



*Ceaușescu, Romania's Jews,
Chief Rabbi Rosen, and Me*

MY FIRST YEARS IN ROMANIA, 1976–1989

In early 1976 I received a phone call from New York asking me to lead an American Jewish Committee delegation to Bucharest in late February. I immediately said yes. I was on the AJC's National Board. As far as I knew, none of my ancestors had ever set foot in Romania, yet the country had always fascinated me. I remembered reading about Romania's joining Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in World War II. In college, I read about the Congress of Berlin, where in 1878 the Great Powers recognized Romania's independence from the Ottoman Empire.

I also read about Romania's role in the slow unraveling of the European order after the Congress of Berlin, its defeat by Germany in the Great War (World War I), and its triumphal return to the war on the Allies' side a few days before the Armistice was signed in Versailles in November 1918. I even had a vague picture in my head of what Bucharest, Romania's capital, looked like. I knew that Romanians called it the Paris of the East, and that in reality it was shabby and decadent compared to the City of Light on the Seine. For whatever reason, shabby, decadent Bucharest appealed to me. Maybe it was

the allure of the unknown or a romantic notion of life in a distant spot on the globe about which I knew almost nothing.

Reality hit me when my wife, Carol, and I boarded a Tarom Airlines (the Romanian national airline) flight from Greece to Romania in late February 1976. I was moving into the unknown, and the plane didn't look any too air-worthy, but we landed safely in Bucharest. Once inside the terminal, we entered another world. There was an air of harshness mixed with corruption and melancholy so pervasive you could feel it. In the airport, the metal detectors did not work and the baggage conveyor was broken. Our luggage was tossed onto creaky cardboard tables by disgruntled, unshaven airport workers in dirty overalls. Corruption was on open display wherever we looked—jostling by airport attendants, customs officials searching for contraband to seize and probably sell on the black market.

Outside the airport, the sense of desolation grew deeper, with hushed conversations on street corners, bugged hotel rooms, paid informers, and soldiers lolling about smoking cigarettes and asking for “gifts.” The streets were dimly lit to save energy in a near-bankrupt country. Room temperatures were bone-chilling.

We stayed at Bucharest's once fabled Athenee Palace Hotel, its pre-World War II grandeur faded almost beyond recognition. When Carol and I exited the elevator the next morning, we saw middle-aged and older women on their hands and knees scrubbing the badly scuffed lobby floors. Carol firmly pronounced, “I am never coming back here.” Neither of us could have imagined that eighteen years later I would return to Romania as the U.S. ambassador.

Over the next few days we saw much of Bucharest, but our principal focus was on the city's Jewish community. Before the war it had numbered some 100,000; now that number was down to about 20,000, mostly elderly. Our first stop was at the Jewish Federation's offices adjoining the Choral Synagogue, a short distance from the hotel. The synagogue, built in the late 1800s, was the historic seat of Romania's chief rabbi.

Although it was February, the synagogue, like most buildings in Bucharest, was unheated. Despite its being without heat and badly in need of repair, the building's faded beauty and great dignity were there to see. Looking at the bema with the “eternal light” flickering over the Torah scrolls and the familiar Hebrew inscription above it, I felt at home. There is a sameness to

traditional synagogues that is familiar and welcoming to those of us raised in Jewish homes. Memories and feelings travel with us, even when hidden beneath the surface. They are rekindled on occasions like this, visiting a once magnificent synagogue.

The federation offices were in a yellow stucco two-story building across a narrow cobblestone driveway from the synagogue. There we were met by a delegation of community leaders carrying flowers and the traditional Romanian gift of greeting, a large beautiful twisted loaf of bread and salt. The delegation immediately apologized for the absence of Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, who at that time was out of the country on his annual visit, with his wife, to a kosher hotel in Switzerland. It was clear from words and tone that Rabbi Rosen was the real power in this Jewish community, both venerated and feared. I would meet Rabbi Rosen for the first time a few years later when I returned to Bucharest to take up with Ceaușescu the cause of Romanian Jewry, which by then had become my cause as well. The Jewish community leaders did their best to explain how the highly organized Jewish community functioned under Rabbi Rosen's direction. Much of what we heard was oft-rehearsed, exaggerated rhetoric intended to impress foreign visitors with the vibrancy of the community and the religiosity of its members. We were told there were functioning synagogues throughout Romania, kosher kitchens, Talmud torahs (schools), a Jewish-Yiddish theater, and more.

In truth, the description was more like a Potemkin village than reality. Jewish life was literally dying out. Most Jews were Jewishly illiterate. Older Jews could read and speak Yiddish but not Hebrew. Their recitation of the Jewish prayers was by rote; few of them could actually understand the Hebrew prayers. Younger Jews knew even less. The Jewish community was principally supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee—the Joint, for short—which each year contributed about \$2 million, a major share of the community's total budget, and helped the dwindling Jewish population survive.

The rest of the day was given over to visiting the Jewish Community Center a few blocks from the Choral Synagogue, followed by shorter stops at two other synagogues. One was the Sephardic Synagogue, now largely a museum with pictures of the slaughter of Romanian Jews by the Nazis and Romanian fascists in the early 1940s. The other was the dark, dank "Great Synagogue," no longer used for daily services but housing a small Jewish pre-

school. Already feeling gloomy, we moved on to the Jewish community's old-age home, where many Holocaust survivors lived, barely able to talk or get about without help. From what we could tell, the staff was kind and caring, but the facilities were old and woefully inadequate.

When not walking around Bucharest, our mode of transportation was an old bus that coughed and chugged but somehow managed to get us where we were supposed to be eventually. February was not the ideal month to be in Bucharest, particularly, as in our case, after a heavy snowfall. Phalanxes of men and women in office clothes were on the streets shoveling snow. Our Romanian guide explained to us that they were "volunteers" doing their patriotic duty on behalf of the Socialist Republic of Romania. These poor souls, dragooned from their offices, had to shovel snow in the bitter cold.

Bucharest in 1976 was caught in a time warp that began in the nineteenth century and ended in the late 1930s. Horse-drawn carts were commonplace on the cobblestone streets. Other modes of transportation were equally dated—rattling, coughing old trucks, underpowered Romanian-made Dacia automobiles, and an occasional foreign car that looked out of place. Bucharest's once handsome buildings were in disrepair, with peeling paint on the outside and rotting wood protruding through openings. In the streets, no one said hello or acknowledged our presence but instead averted their gaze. Gray skies added to the gloom, as did the ever-present smog from coal-burning furnaces that cast a permanent yellow haze over the city. One could smell the smog as well as see it.

Then something unexpected happened that would forever tie me to Romania. Three young Jewish boys in their teens approached Carol and me on the sidewalk outside our hotel. With downcast eyes, one of them asked me in English if I was American. When I said yes, he asked if I was Jewish. When I again answered yes, he blurted out, "Don't believe what they tell you. The situation here is terrible, especially for Jews. We are blamed for everything that goes wrong. Help us get out. There is no future for Jews in Romania. Everything you hear is a lie, a lie, a lie." From that moment on, I was hooked. Over the next thirteen years I built a cottage industry in the United States with one goal—getting Romania's dwindling Jewish community out of Romania.

It is hard for people in the West, even Jews living today, to understand what it was like to be a Jew in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century East-

ern Europe. Jews were a community apart, living together in small Jewish communities, shtetls, and later in largely Jewish cities or parts of cities with their own community leaders and sometimes their own police and tax collectors. Eastern Europe was not a melting pot for Jews. Jews in Romania lived like their fellow Jews in neighboring Ukraine, Galicia (Poland), and Russia. Before World War II, they numbered 800,000, more than 4 percent of the population (less than 2 percent of the U.S. population is Jewish). They were lower-middle-class artisans, metalworkers, tailors, and shopkeepers. After the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the slow lifting of restrictions on Jews, they entered the liberal professions—law and medicine—primarily in Bucharest and larger Romanian cities. Romania's original Jews came from Poland; later, Jews fleeing the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal came to Romania. There were still Sephardic—Spanish-Portuguese—synagogues in Romania when I arrived in the 1970s that traced their ancestry to Jewish communities on the Iberian Peninsula. Other Jews in Romania may have been descended from the Khazars, a nomadic Turkic people living in what is today Kazakhstan, who converted en masse to Judaism in the ninth or tenth century. The region was overrun by the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

A rich culture surrounded Jewish life in Romania. The Yiddish theater began in Romania, and even in my day a large number of *chazanim*, cantors, in the United States were born in Romania. Maybe the fusion of Roma gypsy music with Jewish liturgical melodies accounted for the profusion of Jewish music in Romania. But unlike their coreligionists elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Romanian Jewry did not produce great scholars, writers, nor even notable Jewish lay leaders. The establishment of famous yeshivas, religious schools, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine did not occur in Romania. This led Jews elsewhere to consider Romanian Jews a Jewishly uneducated, backwater society, left behind by the wave of modernity that swept over Europe.

After World War II, most Romanian Jews emigrated to Israel, in all about 400,000. This began immediately after the war, when Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and fascist Romania left in waves for the soon-to-be Jewish state of Israel, later entering the country under Israel's "right of return," which applied to Jews worldwide. Another large wave of Romanian Jews left for Israel in the early 1960s; after that, a slow trickle followed each year.

Israel was closer and easier to get to than the United States and did not require an immigration visa. Moreover, applying for a U.S. visa was time-consuming, with an uncertain outcome. As a political matter, Romania's communist regime rationalized that Jews emigrating to Israel were "returning" to their historic homeland. This was less of a black eye for Romania's communist leaders than Jewish emigration to a Western country, especially the United States. Romanian Jews had been among the early Zionists who emigrated to Palestine more than a hundred years before.

When I visited Romania with two of our daughters in the early 1980s, we saw synagogues in Moldavia (one of Romania's two historic principalities that at one time had a large Jewish population) with primitive hand-painted art depicting biblical scenes in ancient Israel as imagined by the artists. As Rabbi Rosen liked to say, "Our Jews go to Israel, not Philadelphia." It was true then and continues to be true today.

JEWISH EMIGRATION FROM ROMANIA TO ISRAEL: A COMPLEX COLLABORATION

Over time, I became the point person in the United States for Romanian Jewish emigration—not that there was much competition. I eventually built a network among American Jewish organizations, members of Congress, and the executive branch. I spoke not only for myself but also on behalf of the American Jewish Committee and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (Conference of Presidents), the umbrella organization that was then comprised of some thirty or so organizations but now has many more.

