Simeon, brought flowers.

Letter to the President

1962, August 9th. Knowing the Mitroi brothers couldn't supply the whole duration of the sentence (13 years further), Maria makes a risky action: she writes a letter to the President of the State Council of the Popular Republic, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, in which she tells her situation¹. Against her mother's advice, the letter is written and sent in that Thursday, to reach Bucharest.

That same day, Maria went together with Dudu in Iulai village to get food and other supplies. Mihaela remained with her grandma. Reaching the village the following day, grandma wasn't allowed by Marin (who also disapproved the idea of sending a letter) to leave on Friday, being tired, so she arrived home on Saturday.

¹ The letter was like this: *Comrade president, I am a desperate woman. I can't find a job anywhere. My mom is paralyzed and I have two kids. My husband was arrested for a misuse of funds but he is innocent. I was asked to divorce, but I love him too much to leave him at such heavy times. I urge you to help me. With all due respect, Maria Mitroi.*

Baronel¹, the family's dog, happily greeted her. When she entered the house together with Dudu, my grandma received from her mother news that greatly scared her... In the days she was gone, a representative of the President came looking for her. Was it related to the letter? "What if they arrest you too?", Evdokia feared. This could happen in any moment...

Baronel barked, announcing someone as coming. When she opened the door, grandma recognized an official from the employment office, who didn't come to arrest her. Instead, the President himself ordered that, in 24 hours, Maria Mitroi be hired! Grandma was taken to the office of Mr. Popic, director of the Constanța Hydrotechnical Buildings Firm, detached to Tulcea and, after a few questions, hired her as tester at Tulcea hydro-site, with a monthly salary of 734 lei.

General amnesty of 1964

1964. Maria still worked at the hydro-site. Called by the Sulina department chief to make some tests over some building rocks, grandma – being unprepared - had to also take with her her daughter.

After two days, Maria received a call from her tenant, Mrs. Golubov, being announced Mircea came home. There are no words to tell the joy she felt hearing these news! Immediately, she took Mirela from the kindergarden, went up in boat and left for Tulcea. Reaching the city, she was well received by her friends: all heard Mircea was released 11 years earlier, by the amnesty of political prisoners, ordered by Dej.

¹ Baronel, a white and bichon black - received from two friends (Domna and Natasha) in her youth - was a girl, but Maria did not take account of this and called her "Baron", although she should have called her "Baroness".

The moment of their rejoin wasn't too spectacular: Maria didn't immediately find Mircea (he left to greet them at the harbor), but they met again after 15 minutes, experiencing strong emotions. *Mircea was rehabilitated and, in spring 1964, was hired outside Tulcea, at a mine.*

CEAUȘESCU ERA

A new beginning

After 6 years in prison, Mircea wasn't the same man, the most respectable father who had enough money to raise his children, but the former inmate, owner of a half-empty house. He took a "hard battle" to rehabilitate himself. None of those who framed him of the misuse of funds were sanctioned in any way.

On May 11th 1964, Mircea was hired as main accountant at the Somova Mine of the Dobruja Mining Trust, where he worked until retirement, in 1977. He sold the house of Trajan street and the horticultural land in the back to the Damian brothers¹. Baronel was left in the care of the Golubov husbands². The Mitroi family and Evdokia moved to the ground floor of a flat on Isacsei street; my great-grandmother didn't want to move from her parents' house, but eventually agreed.

There, grandma met again Petre Niculescu – who was living on the same street -, now headmaster of the Tulcea Middle School no. 6 (Victoriei street) until 1971, where Mirela followed the gymnasium (1969-73).

¹ A few time after buying the house, the Damian brothers hanged themselves for unknown reason.

² Dogs couldn't live in flats. My grandma suffered for this "loss", being conforted only by knowing that the Golubov family will love the puppie and take care of her.

Last of the Pavlovs

After moving on Isaccei, my great grandmother progressively lost her memory, being sick of multiple sclerosis. She started forgetting: where was Mircea working, in what city she lives, the age of her nephews, the name of her daughter, her own name, until she couldn't remember anything at all... Every day, Evdokia left home, somewhere unknown to her. She started losing vision, hitting walls or pilings... until she completely paralysed and, in a autumn, entered coma. She gave her last breath on October 26th 1966. She was buried at the Molokan church at the end of the month.

