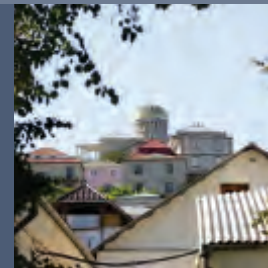




# STORIES FROM GRANDPARENTS

COLLECTION OF STORIES  
FROM SOROCA CHILDREN



Community-led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS)

Funded  
by the European Union  
and the Council of Europe



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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# FOREWORD

Stories play an important part in all the cultures from ancient times to the present days. People have always delivered their messages to the next generations orally, sharing their experiences, feelings and values. Each of us remembers tales and stories told by our grandparents in times of holidays, at the table or by the fire on a cold winter night. Times change, but their memories help us imagine how life was in their youth, what feelings they experienced, what adventures they had and what their expectations were.

Having in mind the intention to preserve the historical values as part of the immaterial cultural heritage, this collection of stories brings together tales from the past, local legends and events that took place in Soroca years ago. By way of these stories collected by children from their grandparents, we have planned to establish connections between generations, thus playing a part in preserving the memory of some long forgotten places or events.

Dumitrita Efremov

*COMUS Project Officer*

We all have special relations with the places we live in and visit, holding on to distinct memories which are transmitted from generations to generations. This form of storytelling is a powerful oral testimony of communities which touches the hearts of many, and can convey strong messages within and about a culture. Over time, the value of these places also changes and gains new meaning. Sometimes, we return to these places to witness the transformation over years and changes in how people relate to their towns and territories. Soroca, with its numerous groups cohabitating for centuries, has many memories to offer its wisdom, experiences and distinct role in the history of the region. Often told by the elderly, these memories constitute part of Soroca's heritage and add to its diversity. The vivid memories of the elderly, if one listens carefully, could be one of the unique resources that shape the planning process of towns, maintaining the old and adjusting to the new.

This publication, which was produced within the context of the Joint Project - Community-Led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS), is a very good example of community action, recognising the elderly and their memories and stimulating inspiration for valuing the heritage in Soroca. In a digital age of photography, it is a good reminder of intergenerational connection and the pleasure of taking time to look at the past and tell stories. We would like to thank the COMUS team in Soroca and all who have actively been involved in identifying and sharing these memories, which we hope will inspire further initiatives for social inclusion and community based activities.

# Hakan Shearer Demir

*Council of Europe*

# Soroca - a land on the fringe of the country

Carried by the swirls of time, Soroca has remained a historical town to these days, where any visitor can travel in time by visiting monuments and picturesque places in town, where pieces of history are written. There are several legends regarding the historical past of Soroca. For example, the folklore tells that this is the place where the former Greek colony Olhionia was established centuries ago. Another legend locates here the Getae town of Serghidava or (Serghus), which had borne the name of Crachidava afterwards. The landmark of Soroca is the Stone Fortress located on the banks of the old Dniester River, guarding the country frontier from the 15th century onward.

Equally valuable for Soroca are the places, legends and traditions that tell us about our past and that need to be preserved and promoted. This protection and capitalization on the cultural heritage of Soroca was the very focus of the stories that grandchildren know from their grandparents, which united the past with the present, history with contemporary times, by the memories experienced by grandparents and passed down to their grandchildren. This material was prepared with the contribution of the employees of the public libraries in Soroca, departments 1, 2, 3, 4, "Basarabia" Department of Romanian Books and "Steliana Grama" Department for Children.

## Tamara Coşciug

*Senior Specialist in the Section of Culture and Tourism  
Soroca District Council*

# CONTRIBUTIONS

Public libraries, Departments 1,2,3,4

"Basarabia" Department of Romanian Books

"Steliana Grama" Department for Children

"Constantin Stere" Theoretical High School

"Ion Creangă" Theoretical High School

"Petru Rareș" Theoretical High School,

"Dumitru Matcovshi" Gymnasium



# The White Church

One day, immersed in an ocean of sunlight, when Soroca was dressed up for celebration, I decided to take my grandmother for a walk to show her how beautiful the town is and its traditions for the Apple's Day. We visited the exhibition and, upon return, granny wanted us to walk, probably she wanted to spend more time with me.

