

My professional Adventures

By **Robi Auscher**

Eastern Europe

After finishing high school in Timișoara in 1954 have weighed three options. At the bottom of the stack, to continue with flute at the Conservatory in Bucharest. The other two, medicine or agronomy. My uncle, who acted as a surrogate dad whenever my biological one was imprisoned, was an MD and pathologist with the Medical Institute. He gravitated toward agronomy. This was in line with my naïve belief that every cloud has a silver lining. Had a daydream about a sought-after profession in far-away Israel. To get ready for the admission test, have spent the whole summer attending a group coached by a charismatic private teacher, hitting the books of biology, botany, zoology and other natural sciences.

We were around 200 testees in one of the written exam sessions. A short, broad and limping middle-aged guy who looked as a supervisor, stopped by my table. Looked at my name and asked in a stentorian heavily Russian-accented voice: "Are you the son of capitalist Auscher?" Stood up and had no choice but to utter a very soft: "Yes". To find out later that this was comrade Smolsky, professor of Marxism Leninism, the wire puller of the Institute, personnel unit inclusive. He usually wore a workers cap, to ooze out a healthy communist spirit. As the smoke cleared, it seemed indisputable to us that my background precludes admission. A series of verbal tests followed. They didn't turn out to be a breeze. Still my name was listed among the approved students. How did they let me reach finish line after that false start? Your guess is as good as mine.

A second screening came at the end of the first year. This time, the clearance for military service. One day all male students of the year had to report at the City Hall across the Capitol cinema. We had to strip off to appear one by one nude and defenseless, first for a medical and then for a political background interview. The medical was chaired by Dr. Naschitz who knew me but brilliantly inspired, didn't show any signs of recognition. Next stop on the runway at a woman who had a pile of papers on her desk. Expected the worst.

She asked first about my folks. Told her that I lived with my mom and she is divorced. This was true. She had to get a divorce from my father who spent his time at Jilava "house of correction". Only by using her maiden name could she get a job. As for my father, told her that we are in no contact with him. This was more than true.

Then she asked whether I had relatives in Germany.

The answer: No, which was true.

Do I have relatives in the US?

No, which was true.

Although I stood naked before her, she apparently wasn't impressed by the missing piece of skin, ritually removed at the time I was 8 days old. No questioning about relatives in Israel and I was dismissed, let off the hook.

Basically, with a non-Jewish sounding last name she seemingly thought I was one of the twenty or so German students in our year. This comrade didn't prepare her homework as meticulously as comrade Smolsky did.

A couple of years later, an agreement was forged between Israel and the government of Romania. About 200 active Zionists who were detained and sentenced, were to be gradually released to depart for Israel with their families. My dad was released after being sentenced for 15 years and in the summer of 1956 we were summoned to the Securitate in one of their offices by Traian bridge. Been told to get ready for the move within a couple of months. However, in the fall of that year, the uprising against Russian occupation broke out in Budapest. The move was stopped. Slight signs of riot spilled over Timișoara. Students held meetings and rallied. I played it safe and didn't stick out my neck.

In January 1957 we got the laissez passer. The three of us left by train for Belgrade. On the platform, Israel's ambassador awaited my father. I will always be thankful to Ambassador Locker for this gesture. After years of abuse and ill-treatment, my dad could feel the recognition of the state he dreamt about since 1939 when he visited Palestine. It straightened out his back and filled up his tank for the years to come. After a few days we moved by train to Vienna for a three-weeks stay. My parents knowing the town's all ins and outs felt right at home, and we began to roam around the Rings. First thing first: mom took us to "Gone with the wind" and to have our first coke. We moved then by train to Rome for a week or so. Mom rushed us first of all to the Basilica di San Pietro in Vincoli for a first-hand look at Michelangelo's Moses. And only then to the mundane. Next stop, Napoli, to board ZIM's "Israel" headed with tailwind to Haifa.

