

Rumanian Family Starts a New Life

By JAMES FERON

IT began about three years ago at a Soviet-Rumanian border crossing, when Sergiu Pop, an auto-body mechanic from Bucharest, approached Stanley Schear, a Scarsdale baker, to ask if he could use his limited knowledge of English to help the American, who was having difficulty with the Soviet customs officials.

Mr. Schear, accompanied by his wife, Doris, was on his way by train to his mother's birthplace, Beltzy, in the Soviet Republic of Moldavia, but Russian border guards were angry. They had discovered goods of resalable value in the Schear baggage — jeans, calculators, digital watches — as well as a Jewish history written in Cyrillic.

The items were confiscated and the Schears were allowed to go on, but the incident made a lasting impression on them. For the Pop family, it meant even more: the beginning of a growing relationship with the Schear family. Two weeks ago, after a long correspondence, the Rumanian family arrived at Kennedy Airport to begin a new life, in Westchester.

They were met by representatives of their official sponsors, the Westchester Ethical Humanist Society, one of whose members has taken the family in. And last week, it appeared

that the 29-year-old had found a job in a Yonkers garage.

He had worked in an auto-body plant in Rumania, but problems arose, according to his immigration papers, "because of conflicts with colleagues who belonged to the Communist Party." In Rumania, he said last week, "It was no life; well, it's good for some maybe, but when they touch your freedom they touch everything, and life is dead."

His journey out, beginning in 1980, included escape from Rumania, a hunger strike at the Rumanian Embassy in Paris to obtain the release of his wife and two children and then, finally reunited, departure from France after they decided that the government of François Mitterrand was becoming "too socialistic." All this came after the meeting of the Pop and Schear families on the train in 1979.

For Mr. Schear, long a civil rights activist, Mr. Pop's defection and the immigration process, and particularly the border incident, also had profound effects. "As a very political person I responded to somebody denied all expression of freedom, but personally I couldn't believe socialism was so stifling."

"I was a 1960's radical," Mr. Schear said, "and I thought this country was not living up to its goals, but com-

Continued on Page 8

A Rumanian Family's New Start

Continued From Page 1

pared to what I experienced, we're not doing a bad job. It could be better here, but we have a right to participate and they don't."

The first link in the chain that was to bind Mr. Schear, who is Jewish, and Mr. Pop, who is Russian Orthodox, was forged when the American decided to visit the village that his mother remembered as Beltz, a part of Bessarabia in 1913 but now in Moldavia.

At about the same time, Mr. Pop and his mother, who are both Russian-born, decided to visit an uncle in the Ural Mountains, more than 1,200 miles away from the Soviet-Romania border. That put the two families on the same train, the Moskva Express, which came to a halt at Ungheni, a border town.

It is a three-hour stopover, providing enough time for railroad workers to change the train's undercarriage — the gauges are different in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union — and to allow travelers to change money and buy tourist goods. It is also a time for officials to examine luggage.

"I heard somebody speaking English," Mr. Pop said, "and I also heard the Russian guards say 'He might have something.'" Mr. Pop, who had learned English by himself, asked if he could help, "but the Russians said it was none of my business."

Mr. Schear recalled the incident the same way, adding that "he told me that he wanted to practice his English and that he liked to save stamps, so we exchanged addresses." Sitting now with the émigré in Westchester, Mr. Schear opened a thick photo album of his trip and a folder with all of Mr. Pop's letters.

The Rumanian, who lives with his family in a nicely furnished basement apartment in the Edgemont section of Greenburgh, smiled and fetched his own thick photo album, also filled with personal and political memories.

The Schears' trip to Rumania, with a side visit to the Soviet Union, was to include a stop in Kishniev, the capital of Moldavia, before going on to Beltsy. They arrived in Kishniev after the



The New York Times / Marilynne Herbert

Right: Valentina and Sergiu Pop and their children Edvard, top, and Emilian, visiting Doris and Stanley Schear

dissidents in Moldavia, and with that they said I could go on to Beltsy, as part of a group and in the company of a Russian guide."

The Schears did visit the village, which Mr. Schear said was just as his

were no good. I said, 'Why keep them if they're no good?' They said, 'If you want to exchange stamps you have to do it in person.' Mr. Pop laughed. "Well, now I'm here," he said.

In December 1980 Mr. Pop took a

rand, so they pursued the emigration option.