Other Jewish organizations helped, particularly B'nai B'rith International. We worked together meeting with senators and officials in the White House and the State and Commerce Departments, interceding with the Romanian ambassador in Washington and, on three occasions, directly with Ceaușescu and his ministers. Over those thirteen years, the Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations supported our efforts, as did the American embassy in Bucharest.

In the Senate, Senators Adlai Stevenson III (D-Ill.) and John Danforth (R-Mo.) were particularly helpful. The Israeli government also pitched in, but

I had no idea at the time that it was paying Romania a flat fee for each Jew allowed to emigrate to Israel. I did not learn about the Israeli payments until I read Radu Ioanid's book, *The Ransom of the Jews: The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain between Romania and Israel*, published in 2005. (Ioanid is the archival director at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.) I later learned that the Federal Republic of Germany paid a head tax to Ceaușescu as well to allow German nationals to emigrate from Romania to West Germany.

Ceaușescu allowed people like Rabbi Rosen to travel abroad with the implicit understanding that they would not use their freedom to criticize Romania. By the time I arrived on the scene, Israel's Romanian efforts were coordinated by Nehemiah Levanon, in the prime minister's office. I met with Levanon in my Washington office in 1979 in what turned out to be an unpleasant few hours. Neither then nor later did he or any other Israeli official clue me in on the secret Israeli payments. In effect, Ceaușescu was collecting at both ends for the same thing—cash from Israelis and trade benefits from the United States. I blame the Israelis as much as Ceaușescu, first, for not telling me, and second, for paying a head tax for nothing. Our group in the United States had the muscle to get Jews out, and we did.

Our leverage was most favored nation (MFN) trade status for Romania, which came up each year for renewal in the U.S. Congress. Under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 trade law, which governed U.S. trade relations with communist countries, the president was required to review Romania's MFN status annually. If the administration recommended renewal, it became law unless Congress voted to reject it. In some years the House of Representatives passed legislation rejecting MFN status for Romania, but the Senate did not concur. My and my colleagues' efforts were focused on the Senate.

The Ford administration first recommended MFN status for Romania in 1975, largely in recognition of Romania's acts of independence from the Soviet Union in some aspects of foreign policy. For example, Ceaușescu continued diplomatic relations with Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War when the Soviet Union and the rest of the communist world broke off relations. A year later he denounced the Red Army's crushing of the Prague Spring and kept Romania's military out of the Warsaw Pact High Command.

Ceaușescu also tweaked the nose of Soviet leaders in the Kremlin by

periodically visiting China, where he was welcomed with lavish displays of friendship fit for a true world leader, far exceeding Ceaușescu's relative insignificance on the world stage. Ceaușescu was an unintended beneficiary of the Sino-Soviet conflict. The Chinese poured on the flattery as a way of showing that the Soviet Union was not the world's only communist power. In Peking, Ceaușescu met with the Chinese Communist leader, Mao Zedong, and, after he died, with his successor, Deng Xiaoping. He also regularly traveled to Belgrade to meet with Yugoslavia's president, Josip Broz Tito, who had taken Yugoslavia out of the Soviet camp in 1948.

Ceaușescu's "freelancing" got Washington's attention, with White House meetings and official state dinners for him hosted by Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. Presidents Nixon and Ford also visited Romania, where they were greeted by large, enthusiastic crowds. The crowds may not have been entirely spontaneous—the communists knew how to turn out the masses—but the huge numbers of Romanians lining the streets and the enthusiastic popular receptions were impressive. The popular reaction was duly noted in Washington and set off alarm bells in Moscow. As Washington saw it, MFN status was the "reward" for Romania's not hewing to Moscow's line. The annual MFN review by the administration and Congress gave me and the other proponents of Jewish emigration the leverage to prod Romania, a country hungry for hard, freely convertible currency, to let its Jews go.

Ceaușescu knew that Jewish opposition would end MFN for Romania, and without MFN, Romanian goods could not compete in the U.S. market. High U.S. tariffs would have kept Romania's exports out of the country. This was a real threat. Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle had reason to want to block MFN for Romania. For some, it was ethnic politics. Hungarian Americans were vocal in their opposition, which stemmed from historical tensions between ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania, which before 1918 had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The majority of people living in Transylvania were ethnic Romanians, but those in power before 1918 were mainly Hungarian. In the peace treaty that followed World War I, Transylvania became part of Romania, but the anger and dismay of ethnic Hungarians, who saw themselves as Transylvania's rightful rulers and cultural elite, remained. Other members of Congress seeking to block MFN for Romania were responding to pressure from American

businesses that would be hurt by cheap Romanian imports. For still others, it came down to their rightful distrust and disapproval of Ceașescu and fear and hatred of communism.

Despite these pressures, Democratic and Republican administrations recommended to Congress that Romania's MFN status be renewed, and Congress went along. In return, Romania committed to Jewish emigration and gave lip service to its commitments under the 1975 Helsinki Accords to respect the human and religious rights of all its citizens. But annual renewal was never a slam dunk, and without Jewish support, the outcome would have been different. To guard against slipups, I and a handful of advocates would meet with key senators each year to urge their support and during the voting would stand off the Senate floor corralling votes.

Meetings with Nicolae Ceașescu

Until Ceașescu's overthrow and death at the end of 1989 and Rabbi Rosen's death four years later, the two men had been the key players for me—Ceașescu because he controlled everything in Romania, and Rabbi Rosen because he was the voice and leader of the Romanian Jewish community. Ceașescu was the country's coach and quarterback—he called every play and then passed or ran with the ball—so it was not a contest between equals. But what Rabbi Rosen lacked in political power, he made up for in wiliness and connections, particularly in the United States, that impressed the peasant-born Ceașescu. By supporting MFN, Rabbi Rosen found a way to be valuable to Ceașescu and in exchange gained modest benefits for Romania's Jews.

Despite Ceașescu's relative independence from Moscow, or perhaps because of it, Romania was one of the most oppressive countries in the communist bloc. Ceașescu modeled his rule on the North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung, whom he visited in 1971. The U.S. policy of containment of the Soviet Union by both Democratic and Republican administrations sought engagement with communist dictators such as Ceașescu who might either challenge Moscow or support the United States at Moscow's expense. Ceașescu played it both ways, sidling up to the West to curry favor without cutting his ties to his ultimate partner in Moscow. Détente made for strange and sometimes odious bedfellows. The United States and other Western countries

showered Ceaușescu with blandishments, even though they had to know that Ceaușescu's trappings of independence were just that. Ceaușescu, the boorish, conniving peasant, with his wife, Elena, at his side, even received an honorary knighthood in 1978 from Queen Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey.

Elena was even more detested in Romania than her husband. Neither was educated, but she laid claim to being a chemist, and her all-powerful husband appointed her head of the Romanian Academy of Science, a venerable and highly respected Romanian institution. Her appointment was a joke among Romanians and a national embarrassment. To complete the charade, the communist propaganda machine attributed to her numerous inventions that she had never even seen and was probably incapable of understanding. Nevertheless, in Ceaușescu's later years and with his health failing from diabetes, Elena appeared publicly by his side, more and more taking on the trappings of being a co-equal ruler with her husband.

Who was Ceaușescu? Peasant-born, largely uneducated, like Josef Stalin, he worked his way up the Communist Party ladder. He had no obvious intellectual gifts and, unlike Stalin, did not engage in ideological debates. On his route to power he was subservient to his bosses, but once he reached the top, he was brutal to those below him. Ceaușescu valued power for power's sake, not ideology. In his younger years he was known as a brawler, but by the time I met him, he was flabby, with a receding hairline of grayish white hair and a pudgy, colorless face. He was peasant-smart, wily, determined to maintain control of the Communist Party and, through it, Romania. Like Stalin, he forsook religion at an early age. Over time, the Romanian Orthodox Church was subjugated to his will and, along with other institutions, infiltrated by informers. The church in Romania was central to national identity. Like communist leaders elsewhere, Ceaușescu was wary of openly breaking with the church for fear of antagonizing the faithful. In the eyes of Romania's communist leaders, an infiltrated, compromised, and therefore subservient Orthodox church (starting at the top with the patriarch) was better than one that might challenge the government. Ceaușescu undoubtedly looked with concern at what was happening in Poland when Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II, openly challenged communist authority.

My first meeting with Ceaușescu was in April 1978 in New York City's grand Waldorf Astoria Towers. It was arranged by Romania's ambassador,

Nicolae Nicolae, who believed the anti-Semitic canard that Jews were at the epicenter of the business world. He implored me to bring a group of Jewish business leaders to discuss investment opportunities with Ceaușescu. I had been in frequent contact with Ambassador Nicolae on behalf of Romanian Jewry, and he probably assumed (wrongly) that I had great sway within the Jewish community.

Not to disappoint him, I persuaded some dozen prominent Jewish business and financial leaders to meet in New York with Ceaușescu on his way back to Bucharest after official meetings in Washington and a state dinner at the White House. Our group, some of whom had never met each other, huddled in the Waldorf Towers lobby long enough for me to explain our mission and to make sure we stuck to the script—tell Ceaușescu that Jewish investment in Romania depended on his government's allowing Romanian Jews to emigrate. All nodded agreement, whereupon we walked across the lobby to a secure elevator that took us to the heavily guarded forty-seventh floor.

When we entered Ceaușescu's suite, we were greeted by Ambassador Nicolae and Romania's foreign minister, Stefan Andrei (much later sentenced to two years in jail for ordering the army to shoot demonstrators in the uprising that toppled Ceaușescu in 1989). To say that Ceaușescu was unimpressive would be an understatement. What little he said was without emotion or conviction. He conveyed minor annoyance at our constant harping on the right of Jews to leave Romania but otherwise seemed distant and uninterested. After the meeting, Ambassador Nicolae registered disappointment that we had focused on Jewish emigration, not business opportunities in Romania, which was the reason for his arranging the meeting. I suppose that was a victory for our side. The only takeaway from the meeting was Ceaușescu's affirmative grunt when I asked him to acknowledge that Romania's Jews were free to emigrate to Israel.

