

# MA VIE

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## JEAN STANOVICI

JEAN STANOVICI was born almost 100 years ago, on September 26, 1921, in Craiova. His first years were spent in a big house, on the main street. One of his first memories was the fountain in the courtyard where, on May 10, the Day of the King, the parading soldiers quenched their thirst.

His first school was a French institute, where he learned the language. Being able to speak French was of great use during his exile in France, where he escaped the communist regime. During the holidays we visited the countryside with his family. They arrived there in a horse driven wagon. Their estate was not far from Bucharest, it was a two-hour journey, as much as it takes today to go from Bucharest to Paris by plane. They would stay there two-three months. They would play backgammon, cards, they would ride their horses and swim in the river. When he was very young, he lived with his family in a huge house that belonged to his grandfather. The house was built in the mountains and was very isolated. The child resembled his grandfather, who became a role model for him. But he grew up to be anything but isolated.

In the country side, he would sit by the candle light and would bathe in the garden, in a wooden tub. The memories from that period would make him nostalgic over the years, when he lived in more luxurious houses.

In the evening, the shepherd would milk the sheep and made delicious cheese, while the housekeeper helped his mother with the cooking – fried chicken or fried duck. His father would make an excellent yogurt. They even cooked their own bread, and the fruits and vegetables came from their garden. They didn't need to go shopping often, since they were self-sufficient.

During the summer, he would go with his family to Herculane, a resort with luxurious hotels, a marvelous casino, where they would go dancing every evening. When they felt like having an exotic adventure they went to Ada Kaleh, an island on the Danube river, that the communists destroyed in the 70s. On the island they would eat the famous Turkish delights and the child imagined himself a character from One Thousand and One Nights.

During the high school years, he wore a uniform with an embroiled number on his sleeve and headgear. The scope of the embroiled number was to identify the students who got into trouble or went to the cinema, since the students were forbidden to partake in such an adult activity. After finishing his homework, he

would play poker with his friends. In Craiova, everybody knew everybody, and he had a lot of friends. Sometimes he and his friends would ask girls to dance.

He hasn't participate to war because when the Second World War began, he was a student. In 1944, he graduated from the Law Faculty, University of Bucharest. Those were troubled times and soon, in 1947, the Communist Party seized power. The king was forced to abdicate, and the opposing parties were declared illegal. His family could have sold everything they own and flee the country, but they didn't.

Instead, they had their proprieties confiscated. Jean Stanovici worked as a judge and he was ordered to falsify the election results to favor the communists, but he refused and was fired from his job. When he worked as a lawyer, he was disbarred.

After that, he was accused that he had shot a Russian soldier who in fact was shot by chance during a parade. The police came to his house to arrest him, but he wasn't at home. He fled to Bucharest, where he stayed in some friends' house. Every day he would swim in the Herastrau lake, because he wanted to cross the Danube river and get to Serbia. He hid some golden coins in the clothes he was wearing, took some clothes in a plastic bag and got to the station, where the police looked for fugitives like him. Fortunately, some kind people instructed him how to get safely to the Danube. When it got dark, he began to swim. The water was not that cold, but there were currents that could have taken him to Bulgaria, where we would have been caught by the communist authorities. He was forced to swim against the current and soon he was exhausted. Fortunately, the plastic bag helped him float. Once he reached Yugoslavia, two Romanian speaking natives helped him.

In Yugoslavia he spent 5 weeks in a camp, sharing his room with some other 20 persons and being guarded by soldiers. But he managed to escape during a rainy night, confronting many dangers. He was almost caught again when he took the train to Zagreb, but the policeman thought he was sleeping and didn't checked his papers. Once again, he was lucky! Just before crossing the Austrian border, he had to climb a slippery hill and he almost gave up, due to exhaustion. But he finally managed to get to Austria and that was one of the happiest moments of his entire life.

Once he crossed the border, he spent several days in a camp as well, but the situation was entirely different. He was given a clean room, with sheets, a bathroom and toilet paper. He had food, coffee and beer and the soldiers apologized that they couldn't do more for him.

With his last golden coin, he arrived in France on December 31, 1948. He was 27 and he was free. But his family was far away, and he couldn't write to them, for fear of having his correspondence read by the communist authorities.

After his exile, his family had to move to Bucharest. For 27 years, they were forced to share a 4 rooms apartment, with one bathroom and one kitchen with 3

other families. This was a common situation during those times, except for the communist leaders, who lived in the houses they had stolen from the people.

Once in France, he did everything in his power to obtain the French citizenship in order to work side by side with those who welcomed him in their country. After the war, there were a lot of things to be done in France. He didn't allow himself to be discouraged by the fact that he didn't know anyone and that his law degree was now useless. Because of everything he went through during those years, he was very strong willed.

For a while, he worked as a wine seller. But what he really wanted was to build something that lasted, that could benefit people like those whom he had left behind. To gain money he had the brilliant idea to sell houses before they were built through a franchise. This implied a huge responsibility, but he was driven since he wished that his future family would never worry about having a roof over their head.

He worked hard and soon enough he was called upon to build houses not only all over France, but also in Switzerland, Spain and other countries. He built villas, apartments and embassy buildings. People called him the Bulldog. But in spite of that, everybody appreciated him, including his family.

With his first wife he had a son and with his second one, a daughter and a son. He spent the rest of his life traveling to Paris, Palma de Mallorca, Switzerland. We will never know what he could have managed to accomplish if the communists hadn't persecuted him and he hadn't been forced to start from nothing. And most importantly, what he could have accomplished in his own country.

Inspiring, energetic and visionary, Jean Stanovici remained active until his last breath. He passed away when he was 96 years old, in Switzerland, having lived a full life and being proud of his accomplishments. He was a fugitive young man from Craiova, who arrived in Paris with a single gold coin and he became richer than anybody in his family ever was. But his dream was that every member of his family would own a house. He would help them every chance he had, because he never forgot his family.

After the communist regime became more permissive, Jean Stanovici returned to Romania to visit his mother and at some point, he managed to buy her from the government, who used to sell people like cattle. His mother lived with his son for a while, taught her grandsons Romanian and came back to her native land, which she missed while being abroad.

After the collapse of the communist regime, Jean Stanovici won back part of his properties from the government. But he also built many buildings in Bucharest. In one of these buildings, today we find the offices of the Curtea Veche Publishing.