

Esfir Dener On A Construction Site



This is me on a construction site. This photo was taken in Chernovtsy in 1947. I was photographed bringing a pot of milk to the Hungarian prisoners-of-war working on the construction site. I was climbing up the ladder when I heard: 'Stand, or I will shoot!' Our mechanic was standing downstairs with a trophy camera. I put down the pot, posed for him and he photographed me. This is the only photo that they gave me back after I was arrested. In 1941 my mother and I were deported by the Soviet authorities to Mogochin town, Molchanov district, Tomsk region in Siberia. There they declared that we were sentenced to 25 years in exile. I ran away from there to Novosibirsk in 1944. I graduated from Industrial College in Novosibirsk. In 1947 I came to Chernovtsy and went to work as a rate setter at the reconstruction of the knitwear factory ruined by German bombing. There were 90 Hungarian and 200 German prisoners-of-war working at the reconstruction of the factory. They worked on one job site, but in different crews. They didn't communicate with each other. In the morning the foreman issued a task and I put down personal scopes of work. By the end of the day the foreman and I checked the laborers' day's work and calculated how much they had earned. For this amount we gave them bread. I hated the Germans, but my good manners didn't allow me not to greet them in the morning; my father would have turned in his grave. So, I came onto the site saying, 'Good day today', just stating that it was a good day. I spoke Russian to the superintendent, but he replied in German knowing that I knew German. Once he asked me, 'Fraulein Fira, do you think there is a God?' and I replied, 'When I got to know what you were doing to the Jews in Europe, I said there is no God. But when you, fascists, receive bread from my Jewish hands, as much as I write you should have, I say: there is a God!'