Granny stopped in front of the church, made the sign of the cross and told me:

- My dear, you know, "Biserica Albă", as I call it, or "St. Theodor Stratilat" Church, reminds me of my mother who, whenever she had the occasion, would bring me here to light a candle and say the "Lord's Prayer". The church was built by a high ranked nobleman called Oleinikov, during the First World War. The White Church is very close to my heart, along with the memories of my mother.



Vlada Grițco, 9th grade,

"Ion Creangă" High School





Ana-Maria Semendeaev, 7th grade

“Dimitru Matcovschi” Primary School

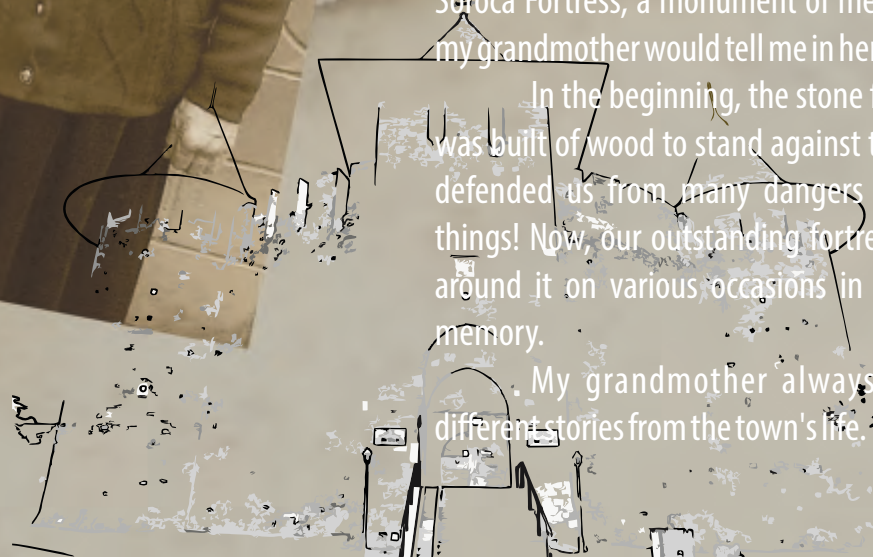
## The Soroca Fortress

Each of us has a favorite, valued and special place. I also have such a place, which is my home, my town, with many relatives, dear people, old places.

One of the most impressive beauties of my town is Soroca Fortress, a monument of medieval architecture, as my grandmother would tell me in her stories.

In the beginning, the stone fortress, as seen today, was built of wood to stand against the foreign invaders. It defended us from many dangers and witnessed many things! Now, our outstanding fortress, brings us together around it on various occasions in order to celebrate its memory.

My grandmother always impresses us with different stories from the town's life.





# Bechir's Legend

One can enter Soroca along Bechir's Hill and crossing Bechir's Bridge. In the past, two customs officers were guarding here, collecting money for the goods entering or transiting the town. The hill is also surrounded by a gorge intended to serve as a natural obstacle for those who wanted to climb the hill. These natural obstacles were important for the people who lived in this area and who chose to build a fortress on this hill. Elders remember the legend of an outlaw who chose this peak as a hiding place in the cave dug high up the hill. He is said to have lived around the mid 19th century. He had grapes, since there were plenty of crops, and fresh water from the spring that still exists today. The outlaw was caught and convicted, but his name was kept.

Another legend tells us about the fact that hundreds of years earlier, a monk had lived in the cave with the same name. He had decided to break contact with the world and had hidden in the cave high up the hill. Only once a year, when there was an important religious holiday, would the monk come down and walk for a short distance to the spring, then he would return to his cave. All the people in the neighborhood knew and respected him and every traveler passing by would put some food for him in a basket tied to a rope.



*Roman Donos, 5th grade*

*"C. Stere" High School*



Mădălina Plăcintă, 6th grade

“C. Stere” High School

## From Soroca's Past

**M**y relationship with my grandmother is special. We often talk about past times, about past things and events. Her birth village is Vasilcau, but my grandmother used to come often to Soroca ever since she started the 10th grade. This is where she watched her first film at “Dacia” Cinema. The cinema was operated on three shifts. The first shift cost 5 “copeici” and only children were allowed, the second shift cost 10 “copeici” and only adults were allowed. The third shift, which is the night shift, was for young boys and girls. It cost 15 or 20 “copeici”. After one or one and a half hour, depending on the film, many people would go there till late at night when the night shift started. Silence was kept in the cinema. They all listened carefully, because watching a film was not something to be seen every day and by anyone. So the cinema was very popular in those times. The film “Zorro”, White Dress (“Rochie albă”) and some other Indian films “O șatră urca spre cer” (Tabor ukhodit v nebo), were very appreciated in those years. People would watch the same film two or three times and would always come out satisfied from the cinema.