Ceaușescu may have been grumpy for another reason. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, had called me earlier that morning to tell me that President Carter had raised the issue of Jewish emigration with Ceaușescu in their meeting at the White House. This was in response to my raising the issue with Brzezinski a few days before. Ceaușescu angrily rejected President Carter's intervention, saying that emigration was an internal Romanian matter—in effect, "This is none of your business." Pres-

ident Carter replied unsmilingly, with his well-known icy blue-eyed stare, “I want you to understand, President Ceaușescu, that in the United States, the concern of American Jews for their co-religionists in Romania has a bearing on U.S. government policy toward Romania.” It was a not very subtle hint of things to come if Ceaușescu steered Romania off course.

The Israeli Government Gets Involved

After the Ceaușescu meeting, things went well for a while. Then the Israeli government got involved, and it was a whole new ball game. I had not heard before from the Israelis on Romanian Jewry. I had assumed Israel was staying away from the issue largely as a quid pro quo for Romania’s helping Israel on other matters. I was wrong. The Israeli government decided to use its muscle in the United States to oppose renewal of MFN for Romania unless it agreed to allow 2,500 Jews to emigrate by the end of 1979. I later learned that this was part of a larger strategy to convince the Soviet Union to take seriously its obligations under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the U.S. Trade Act that mandated communist countries to allow free emigration as a condition of receiving MFN status.

While Israel paid Romania to allow Jews to leave, MFN was the only tool available to the Israelis to prod the Soviet Union to allow its Jews to emigrate. And the numbers were huge: An estimated 2 million Jews lived in the Soviet Union, making the Jewish population in Romania seem minuscule by comparison. The Israeli government had decided that the Soviets would view pressure on Romania as a sign that the Soviet Union needed to open its spigot or risk losing MFN. This cockamamie thinking puzzled me. Israel was desperate to speed Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel. This depended on MFN. No one was foolish enough to think that Israel or its friends would fool around with Jackson-Vanik as it applied to the Soviet Union.

It was a hollow gesture on Israel’s part even to suggest this possibility, let alone make it a threat. Soviet diplomats in Washington and their colleagues in Moscow were not spending their time worrying about what was happening in Ceaușescu’s Romania, for which they had no love. Moreover, blocking MFN for Romania would have harmed Romanian–United States relations and probably Romanian–Israeli relations. The Jewish community in the United States would have been blamed for pushing a parochial interest, at

the price of the larger national interest, and it would have placed the Romanian Jewish community in an impossible position, held hostage by Ceaușescu and likely blamed for Romania's failure to get MFN. Bilateral trade between the United States and Romania at the time was around \$1 billion a year, not a huge number, but MFN was important to Romania, a country desperate to get hard currency to pay down its external debt and to improve economic relations with the United States and Western Europe.

I tried to explain this to Nehemiah Levanon, the point man in the Israeli prime minister's office, when he came to my office in Washington in late April to convince me to take a hard line with Romania. Several prominent Jewish organizations, not previously concerned with the plight of Romania's Jews, had been persuaded by Levanon to follow Israel's lead and take an active role opposing MFN for Romania. Levanon spoke with great authority and did not hesitate to mention the names of important Israelis as he made the rounds speaking to Jewish organizations. On matters affecting distressed Jewish communities around the world, American Jews tend to follow Israel's lead on the assumption that Israel knows more about what is happening in those countries than they do. While often true, there are exceptions, and this was one of them. By looking at potentially large Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, and trying to use Romania's Jews as leverage, Israel was putting much at risk for nothing. In the end, we were able to come up with a decent outcome to avoid what would have been a loss for all concerned.

When word reached Bucharest that renewal of MFN was in serious trouble, the Foreign Affairs Ministry sent to Washington its head of the North American Section, a former Romanian ambassador to the United States, Corneliu Bogdan, a Romanian Jew who had forsaken his Jewish roots. Theodore Mann, the president of the Conference of Presidents, asked me to chair the meeting with Bogdan. There were to be three of us: George Spectre, associate director of B'nai B'rith International, Mark Talisman on behalf of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropists, and me. Spectre, Talisman, and I met fifteen minutes before the scheduled meeting to plan our strategy. Both men turned to me, the Washington lawyer, and expressed the hope that I could think of something before the meeting began. When Bogdan arrived, I put together a three-part proposal that survived the heat of the negotiations and became the cornerstone of the agreement we reached.

Bogdan had served as Romania's ambassador to Washington from 1967

to 1976, longer than any other person. He was well regarded in the United States, where he had reached out to the American public, including the Jewish community. (Bogdan later broke with Ceaușescu and was sacked by the Foreign Ministry. Out of work and money, he turned to the Jewish Federation in Bucharest for help.)

In our meeting, I proposed to Bogdan that Rabbi Rosen (whom I had not yet met) be authorized to announce publicly throughout Romania that any Jew wishing to emigrate would be permitted to do so and that the Romanian government would furnish me with regular reports on the number of applications filed and the dates they were filed. The last part of the proposal called for Jews seeking to emigrate to Israel to register with the Israeli embassy in Bucharest.

Following several days of brinksmanship and an all-day session on July 4 at the Romanian embassy, we had an agreement. Bogdan had resisted at each step of the way, but after checking with Bucharest at the end of the day on July 4, he finally agreed to our proposal while conveying his unhappiness and that of his government.

The agreement was put on paper in an unsigned aide-mémoire. As a private person negotiating with a foreign government, I knew I would need State Department support, so with Bogdan at my side, I presented the agreement to the State Department. The department forwarded it the same day to the U.S. embassy in Bucharest, after which I sent a letter to Congressman Charles Vanik (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade, reporting on the successful negotiations and endorsing the renewal of MFN for Romania. With American Jewish support, a resolution in the House to block MFN was defeated and not even introduced in the Senate.

In October Rabbi Rosen proudly announced to a full synagogue of worshippers in Bucharest on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) that any Jew wishing to emigrate to Israel could register with the Romanian Jewish Federation. Within days, more than 600 people registered. Rabbi Rosen thought the initial burst would become a trickle, but by year-end the number reached 1,000. Importantly, after the July agreement there was only one case of an applicant being demoted in her job after applying for a passport—previously a common occurrence. Rabbi Rosen interceded, and the applicant, an English teacher, received her passport and emigrated to Israel.

For the next four or five years things went reasonably well. Each year President Ronald Reagan's administration recommended renewal of MFN for Romania and Congress did not oppose it. Each month I received from Bucharest a list of passport applicants with dates of their applications. I went over the names, checked on the time it took for an applicant to receive a passport, and helped those in need to settle in Israel.

Enter His Eminence, Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen

In December 1979 I learned that Congressman Vanik would be heading a congressional delegation to Eastern Europe in January and that his trip included a two-day stop in Bucharest. Congressman Vanik was a strong supporter of Jewish emigration from communist countries and was rightly proud that his name was attached to the famous Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act. I also heard that Congressman Vanik's delegation would meet with Ceaușescu, an opportunity I did not want to miss.

With encouragement from Congressman Vanik's office, the Conference of Presidents asked Jack Spitzer, the president of B'nai B'rith, and me to go to Bucharest. We were to meet with Rabbi Rosen and the Romanian Jewish community and then join the congressional delegation during its two days in country. Before leaving for Romania, I met with Congressman Vanik, State Department counselor Matt Nimetz, and Carl Schmidt, director of the Office of Eastern European Affairs at the State Department, to get an update on happenings in Romania.

For four years I had been promoting the right of Jews to leave Romania, and I felt a personal responsibility to see it through. For Jack Spitzer, Romania was a new experience. But what he lacked in knowledge of Romania and its Jews, he made up for in enthusiasm. Once in Bucharest, our first stop was the Jewish Federation offices adjoining the Choral Synagogue, where I had met the federation's leaders, but not Rabbi Rosen, four years before. This time Rabbi Rosen was the first to greet us, which he did with great warmth.

It was late afternoon on a cold January day. He quickly ushered Jack and me into his office to plan a trip the next day to Predeal in the Carpathian Mountains, where Ceaușescu was vacationing. We knew there could be no meaningful meeting with Ceaușescu concerning Romania's Jews without

Rabbi Rosen's presence and participation. This was the beginning of my close collaboration with him, which continued until his death in March 1994.

Rabbi Rosen's role as chief rabbi of Romania bore little resemblance to that of an American rabbi, even a prominent one. Rosen was Orthodox, but not Hasidic. Yet despite a steady drop in the number of Romanian Jews, to about 20,000 in 1976, Rabbi Rosen maintained the trappings of a traditional Hasidic rebbe, with a royal court of attendants, including a chief of protocol, a government relations specialist (fixer, I suppose), an appointments secretary, a sermon writer, another writer to edit the community's weekly newspaper with articles signed in Rabbi Rosen's name, plus personal attendants, secretaries, and a driver for his black Mercedes.

As the political and religious head of the Jewish community, he automatically had a seat in the Romanian Parliament. (Under the Romanian constitution adopted after the communists came to power in 1947, Jews were one of fourteen recognized "cults" whose leaders were entitled to membership in Parliament.) In short, he thought of himself, and acted, as a notable potentate.

Much about Rabbi Rosen's persona raised questions. His father had been a rabbi in Moldavia, a historical Romanian principality, and Rabbi Rosen claimed to have received rabbinic ordination in Vienna, but the details were sketchy. He survived World War II as a rabbi in Moldavia, where Jews were relatively safe under Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), the authoritarian prime minister and dictator of Romania during World War II who condoned murdering Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, both of which had been annexed by the Soviet Union before World War II, but not in the historic Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.

Among Rabbi Rosen's detractors was Alexandru Șafran, Rosen's predecessor and later the chief rabbi of Geneva, Switzerland. He had been deposed as Romania's chief rabbi by the communists in 1948 in favor of the more communist-compatible Rabbi Rosen. Rabbi Șafran later wrote a tell-all book about his life in Bucharest and his role as Romania's chief rabbi during World War II, sharply criticizing Rabbi Rosen's "takeover" as chief rabbi.

Rabbi Rosen clearly thought of himself as not just part of the Jewish community but as its undisputed—and unquestioned—leader whose directions others should follow even if he did not always follow them himself. To illustrate the point, he frequently talked about the obligation of childless Ro-

manian Jews to bequeath their property to the Jewish Federation, but this apparently did not apply to him. When he died in 1994, his sole beneficiary was his wife's nephew.

Imperfections aside, Rabbi Rosen was an engaging, energetic operator who kept alive and sustained the Jewish community in Romania. What he did was not always pretty or strictly kosher, but he was courageous and shrewd. He made a Faustian bargain with the communists that they would not interfere in the affairs of the Jewish community, and in return he would see to it that the Jewish community did not cause trouble for the government.

