

THE SKY THROUGH BARS

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Ecclesia in Sadu



1920s - 1930s

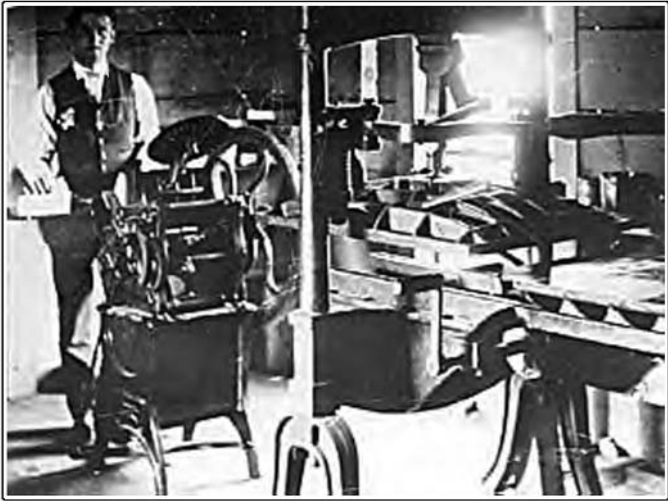


Ecclesia in Ocna Slatina



**Various Meetings
1920 - 1930**





*Br. Filipoiu bought an old manual printing press,
and he set it up in one sister's cellar.
Here for a year, under difficult conditions
with jeopardy of being discovered at any time,
Br. Filipoiu clandestinely printed literature.*

(Quoted from Page 43)

CHAPTER FOUR

BRINGING THEIR WORLD OUT OF CHAOS

(1930-1948)

Very little is known about the events, activities or real stories that took place during these 18 years. Available written documents refer to only four of these years—1932-1936. There are no survivors from this period of time. The memories of those who knew something about that period are not very clear. This is due in part to the war which blocks out the memory of everything else. After the end of the war, an uncertain time came when the Communist regime took over Romania’s “rights” with brutality, snatching property, and throwing the owners in prison. For the population in general, this meant the burden of paying for a huge war—dues to the USSR. All this cruelty took place during the span of nearly a decade and stopped the usual activities and normal rhythm of life. For this reason, the information we have about this period is scarce.

The year 1930 was a tumultuous year. The fall of the Society, the separation from those who would become “Jehovah’s Witnesses” on the wave of dirty court trials, slanders, false rumors of all kinds, drove many brethren to despair, disappointment, and uncertainty. Questions like: “Who are you with?” “Did you stay with Rutherford?” “Did you cross over to the other side?” were probably very common during those days. For that reason, it seems like the Lord providentially overruled that a personality like Onisim Filipoiu would be on the scene at this time. His methodical, dynamic, decisive nature was an invaluable support for the reorganization of the brethren. If we would want to give his work a fitting title, it would probably be “bringing their world out of chaos.”



**A Meeting During Communism
Manastireni 1965 (Near Cluj)**

CHAPTER FIVE

THE COMMUNIST PERIOD — TRIALS AND BLESSINGS

To realistically describe the Communist period and its effect on the brethren's lives precisely and objectively with all of its aspects—would be an impossible task. Therefore, the complete record is left in our Heavenly Father's hands.

However, we would resort to observing that it left deep marks on any person living through it, bringing about a revolution in the personality of that individual, in his way of perceiving things, of thinking, and acting. Sometimes these marks go beyond the limitations of the conscious mind.

Communism wanted to create not only a new political ideology, a new economy, a new social structure, but also a DIFFERENT MAN from the one who had existed before. This new political ideology dug into the human soul—into its inmost fibers of faith in God. Communism alleged that atheism was the way to this NEW MAN.

The Communists started acting on these beliefs as soon as they came to power. They began by “cleaning out” the religious groups. Outside of the Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Adventist churches, almost all others were declared illegal.

What did this mean on the practical side? Meetings in small or big numbers, preaching, witnessing, and printing were strictly prohibited. Even owning religious literature at home would put one in danger.



Prison in Sighetu Marmatiei

*“And prisons would palaces prove,
If Jesus still dwelt with me there.”*

Hymns of Dawn, 94

PART TWO

MEMORIES OF A GENERATION

The experiences of those who suffered in prison, risking their freedom for the Truth and the brethren, cannot be erased from the history of humanity.