For some reasons the professional ties between Romania and Israel warmed up in the mid 1970s and hosted, on behalf of the Extension-Advisory Service of the Ministry of Agriculture, several visits of Romanian peers. Our turn for a repay visit arrived and twenty two years (1979) after leaving behind Romania and its citizenship, I was invited in the framework of an official mission. We were two. An official from our Ministry's Foreign Relations and me. We were accompanied in Romania throughout the whole itinerary by a former agricultural attaché at Romania's Embassy in Washington DC. It was obvious that he was either a Securitate person or some sort of hush-hush. On the whole, he was a resourceful guide. He spoke good English, entertaining my teammate who didn't speak Romanian.

We were taken to the beats of the officials who have been our guests. We spent some time in Moldova, in Suceava, inter alia, and had the chance to see

the picturesque monasteries. And as a special gesture, we passed through the Banat and reached Timișoara. The meals in all collective and state farms were a show: exuberant three-four sorts of meat, appetizers, vegetables, fruits, sweets and drinks. In sum, we were wined and dined. The Lenauheim collective farm owned as many others mustered out tractors of various ancestries: east German, Russian, Romanian, etc. No spare parts were available anymore for these vintage tools. In a little on-farm workshop, however, three-four elder German smiths chiseled manually the missing parts keeping the farm machinery alive. I wondered who else would have the same craftsmanship in light of their imminent exodus. We had a rundown at the collective farm chairman's office. He looked 65ish. I ducked out from the conference room for the restrooms. A plump woman in her late thirties ran into me in the hall. She took both my hands, pushed me slightly to the wall, and leaning over deliberately told me almost cheek to cheek that she's got a friend in Israel and would like to send her a present. She would come to my hotel in Timișoara with her daughter to deliver it. Willy-nilly I gave her the address to free myself from her clutch and get back to the meeting. She was the chairman's young and horny wife. When we left the farm at the end of the day she appeared with two huge smoked pork gammons. One for me and the other one for my teammate. The latter being an observant compatriot, he passed it on to me. I wound up with two huge jambons. I left one with my uncle in Timișoara and schlepped the other one in my suitcase to the Holy Land. I will never know what I missed, since she never called or showed up.

While on a field visit around Timișoara we were guided by an agronomist from a regional research center. A party boss joined us and quite brutally pushed him out of my car and sat down next to me. He was afflicted with a skin disease and in need of a prescription ointment found only abroad. He didn't want a lower-ranking to witness his compliments followed by a call for the stuff. He explained me at length how friendly the Romanians were with the Jews during WWII. We had to fly back from Timișoara to Bucharest. There was a storm in the area and all flights cancelled. We moved to Arad and boarded there. It's been hunky dory until the Antonov began its descent toward Băneasa airport. When out of the blue we hit clear air turbulence. Not the usual sensation of bumpy air pockets. The aircraft swung from side to side rocking us with great strength. A sensation of total loss of control. Although the waggle lasted not more than 10 minutes, it was my scariest air-borne experience ever. And on top of that in an Antonov.

My mother succumbed to cancer within the next couple of years (1981) and I wanted to visit soonest with her brother, my uncle, who lived in Timișoara, to pacify his worries about the treatments she's been administered. The shortest way seemed to rent a car in Belgrade and drive the 100 km to Timișoara. After a two hours drive, all of a sudden found myself in the town's outskirts. Couldn't recognize any place from this angle and in no time landed in the town's center.

Traffic was sparse. Parking no problem. I was a private visitor and no member of an official mission. The place offered its other cheek. The hotel clerk gave a room only after greasing his palm. No coffee at breakfast. Wanted to grab some hot dogs in the center, had to queue up in an endless line. Gone were the 4 sorts of meat at the state and collective farms. The lady clerk at the change office complained about her monthly dilemma. To buy food, heating material or medicine? My uncle's suits, pitifully worn-out. Suffocative environment. I came for just 48 hours. Almost upon arrival, I wished I could go home.