Under this unwritten pact, Romanian Jews lived as traditional Jews, practicing their religion, but were expected to stay out of politics. They were also under constant surveillance. One of my favorite photographs, taken in the Choral Synagogue in the late 1980s, shows me in the front row during the annual memorial service for Jews murdered by Romania's Iron Guard in 1940. On one side is Roger Kirk, the American ambassador. Seated next to us is the ambassador from Poland and to his left the Canadian ambassador. On my right is a Securitate agent sent to observe and record everything we said and did.

As far as I know, Rabbi Rosen never spoke truth to power in Romania, but given his role and responsibilities, this was understandable. The penalty for dissent in Romania was severe, with little to be gained. One either went along with Ceaușescu through silent acquiescence or ended up in prison under a penal system that was at best harsh and often brutal. At the same time, when outside Romania, Rabbi Rosen was not an apologist for Ceaușescu and did not sugarcoat the bad things that happened in Romania. I suppose he could get away with this because Ceaușescu saw the value of having someone speaking freely abroad who was not a Ceaușescu puppet, but Rabbi Rosen knew his limits.

No Jewish community in postwar Eastern Europe had an easy time, but Romania posed particular challenges. Romania's communist leaders, first Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, then Ceaușescu, came to power at the point of Soviet bayonets. Lacking a homegrown base, communism in Romania progressively turned inward, as its leaders sought to stoke feelings among its indigenous nationalities of pride in the country's traditions and culture. This put Jews, as an ethnic and religious minority, under suspicion of being less

than “purely Romanian.” In the eyes of non-Jewish Romanians, Jewish traditions and culture were different. They were linked to a separate Jewish existence in a Jewish world that did not include Romania.

In the same vein, from time to time Ceaușescu would allow, and perhaps encourage, virulent anti-Semitic articles in the tightly controlled Romanian press. These were written by his non-Jewish court poet-jester, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who after Ceaușescu’s death continued his anti-Semitic diatribes as the founder and leader of the crypto-fascist political party Romania Mare (Greater Romania). This went on for fifteen or so years after Ceaușescu’s death, until he did a complete turnabout, becoming philo-Semitic—perhaps influenced by an Israeli campaign strategist he had hired who had previously advised prominent Israeli politicians. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun.

The meeting in Predeal was scheduled for 9 a.m. This meant a 6 a.m. departure from Bucharest for the three-hour drive to Predeal, high in the Carpathian Mountains. It was January and still pitch dark when we left Bucharest. Once in Predeal, the sun’s welcome rays provided the first warmth of the day. We were high in the Carpathians with several feet of newly fallen snow—before us, young people walked to the lifts carrying their skis on their shoulders, and children whizzed down the snow-covered slopes on old-fashioned sleds. The few cars on the roads maneuvered to avoid pedestrians. Once inside Ceaușescu’s compound, we were greeted by Romania’s minister of cults, the word “religion” being taboo. He explained that there were fourteen cults in Romania. Two such groups, the Old Believers and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, were unknown to me.

Minutes later we were ushered into Ceaușescu’s villa, whereupon Rabbi Rosen whispered to me, “It is unbelievable for me, a Romanian Jew, to be received by Romania’s president with a government minister waiting in the snow to greet me, a room set aside for me to recite the morning prayers” (which by tradition cannot be said before sunrise). He then excused himself, went into an adjoining room, and said the morning prayers.

After prayers, we were ushered into Ceaușescu’s living room to meet the president. Ceaușescu was wearing a baggy turtleneck sweater and a pair of ill-fitting pants held up by elastic. The room was filled with baskets of withered

flowers extending as far as the eye could see. We were told they were gifts from Romania's "grateful" workers to his wife, Elena, in honor of her birthday two days before.

The meeting lasted more than two hours, common in Romania where brevity is not considered a virtue, but it was not uplifting. The absence of a common language and the delayed translation tended to produce stilted, largely hollow statements by Ceașescu. He sought to persuade us that Israel needed to be more forthcoming in solving the Palestinian issue, a theme I was to hear at home and abroad for the next forty years. He also spoke boastfully about the importance of his role in facilitating Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem in November 1977. Before the trip, Sadat had asked Ceașescu whether Israel's prime minister, Menachem Begin, was a strong leader and trustworthy. Ceașescu answered yes to both questions. (In my meeting with President Sadat five months later at his home in Mit Abu al-Kawm, Egypt, he told me that Ceașescu had indeed given him the assurances he was seeking, but that he had decided before his meeting with Ceașescu to go to Jerusalem.)

As for Jewish emigration, Ceașescu repeated more clearly the assurance he had given me in New York that any Jew wanting to emigrate to Israel would be allowed to go "in accordance with Romanian law." But here was the rub: Under Romanian law a Jew seeking permission to emigrate first had to go to the local police station to request an application for a passport. The application form was only given after a local committee tried to persuade the applicant not to apply. This had the intended chilling effect, particularly for Jews intimidated by a local committee of non-Jews in a country with a long history of virulent anti-Semitism. I had not been aware of this when I met with Bogdan in Washington the previous July.

Now was the time to fix this last part of the emigration problem. I asked Ceașescu to change the procedure so that any Jew who wanted to emigrate would receive an application directly from the Interior Ministry. He agreed. The change was made and the number of emigrants went up. Again, it was hard to equate this Ceașescu with the one who was the absolute ruler of an authoritarian communist country. When speaking, he did not exude the strength or the drama of Anwar Sadat, or the passion and steely determination of Menachem Begin.

It became clear from my meeting with Ceaușescu in Predeal that the agreement we had made the previous July in Washington reinforced for Romania the reality that on matters affecting Jewish communities abroad, American Jews had a legitimate and important say in U.S. government decision-making. Nothing short of this could account for the leader of a communist country spending more than two hours with two private American citizens discussing his country's emigration policies, for the courtesies shown to Rabbi Rosen, Jack Spitzer, and me.

Once the meeting was over, Rabbi Rosen took charge. Back in Bucharest after a three-hour drive, we went directly to the Jewish community's dining hall where more than 1,000 meals were served daily, mostly to persons who paid little or nothing. By the time we arrived, it was already past 2 p.m. The kitchen was closed, but a few elderly Jews remained to sit in the heated room and enjoy one another's company. We had now been awake since 5 a.m. and were getting wobbly.

Taking no notice of our fatigue, Rabbi Rosen proudly marched us through the kitchen and storage facilities and then up a long flight of stairs to a meeting hall complete with a stage where I would later see performances by the community's amateur actors. Next the indefatigable rabbi insisted we visit the Moses and Amalia Rosen Jewish Old Age Home—a replacement for the dilapidated Jewish Home for the Aged I had visited in 1976—which was a thirty-minute drive from the dining hall. We were due back at the Choral Synagogue at 5 p.m. for Friday night services.

Despite the rush, I was struck by the Old World manners surrounding us. The Romanians addressed Rabbi Rosen as “Your Eminence,” an honorific seldom bestowed on Jewish clerics. Peasants doffed their caps. In the synagogue, children rose unprompted in complete silence when Rabbi Rosen entered. Distinguished people from the world of music and government kissed Amalia Rosen's hand, a chivalrous gesture from another era. It seemed stiff and formal to me, but I said to myself, “Hey, this is the world of my ancestors.”

As the sun set, Rabbi Rosen ushered us into Bucharest's faded synagogue. Leading the Friday night service was the cantor, a distinguished older gentleman with the familiar, non-Romanian name, Willie, who, despite his age, had a magnificent, resonant voice. None of the well-known modern Israeli

melodies had crept into the service. When I closed my eyes and listened to the cantor and choir, I was magically transported to the synagogue I had attended as a boy in Baltimore. Seated on the bema, I was also conscious that I was wearing new yellow boots my daughters had given me before I left for Romania. Sartorial splendor was not a Romanian distinction, but even in Romania, yellow boots stood out as less than decorous. My only consolation was the realization that I had not asked to sit on the bema; I was there because Rabbi Rosen put me there.

Following the service, we waited in the federation's offices next to the synagogue for the arrival of the U.S. congressional delegation. Again, I wondered how the Romanian government felt when such an important delegation decided that the first person it would see in Romania was Rabbi Rosen. Congressman Vanik had insisted on this. The seven-member delegation included my congressman, Joseph Fisher (D-Va.), and two congressmen friends from my Dartmouth days. Rabbi Rosen gave a virtuoso performance, summarizing the situation in Romania, focusing on the Jewish community.

The only negative voice came from Congressman Richard Schulze (R-Pa.), who led the opposition in the House to the renewal of MFN for Romania. He took out of his pocket several Israeli newspaper articles critical of Romania and Rabbi Rosen and, after standing up to add emphasis, sharply questioned the rabbi about the stories. Rabbi Rosen replied, in typical Talmudic fashion, with questions of his own. "Why ask me about stories in the Israeli press? Why not ask the persons who wrote them? I am only a rabbi, not a storyteller." Schulze quickly realized he was in a fight he was not going to win and sat down. The meeting ended with all seven U.S. congressmen, assorted congressional staff, U.S. Ambassador Reuben Aggrey, members of the American embassy staff, and others raising champagne glasses and toasting Rabbi Rosen with "L'chaim!"—To life!

The last stop was the Intercontinental Hotel, less than a mile from the synagogue. Because it was now the Sabbath, Rabbi Rosen had to walk on a bitter cold night through the snow-covered streets of Bucharest. I accompanied him out of respect and admiration. Once inside the hotel, we joined the congressional delegation being feted by the Romanian National Orchestra in the ballroom. It was totally incongruous, a luxurious floor-lit room with glass walls and chandeliers and a small all-male orchestra decked out in white ties

and tails to honor the chief rabbi of Romania, in a historically anti-Semitic country run by communist toughies.

Dinner did not end until well after midnight. Congressman Vanik announced that the delegation would leave at 8 a.m. the next morning for a meeting with the minister of trade. In the morning, a bleary-eyed congressional delegation stumbled through a meeting intended to discuss trade between our two countries, but which quickly became a speechathon that filled the allotted time with meaningless oratory. From the Ministry of Trade we proceeded en masse to two of Bucharest's architectural relics a few miles away, the parliament building, home to the Grand National Assembly, and, next to it, the Patriarchal Cathedral.