My grandmother told me that at the crossroads towards the Gypsies' Hill (now panels are installed there with representative pictures of Soroca), there was a market before. Men and women from across villages would come and sell fruit and vegetables there. People would arrange their goods in crates or buckets and sell them. The place was convenient for them because the townsmen would often buy from them. However, some of the town's inhabitants were not fond of the idea of having a market there, because whenever the sellers would leave the place, there was a mess. Thus, at the citizens' call to the authorities, the market was closed down.

Ion Ciumac, 9th grade

"C. Stere" High School

## The Industrial Town

My talk with grandmother Valentina Rebeja is a virtual trip to the Soviet past, which was something unknown and interesting for me. When my grandmother was born, a central market was spreading around the fortress, and there was not a single block in Soroca. The New Soroca Neighborhood did not exist, there was merely an agricultural field there. The first factory built in Soroca was the beer factory founded by the Germans. After the war, a factory for household items was built and, subsequently, it was called ZTO (Technical Equipment plant), becoming one of the largest in the former USSR. In Soroca there was also a factory where buttons were made from shells in the Dniester. There was also a footwear factory and a garment factory, which was one of the largest of that period. A metallurgical plant and a power engine plant called "Opetnii Zavod" were built On Soroca Hill. Those factories and plants employed workers from many places: from the town, from the villages, from across the Dniester. Residential blocks were built for them.





# My Grandfather's Memories

*M*y name is Ecaterina and I am a pupil in the fifth grade at "Petru Rareș" Theoretical High School. I am truly happy that I can live with my parents and grandparents. My grandfather is a good friend of mine, and I can share many secrets with him. In the evening, after dinner, we all serve a cup of tea and grandfather starts to share his memories. I really love it when he tells about the past of our town, Soroca. There are many places that really mean something for people like my grandfather, such as the building of the Population Register's Office. It was a beautiful, bright building where young people would register their marriage. My grandfather also married here. He says that if the groom carried the bride in his arms upstairs, they would live happily ever after. This was the case with my grandfather.

He also tells me that, where the mayor's office building stands today, there was once a row of little houses where Russian, Jewish and Moldovan people lived. There were also two stores, one with smoked fish and the other with bride's dresses. The police precinct is near the medical cabinets but it was moved because of landslides. The town also had a bathing area past the Community Centre. On Saturday, there were queues till late at night, sometimes they were working until morning.

My grandfather is like an encyclopedia for me, I am proud of him.

Ecaterina Jicul, clasa a V-a

"Petru Rareș" High School





*Tatiana Tabuncic, 3rd grade*

*“D. Matcovschi” Primary School*

## *A Walk to the Past*

**I**n Soroca, The National Festival of Apples is celebrated on 1 October. My grandmother prepared a nice costume for me for this occasion. Together with my colleagues from the third grade we went to the festival. For the costume, my grandmother and I gathered leaves nearby the Agricultural Technical College on V. Stroescu Street. Across the street there is an old building and next to it there is another building with similar structure and masonry, which today hosts the library, i.e. Department No 1. I asked my grandmother about these buildings and about what used to be there. She told me that these buildings were erected together with the church by nobleman Oleinikov. One building was for the priest and the other for the church workers. Remnants of the cattle stable were kept, two cellars, of which a simple one and a three-leveled one, where vegetables, wine and goods were kept. Both buildings have large plots of land. The buildings were made to last, and they were different from the houses built today. We went into the building with my grandmother and she showed me the place. Later on, these buildings became schools, where my grandmother also worked as a primary grade teacher. My father and grandfather also studied here. When the new school was opened, these buildings were returned to the property of the church.