Historica notes: In the **Soviet Union**, Nikita Khrushchev was dismissed by his opponents in the Central Committee meeting on 14 October 1964, being replaced by stalinist Leonid Brezhnev (whose 18 years term, until his death in 1982, was the longest in USSR history, being followed by the shortest: 15 months: Yuri Andropov; 13 months: Konstantin Chernenko). In **Romania**, dictator Gheorghiu-Dej died on 19 March 1965 of liver cancer. His function of first-secretary of the party was taken by Nicolae Ceaușescu (22 March), and the Presidency of the State Concil by Chivu Stoica (24 March). Ceaușescu changed the party's name from "Worker's Party" (PMR) to "Communist Party" (PCR), and renamed the People's Republic (RPR) the Socialist Republic (RSR).

Somova Mine

April 5th 1967. Maria Covaliov was hired at Somova as accountant, together with her husband (then chief of the financial accounting service). They both calculated pretty fast, faster than a calculator of those days¹, using numbers of hundreds of thousands.

¹ In the 60s and 80s, computers were big, heavy and slow machines, that made calculations in minutes. Mariana was given one by Mr.Popescu, and learnt to use it from Mircea.

Grandpa wasn't a nice boss, asking his employees be most serious. He didn't treat his wife other than a subordinate who had to fulfill her obligations. Chief of the office ('73), he hadn't any role in the promotion of her wife, together with raises of salary. After tirement (January '77), the chief of the office became Mr. Panciu, and Mariana main accountant, the employees becoming more relaxed when asking for favors (eg. spare of a working day for problems such as a child being sick).

The Somova mine, where barytine² was extracted, together with the other mines (eg. Cerna) depended on the Mahmudia mine, the "main center" where monthly financial reports were sent, where chalk was extracted³. All branches were subordinated to the Dobrujan Mining Trust, with headquarters at Constanța, where the director had his office (at first, engineer Peter Ciupercă, dettached at Mahmmudia, then Ion Popescu, dettached at Somova, father of two sons⁴).

From the working colleagues, I remember: at Somova – Mrs. *Wagner*, accountant, wife of a ship captain, mother of a girl; Mr. *Pera*, technician; Mrs. *Florescu*, secretary, wife of a chief-engineer, mother of two children (a boy and a girl), raised at Somova, but graduate of high school; *Nina Nisiparu*, secretary, wife of an engineer, mother of a girl; Mr. *Ciontea*, enngineer, and Mrs. *Ciontea*, secretary, parents of two children; and

² Barium sulfate mineral (BaSO₄). Used as a weighting agent for drilling fluids in oil and gas exploration, as well as to produce paint, heavy concrete, to extract barium etc.

³ Calcium carbonate (CaCO₃). White, porous sedimentary rock used for building.

⁴ Popescu's sons died young, after graduating college, due to diseases. Not a year after, in '88 (Maria was retired), Mr. Popescu died too.

from Mahmuia - *Veronica Almăjan*, chief of the accounting service; and *Rita Păunescu*, secretary [note: some offices, mostly those for secretaries, were occupied based on “relations”, mostly with director Popescu, or were given as a personal favors]. *Grandma retired on September 1th 1988, after aging 57 years.*



80s. The Somova accounting service. Mariana Mitroi (chief of service) is the second at right; besides her, Mrs. Wagner.

Mirela and Dudu

What does a mother feel seeing her children grow? Probably something between the joy of seeing them grown-up and the nostalgia for the past, together with the regret they leave the parental home.

Mirela and Dudu graduated “Spiru C. Haret” High School (1974/1977) [headmaster: Virginia Dima]. Dudu left home in 1975, following military service at Buzău, then the Faculty of Geology and Geophysics at Bucharest University (1975-78). Mirela left home in 1977,

to follow that same faculty (1977-81). They both received repartitions at communes in Mutenia, to make “workout”. With the children way, my grandparents moved in 1977 to a small appartment on Păcii street.

