

Siima Shkop



This is me, a year after having finished lyceum. I was working at the hairdressers' and attending art courses. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 1939. I finished lyceum in 1938 at the age of 18. I wanted to go on with my education, and was dreaming of going to the arts institute. The tuition was very expensive, and I could not afford it. Aunt suggested taking me as an apprentice in her workshop, but I did not like sewing and had no skills for that. I decided that I would take any profession, but that. I became an apprentice of a famous hairdresser in Tallinn. Even the president had his hair cut there and the wives of all the diplomats were customers there. At that time, when the fascists came to power in Germany, fascism was trickling down here as well. They even did not

want to hire me for being a Jew, but still took me as an apprentice for two months. Then one of their regular customers - a wealthy Jew - stood up for me. She said if I was fired only because of my nationality then no Tallinn Jews would ever come to the salon. She was also supported by a rich German lady, who was also a regular customer. She said the nationality did not matter, the work did. Unfortunately, during my apprenticeship I was more involved in cleaning than in training. When I had spare time I was standing by the master and watching his work - beautiful hairdos. Once a week I attended a special school where I was taught to put wigs on and do make-up. It was very interesting for me. When I finished school, I worked at the hairdressers'. Often I did not have to do my job, but be at beck and call for my customers, who were of different age - adult ladies and young girls like me. While they waiting in line, they could send me to fetch cakes from confectionary or run other errands for them. When a customer was my age I sadly thought to myself - that she could do what she wanted - study and have no problems in life. I wanted to study, but could not afford it. I wanted to banish those thoughts, as there was nothing I could do. If I was too focused on that, it would make my life unbearable. I tried to have a fully-fledged life the best way I could. In the evenings I went to Maccabi for training.