*Dumitru Semendeaev, 6th grade*

*“Dumitru Matcovschi” Primary School*

## *Teodor Oleinikov's Mansion*

Once we stopped with my grandmother in front of Oleinikov's Mansion to rest. This street was covered in stone, today it looks different. The house had an orchard that looked like heaven's garden, around which there was a park and a small yard with a stable for purebred horses. From the gate to the entrance to the house there was a carpet of flowers of a rare beauty, and in front of the main entrance there was a small fountain supplied with water from three springs. The building is made of stone and looks like a castle, with a latticework balcony supported by two columns. The tile stoves were also kept, as well as the wood tile floor on the second level and the oak staircase in the hallway. I remember having entered this building with my grandmother. Today, this is a valuable place for the town.



*Dana Spânu, 7th grade*

*"Peru Rareș" High School*

## *From my Grandparents' Youth*



I visit my grandparents often. When I go to their place, they would always give me something sweet, we talk, we laugh and I listen to their captivating stories. Not long ago, I found out from them that, across the general hospital, where now are the ruins of a building, there was before the Population Register's Office, a tall building with large bright windows and a beautiful entrance. They registered their marriage there, their most beautiful memories are linked to this place.

Before she got married, on Saturdays and Sundays she would go to the cinema next to it, which is a huge building divided into several compartments. On the first floor there was the film room and the price for a ticket was 30 "copeici". Before the film, they would go to the second floor, where there was a small coffee shop. They would buy there coffee and cakes, then they would go to see the film. My grandparents lived a wonderful youth, they took advantage of every second spent together. Walking in that part of the town, they remember with great affection the beautiful moments of their remote youth.