Their lives stand as witnesses for us who live in a new era radically different from the previous ones. Their stories tell us how the faith can be kept through completely unfavorable circumstances. It is for us to learn how the same faith must also be kept under completely favorable conditions. (Who knows if today's experiences are not even more difficult for faithfulness than those in earlier years?) These witnesses also testify to us that faith is not a passive state, but is active, all-consuming, risky—and full of strife, hard work, sacrifice, and finally . . . victory.

Some of these brethren have finished their course, others are on their way.

May the Lord be their “exceeding great reward”!



Elena and Iacob Filipoiu
(Born 1915) (1905-1985)

FIRST MEMOIR

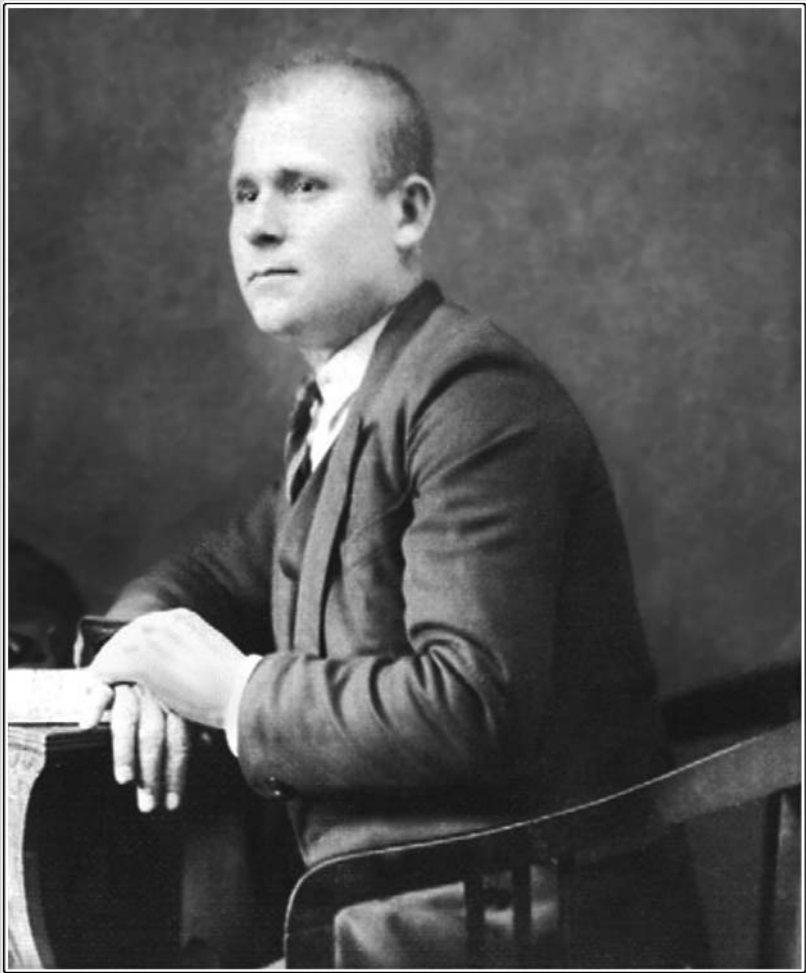
“THE BEST OF THE BEST”

THE FILIPOIU BROTHERS — RODNA VECHÉ

A daughter of one of the brethren from the interwar period qualifies the leaders of this generation as being: “The Best of the Best.” Onisim Filipoiu and his brother Iacob are a couple of the representatives of choice. Their high moral standards, sobriety, zeal, and intellectual capacity have left a deep impression on those with whom they came in contact. So this Filipoiu family represents the interwar generation, who were especially active in this period.

Elena Filipoiu, 92, lives in Sibiu and is still active and alert. She is the one who provided the information about what the Filipoiu family meant for the Truth movement in Romania. She did this with much modesty and meekness, stating often that what they did is not important. But what is important is the testimonies of brethren’s examples in their faith—both in their lives and sharing of the Word. Since we need examples, we take Apostle Paul because he was one who truly suffered with Christ. With much difficulty, we were able to assure her that if Paul remains a standard for our Christian life, it is not less true that we need to know the experiences of other brethren from whom we can receive strength and courage.