"In France," Mr. Pop wrote to Mr. Schear, "are many crazy men thinking about socialism. I asked many people why they liked this absurd sys-

and a black photo album of
and a folder with all of Mr.
rs.

manian, who lives with his
nicely furnished basement
in the Edgemont section of
h, smiled and fetched his
photo album, also filled with
and political memories.

ars's trip to Rumania, with
to the Soviet Union, was to
top in Kishniev, the capital
a, before going on to Beltsy.
red in Kishniev after the
ident, checked into the In-
el and went to sleep.

en the phone rang and a
eaking English, asked me
downstairs," Mr. Schear
d so, to face three interro-
d a translator. "They
to sign a statement that I
ly giving up the book, 'The
he Jews,' saying that since
ussian, and I didn't speak
couldn't know what it

arned me not to contact any

Right: Valentina and Sergiu Pop and their children Edvard, top, and Emilian, visiting Doris and Stanley Schear

dissidents in Moldavia, and with that they said I could go on to Beltsy, as part of a group and in the company of a Russian guide."

The Schears did visit the village, which Mr. Schear said was just as his mother told him she remembered it from 1913. "I found my grandmother's grave, and those of aunts and uncles, with inscriptions saying that Fascists had exterminated them in 1942," Mr. Schear said. He departed with some dirt from the grandmother's grave and placed it on the grave of his own mother, who died a few months after he returned to the United States.

Mr. Schear then began to write, enclosing stamps, "but they were confiscated," according to Mr. Pop. The Rumanian authorities "said the stamps were stopped because they

were no good. I said, 'Why keep them if they're no good?' They said, 'If you want to exchange stamps you have to do it in person.'" Mr. Pop laughed. "Well, now I'm here," he said.

In December 1980 Mr. Pop took a Mediterranean cruise, alone, and then jumped ship at Marseilles. He had not told his wife, he said, "because I was afraid she would cry and the police would know." Reaching Paris, he applied for emigration to the United States, and was put in touch with the World Council of Churches, which sponsors such emigration.

Mr. Pop found a job, working on Renaults, at about 7,000 francs, or \$1,000, a month, and began the long effort to persuade Rumanian authorities to permit his family to join him. They refused, telling his wife, he said, that he was in Germany, or that he wanted a divorce, or other stories.

A year after his arrival in Paris he began the hunger strike on the street in front of the Rumanian Embassy. It lasted for eight days; the effort gained the anticipated publicity, and he attracted support, including the assistance of Georges Mesmin, the Mayor of the 18th Arrondissement.

Phone contact with his family was eventually cut, while letters would arrive opened and only after three months' time. But Valentina, his wife, said that neighbors would keep her informed "because Radio Free Europe did broadcasts about Sergiu during and after the hunger strike."

Finally, his family was allowed to join him, and Mr. Pop's own folder depicts that moment, with Mr. Mesmin present in a photograph taken at the Paris station. The Pops said they thought for a while that they would remain in France, but Mr. Pop said they were harried by Communists — local officials, others — and decided life would not change under Mr. Mitter-

rand, so they pursued the emigration option.

"In France," Mr. Pop wrote to Mr. Schear, "are many crazy men thinking about socialism. I asked many people why they liked this absurd system. They answered, 'because there are many rich people.' They want to be rich but they don't like to work."

Mr. Schear, who was now in touch with potential sponsors, said he "needed an organization and a family, and so the Ethical Humanist Society and one of its members came forward; they are a wonderful organization; they get things done."

Oliver Swift, president of the society, said the group had previously sponsored a Laotian, "and that worked well." He said the society was considered religious, "but humanists transcend religion; we believe in the individual, rather than in a credo."

The Pops are receiving an initial stipend from the sponsoring group for rent and other costs, but they will pay it back as well as return the cost of the air fare to the Church World Service, which advanced that money. Mr. Schear, who operates Jespersen's Pastry Shop in Scarsdale, had several garage owners test Mr. Pop's work on auto bodies, and one has indicated that he will hire the Rumanian.

Last week, when the two men were sitting together for the first time since Mr. Pop's arrival, Mr. Schear described his own father's escape from Russia "by swimming the Dnieper River with four others; they were escaping conscription in the Czar's Army."

Then Mr. Pop spoke of his father, a Rumanian who spent World War II in a Hungarian prison, then in a German prison and, finally, after release by the Americans and travel across the Elbe River, in the custody of Soviet authorities.