

Emilia Ratz



This picture of me was taken in 1940 in Lwow, the first stop during my flight from the Germans. When I got off the train in Lwow in the evening I stood at the railway station like a poor orphan. I had never been to this city before. I knew that Lwow was a cultural center, but that was about it. A woman approached me, saying, 'Girl, you must be a refugee!' 'Yes', I replied. 'Do you have a place to stay?' 'No.' 'You can stay at my place. I only have a small apartment but I'll put a mattress into the bathtub and you can sleep there.' My benefactress turned out to be a teacher. I told her, 'You know, I want to study at the university here. I have no money but I'll probably meet many friends at university.' I knew many people from Warsaw, also older students. The next day I wrote to my uncle: 'I have arrived.' And, indeed, I met a lot of old acquaintances at the university. I was the

youngest and everyone felt obliged to help me. It was the beginning of November and exams were over already. However, there was a student committee because this was an unusual year: there were a lot of people who wouldn't have been allowed to enter university, both Jews and communists. And this committee had fought for us to be allowed to take special entrance exams. What turned out to be a little bit more complicated was the matter of accommodation. There was a so-called 'commander', an older student, in the student hostel. Much to my disadvantage I had this coat with a Persian lamb collar that my mother had made for me for my final exams. Now this 'commander' concluded that someone who owns a coat with a Persian lamb collar simply must be rich. I had no money whatsoever though and couldn't possibly afford an apartment. And so I lived illegally for two months, spending the night here and there. Some of the people, who accommodated me, gave me some food. I had to study a lot and finish my exams quickly. I had done my finals in June and now I had to sit exams in maths, chemistry and physics.