At that point, she thought and replied that it was possible that we, the younger generation, will go through more difficult experiences because the hardest times are yet to come. For that reason, we assured



Petru Bote
(1903-1975)

SECOND MEMOIR

“THE OLD BROOD HEN”

PETRU BOTE — CLUJ NAPOCA

Br. Bote is in that category of people who leave an unforgettable, deep impression—“angel like” according to those who met him.

Together with his wife, Maria, he worked at the “Viata” Society as a colporteur. He worked closely with Bros. Sima, Filipoiu, Ciucas, and others. Though he did not travel as much as these, he was very hospitable. His house was always full of guests, and as the host, he would offer them excellent spiritual fellowship, as many of the brethren in their home have testified.

Br. Bote was an intelligent person with the ability to teach with subtle humor and irony. He was a mentor for the young people, and they testify about the zeal, courage, and uplift received while talking to him. He and his wife, Maria, a person of great poise—meek but also courageous—were front-line warriors in the vast field of the good fight of faith.

Br. Iosif Ilies from Mintiu writes about Br. Bote:

Br. Petru Bote was born in the village of Feldru, in the Somes Valley. He came from a reputable family of peasants, which had three boys and three girls.

Petru and Mihai Bote found the Truth while still young, and consecrated. At that time, there were no other Protestants in Feldru, and at their baptism, the entire village gathered as if for a



Sandu Mogojan
(1920-2006)

THIRD MEMOIR

“BECAUSE I WHISTLED IN THE CHURCH”

SANDU MOGOJAN — MANASTIRENI

Br. Sandu from Manastireni was an old defender of the Truth. A jovial figure, agile and full of life, with a rich linguistic style, intelligent and spiritual, and with a good sense of humor, Br. Sandu won the approval of all those with whom he came in contact. His vast knowledge, combined with a rich life experience, kept the attention of his listeners alive. He could talk about almost any subject—but he preferred to talk about the Truth.

In order to understand the quick and bold temperament of Br. Sandu—which made him a perpetual defender of the principles of righteousness and honesty—we will relate a story he told.

It was during World War II when Br. Sandu’s house was invaded by German officers. One of them got up on the bed with his muddy army boots and started to step on the pillows. (The village custom is to lay pillows with beautiful handiwork on the bed.) This was an extra wickedness on the side of the German officer, which Br. Sandu could not endure. Turning his cheek in a sign of impudence, he said, “Nicht Kultur!” For this he could have paid with his life, if the German army had not been in such a hurry to leave.

The interview that follows was taken in the summer of 2000 in Cluj when Br. Sandu was 80 years old. (We tried to maintain his savory style as much as possible.)



Iancu Petrita
(1927-2000)

FOURTH MEMOIR

“HE WAS DEFENDING WITH POWER OUR BEAUTIFUL TEACHINGS”

IANCU PETRITA — BIHOR

Srs. Veta Balanean and Marioara Cimpian from Zalau will tell us about Br. Iancu from Bihor. He lived the last years of his life in Zalau and died suddenly in the spring of 2000. These sisters knew him well, and they agreed to write briefly the experiences of Br. Iancu.

What we remember about Br. Iancu is that he was of medium height and plump. He was a strong character, able to speak the Truth for hours. Here is the report we received:

On December 13, 1958, in the morning at about 5 - 6 o'clock, Br. Iancu was taken from home, being given permission to take some food and warm clothes with him. From the moment the Security Officers came in the house, he was not allowed out of their sight.

He was taken by van to the Security in Oradea. There, he was kept in a cell for four months, with poor food, and was not allowed to sit down or to lean against anything until 10 p.m. Every day he was interrogated and asked where the meetings were taking place. They also asked him regarding the “present evil” day from the First Volume, in the hope that he would say that Communism was bad. But he would explain beautifully that this was referring to all the evil in the world: sickness, sorrow, and death. He would tell them about the Kingdom, the blessings it will bring, and about the way the order of



Lazar and Anuta Fodor
(1920-2003) - (Born 1923)

FIFTH MEMOIR

“THE PRESENT SUFFERINGS
ARE NOT FOREVER”

LAZAR FODOR — SURDUC

For many years Br. Lazar had the reputation of being one of the best orators. Truly, he had an exceptional memory, distinguished vocabulary, sharp intelligence, solid knowledge of the Bible and the Volumes, and the courage to stand the tests. All these qualities—and more—make him a very special character who won the love of the brethren and the admiration of the people.

