

Dear Family,

We've been back from Romania for two weeks and I haven't had a chance to write about it. So I'll try a little here. The main thing I want to write to you is that we went to Grandma Rebecca's birthplace – Braila (pronounced Bru –ee- la). It's now a city of about 200,000 on the lower Danube. It's main industry seems to be as a port of shipping from the Black Sea up the river. It's quite interesting that it has a river town similarity to St. Louis. The Danube there is about the size of the Mississippi in St. Louis, only maybe not quite so swift. We walked down to the levy and there was a summer festival going on there, boats on the river front for entertainment, and even a rock concert. Just no Arch and no bridges. We had to take a ferry across the next day. And it was hot and humid just like St. Louis. No wonder grandma ended up in St. Louis.

It seems that the city had some class about a hundred years ago from the old fancy buildings. But now many of them are crumbling, a legacy from the communist era. There is one synagogue there, and it is used, mainly on Shabbat and holidays. We went to the Jewish community center, which is sponsored by the federation, as are many similar centers all over Romania to take care of the Jews who are left there, which are mainly elderly. There was a 76 year old Jewish man there who showed us around the synagogue and then took us to the cemetery. It was a little difficult understanding him because he didn't speak a word of English or Hebrew, and we don't speak Romanian or Yiddish. Fortunately at the cemetery the caretaker (an elderly gentile woman) had a grandson 18 years old who spoke English and translated for us. I was hoping that we might find a grave of an ancestor. The problem is that the only information that I had was two first names: Yisrael Chaim and Levy Mordechai, the father's of grandma Rebecca's parents which I think I got from the gravestones in St. Louis. The cemetery is huge, about 5,000 graves, and is still used. We couldn't see most of it as it is very overgrown. Also, there was an older cemetery that during WWII the Jews were forced to relocate the graves to this cemetery. And like all old gravestones, many of them are weathered to the point of being unreadable. And if all that weren't enough, we really don't know if any of our ancestors are buried in Braila. (According to the Federation, all of the Jewish cemeteries in Romania are intact.) Nevertheless, it was a moving experience to be in the place that our ancestors once lived, and to be in a synagogue that they may have prayed in.

The only archives in the community center are of deaths. I left the names and an estimation of when they probably died. The man said that he would take a look, and if he finds anything he will write us.

Attached are a few pictures, of the synagogue inside and out, the cemetery, and a nice building in the town.

The rest of the trip was also very interesting and beautiful. I'll try to send some more pictures.

Love, Yosef