Sophia Vollerner

This is a picture of me, taken in Chernovtsy in 1940. In 1940 Bessarabia and Moldavia [today Moldova] joined the USSR. Before they joined the USSR my husband went to Chernovtsy as a member of governmental delegation. In July 1940 the Ukrainian Ministry of Trade sent my husband, Alexandr Andrievskiy, to work in Chernovtsy. In September I was transferred to work at a bank in Chernovtsy at my request. I took my son Rostislav with me. We got a nice three-bedroom apartment in the center of the town. Our son went to school in Chernovtsy. We liked Chernovtsy. It was an old beautiful town. Many people spoke Yiddish in the streets. There was a big synagogue and several smaller ones, a Jewish school and a Jewish theater. Before the Great Patriotic War the majority of the population was Jewish. There were no conflicts and people treated each other nicely. The locals didn't really welcome the newcomers: they called us 'Soviets', but I didn't feel any prejudice on my part. Many people spoke German. Before 1918 this area belonged to Austro-

Hungary and since then German was as common a language there as Romanian. They addressed me in German in the streets taking me for one of them. My husband felt at home very soon after we moved. He made friends with the local Bessarabian men that spoke fluent Russian. Alexandr was chairman of the trade union of workers. When he had to speak at a meeting I wrote a speech in German in Russian letters. People appreciated his respect of their language and traditions. There was a difference between the newcomers and local people. One could tell the difference at once at a theater, for example. I saw women wearing nightgowns with lace and embroidery to the theater. They must have taken them for evening gowns. Many of those that moved to Chernovtsy made an impression of wild and ignorant people that were buying everything they saw in stores. It could be understood since many officials in the USSR were peasants or workers with little or no education. A colleague of mine once told me with indignation that one of those newcomers didn't know who Schiller was. I replied with a smile that it was no wonder since that person didn't know who Pushkin was either.