*Axenia Mihalas, 5th grade*

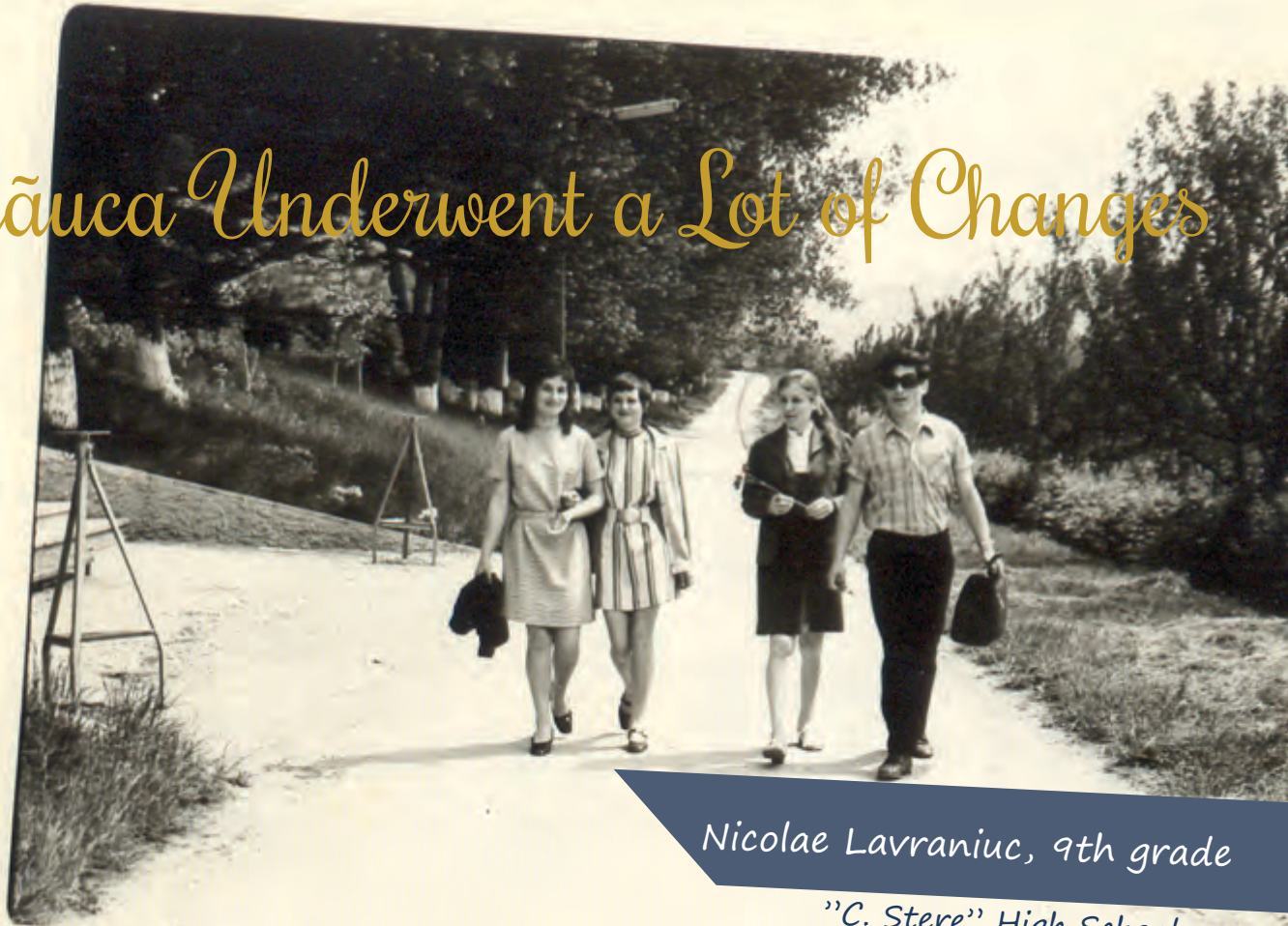
*"C. Stere" High School*

## *"Dacia" Cinema*

**O**ne day, I was walking with my grandpa Vitalie Timbaliuc and passed by "Dacia" Cinema and I was very curious to know what had been in this region before. My grandpa, seeing my interest, was happy to tell me.

In the old days, instead of the cinema and of "Nistru" restaurant there was the agricultural market of Soroca. "Moldavia" Cinema was built around the 60s, and it was then the largest and most beautiful in Moldova. Afterwards, around the 89-90s, its name was changed to "Dacia" Cinema, the pride of all the town's inhabitants.

# Bujerăuca Underwent a Lot of Changes



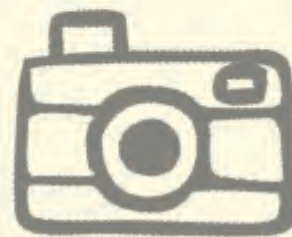
Nicolae Lavraniuc, 9th grade

"C. Stere" High School

My grandmother's memories are like a dream from the past. In 1967, the student Ludmila Topor graduated the School No 1, located on the premises of the current "Mihai Eminescu" College. As she told me, the central park in front of the Mayor's Office building occupied a very large space and there was no market. The park would lie on the grounds of an unfinished church, which sadly was not sanctified. One night (in the 1960-1965), the Soviet authorities demolished it with an explosion and then erected a summer stage instead. In the same period, my grandmother witnessed the establishment of a series of new undertakings: The knitting factory, the current S.A. "Stil", the Metallic Accessory Plant – S.A. "Monolit", erected on the territory of the former Bujerăuca village, which ceased to exist in 1960, when it was turned into a micro-district of Soroca. The new buildings were erected on the place of the villagers' households and the owners of the demolished houses received apartments in the new residential blocks, becoming citizens.

The "Hidroimpex" experimental plant was built on Soroca Hill in 1974. In 1977 the house where my grandmother lived and where my mother spent her childhood was built on 76 Tatarbunarului Street (today Calea Bălțului). On the agricultural land worked by the people who lived in this house School No 4 was built and opened in 1988, today I.P. "Ion Creangă" Theoretical High School.

There has been much restructuring since then. How will Soroca change? Years will tell. We will forge the future and we will be the witnesses of events to follow.





*Ștefan Stavița, 7th grade*

*“Dumitru Matcovschi” Primary School*

# *The Agricultural Technical College*

This summer holiday I spent my time in the library. One August afternoon, something happened - screams were heard, along with fire engine sirens. The workshops of the technical college were burning. A thick smoke was rising in the air and the slates on the roof were cracking. I went there with my grandmother. This was the first time that I saw a fire. With great sorrow, my grandmother started to tell me about this old beautiful building that is full of memories.

A long, long time ago, Soroca was an agricultural region. The Secondary Agricultural School was built on the town's hill and it prepared young technical and agricultural specialists. The school was reorganised several times, new specialties being added. My grandmother showed me a large field called the Park of Agricultural Machines, where students learned to drive agricultural vehicles: harvesters, tractors and others. As of 1992, it is called the Technical Agricultural College, and my grandmother is proud that her father, my grandfather and some other relatives studied there. Young people from all over Moldova's districts studied in Soroca. Soroca is forever young and full of students.