On the way back to Belgrade stopped for an elder hitchhiking country woman. She lived in a village in the Serbian Banat and commuted daily to her work in a Romanian border village. She stepped into the car and began to talk obsessively. It wasn't easy to follow her vernacular Romanian. Her only son was in the military when he was hit by lightning and killed. What I described here in one concise and frigid sentence she did unfold for more than an hour until we reached her place. I tried clumsily to express my sorrow for her bereavement. Her storytelling was so plastic and dramatic that just recording her words would have produced a fully-fledged well-written novel or short story. I was deeply moved by the event and by this woman's gift to recount it. Wished I were a writer and could grab the opportunity to reproduce it.

Some twenty years later, in 1999, it was my uncle's turn to pass away at 91. We flew, my son and me, to Budapest and rode with relatives to Timișoara for the burial. I was kind of blasé when strolling through the town's streets but my son was impressed by the green parks, the historical buildings and the town's overall layout. The same happened later in 2006 when we spent a couple of days in Timișoara with my little daughter and her husband. They found that the green parks and the respectable albeit run-down buildings had a charm. I was happy that they were free of my own past's burden.

Have paid Timișoara some more visits. This time around the endless and still futile attempt to recuperate the family's abusively nationalized textile factory. It was a swooning experience to enter the premises of the place where have spent much time as a kid and where my grandparents lived. After 18 years of to and fro, our outlay seems to be higher than the anticipated reparations.

In the early 2000s after retiring from the Ministry of Agriculture in Israel, have been invited by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) with residence in Paris to consult for their Eastern-European program. UNEP had the mandate of awareness-raising, technical assistance, training and capacity building for the ozone-depleting methyl-bromide (MB) phase-out project. The program encompassed Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary and Lithuania. I did some monitoring work in Romania and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well.

In South- and Eastern Asia as well as rural Latin America, areas with no Jewish population, you are viewed as Israeli per se, as the citizen of any other country. In Eastern Europe, however, you cannot head off the confrontation with

the Jewish problem. I felt at ease in **Bulgaria**. They received me with much openness and sympathy. Historically, the relationship between Bulgarian Jews and their gentile neighbors was always good. On my first visit, had a meeting with the National Agricultural Research Institute's management. The head was a stored grain specialist and one of his associates a researcher in the same domain. At the end of the meeting they asked me whether I knew Dr. Calderon. Prof. M. Calderon was a stored grain entomologist (insect-pest researcher) with our Research Center. Although we worked in the same branch, we never collaborated. He was born in Bulgaria. Although much older than me, was always keen to get updated on my work and progress. I told them that to the best of my knowledge he passed away a few months earlier. Both my Bulgarian hosts were deeply shocked by the news. They regarded him as a mentor and sharing the same language and background, they developed throughout the years a very close friendship and professional ties. Their frank sorrow was deeply moving. Without knowing Moshe's daughter, Dr. Ruth Calderon, who was a Knesset member at the time, have written to her about her father's reputation in Bulgaria. She was extremely thankful.

Sofia, very much as Sarajevo, displays a unique blend of east and west. Next to the Greek orthodox churches you'll find mosques underlying the town's oriental flavor. The lengthy Turkish rule didn't leave behind much quality except a tradition of tasteful food. Even mom-and-pop restaurants carried a broad variety of very nice dishes. Stayed at a mid-town hotel reminding very much of the old socialist regime's style. One day just walked around the hotel and found a crowd around a building. They were at the intermission of the concert hall. I could walk in with no ticket and sat down on the gallery for the concert's second part. The upper windows of the hall were open.





Greek-orthodox church, mosque and synagogue in Sofia.

A thunderstorm broke out. The wind and the street's rain competed with the inner sounds. And then came a power failure. Pitch dark in the concert hall but the orchestra kept on playing. Several more power failures of very short duration followed but the show went on. You could imagine the standing ovation the conductor and orchestra received at the end of the concert.

We travelled quite a lot in the country visiting mainly the greenhouse industry, the main MB (ozone-depleting methyl-bromide) consumer. The post-communist change was bubbling. Private money poured into the former state farms to buy up the good ones. New technologies were introduced and most of the produce - vegetables and flower crops - found its way to the quality-requiring Western European marketplace. We visited regional research institutes. An elder researcher worked at Plovdiv on soil solarization, a technology developed and investigated in Israel. It is one of the most promising non-chemical MB alternatives. He graduated from a Russian university, his English almost nil and had no ties with the western professional world. Didn't attend

conferences or been on sabbaticals. We had a lengthy discussion on the subject. He was happy to be involved in our program.