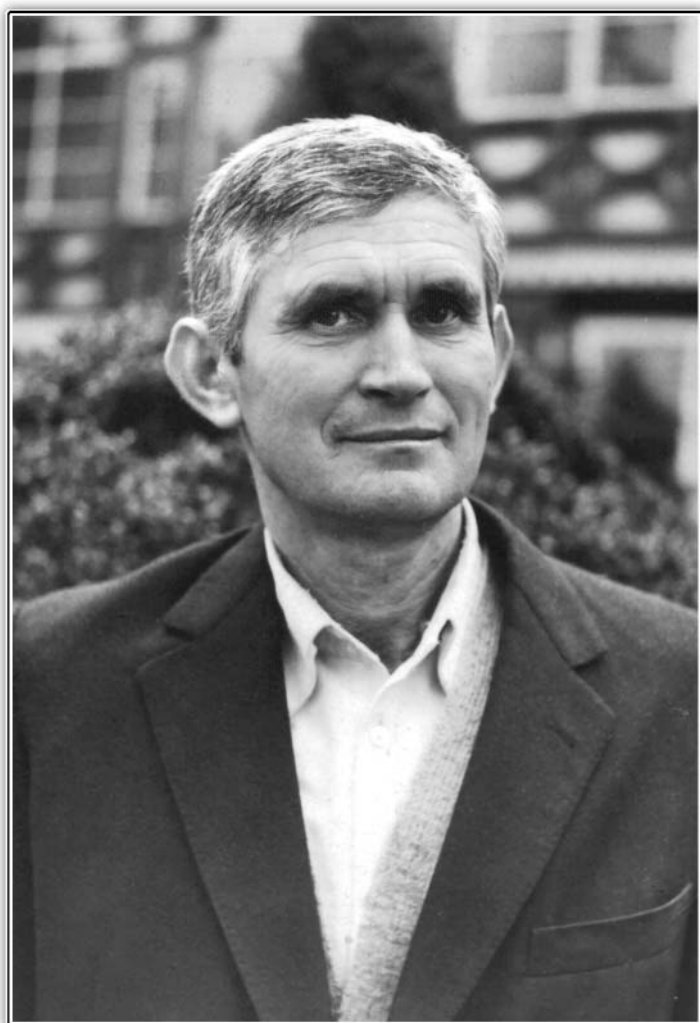
Answering one of our letters, Br. Lazar sent us the following information and history, which we structured into sections to make it easier to follow.

*Dear brethren and sisters in the Lord,
I, the writer of this letter, am called Lazar Fodor, born in 1920,
February 29, in the village of Surduc, county of Bihor, Romania.*

The School Years

My father, even though a wealthy man, favored the Protestants, though at that time, the only Protestants in my village were the Pentecostals. This was before the Communist regime.

I had a grandmother who could not read. She loved me very much, and she would ask me to read to her from the Bible. I listened to what I was reading to her. On the one hand, it made me realize that I had



Nelu Galis (Born 1935)

SEVENTH MEMOIR

“THE SKY SEEN THROUGH BARS”