The parliament building was historic but not functional. The straight-back wooden chairs were unusable. The socialist realism art interspersed with portraits of long-deceased parliamentarians, with unlikelike faces and stiff poses, was out of place. A garish National Socialist Republic shield in the entrance hall added a further discordant note, reminding us that the doctrine of separation of powers did not exist in communist Romania. Ceaușescu's wishes became law in form and in fact. A visit to the cathedral next door did not dispel my gloom. A peasant woman in a black dress and shawl was squatting on the floor while a similarly dressed woman hovered over the communion offerings.

The congressional delegation quickly moved on, to meet with Ceaușescu. By prearrangement, Jack and I headed to the Foreign Ministry to meet with Corneliu Bogdan, still head of the North American Section, and his deputy from his Washington days, Mircea Raceanu. There we were joined by the deputy director of the Office for Passports in the Interior Ministry. (Raceanu was later convicted of treason and sentenced to death for giving classified documents to the CIA. He was pardoned in 2002.)

The next morning we were whisked from our hotel in downtown Bucharest to Otopeni Airport (now renamed Henri Coandă International Airport), where we were escorted to the Tarom plane to New York. As we boarded the plane, the flight attendant handed me Romanian newspapers with front-page pictures of Jack and me meeting with Ceaușescu. When I arrived home, I proudly showed the pictures to one of my daughters, who remarked dismissively, "It's easy to be famous abroad," to which I wearily nodded assent.

Rabbi Rosen Comes to Washington

After arranging our January 1980 meeting with Ceaușescu in Romania, Rabbi Rosen came to Washington each year, and the two of us met with senators and administration officials to bolster MFN. Rosen, in his rabbinic garb, would shuffle from office to office explaining, with impressive theatrics, that despite communist oppression and the despotism of Ceaușescu's totalitarian government, Romanian Jews were free to emigrate to Israel. Congress was not Rabbi Rosen's only stop. We regularly met with State Department officials, including the deputy secretary of state, John Whitehead.

Secretary Whitehead never seemed to tire of Rabbi Rosen's stories, and the meetings would often run into overtime, driving his staffers to distraction. Not the least disturbed, Rabbi Rosen would keep on talking about the perils of Jewish life in communist Romania. Secretary Whitehead knew a great deal about Eastern Europe from his frequent visits to the region and was an innovative thinker and doer in U.S. efforts to wean the satellite countries of Eastern Europe away from the Soviet Union.

In meetings with Americans, neither Rabbi Rosen nor I defended Ceaușescu or his government. In fact, in my only congressional testimony on MFN, I described the situation in Romania as "horrible." This obviously did not endear me to the Romanian government, but it needed American Jewish support for MFN as much as we needed leverage to persuade Romania to allow its Jews to emigrate to Israel. It was a workable but never comfortable arrangement—diplomacy is rarely about negotiating with friends.

In recognition of Rabbi Rosen's activism, in 1982 the Romanian embassy hosted a lunch in his honor. Rabbi Arthur Schneier and I were invited to attend. Schneier, born in Austria, was a close friend of Rabbi Rosen. In addition to being the senior rabbi at one of New York's large Orthodox synagogues, he was chairman of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, an interdenominational group of clerics and business leaders operating worldwide. The conversation at lunch was the usual exchange of pleasantries, but then, as we were about to get up from the table, Rabbi Rosen remained seated, took from his pocket a prayer book, and proceeded to chant in Hebrew the entire Birkat Hamazon, the blessings after a meal. As in Predeal, our communist Romanian hosts waited for the rabbi to finish his prayers.

I matched Rabbi Rosen's trips to Washington with trips of my own to Bucharest to check on emigration and remind the Romanians the deal was a two-way street. American Jewish support for MFN required Romania to allow its Jews to emigrate.

Hanukkah in Romania

One of the benefits for me of my involvement in helping Romania's Jews emigrate to freedom was to receive an invitation to visit small Jewish communities throughout Romania as part of Rabbi Rosen's annual Hanukkah tour.

In 1983 and 1984, two of my daughters and I joined Rabbi Rosen for his annual Hanukkah tours of Jewish communities. During the eight days of Hanukkah we traveled from sunup to late at night, crisscrossing Romania by bus, visiting four or five synagogues each day. Our little caravan with a police escort was led by Rabbi and Mrs. Rosen, who were seated in the back seat of his Mercedes. Amalia Rosen, an attorney by profession, preferred to speak French. The rabbi was at home in six languages: Romanian, German, French, Hebrew, Yiddish, and English.

Among our dozen or so travel companions were a CIA official attached to the American embassy and Avram Burg, later speaker of the Israeli Knesset and, still later, head of the Jewish Agency worldwide. The sixty-person Romanian Jewish choir, traveling on a separate bus, would sing at each stop. Then someone in our delegation would speak, followed by the rabbi. The drama was repeated at every stop. Elderly Jews waited in cold, half-empty synagogues, sometimes for hours, for the triumphal entrance of the chief rabbi in his full rabbinic regalia, a purple robe, gold chain around his neck, holding a large Star of David, and wearing a miter hat fit for a bishop or someone of high ecclesiastical rank—quite fitting for someone addressed as "Your Eminence." Combining an inspirational retelling of Hanukkah, the story of the Maccabees as brave defenders of Jewish traditions against the intrusion of Greek culture, with exhortations as to how Romania's Jews must now preserve and protect their Jewish way of life by emulating the Maccabees, his talks were masterful, reaching a high point in fifteen minutes or so.

This was followed by the lighting of the Hanukkah candles, Rabbi Rosen's dramatic exodus from the synagogue, the choir singing, and the congregants

looking with tear-filled faces as their spiritual leader walked slowly, ever so slowly, out of the synagogue. For me, it was both an emotional drain and an endurance contest. Emotional because seeing mostly elderly Jews listening to a Romanian rabbi in unheated synagogues in a far-away country called up in my imagination pictures of centuries of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. And an endurance contest because to stay awake for an hour or longer listening to speeches in Romanian was an ordeal in itself, particularly after only a few hours' sleep the night before.

The rabbi invariably called on me to speak after introducing me in flowery style as a world Jewish leader and adviser to U.S. presidents. I would then speak for five or ten minutes about Jewish history and the unity of the Jewish people. The mere fact that I was from the United States and had traveled behind the Iron Curtain to Romania for Hanukkah was all the congregants needed to hear in order to welcome me, but Rabbi Rosen was not to be dissuaded from extolling my virtues, many of which were unknown to me.

One such evening stands forever engraved in my memory. It was in Iasi, a historic city in eastern Romania, where the congregation had been waiting for three hours for the appearance of His Eminence. We were very late and did not arrive until after 9 p.m.; the rabbi was exhausted. He was counting on me to speak first so he could rest, but fate was not kind to him. I, too, was exhausted, so instead of giving my usual speech, I quoted the Jewish saying "From Moses to Moses there was no one like Moses." The reference was to "Moshe Rabenu," the Moses of the Bible, and the "Rambam," Moses Maimonides, a famous twelfth-century Jewish philosopher. I continued, "Whereas the Jewish people had to wait three thousand years from Moshe Rabenu to the Rambam, tonight you will only have to wait thirty seconds from this Moses to Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen." An unhappy Rabbi Rosen rose slowly to his feet.

Rabbi Rosen never ceased to amaze me. On the first night of Hanukkah in 1983, we traveled by train from Bucharest to Falticeni, deep in Moldavia, where Rosen had served as a young rabbi in the 1930s. When we exited the train at 5 a.m. and entered the small wooden Falticeni train station, only a few Romanians were there, all huddled around a wood stove to protect them from the winter cold. Rabbi Rosen suddenly stopped, turned around to our little group trailing behind, raised his cane, and announced in a loud voice,

“Morning prayers will begin at seven in Falticeni’s synagogue,” but then he added, “For those of you who prefer to say prayers in your rooms, breakfast will be served at eight thirty.” To no one’s surprise, the rabbi and I were the only ones who made it to synagogue.

Most of the synagogues in small villages we visited had been recently refurbished. The newly polished floors glistened. They had not been trod upon for one reason: There were no Jews left. They had gone to Israel. Despite the absence of Jews, Rabbi Rosen saw it his duty to preserve the artifacts of Jewish life in a Romania that had once existed. It was different in Iasi, Cluj, Timișoara, Targu Mureș, Bacau, Brașov, and other larger communities where Jewish life continued, but, with a few exceptions, the small shtetls had disappeared.

The two exceptions I saw were in Dorohoi and Piatra Neamt. I visited both as part of the rabbi’s Hanukkah tour. Dorohoi, a small village nestled close to the Ukraine border, still housed a small functioning wooden synagogue. The Jewish community was led by Reb Wasserman (in the Orthodox tradition, the honorific “Reb” is bestowed on a learned person who is not a rabbi). Reb Wasserman was like a character out of a Sholem Aleichem play, with his gray beard, dark, penetrating eyes, and ill-fitting gabardines. He seemed ageless. On this particular morning, he led the service, which was attended by the few Jews still around plus our caravan of seventy or so. When we filed out of the small synagogue, curious villagers were peering over wooden fences gazing at these Jews who had come to Dorohoi in December to celebrate “their Christmas.”

Piatra Neamt in Moldavia was less isolated and far bigger, but the synagogue was even older. Built centuries before of rough-hewn unfinished logs on the outside, the small synagogue was warm and welcoming inside. It dated from the time of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic movement in the early eighteenth century, who is thought to have visited Moldavia on one of his historic missions to the Jews. According to legend, the Baal Shem Tov prayed in this synagogue later in the eighteenth century. After evening services in what the local Jewish community called “Baal Shem Tov’s shul,” we were invited to a private home next door for dinner. As I was walking over, Amalia Rosen whispered to me, “The knaidels”—potato dumplings—“are ‘the best in the world.’ They go down like ice cubes.”

This was repeated at dinner, and sure enough, the knaidels went down as smoothly as ice cubes.

Last Meeting with Ceaușescu, February 1986

By 1986 the winds of change were already blowing across the communist world. The previous year, Mikhail Gorbachev had taken over leadership of the Soviet Union after two infirm, aging leaders in the Brezhnev mold died in rapid order. With Gorbachev came *glasnost*, openness, and *perestroika*, restructuring; the reins of communist control began to loosen across the region. The more communism buckled elsewhere, the more Ceaușescu tightened his control in Romania, leading to new economic lows and political oppression. Those of us in the United States who tried to help Romania's Jews were worried. After consulting with others, Jack Spitzer and I decided to return to Bucharest for another visit with Ceaușescu. It was to be my third and last meeting with Romania's dictator.