Mark-Mădălin Belous, 8th grade

“Ion Creangă” High School

# What I Have Learned from my Grandmother, Lidia Moraru

The “Dacia” Cinema was not just a tall beautiful building, but a precious pearl of Soroca, a place where people, young people, children and elders could go and relax after a long day of work. They could watch here films and cartoons on the big screen. There was a large hall inside, where visitors could buy popcorn, lemonade and sweets. The cinema was important for the life of people in Soroca and after it was closed, people always hoped that it would be restored and opened again. People in Soroca still hope that one day the cinema will be reopened, casting a gleam of light on everyone's life.



# At the Widow's Cross

Grandparents love us very much and by their deeds and memories, they guide us through life. My grandparents from my father's side lived their life in Soroca. This picturesque town offered them a tumultuous and interesting life. I like to hear the stories of their childhood and youth. An interesting history is related to the street they live on. A long time ago, there was a cemetery around the cinema. As cemeteries are mysterious places, and children try to avoid them, my grandmother also avoided this place, especially at night.

At the gate of the cemetery there was a cross that the locals would call the Widow's Cross. The cross was made of stone and it was old and darkened by time, with deteriorated corners and covered with moss at the bottom. My grandmother does not remember who put it there, and my parents think that it was there from the war period, either the war with the Turks or with the Russians. But my grandfather has another version of this story – the cross was erected by the widow of a wealthy man, who died during a trip to the sacred places.

People's fate is different, some live longer and some shorter, while the cemetery guards the sleep of various people. According to my grandparents, widows who buried their dead would weep first before the Widow's Cross and then they would go to the tomb. She was referred to as a living person. Life must have loved her very much and he must have been a good man, my grandmother says, if he was remembered for so many years by the locals.



*Polina Gherman, 8th grade*

*"Peru Rareș" High School*

Carolina Ursu, 8th grade  
"Peru Rareș" High School

# The Bride Tree

My grandparents on my mother's side were rooted in the land of Soroca, namely Bujerăuca village. I often fell asleep with the songs sung by my grandmother about her childhood adventures because, according to her saying, "there were children then, too, but more humble".

I must tell you that my grandparents still keep a plot of land called "La Tiuliman", a toponym used very often by elders. I often went with my grandparents to sow corn, to weed and my duty was to look after their goat, which, according to grandma, was prankful and rompish like me or I was like it.

At meal time or on the road, my grandparents would pick one place or another and relate it to certain memories. I liked the story of the clay pits around the maternity hospital. There is a hill peak with a few bushes and a tall, branchy hawthorn tree, which was the secret place of a young couple coming from families of different origins, one was poor and the other, rich. The parents were hostile to one another because of their social status, but the children fell in love with each other and they would date at the site in question. The parents found out about their love, and the girl was forcefully married with a young man from another locality, while the boy became a shepherd. He never married and the young woman died unexpectedly. At the sheepfold under the "polenta", as the hawthorn was called, locals saw many times a shadow that would disappear as swift as lightning into the tree when people came around.

In spring, when the tree blossoms and I go and pasture my grandparents' goat, the tree is so beautiful that I feel that it looks like a bride.





*Andreea Grigoriță, 4th grade*

*"Petru Rareș" High School*

## *Grandparents Boris and Maria*

*M*y grandparents are called Boris and Maria. In their times, there was not one old or destroyed building in the town. Their time to engage had come. They got engaged on a beautiful day of 1978 at the People's Registry Office, which is now an old building. This old building is in the green park. My grandfather remembers these beautiful events.



Andreea Alexandrov, 7th grade  
"Constantin Stere" High School



## Soroca in the Past

According to my grandmother, we reached the conclusion that there have been great changes, some buildings were demolished and others were partially renewed. The fair was much more alive and so was the cultural life.

My grandmother would tell about „The Lady”, a housewife rooted in Voloave Village, having 80 ha of land in Dubna Village. Half the village in Dubna worked the 80 ha land in order to harvest. In time, history was lost and the land was distributed to people.