NELU GALIS — RUGINOASA

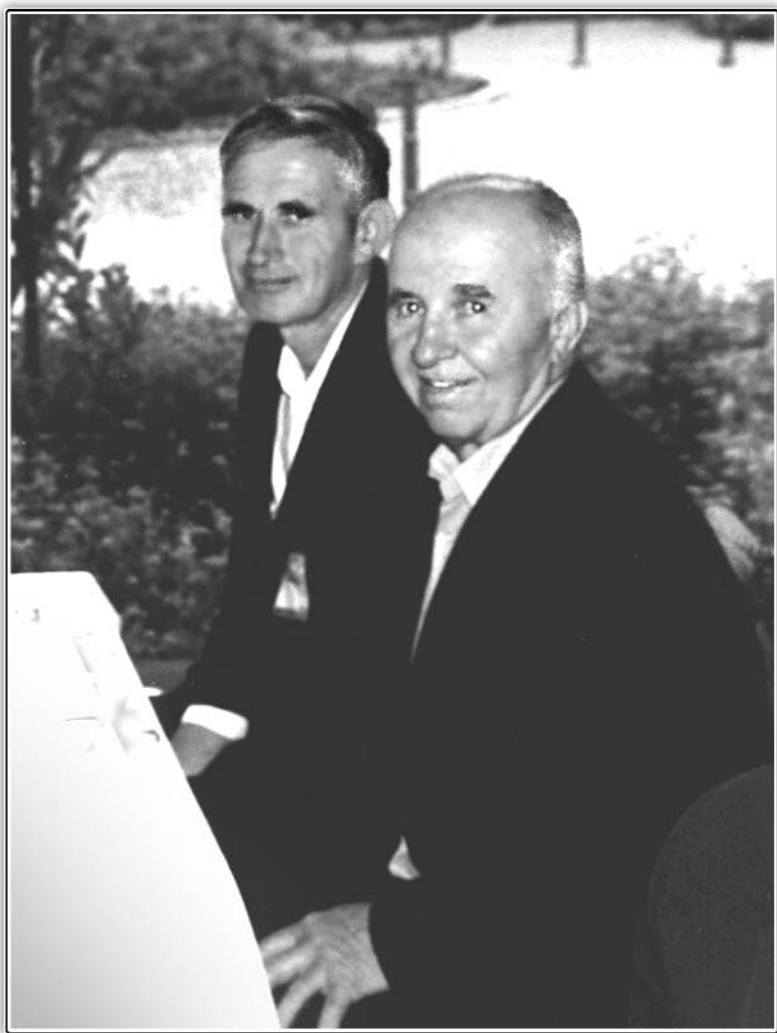
“You have no idea how beautiful the sky is when seen through bars!” says Br. Nelu. The expression startled me. When you have the freedom to look at the sky any hour of the day or night with its entire expanse, you do not realize the privilege you enjoy. But when you cannot see more than a small piece of it—and this from behind bars—the sky gains a special new beauty.

Br. Nelu needs no introduction. You could hardly find a brother in Romania who does not know him!

Not having a family, Br. Nelu consecrated his entire life to the Truth and to the brethren. He has traveled extensively, preaching the Word, encouraging the brethren, suffering persecutions—all with the same zeal and tireless enthusiasm. He is one of the most active brethren we have ever met. Truly, he is consumed in the service of the Great King.

Through his character and life, Br. Nelu is an example of rare idealism.

(After much insistence, because he doesn't like to talk about himself, we obtained from Br. Nelu the following material. The section divisions are ours; otherwise, we have tried to maintain his testimony as close to the original as possible.)



Right: Cornel Negrea (1920-2004)

EIGHTH MEMOIR

“MUCH JOY IS OURS”

CORNEL NEGREA — MIERTA

With a soft facial expression revealing a great internal calmness and a clear and warm heart, Br. Cornel from Mierta (as he was known to the brethren) was one of the most prominent figures among Bible Students in the Almas Valley. His calm voice exuded an unexpected force when he began singing. In fact, he was the hymn leader at Conventions. Yet, his talent was not limited to that ability. The fact is well known that he even composed hymns. Having an exceptional memory, he also knew the Truth very well.

The report below—after much insistence—was obtained by gathering information from Br. Cornel Negrea, who did not want to talk too much about his own experiences (not wanting to be interpreted as boasting).

The father of Br. Cornel, who had a profound religious spirit, was Orthodox. During World War I, while in Russia, he came in contact with a Baptist and decided to convert to Protestantism. When he returned from the War in 1918, he came in contact with our brethren who had lived in his village, Mierta, since 1912. Together with his wife, he consecrated.

With this background, Br. Cornel came to be born into a family of believers—even though his mother died six months after his birth. At a very young age, his father took him to meetings and entertained brethren, and so the spirit of the Truth penetrated his mind.



Maria and Vasile Intea
(b. 1935) (b. 1927)

or sister who received even that copy would feel very privileged to be among the five. He traveled extensively and was not afraid to witness whenever he would have the privilege. All these activities were very risky at the time, but we do not doubt that the benefits to the brethren—and before the Lord—were far greater than the risks involved.

Another brother who contributed to the printing of literature was Br. Vasile Intea. Br. Intea, always very active, is well known in Romania even till today. Although not young anymore, Br. Intea, together with his wife, Sr. Maria, faithfully still visit the brethren, encouraging the sick and the isolated.

During Communism, through one of his neighbors who was a binder at the University Press on Puskin Street, Br. Intea found a method to print religious literature. In this way he was able to print 275 copies of Volume V (the large format), 2,500 hymnbooks, 2,500 *Mannas* and a small number of the booklets, “*What is Truth?*”