In the 80s Dudu married Claudia Stan at the town hall and was hired at Constanța harbor. If, in childhood, his liberty was suffocated by the authority of his father (Mircea), after leaving home, his place was taken by the more hideous face of communism. Under a such brutal dictature it can be easily understood how, driven by the “dream of liberty” in the west, Dudu devised a plan to flee the country, to the democratical and capitalist world: in 1987, he was to hide on the ship where worked Gelu Popa, his relative (daughter of his cousin, Lidia, daughter of Ispas Mitroi), during the way from Constanța to France – where he was to ask for “political asylum”. Of this dangerous plan knew only his wife Claudia and his sister Mirela: his parents didn’t knew a thing. Eventually, Mariana found his son was on a ship where, if he was discovered, he would be arrested and imprisoned, or even shot on the spot! What huge fear she felt in those moments! Fortunately, the plan succeeded: while the ship was near Turkey, Dudu jumped together with Gelu off-board in the Black Sea, being “recovered” by the Turkish coastal patrol. They received political asylum at Istanbul. Grandma was relived when she received a letter from Dudu from Turkey. In 1988, helpeted by Australian tourists, Dudu was allowed to settle in Australia, at Melbourne. Instead, Gelu went to the United States of America, in the opposite part of the globe.

Glasnost and perestroika

The Romanian Socialist Republic fell in 1989. The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic fell in 1991, two years later, after eastern Europe was mostly liberated from the “shadow of communism”.

Nicolae Ceaușescu became leader of the Romanian Communist Party on March 22th 1965, president of the RSR Council of State on December 9th 1967 and entitled himself President of Romania on April 29th 1974. Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Communist Party on March 11th 1985 and entitled himself President of the Soviet Union of March 15th 1990. Gorbachev spoke of reform while Ceaușescu planned megalomaniac projects such as the Civic Center and the House of the Republic, while in Romania the economical difficulties grew (Romania became more communist than the USSR!).

In Romania, on December 16th 1989 started the protests in Timișoara. The following days, the revolt extended across the country, reaching Bucharest on December 21th. On December 22th, all main cities of the Republic became scenes of the revolution. On December 24th was proclaimed the victory of the revolution. On 25th December took place the trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, condemned to death by shooting, sentence carried out in the same day.

In the Soviet Unions, the reforms had a “paradoxical effect”: the economical reform (perestroika) couldn’t develop on the old and unefficient infrastructure at the end of the 80s, and the liberty of speech (glasnost) allowed the affirmation of criticism towards the regime and the intentions of the non-Russian Soviet nationalists. On February 7th 1990, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party agreed to renounce at monopoly of power. After several countries USSR and declared their independence, Gorbachev met with separatism. Despite the *coup d’état* against Gorbachev on August 19th 1991 failed, his power was compromised. Of the 15 Soviet republics, all declared their independence (excepting Russia), joining the new

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)¹. For this reason, on December 25th, realising the failure of his reforms (that destroyed what he tried to change), Gorbachev resigned as leader of the USSR, passing power in Russia to Boris Yeltsin, president of SFSR Russia. On December 26th, the Supreme Soviet voted for its dissolution, canceling the declaration of 1922 regarding the creation of the USSR, 15 independent states appearing².

Returning to the Romanian Revolution of 1989, I will say its results: it ended communism, allowing the democratisation of the country and the building of a capitalist system. At last, Romania was free...

FREEDOM, AT LAST

Visiting Australia

With all it lacked, the new political context in Romania at starting at the end of 1989 gave, by the idea of economical, social and political liberty, the faith and hope no one had during the oppressive communist regime.

On October 21th 1991, Mirela Mitroi married designer Radu Vişan-Miu, and on April 24th 1992 was born their first child, Andra. Dudu returned to the country to take Claudia with him and move to Australia, and on March 20th 1993 was born their daughter, Leah Mitroy. On December 29th were born us, twins Tudor and Mihai Vişan-Miu. A year before, my grandparents had moved

¹ Founded in 1991 through the Belavezha Accords (8 December). Initially had 3 members (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), on 21 December other 8 states joining (raising total to 11). Its members are independent states.

² Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

to Bucharest, in an apartment in a flat on Ripiceni street, Lacul Tei neighborhood.

In 1994, Maria Mitroi had the chance to visit Melbourne, Australia, living there 6 months (July – January)*. After a 14.000km road, she reached the destination of July 26th, the day Claudia was born. Because Maria arrived at evening, Claudia was celebrated the next day. “Granny” lived 164 days in Australia (July 26th 1994 – January 7th 1995), period in which – despite not knowing English was a problem – she met her niece, Leah, and spent a good time with the family of her son, learning about Australian culture, admiring the clean streets, general peace and the beauty of gardens. When she left, she was happy to she saw her son, niece and nephew at their homes, in a so civilised country....