Another history pertains to the trading activities between Soroca and Iampol; Otaci-Movilău ensured the transportation of goods. People from Soroca were great merchants and the goods were sold to foreign people. My grandmother lived in the rural area and her occasions to go to a fair were rare. According to her experience, my grandmother appreciated the endeavors of people in Soroca, who were genuine craftspeople. My grandmother remembers the film “O șațră urcă spre cer”, whose action took place in the centre of Soroca. All I can say about the fortress is that voices were heard when Soroca Fortress was built like a clover for good luck. But Dniester remains unchanged and it keeps guarding Soroca Fortress. There are many legends and all the old buildings seen in town, the “V.Apostol” Theater, “Soroca Fortress”, “the Dniester”, the old buildings from the old centre are still creating their history.

# The Old Road from Soroca to Trifăuți

The road from Soroca to Trifăuți is long and every rivulet down the hill to the river has a name. The first one, after Bechir Bridge, is called Cobzanca, after the name of a woman who lived in those places. This is followed by Soșca Gullet, which was called so in the memory of a local from those parts. The spring in Inundeni Village is called Zagastru. During the Turkish occupation, there was an underground entrance in that area. Turkish people used to hide there all their catches. The next gullet is Burscova, because there were many badgers in the past. Another one was called "Râpa Corbului" (Raven's Gullet), because there were many ravens nesting in hollows. There is also "Râpa Mihai Guzun" (Mihai Guzun's Gullet), because the land bordering the gullet belonged to Mihai Guzun. There are no other gullets and the next is "Hârjoe" Hill. On Easter, the boys used to keep vigils on this hill. I am grateful to my grandfather that he told me about this road.



Nica Epihin, 3rd grade  
"Constantin Stere" High School



Petru Țurcă, 3rd grade

„Constantin Stere” High School

## What I Found out from my Grandfather

One quiet but rainy autumn evening I was invited to have dinner at my grandparents' house. My grandfather recollects the beautiful moments of his youth. This is how his interesting short story told before the fireplace begins. He was sixteen when, still being a restless and dynamic young man, he came to Soroca. He was amazed by the beauties of the town: Bechir Bridge, Soroca Fortress, which looked different compared to now, the splendor and clarity of the Dniester River flowing hastily downstream; but, seeking adventure, he went to the centre of the town, to “Dacia” Cinema, which is no longer operational. At the time, around 1970, the cinema was a beautiful two-leveled building with large cinema halls, where adults would watch Indian films and children would watch cartoons. After the film, you could go the cafeteria to buy sweets and lemonade. Memories overwhelmed him and became as vivid as the present. Here, at the cinema, he met his better half, my grandmother.

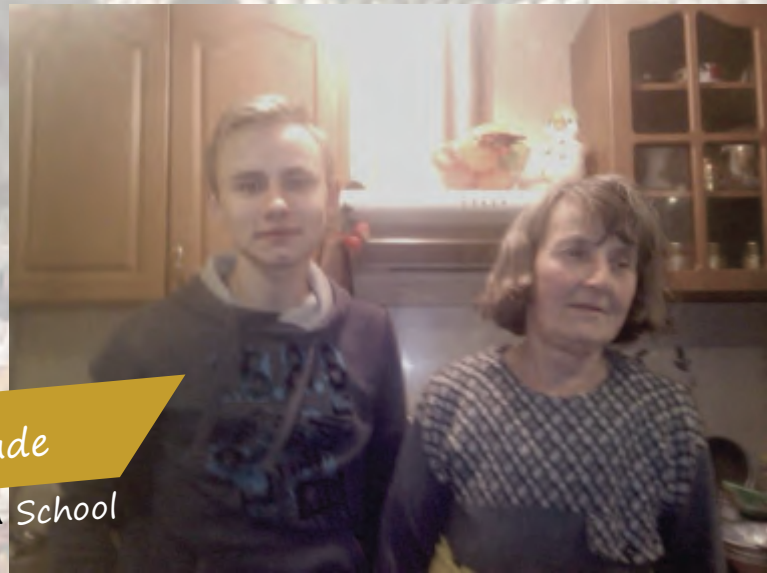


## *From My Grandmother's Youth*

*M*y grandmother told me that in her youth she worked in the N4 garment factory. The factory manufactured children's garment, coats, short coats etc. Children's clothes were marked with the image of "Soroca Fortress". They worked on three shifts. Later on, they started to manufacture clothes for elderly people. Their medical cabinet, the canteen and the rest area were on the Dniester bank. They were working punctiliously in order to be among the first and be awarded an order. My grandmother would receive a treatment paper for the Sergheevca Sanatorium. "Dana" Company started to operate in 1950 as a sewing shop and then developed into a public company, becoming one of the largest textile manufacturing factories in Moldova.