Cucumber crop in old-fashioned greenhouse in Bulgaria

Poland focused its effort on the administrative reduction of MB (ozone-depleting methyl-bromide) utilization. In this effort the country had to coordinate its activity with the European Union, and to this end the project leader, my counterpart, visited Brussels on a weekly basis. I toured the research facilities such as the University of Warsaw, regional research and regional agricultural advisory services. All middle-aged and young professionals had a good command of English. My counterpart couldn't believe that I didn't speak Polish. He believed that all Israelis originate from Poland and Polish is the country's second language. It was hard to persuade him that Polish might be heard not more than in one or two cafés in Tel Aviv where over the hill ladies born in Warsaw or Lodz would get together for a cup of tea. Have befriended a Professor of Entomology at the Warsaw University and he used to invite me to his nice suburban cottage whenever I reached Warsaw. He had spent many years in Kenya and we had much common ground to discuss cotton pest problems which were his main subject-matter while in Africa. He was born in Warsaw and remembered with nostalgia the town's cosmopolite character before WWII with its Jewish and German communities. While reconstructed after the war, the town is scarred by communist era's drab blocks and subsisting on its homogeneous, less colorful, Polish population. His wife came from a small town. And described the way the Jewish merchants, who usually controlled main street, would fight in concert any Polish traders who would dare to open a shop

in "their" street. Travelled quite a lot together with a good plant pathologist actively involved in the investigation of MB alternatives applied for the control of soil-borne diseases. Have met him before at international conferences. He was a government employee who used to collaborate a great deal with a private chemical firm dealing in pesticides. When we visited the firm, he even showed me with pride the house he got on the premises of the firm's employees. To my money, a rather dented ethical code. At one field trip he had one glass too many. I took the driver's seat in his car for a long and rainy drive back to Warsaw. Polish food is the equivalent in Israel of poor taste, sweet fish and laundered chicken. I found the fried dumplings (pirozhki) with various fillings and sauces, starring on the menu of most restaurants and bars, as refined. On the top of it, young waiters in the bars and restaurants spoke very good English. The capital city offers various guided sightseeing tours, among them Jewish Warsaw. It focuses mainly on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising's sites and remnants of the once heavily populated Jewish quarter. Both have been razed by German forces.

Nowadays we witness a deep conflict of narratives between Poland and Russia concerning the roles they played in WWII. No doubt about Soviet Union's decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany. It is clear, however, that the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement signed on 23 August 1939 allowed Germany to invade Poland within a week. Basically, Poland became a victim of double aggression. The German invasion of September the 1st and the Soviet one on the 17th of the same month. Moreover, Poland was affected by the execution in Katin, following Stalin's orders, of 20.000 Polish prisoners of war.

After WWI Cieszyn (Teschen) was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Right after the notorious Munich agreement, Poland invaded the area, annexing it with Germany's backing. Germany concomitantly invaded other parts of Czechoslovakia. A most fateful Polish step occurred between 1938 and 1939 when England and France realized that their conciliatory policy toward Hitler was a strategic error. They requested, in coaction with the Soviet Union, Poland's accord to stop Germany's anticipated invasion by letting the Red Army to enter its territory. Poland refused. The coordination between the Soviet Union-France and England came to an end. Within a couple of days the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement had been signed in Moscow. One could guess that the Red Army's presence in Poland would have changed the outcome of WWII and of the Holocaust. The victim shouldn't be blamed. The major responsibility falls on Germany and the Soviet Union. But Poland never took responsibility for this act which paved the road to war.



