

Ernest Galpert



This is me at the time when I worked in a mechanic shop. The photo was taken in Mukachevo in 1939. I turned 15 in 1938 and had to go to work. I became an apprentice to a mechanic, the Jewish owner of an equipment repair and maintenance shop. I learned to fix bicycles, sewing machines, gramophones and prams. My training was to last for two years. I actually started work a year later, but my master didn't pay me a salary. I did repairs and he received all money. He only gave me small allowances. In 1938 the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia and gave the former Hungarian territory including Subcarpathia back to Hungarians. [Editor's note: The Germans only occupied the

Czech lands, Slovakia became an independent state but that part of it, which was mostly populated by Hungarians, was in fact ceded to Hungary in accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938.] In the course of time it became clear that this was a fascist Hungary and the authorities began to introduce anti-Jewish laws. My father lost his trade license. My master also lost the license for his shop. In 1940 his shop was closed. My father and I had to look for a job. We went to work at Mr. Rot's stationery factory, which was still operating at the time. I became a mechanic and my father was hired as a worker. My generation grew up less religious than our parents. I met with other workers that were communists and this had its impact on me. Of course, we didn't become atheists, but we were certainly not as close to religion as our parents. My mother was very upset about it while my father was more condescending and forgave me many things. When I was in my teens I didn't want to stay at the synagogue until the end of the prayers. When I was leaving the synagogue to go out with my friends my father only asked me to come home when he did to cause my mother no additional worries. Once my mother got angry with me for some reason and said, 'Well, you will get back to religion when you grow older'. We treated our parents with respect, but that time I lost my temper and replied, 'Only if I lose my mind'. I cannot forgive myself for it. I can imagine how my mother must have felt hearing this from me. I feel so sorry that I didn't ask her forgiveness.