

Rachel Gitelis With Her Sister Freida Goldferb And Her Sister's Friend



I (on the right) with my sister Freida (on the left) and a friend of hers. The photo was taken when we were in evacuation in Kazakhstan in 1942. We decided to evacuate in September 1941. We got on the train heading for Karaganda region in Kazakhstan. When the train stopped we could go and buy some food again. It was my duty to fetch some water to wash ourselves and drink. Our trip lasted a week, or longer, before we arrived at Jan-Arka station, Karaganda region, Kazakhstan [2,000 km from Odessa]. We rented a small room with two single beds in it from a Kazakh family, where we lived throughout the evacuation period. They had a cow and every morning our landlady left a jar of milk at our door. 'This is for the children', she used to say. I was lucky and found a job at a canteen. The human resource manager there liked me and offered me a job as a waitress. I cried because I couldn't bear the smell in the canteen, but my mother said that I had to accept this job because nobody else in our family had one. There were two girls from Odessa in this canteen, and they also convinced me to accept it. After some time I got used to this work. Every morning I came to the canteen wearing a starched apron. The other employees liked me and called me 'Purple Rose'. People could get food at the canteen for money or cards. People were starved because the monthly cards only lasted for one or two weeks. We always gave the leftovers to starved people. We had many Jewish, Russian and Kazakh friends during our evacuation. I remember a nice Russian woman, Dusia, and a man, Vania, from Belarus. He was shell-shocked and couldn't talk. People were saying that he began to talk because he fell in love with me. He and his friend, Volodya, went to the front and wrote to me from there. Unfortunately, my husband destroyed all their letters later. I have no idea what happened to these two men. Later my sister got a job as an assistant accountant at the same canteen. My father got a job as a storeman at the railroad storehouse. My mother was too weak to work. She observed Sabbath and followed the kashrut even in evacuation She didn't work or cook on Saturdays, but we had to work on Saturday.