Warsaw Ghetto-underground opening and Memorial



The Polish underground which received its orders from London didn't carry out significant resistance during the German occupation and it didn't extend any substantial help to the ghetto's uprising Jews in 1943 to prevent the extermination of Polish Jewry's remnants. The resistance acted only in 1944 while the Red Army was nearing Warsaw's gates to push out the already withdrawing German Army and to prevent Warsaw from being freed by the Soviets. This brief review relies on Prof. Shlomo Avineri's work. It throws light on the complex set of events of WWII and the current Polish-Russian feud on narratives. Topics that preoccupy anyone who visits Poland.

No doubt that my consultancy in Romania and Hungary rendered a particular edge, speaking natively both languages. Still, when in Bucharest, my

counterpart, Dr. Bogoescu urged me, whenever taking a taxi to tell the driver but the address and sit still. The moment I would further engage in a conversation, the cabbie will find out that I'm a foreigner and charge three times higher. As for **Budapest**, the cabbie who picked me up at the airport told me right away that I came from Israel. Visiting the indoor market (Csarnok) in Budapest, have asked in Hungarian for some salami and paprika, the usual stuff. The vendor lowers on me a doubtful look and says:

You're not from here.
 I say, I'm not.
 Where do you come from?
 I tell him, from Temesvár.
 But you don't live there!
 I say, I don't.
 You live in Israel, was his verdict.
 Quite a sharp ear!

My first meeting with the team I worked with in Budapest began with an apology. I was coached, years back when just joined Extension Service, that a lecturer should never apologize before his audience. He should get ready in such a manner that he will never have a reason for an apology. We entertained some small talk in Hungarian prior to the meeting and my lingo sounded colloquial although I could imagine that it struck them as frozen back in the 1950s. However, since have never frequented any Hungarian school, couldn't come to terms with the technical expressions. After the first minutes of briefing on my mission's terms of reference had to apologize and switch to English. Have stressed the fact that this is not a matter of being elitist but just at a pinch with the technical terms. It took me a few days of discussions and visits to get acquainted with them. Basically, have worked with two main groups: Ministry of Environment Protection and Plant Protection Service of the Ministry of Agriculture. Found well-prepared professionals, well-versed on MB matters. The field trips took us to the country's south east where the glasshouse industry is concentrated. One such little town was Szentes. In the town's center you could see the synagogue converted into a center for elderly. A uniquely impressive still active synagogue is the one in Szeged. Unfortunately it was closed. The glasshouses in the Szentes area were installed with Dutch equipment and technology and were practicing MB substitution. Further, we visited the Plant Protection Center of Hódmezővásárhely. For some odd reason, one of the researchers couldn't fully understand the fact I speak Hungarian and nevertheless am no Hungarian. I didn't want to play the trump card, that if had been living in that town and not in Romania, in the best case would have ended up in Bergen Belsen. Like my wife's grandparents from Makó or her cousins from this very town. At the end we became friends with all visited researchers and

officials, exchanged presents and sincere smiles to the camera. We worked out the program which would expedite the search for MB alternatives for the massive local glasshouse industry. To one of the officials we met in Budapest who originated from Makó, my wife's grandparents' last name sounded familiar. "Stolpersteine", cobblestone-sized memorials, have been placed in front of the house where they lived and were deported from.

Lithuania is a Baltic, northern country and the great share of its MB is consumed by the stored grain industry while soil applications, my specialty, play a lesser role. We visited huge storehouses. The first visit was in winter with plenty of snow around. The temperatures in the storehouses were bitterly low and chilled us to the bone. I joined a British stored grain consultant who played first violin while I couldn't visit any crops in that season, and focused on indoor planning sessions. Forgot my cap in a taxi. Have been utmost lucky that next to hotel there was a hat shop. I sprinted the 20 meters to reach it and bought the warmest and ugliest hat of my life. The old town of Vilnius is nicely renovated, turned into a touristic gem. It contains several interesting, sad Jewish relics. Beggars invade the old city in the evenings. You can see them displaying appalling leg wounds to arouse pity and fetch a few coins. Glimpsed one in the morning, making up his "wounds" with dyestuffs and pencils. From Vilnius had to fly non-stop to Budapest. Reached the airport but all flights were cancelled because of the storm. Huge lines being formed to rebook all passengers. Was lucky to be among the first in one of the lines and rescheduled for next morning. Back to town and hotel to report again at the airport very early next morning. To my money, the wind was even stronger than the day before. Still a bus hauled us to the plane. Living in the subtropics, have never experienced such a weather. The wind was blowing real strong and horizontally, shelling sharp with the thick snow. We boarded the aircraft. I awaited the worst. Couldn't believe that we could move. The plane taxied to the runway at zero visibility. Unbelievably, we took off. It wasn't the scheduled non-stop flight but I hit Budapest after all.

