

Amalia Laufer With Her Mistress



This is me (on the left), photographed with my mistress. I worked for her from 1942 to 1944. She was very kind to me. I am wearing a dress that she gave me. The photo was taken in Chernovtsy in 1944. She wanted to have a picture of us. We were photographed in the yard of my house. On 22nd June 1941 the Great Patriotic War began. We had to leave Kabaki. We packed some clothes

and a little food and left the village at night. We reached the Jewish neighborhood in Chernovtsy. We had been staying in the ghetto for about two months when our hostess told us that the Germans were going to raid the ghetto and check everybody's documents. She asked us to leave her house. Her husband worked at the laundry in the ghetto. He took us to the laundry. He hid my sister and mother in the laundry, and I was waiting outside when policemen approached me and asked my name. He gave me a sign to remain silent and told them that I was a deaf and dumb girl from the village and came to ask for a piece of bread. He said he knew me and that I wasn't a Jew. They left. Then a Jew from the synagogue said that he knew an empty house. He said we could settle there, but the community couldn't help us with food. We cleaned a room and it became our lodging. My mother didn't work in Chernovtsy. She was very sickly after what she had to go through. My sister and I went to work. I became a housemaid for a local Jewish woman. I washed the floors, cleaned her apartment, fetched water and did her laundry. There was an old people's home nearby, and I washed floors there, too. I was given a meal there, but I didn't eat it. I took the food to my mother. My mother asked me whether I had had something to eat, and I assured her that I did, when in truth I felt nauseous from hunger. Jews had to wear the star of David on the sleeve and chest. I looked like a Ukrainian girl and nobody took me for a Jew, so I didn't wear the star. When my mistress saw that I didn't have a star of David on my sleeve she asked me how I went outside without it. And I replied that God helped me. I said that I believed in God and that the place for the star of David was in the synagogue, not on a sleeve. My mistress gave me her old clothes, because I didn't have any. Her husband had a good job and provided well for his family. My mistress treated me to a meal every now and then and made sure that I ate it in her presence. But I returned each day to the ghetto to my mother and my sister. In 1944 my employer left for America and offered me to go with her. She told me that she knew what the Soviet regime was like. She lived under the Soviet power and was afraid of arrests and deportation to Siberia. She said that Stalin was no better than Hitler. I told her that I couldn't leave my mother, that if I went there would be nobody left to give her food. Now I sometimes think - why did God pay me back with problems and bad luck for my kindness? I was a caring and decent daughter.