*Andrei Golub, 9th grade*

*"Constantin Stere" High School*



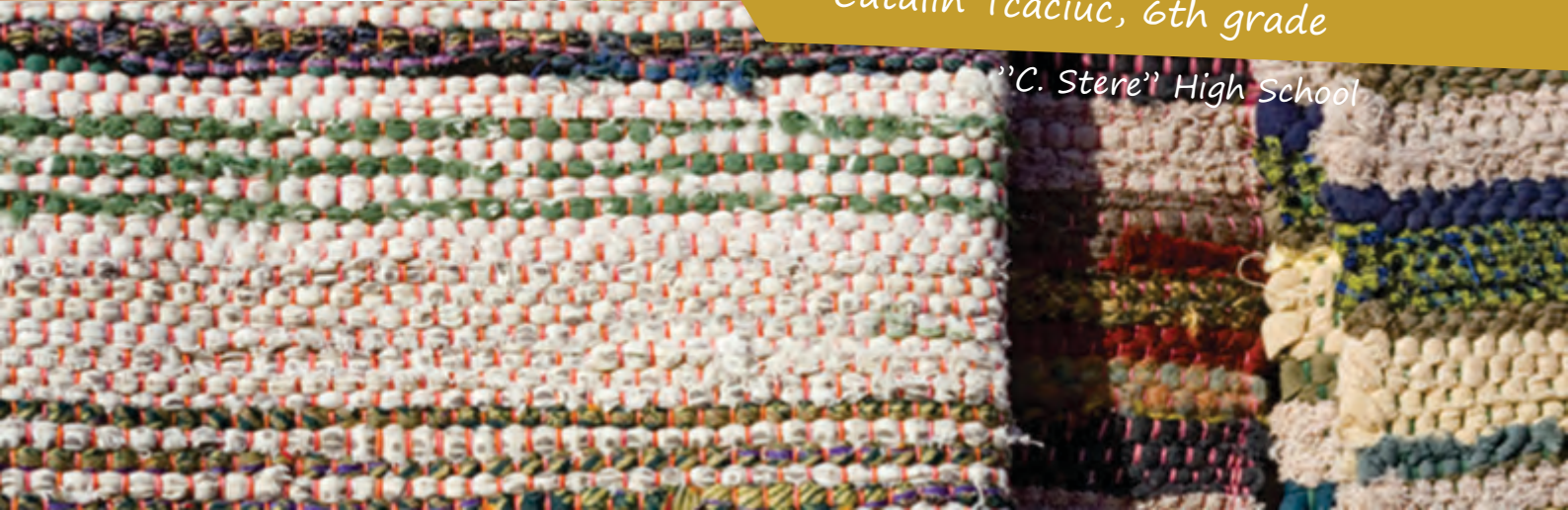
# Memories of an Actress

Many interesting events took place in the youth of my grandmother Zinaida. There are many things still kept in her memory and she often tells us stories with great pleasure, as she relives again those fine feelings. She had the opportunity to act in two movies "Tabor uhodit v nebo" and "Zarubchinapameati".

The shooting took place in Soroca. She played the part of a pupil in the Romanian school from Basarabia. Now we all watch together these films with great affection. These are some of the pages from my grandmother's teenage years.

*Cătălin Tcaciuc, 6th grade*

*"C. Stere" High School*



## [www.coe.int/comus](http://www.coe.int/comus)

In the framework of the EU and the Council of Europe initiative “Community-Led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS)”, this publication contains a selection of memorable stories told to children by their grandparents. These stories, which illustrate stories and events from the past, are valuable lessons for the new generations and ascertain the importance of oral history for various communities.

This document was prepared with the financial support of the European Union. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union.

EN

The Council of Europe is the leading organisation on the continent in the field of human rights. It contains 47 Member States, of which 28 are EU Member States. All of the Member States of the Council of Europe have signed the European Convention of Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, the democratic principles and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the Member States.

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