A few months prior to my assignment of monitoring the state-wide MB (ozone-depleting methyl-bromide) substitution project of **Romania**, have met my prospective counterpart Dr. M. Bogoescu at a conference in Corfu, Greece (2004). We planned out the visit and have picked up early information. Bogoescu was the director of a horticultural research institute near Bucharest. Previously, he worked as sector chief of a state farm. Party officials used to visit frequently the farm requesting their allocation - boxes of fruits and vegetables and giving off direct and dilettante commands to the professional staff. They were ignorant and their interference became an unbearable nuisance. He left the service, completed his PhD and embarked on a more distant research career. We travelled together to the main glasshouse industry centers: near Bucharest,

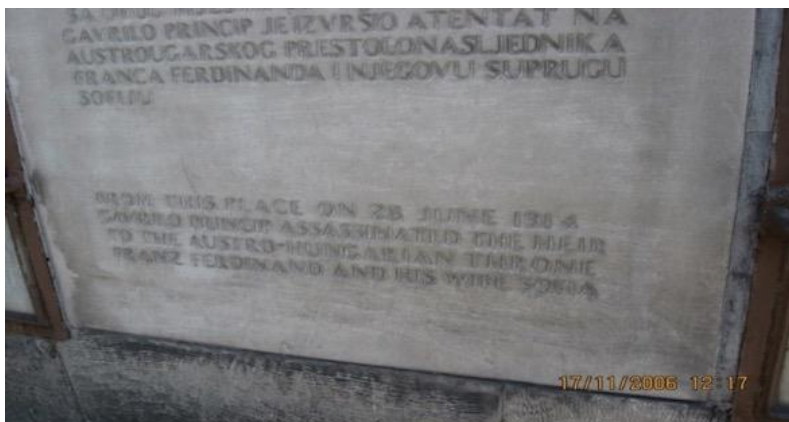
Braşov and Constanţa. In the glasshouses much compost and organic manure substrates were in use. Their high nitrogen levels had a suppressive effect on soil-borne diseases. They acted as natural MB substitutes. The national coordinator of the MB substitution project was a young woman with perfect command of English. To find out later that she was the granddaughter of Timișoara's former Greek-Orthodox Metropolitan. I told her how I interrelated to her Grandfather. The Jewish Lyceum neighbors the bishop's villa. We were playing football in the school's courtyard when a dog jumped the fences and frenzied by the running boys began his own amok and bit at least ten of the players. Me, at eleven, among them. If the dog was rabid or not, could be defined only by autopsy. The bishop rejected the idea and all affected kids had to undergo a series of subcutaneous shots in the bellies. The granddaughter seemed to be a very smart young lady. Left her domestic job to join UNIDO in Vienna. Have joined Bogoescu for a visit at the Academy of Sciences in Bucharest. The place was manned by seniors clad in outdated suits who spent a few daily hours at their clean desks to enjoy a complimentary cup of tea. They had no projects, funds, students, secretaries or assistants. Anyone who popped in for a brief chat made their day. I was invited to Bogoescu's block apartment for a meal of traditional koliva. Later he attended one of the three international MB substitution workshops I organized in Israel giving me the chance to play in turn the host's role.