Ceaușescu received us in his office at Communist Party headquarters in Bucharest, the same building from which he would flee by helicopter three years later. In addition to Rabbi Rosen, we were accompanied by the American ambassador to Romania, Roger Kirk, a great supporter and warm friend. He and his wife, Betty, insisted I stay with them in Bucharest. In our meeting, Ceaușescu agreed to allow the Baptist Bible to be printed in Romania, to free two imprisoned Christian clergymen, and to allow the Romanian Jewish choir to travel to Washington a few months later to sing in the rotunda of the Capitol at the annual congressional Holocaust memorial ceremony. When I raised the issue of the choir's travel, Ceaușescu first responded that it was up to Tarom to decide whether or not to fly the choir to the United States. This was patently false. Ceaușescu controlled Tarom and everything else in Romania. When I mentioned that a favorable word from him could be helpful with Tarom, he grumpily acknowledged that might be so—and on this occasion, it was.

The Romanian Jewish Choir Visits Washington

On a bright sunny morning in May 1986, seventy young Romanian Jews walked down the ramp of a Tarom Boeing 707 at New York's Kennedy Airport, along with Rabbi Rosen and his wife, Amalia, the choir director, Izu Gott, and three Romanian Jewish community leaders with fancy titles I had come to know from my many trips to Bucharest. A man named Zilberstein was the only one who spoke English and was fittingly given the title of chief of protocol.

I had raised the money for the choir's visit from prominent Jewish donors, including Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress and CEO of the Seagram Company Ltd.; we "shook hands" on it over the phone. A few weeks later when I called back to get the money, my call was transferred to Israel Singer, the secretary general of the World Jewish Congress. Singer had a reputation of trying to walk back, if not reverse, Bronfman's commitments, and this was no exception. He told me that Bronfman had decided to cut his commitment in half. Knowing Singer's ways, I had expected as much and was prepared: I told him that if Bronfman did not pay the full amount, the Romanian choir would picket outside New York City's Seagram Building on Park Avenue holding placards reading, "Edgar Bronfman won't give us the money to fly home." Singer mumbled that I would receive the money—and I did.

Once the choir landed in New York, representatives of the American Jewish Committee shepherded the young singers around the city with stops at the usual tourist attractions—the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, and the United Nations. The next day the choir sang in Philadelphia's Independence Hall before traveling to Washington for an evening's performance at the Israeli embassy. This, too, had its difficult moments. The Israeli ambassador, Meir Rosenne, born in Romania, had concerns about Rabbi Rosen's having cozied up to Romania's communists.

Now in Washington, the Romanian choir, with Rabbi Rosen in the lead, headed down the steps of the tour bus and into the Israeli embassy. The atmosphere was frosty. But all changed when the choir, young Jews who had never set foot outside Romania, began to sing their program of Yiddish, Romanian, and Hebrew songs. I looked over to see Ambassador Rosenne and

his wife, their eyes filled with tears. A few moments later, the choir director, Izu Gott, raised his accordion and began playing the hora. There was Meir in the middle of the circle dancing with Rabbi Rosen. After that, Rosenne and Rabbi Rosen became friends. Rosenne wisely understood that regardless of any putative taint in Rabbi Rosen's political past, he was the person keeping Jewish life and culture alive in Romania.

The choir's performance of the same program the next day in the rotunda of the Capitol was equally moving, ending this time with an English rendition of "Oh, Susannah!" This was the first time a choir from behind the Iron Curtain had appeared publicly in Washington, and it was widely reported in the press and on television. I was interviewed on ABC's *Nightline* about the visit. The next morning the choir performed for Vice President George H. W. Bush at the White House before leaving by bus for a cookout at our home in McLean, Virginia. When the hamburgers were on the grill, our daughter Amalie put out a tray of bananas. Within seconds, all eighty bananas were gone, snatched by the eager hands of those with painful memories of empty stomachs. It was a telling indicator of the sad conditions in Romania.

The Waning of Ceaușescu's Reign and Saving the Great Synagogue

Romania's Jews shared their countrymen's fate as victims of Ceaușescu's ever-increasing megalomania. One of his grand schemes in the 1980s was to eliminate Romania's foreign debt to show foreign lenders he did not need them. This was after they refused to expand Romania's credit lines. Over the next decade, Romania repaid its entire foreign debt, but the Romanian people paid the price, not Ceaușescu. Imports were slashed, and whatever in Romania could be sold was sold. Harsh austerity drastically reduced Romania's already low standard of living. Imported goods disappeared from store shelves. Long lines formed outside food stores whenever there was a rumor that meat or some other scarce commodity might become available. Streetlights everywhere in Romania were permanently dimmed.

The prevailing economic gloom, combined with Ceaușescu's delusional self-promotion as the "Genius of the Carpathians," led him to embark in the 1980s on an insane project to construct a massive Romanesque government center in downtown Bucharest dedicated to the glory of socialism. The outra-

geous \$2 billion price tag was staggering for a country whose citizens were without food, housing, and heat. But the Genius of the Carpathians could not be denied.

One of the historic buildings slated for the wrecking ball to make way for Ceaușescu's building program was the Great Synagogue, built in 1845. On a July morning in 1986, I received a frantic telephone call from Rabbi Rosen telling me that he had just come from a meeting with the Israeli ambassador, who had met that same morning with the mayor of Bucharest. The ambassador had sought the mayor's assurance that the Great Synagogue and the historic Sephardic Synagogue, built by descendants of Jews who had left Spain after the Inquisition, would be spared demolition. The mayor told the ambassador not to worry; both synagogues would be preserved. Thinking all was well, the ambassador planned to walk by the Sephardic Synagogue on his way back to his embassy. Rounding the corner, he was shocked. The Sephardic Synagogue was gone; it had been demolished the night before. When Rabbi Rosen heard the news, he rightly feared that the Great Synagogue would be the next to go. He immediately called me, asking for help.

After I hung up, I called the State Department. Within an hour I was seated in the office of Thomas W. Simons Jr., regional director for Eastern European affairs (later the American ambassador to Poland), along with his deputy, Mark Palmer (later our ambassador to Hungary), and the Eastern European area director, Martin Wenick. All agreed that if the Great Synagogue were destroyed, it would irreparably damage our relations with Romania. The situation was serious enough for us to get on the calendar that day with Rozanne Ridgway, assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs. On this occasion, as on others, Roz was fully on board. She took the matter to the top, briefing Secretary Shultz, also a stalwart on human and religious rights. He pressed the matter a few weeks later at a meeting with Romania's foreign minister, Ioan Totu, on the margins of the annual UN General Assembly session in New York. Roz reported that Secretary Shultz told his Romanian counterpart that if the Great Synagogue were destroyed, the U.S. government would reexamine its relations with Romania. That did it. The Great Synagogue was spared and is still in use today. Completely renovated, it is an architectural and historic gem fully functioning as a synagogue.

Later the same year, the saga of the Great Synagogue produced another

unexpected call, this time from my friend Elyakim Rubinstein, at the Israeli embassy. Ely, a highly respected retired justice and former deputy president of the Israeli Supreme Court, was then the Israeli chargé in the absence of Ambassador Meir Rosenne. An Orthodox Jew and great storyteller, Ely was all business that day as he read to me what he called “an official statement from my government.” The statement was along the lines of “Mr. Moses, we know you are very active in efforts to save the Great Synagogue in Bucharest. Please be advised that the Government of Israel has a special relationship with the Government of Romania and that this special relationship is in danger of being compromised because of your activities on behalf of the Great Synagogue. Please bear this in mind in your future dealings.”

Apparently, the Jewish state of Israel was fearful of offending Romania if I spoke up in defense of the historic synagogue. It was pressuring me to back off. At first I was speechless. Then I asked Ely if there was anything more he wanted to say. When he said no, barely containing my anger I said that I appreciated his government’s words, but that I intended to do all I could to save the Great Synagogue. Not to be outdone, Ely replied, “I have read you my government’s message. Now I will add my personal words; I agree with you,” and hung up.

The years 1987 to 1989 were even darker for Romania. Fewer and fewer Westerners visited Romania, a country that seemed to be withdrawing within itself. Rather than expose his country to withering criticism in the U.S. Congress, Ceaușescu renounced MFN, thereby virtually closing the door to Romanian exports to the United States. Street riots and demonstrations followed. The end was near. The only thing not known was how soon and by whom Ceaușescu would be overthrown.

POST-CEAUȘESCU ROMANIA AND MEETING NEW PRESIDENT ION ILIESCU

On Christmas Day, 1989, Carol and I were in the Bahamas with our four children and first grandchild, belatedly celebrating my sixtieth birthday, when we saw the trial and execution of Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu on television.

I assumed that the end of the Ceaușescu regime and the fall of communism signaled the end to my efforts on behalf of Romania's Jews, who would now be free to emigrate. But I soon found that my ties to the Jewish community and particularly to Rabbi Rosen were enduring. He continued to ask for my help in caring for the dwindling Jewish community and ensuring his own safety and well-being.

Three months after the revolution, I was back in Romania. Soldiers were on the streets; order had broken down; the economy barely functioned. Inflation was rampant. Rabbi Rosen was full of stories about the personal dangers he faced during the revolution when hundreds of people were killed. His concern—not unfounded, considering the history of anti-Semitism in his part of the world—was that the chaotic conditions would result in violence against Romania's Jews, and that his dealings with Ceaușescu would lead to his denunciation by Ceaușescu's successors. Fortunately for him, the new Iliescu-led government did not hunt down former Ceaușescu go-betweens. Moreover, Rabbi Rosen was nimble enough to join the anti-Ceaușescu crusade, publicly condemning Ceaușescu immediately after his downfall.

I had never heard of Ion Iliescu before seeing him interviewed on television as the newly chosen head of the National Salvation Front and then of the Provisional Government of Romania. However, when I went to Romania a second time after the revolution, Rabbi Rosen arranged for me to meet newly elected President Iliescu and other government officials, including the new minister of religion. For close to an hour President Iliescu and I chatted amiably in a large formal room in Cotroceni, the newly refurbished presidential palace, a beautiful transformed monastery set in a botanical garden.

My first impression of President Iliescu proved a lasting one. He was down-to-earth, open, and plain-speaking and had none of the airs of a self-important head of state. He thought of himself as a man of the people. The only other person present in our meeting was the president's adviser, Ion Mircea Pascu, who laughed loudly at my weak attempts at humor. (In 2001 Pascu became Iliescu's defense minister; he is now vice president of the European Parliament.)