* The permitted legal duration was of three months (July–September 1994). Because grandma stayed three months more, Dudu had to pay a pretty large fine... Still, the extra time spent with his mother was worth it.

Our Dear Granny*

In 1995, before we were born, our grandparents moved to Bucharest („Granny” already lived more in Bucharest than in Tulcea) – at first, Ripiceni street, Lacul Tei neighborhood. Every day, with the exception of Saturday (when she cooked for her own home), grandma came to visit as on Mozart street, Floreasca neighborhood, usually from morning to lunch. She never missed the anniversaries of her nephews.

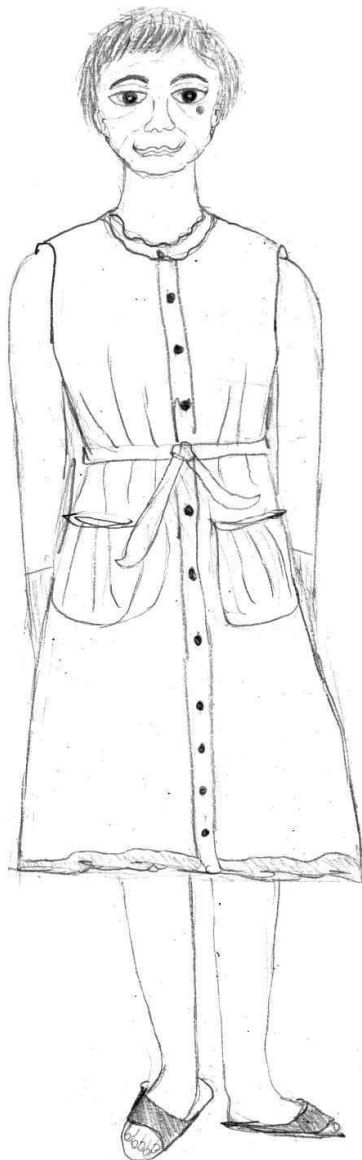
Since 2003, when we started primary studies, grandma began picking us from school, enjoying together with us a 30 minutes walk. Sometimes, she told us of her life (more from childhood / youth, about her mother’s sisters, tsarism, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917). Since 2007, my grandparents moves in the same flat with us on Mozart street (in 2009, we moved to a new house built by our parents, separated by a yard). Granny continued to visit us every day, we doing the same on Sunday (at 16:00).

Granny understood well with our other grandma, Eliza Vișan („Lizica”), who she visited on Chopin street, then – after she moved in her own apartment at the same flat with us on Mozart street – together with us, to drink a coffe with milk. Granny was very upset when, on April 29th 2008, Lizica passed away, at 92 years.

I haven’t wrote until now that Mircea was a good householder, taking care of everything in the house (from cleaning to cooking). This was convenient for my grandma during youth (although she also was a good householder), but, near old age, she was forced at 80 years to start taking care of things she hadn’t to take care of when she was 20!

* We call our grandma „Granny” (in English) and not „bunica” (in Romanian) due to our sister, who, while at the kindergarten, finding this is how Leah called her during her visit in Australia, liked it and also wanted to call her „Granny”.

Despite my grandparents soemtimes argued from time to time, for not too serious reasons, they regreted any stupid conflict and quickly reconciled. They lived together 58 years (1954-2012), and the loved that united them at youth didn't faint at old age.



Post scriptum:

On January 3th 2012, at 8:00 AM, after spending 4 days sick in bed, Mircea Mitroi died in his apartment from W.A. Mozart Street, without pain (being asleep), with his wife in the next room, joining his parents and brothers in the Heavens. He was buried in Pipera cemetery on January 5th 2012, a day before Lord's Baptism. Granny lives today together with us.



Note

In childhood, grandma made the error that, invited to a friend's home, she accepted that her grandma predict the future.

She predicted four things:

- 1) She would marry an older man (proved true);
- 2) She would have two children, a boy and a girl (proved true);
- 3) She would die at 70 years (proved false, despite grandma was pretty worried when she got this age; today she is still healthy, at 82 years);
- 4) She would die before her husband (proved false).