The mission to **Bosnia-Herzegovina** tackled the issue of quality management. To get the country ready to comply with western European marketplace's quality standards. The European Union launched a wide variety of projects to boost the country's agricultural productivity and export capabilities. The country's managerial structure following the war of 1992-1995 relied on balanced appointments between ethnic Serbs, Bosnians and Croats. This appeases ethnic sentiments but is counterproductive to merit-based appointments. Bosnia is a Moslem country, still everyone we met emphasized that first and foremost they feel Europeans and only next Moslem. I wonder whether in light of the heavy influx of Saudi funds and their attempt to radicalize, this approach still enjoys the same broad support. Our counterpart was a young Bosnian. His family fled to Australia during the war and he grew up there. Out of pure idealism, he returned to Bosnia and put his capabilities and drive at the service of his country's agricultural development. He visited Israel several times guiding groups of trainees. We left behind a program based on environmental protection, reducing the amount of pesticides and introducing elements of quality management in agricultural production. We visited one of Sarajevo's synagogues but the world-famous Sarajevo Haggadah wasn't on display. Sarajevo's center is very oriental, hosting mosques, bazars and Turkish food. Many other quarters are typically Austro-Hungarian scarred by wretched Communist-era blocks.

After a first round of fact-finding visits to the project countries, I reached home-base, **UNEP headquarters in Paris**. Task Manager and contact was Christine Wellington. A Canada-educated, young, on the ball and down to earth woman from Barbados, where she coordinated her country's MB substitution project. We corresponded already in her previous position and I was glad to renew our ties. She tried unsuccessfully to set a meeting between me and the section head, Arjun Patel, an Indian official who gave me the cold shoulder. We sat down in the morning and I showed her the Power Point presentation that I prepared for the countries involved in the project. UNEP's role in MB substitution was awareness raising, training and capacity building. Other institutions such as UNIDO, UNDP and the World Bank were in charge of the projects' execution. Since I came from the agricultural extension-advisory sector, being involved in the same time in Research and Development (R&D), training, publications and outreach programs in both the industrialized world and in the developed one, could draw up the institutional support and mechanisms to put flesh on the bones of UNEP's mandate.



Refurbished Ashkenaz Synagogue, Sarajevo.



The place where Prince Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in 1914 triggering WWI, Sarajevo.



"Don't forget '93", Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina



War memorial at Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina. With Ben (young Bosnian/Australian counterpart) and Yigal, Israeli teammate.



With Christine Wellington, UNEP, Paris

Christine was awed by my outline. She has never seen such an all-terrain holistic approach to their mission. She scheduled right away a seminar for the whole group for that afternoon where I would elaborate on my proposal. Arjun Patel gave in and was ready for a meeting in his office. Neither could he allow himself to be absent from my presentation. During the next days and my next visits to UNEP, his office door opened up for me. Usually he was on the phone, talking to his travel agent, discussing the upgrade on his business class ticket. He apparently nurtured a lofty disdain toward women and didn't extend Christine's contract. She had to leave Paris and spent the next year in Barbados, her home country. Arjun's boss, a French-Jewish lady, took a firm stand and brought her back. Once my project proposal was accepted, the next field visits focused on putting its outline in place. Still, Arjun pulled off a new hat trick. He loved to hate foreign consultants. We were too expensive for his budget and his own people could by now take over for less. Our employment was discontinued. Christine got married and left for the US to get a position with another UN agency. Although UNEP co-sponsored the international workshops organized by me in Israel, this quitter never sent any representatives. He was ready to address our audience through video-transmitted talks. That was the most we could see eye to eye.

Wrap up

The UN's political credibility is a well-deserved low. However, its professional capabilities to launch projects of global significance is a different ball game. I state it without hesitation that the world-wide phase-out of ozone depleting substances is a success story. Methyl bromide used in agricultural production as well as chloro fluorocarbons (CFCs) used as refrigerants and aerosols were phased-out in the year 2005 in the industrialized countries and after a ten years grace, in 2015, in the developing world. One hundred and sixty countries signed the Montreal Protocol. A specially established Multilateral Fund financed and steered the project's activity in the developing world. It implied a major Research and Development effort as well as an ample series of administrative, legislative and law-enforcement measures. I am grateful for having been part of this challenging endeavor. Coordinating first MB's field-level substitution program in my country and adjusting the accrued experience to the developing world's needs: in African countries, in most central American countries, in Turkey and in Eastern European countries.