At the end of the meeting, President Iliescu suggested that I meet with Prime Minister Theodor Stolojan, who had been Ceaușescu's head of central

planning. Stolojan had succeeded Prime Minister Petre Roman after a second coal miners' raid on Bucharest resulted in a split between Iliescu and Roman. Five years later those raids contributed to Iliescu's losing his bid for reelection. It was a cold, rainy day and already dark when I was driven through the unlit streets of Bucharest to the prime minister's office. Stolojan was sitting at his desk, which was lit by a single bulb. His skin was ashen, his gray hair was thinning, and he had a weary look on his face. He was struggling with a railway workers' strike and a huge budget deficit with no prospect of increasing government revenues. It was quickly apparent that neither of us knew why President Iliescu had sent me to him. We chatted aimlessly for a few minutes, then I left.

I later heard that the railway workers' strike was settled, but I never learned what the strikers received in return for going back to work. Prime Minister Stolojan's real accomplishment came a few months later when he steered through Romania's Parliament a new constitution modeled on the constitution of France's Fifth Republic. Prime Minister Stolojan resigned after the 1992 Romanian elections and joined the staff of the World Bank in Washington as a senior adviser, where I saw him from time to time. We remain friends.

I met with President Iliescu again when he came to Washington in May 1993 for the dedication of the Holocaust Museum. I hosted a lunch for him with U.S. government officials and others at my law offices on Pennsylvania Avenue. The same year, I met with Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Nastase. I gave a lunch for him, and he in return gave a dinner for me in Bucharest when I visited in October 1993. After serving as prime minister ten years later, Nastase lost his bid for president in 2004 and subsequently went to prison, convicted of corruption while in office.

It was now late 1993, and again I thought my mission to Romania was over. Rabbi Rosen was safe, and the Jewish community in Romania was no longer in danger of anti-Semitic outbursts. Moreover, it was now up to Romania to decide its future. I turned my attention to my law practice. Two years before, I had been elected national president of the American Jewish Committee, a demanding job in itself. And by then Carol and I had six grandchildren! But life for me took a different turn, and Romania called me back.

ON THE AMBASSADOR TRACK

Little in Washington happens by chance. It all depends on timing and the people in a position to make things happen. Sometimes it is an influential member of Congress, other times a major business leader with close ties to the top rungs of government, but it can also be someone in government who, because of his or her position or relationships within government, can make things happen. This was borne out by my becoming the American ambassador to Romania.

On a gray, rainy day in November 1993 I had lunch with my friend Marc Grossman at Kinkead's, a well-known restaurant in downtown Washington. Marc and I had worked together in the Carter White House.

When I arrived at the White House in 1980, I did not know President Jimmy Carter, but the administration was in trouble as a result of an ill-considered vote in the UN Security Council strongly deploring Israel's settlement policy in the "occupied Arab territories including Jerusalem." The resolution as it applied to Jerusalem was contrary to assurances President Carter had given to Prime Minister Menachem Begin the previous year that the status of Jerusalem would not change without Israel's concurrence. Without giving the matter much thought, President Carter had approved Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's recommendation that the United States vote in favor of the resolution. The UN vote took place on Saturday, March 1, 1980. On the following Monday morning the Jewish community and its supporters in Washington were up in arms. President Carter issued a mea culpa that made him look either incompetent or uncaring. He was neither, but the president had badly botched this one, and his relationship with a constituency that was important to his reelection hopes was under strain.

With the administration in full retreat, three White House wise men, Lloyd Cutler, the president's counsel, Sol Linowitz, a close confidant of the president, and Stuart Eizenstat, the president's domestic affairs adviser, put their heads together. I was told that Sol suggested that someone like Al Moses join the White House staff as special adviser to the president for Jewish affairs—the post was suddenly vacant as the result of a medical emergency—whereupon Stu piped up and said, "That's a good idea. Let's get Al." And so it was.

The job was two-hatted: advising the president on matters affecting Jews and reaching out to the Jewish community in an effort to calm the waters on behalf of the administration. To keep abreast of critical Middle East issues affecting Israel, so important to the Jewish community, I needed the State Department's help. The White House asked Hal Saunders, the assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, to dispatch someone to the White House to advise me. The short straw fell to Marc Grossman, a highly regarded junior Foreign Service officer who had recently served in Pakistan and was now Assistant Secretary Saunders's hand-picked assistant. For the next ten months, until the end of the Carter administration, Marc did his best to keep me informed and out of trouble in a three-way tug-of-war among the White House, the State Department, and the Jewish community. Those White House years cemented our friendship, which continues to this day. Marc had a spectacular State Department career culminating in his appointment as under secretary of state for political affairs, the third-ranking position in the department and the highest that career officials (as opposed to political appointees) can attain. Later he served under President Barack Obama as special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He also knew Eastern Europe and Romania from his frequent trips to the region and knew of my activities in Romania. When we met for lunch in November 1993, Marc was the executive secretary of the State Department.

At lunch our conversation started with the usual convivial niceties about family and career. Suddenly Marc looked at me, his eyes half closed, a faint smile on his face, and said, "Al, are you still interested in Romania?" I said yes, thinking it was a harmless statement leading nowhere. I was wrong. Marc continued: "Our present ambassador to Romania, John Davis, has been in Washington for a year undergoing medical treatment and will not be returning to Bucharest. Do you have an interest in being ambassador?"

I blurted out, "Marc, that's a great idea, but I don't know anyone in the White House. I did not contribute to President Clinton's campaign, and anyway, I am not a Foreign Service officer, so the State Department will not support me." Marc in his usual calming voice said, "Well, Al, think it over. You know a lot about Romania. Why don't you speak to people who can help," meaning, I thought, people I knew from my Carter days, members of Congress and others in and out of government who might be helpful. There was no suggestion or indication that the State Department would support me

or any real likelihood that the White House would either. Nevertheless, I was intrigued and decided to give it a try.

The position and function of executive secretary to the State Department are little known outside Washington cognoscenti. The executive secretary is at the center of the written communications hub at the department. Fortunately for me, no one was more adept at moving pieces on the State Department chess board than Marc, who, despite his quiet, unassuming manner, had extraordinary bureaucratic skills and deftness. Marc's encouragement was enough to get me thinking about being ambassador to Romania. Rabbi Rosen was still chief rabbi, and I knew Romania's president, Ion Iliescu, and a few others at the top in Romania.

I was then a senior partner in the Washington, D.C., law firm of Covington & Burling, one of whose distinguished partners had been the former secretary of state, Dean G. Acheson. When I was a young lawyer, I revered him as the architect of post-World War II U.S. foreign policy. My most memorable recollection of Mr. Acheson was a chance encounter with him in January 1961 when I entered the downtown building where the firm had its offices early the Monday morning following John F. Kennedy's inauguration the previous Friday. A foot of snow had fallen the night before the inauguration, and it remained bitterly cold three days later.

Just as I entered the building, the six-foot-two, mustachioed former secretary of state strode into the lobby wearing a pearl gray fedora and a full-length black overcoat while vigorously clapping his gloved hands. As we rode up together in the elevator, he was in obvious high spirits, talking about the dinner he had attended on Saturday at the White House. He said, "It was a wonderful evening; the president was there." This struck me as odd: Of course President Kennedy was there; where else would he be? Only later did I realize that "the president" meant Harry Truman, whom Acheson had served for four years as secretary of state. To Acheson, "the president" would always be President Truman.

Acheson's words resounded in me. I thought about the excitement of public life and the opportunity to shape history that comes with it. As a young man, I aspired to be a part of that legacy, although I could scarcely fathom its actual contours then.

After my lunch with Marc, I planned first to speak with Carol, who had been in Romania with me seventeen years before and had vowed never to return.

As it turned out, our oldest daughter, Barbara, a lawyer in New York, was home for the Thanksgiving holiday, so I decided to try out the idea on her. She liked it. With this encouragement, I screwed up the courage to ask Carol, who surprisingly did not say no; she only said, "You're crazy. You have no chance of being appointed." Then, with her usual high spirits, she added, "If you want to try, it is fine with me."

Looking for Support

My first call was to President Carter at the Carter Center in Atlanta. In addition to my White House hat advising him on Jewish affairs, I had been lead counsel to the president in the "Billygate" affair in which the president's brother, Billy Carter, had caused a huge political problem for the president that gripped the nation for a few months. As lead counsel I was immersed in it from the beginning: spending a weekend with President Carter at Camp David working on his speech to the nation, reporting to Congress as special counsel to the president, representing witnesses at congressional hearings, dealing with a Justice Department investigation and press briefings in the White House. Eventually Billygate was buried and forgotten—just another one of our nation's "much ado about nothings."

From this crucible a strong personal bond developed between President Carter and me. I liked him and he clearly trusted me. When I called in late 1993 to ask for his support of my bid to be appointed ambassador to Romania, he immediately offered to write to President Clinton on my behalf.

I next reached out to my old friend Lane Kirkland, head of the AFL-CIO, whom I knew socially in Washington and with whom I had traveled in Israel. It is difficult to explain today the power and weight that the leader of the nation's largest labor union had in official Washington then, particularly with a Democratic administration in the White House. Kirkland's dedication on Jewish issues came from the heart as well as the head. Lane's wife, Irena, and her identical twin sister had been born in Czechoslovakia and had survived Auschwitz. Kirkland had been in the Merchant Marine in World War II and still talked like an old salt. When I called explaining that I wanted to talk to him about being ambassador to Romania, he replied with his usual bonhomie, "Al, come on over." As soon as I entered his cavernous offices on Sixteenth Street, a block from the White House, he exclaimed, "Al, you will

be a great ambassador to Romania. It is the best thing those bastards in the White House ever did.” Kirkland was still upset with the Clinton administration for its championing the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, among the United States, Canada, and Mexico, which the AFL-CIO vigorously opposed. Lane mentioned the names of union leaders in Romania and promised to get behind my nomination. He, too, sent a message to the White House, which was eager to mend its fences with the AFL-CIO.

Support came from others in government, such as Connecticut’s senior senator, Joseph I. Lieberman. We first met when he arrived in Washington as a junior senator in 1988. Our common domain was the Jewish world and our regular attendance at a small Orthodox Jewish synagogue in downtown Washington where we schmoozed after (and sometimes during) services. Unexpected support also came from Senator Paul Simon of Illinois. I did not know the senator personally, but his chief of staff had worked with me on Romanian matters when he was at the State Department. On his own initiative, he drafted a letter for Senator Simon to send to President Clinton. It was a classic, saying, in effect: “I have been to Bucharest, and if Al Moses wants to go there as ambassador, send him.”

I have often thought that the most consequential endorsement may have been one that came from an unlikely source, a former law client, Louis Ramsey, the chairman of Simmons National Bank in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Simmons’s bank had gotten caught up in the early 1980s in a savings and loan scandal, and I was lead counsel to the bank in the follow-on investigation. Ramsey had been chair of the board of trustees of the University of Arkansas when Bill Clinton graduated from Yale Law School and returned to Arkansas to launch his political career. Clinton had been hired to teach law at the university. Now, Ramsey wrote directly to Clinton, which at least helped with his Arkansan inner circle and possibly with the president himself. In time, others at the White House such as the president’s adviser, Rahm Emanuel (now mayor of Chicago), and my longtime friend Richard Schifter, then serving as a senior official on the National Security Council staff, gave me a big boost. By January 1994, I was sufficiently confident that I would become ambassador that when Rabbi Rosen visited Washington late that month, I told him, in confidence, that I expected to be nominated. He was thrilled to hear the news. Sadly, he died two months later, before I took up my posting.

As it turned out, there was a last-minute hiccup. Tony Lake and Sandy Berger, the president's national security adviser and deputy national security adviser, had proposed one of their senior staff as our ambassador to Romania. Again, Richard Schifter came to my rescue, persuading Sandy that I was a better fit for Romania based on my experience there and my prominence in the Jewish community.

The president signed off on my nomination in August, and my name went to the Senate a few days later. After a routine hearing before the Europe Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, presided over by Senator Joseph R. Biden (D-Del.), my name, along with those of four other proposed ambassadors, went to the Senate. In late September our nominations were unanimously confirmed.

Much later I learned that I was not just the White House's but also the State Department's choice for ambassador. Since I was not a Foreign Service officer, this was unusual and was due entirely to Marc Grossman's support. It was not the last time Marc would work his magic on my behalf. Five years later I became President Clinton's presidential special envoy for the Cyprus conflict. At the time Marc was the assistant secretary of state for European affairs and suggested my appointment to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, whom I also knew from our days together in the Carter White House.

Back to School—Ambassador School

After our confirmation by the Senate, the next step was "ambassador school." Five of us attended—Marc Grossman, ambassador to Turkey; Charles E. Redman, Germany; Johnnie Carson, Zimbabwe; and Jerome Gary Cooper, Jamaica—and our wives. We represented the "new look" at the State Department. Marc and I were Jewish; Johnnie and Gary were African American; only Charles Redman was cut from the traditional Foreign Service cloth.

Ambassador school was run by two veteran Foreign Service officers. Langhorne A. Motley had been U.S. ambassador to Brazil, and Sheldon J. Krys had been our ambassador to Trinidad. They were highly entertaining and gave sound advice based on their personal experiences. Lacking prior State Department service, I was the one who had the most to learn about the bureaucracy and what was expected of an ambassador. I received lots of prac-

tical advice, such as when to cable to Washington and when not, how to mark my cables so they were not read by everyone in the State Department and outside, how to lead and inspire embassy staff, and how to deal with foreign press and political leaders in my soon-to-be host country.

We spent the last day of the two-week course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where we were indoctrinated into the mission of the U.S. Special Forces, who would come to our rescue if we were seized by terrorists. Wives did not participate in this part of the training, which included use of live ammunition and demonstrations of hostage taking and rescue operations.

I remember thinking that terrorists might be a problem for Johnnie in Zimbabwe or Marc in Turkey, but not for me in Romania. A terrorist attack was not high on my list of concerns in 1994. The greater danger, I thought, would be serving as the first Jewish American ambassador to a country with a long history of anti-Semitism, marked by the death of 400,000 Romanian Jews during World War II, one-half of them killed by Romanians in concentration camps in Transnistria (now technically the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic), the other half killed by Germans at Auschwitz. My friend, the late Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, was one of a small number of Romanian Jews to survive Auschwitz. He had been deported from his home in Sighet, in northern Transylvania (then briefly part of Hungary), to Auschwitz at age fifteen, along with the rest of his family. Only he and two older sisters survived. Against this backdrop, it was both supremely ironic and quintessentially American that it was my Jewish activism that had led to my being chosen as ambassador in the first place.

The second part of my indoctrination was a breakfast meeting with the legendary Richard A. Holbrooke, then assistant secretary for European and Canadian affairs. Once I became ambassador, Dick was not officially my boss—technically the president is an ambassador's boss—but Dick was the person to whom I reported. The day after I was confirmed by the Senate, Dick called. We had met in Germany when he was ambassador a few years before, and prior to that in the White House, when Carter was president. He was charming, telling me how pleased he was that I was going to Romania and how important Romania was for our country, neither of which was entirely true.

As we talked further, it became clear that Dick knew little about Romania, but he was a remarkably quick study and with broad brushstrokes

painted a picture of what our country hoped to achieve in Central and Eastern Europe. Dick set great store by personal relationships and expected American ambassadors in Europe to look primarily to him as assistant secretary. In “Washington-speak,” Dick was an empire builder. He possessed an enormously forceful personality, prided himself on the scope of his Rolodex, and made no secret of his own unquenchable ambition to become secretary of state, but he died in 2015 without achieving his ambition. Right or wrong on a given issue, Dick was exciting, action-oriented, and interesting.

A few days after I was confirmed, Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the ranking Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, received a letter signed by six Romanian senators, five of whom were members of a right-wing xenophobic, anti-Semitic Transylvania-based political party, the Romanian National Unity Party, asking him to vote against my confirmation. They claimed I had been too close to Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu and added a not-too-subtle reference to my being Jewish. The American and Israeli press termed the letter anti-Semitic, as indeed it was.

The fact that I had never laid eyes on Elena Ceaușescu and that my only dealings with Nicolae Ceaușescu were anything but cordial was beside the point. As far as I know, Senator Helms never replied to the letter, probably because by the time he received it, I had already been confirmed. The day I arrived in Romania as ambassador in December 1994, I was asked at an impromptu press conference about my reaction to the letter. As it happened, I was attending an interdenominational service in a Roman Catholic Church and was able to reply, truthfully, “I never discuss politics in church.”

My Trip to Saudi Arabia, October 1994

Before setting the date for my swearing in and subsequent departure to Bucharest, I took time out for a seven-day trip to Saudi Arabia and Israel. I was invited to visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a guest of King Fahd, in my capacity as president of the American Jewish Committee. The Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians, signed the previous year on the White House lawn, ushered in a diplomatic thaw by the Saudis, who were taking their first tentative steps toward building a wider peace in the Middle East.

Four days in Riyadh were an eye-opener for me. Unlike the Arab leaders

I had met in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and, of course, Israel, the Saudis seemed to have no problem with the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, provided the conflict with the Palestinians could be resolved. We delivered the Saudi message to Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres a few days later in Jerusalem.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

On my return from my seven-day trip to Saudi Arabia and Israel, I was greeted with a devastating shock: Carol was at home in bed with severe abdominal pains. We had spoken by phone every day I was away. She never mentioned illness, but as soon as I saw her, I knew something was wrong and insisted we immediately go to the hospital. After a battery of tests, the doctors reported that Carol had a growth in her abdomen that would require surgery both to remove it and to ascertain whether the growth was malignant.

Washington is big on celebrations, and friends of newly appointed ambassadors customarily give lunches or dinners for them. Carol's doctors urged her to continue her normal life pending the operation, scheduled for early November, so we accepted four or five invitations. The first was for dinner at the residence of our friends the German ambassador, Immo Stabreit, and his wife, Barbara. At the Stabreits', Carol and I were surrounded by old friends and government officials we knew and liked.

The next day, ten of my Dartmouth classmates gave a lunch for me at the Cosmos Club, a private club in Washington that prides itself on having distinguished literary members, among others. As we sat together in a private dining room drinking and retelling undergraduate escapades of long ago (some of them no doubt imagined), the intervening four decades melted away in a spirit of camaraderie and an alcoholic haze.

A few days later, Carol endured a two-and-a-half-hour operation at Georgetown University Hospital. She was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. The surgeon said that treatment would entail six months of intensive chemotherapy.

I was stunned. The sonogram Carol and I saw at the doctor's office a week before the operation showed the growth, but the doctor downplayed its seriousness as probably nonmalignant. Carol knew better. While still in the

recovery room she whispered to me, "It's bad, isn't it?" I stayed at the hospital the next three nights, sleeping on a chair in her room. Her recovery from the surgery was difficult and she was not strong enough to undergo chemotherapy for another three weeks.

After Carol's operation and diagnosis, I decided to forgo Romania and stay home with her. When I called Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott to tell him my decision, he asked me to meet him the next day at the State Department. When I arrived, Holbrooke was there. He had gotten word from Strobe of Carol's illness and knew I had decided not to go to Romania. Dick would not hear of it. He insisted I go, saying that we had not had an ambassador in Bucharest for over a year, and that we needed an ambassador there now even if I could only stay a month or two. He went further, saying that I should consider the Bureau of European Affairs at State (known as EUR) my administrative "home" and return to Washington whenever Carol needed me. Strobe nodded in agreement. This meant that EUR would cover the special costs incurred by the medical situation.

After I told Carol what Dick had said, we decided that I would remain in Washington for her first chemotherapy treatment two weeks later, then go to Romania, and after that return for her five scheduled follow-on chemotherapy sessions. As it turned out, she had a hard time with chemotherapy and stopped earlier than planned. She continued on a nonchemotherapy regime as an outpatient at the National Institutes of Health, living a fairly normal life for almost nine years. She was able to join me in Bucharest only three times for short stays, otherwise staying close to the NIH's essential medical services. For the next three years, I returned home every month for ten days or so.

At first, EUR paid for my travel, as Dick had proposed, but early on I decided that I should pay, not the State Department. Several years after I returned to Washington for good, there was an investigation prompted by a complaint about my frequent trips home. There was also a rule that all chiefs of mission must request permission to leave their posts. The complainants did not know that I paid for the travel myself and that each time, before leaving Bucharest, I received permission from the State Department. When investigators asked Dick about this, he confirmed that he had authorized the travel. Dick was at that time the American ambassador to the UN and had a lot of clout. I never heard anything more about my travel.