

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Grigory Liberchuk
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Grigory Liberchuk, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on March 16, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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GRIGORY LIBERCHUK

March 16, 2004

Q: Good afternoon, Grigory.

A: Good afternoon.

Q: It's nice to see you.

A: Thank you, same to --

Q: What was your name when you were born?

A: When I was born my name was Gershel.

Q: Gershel?

A: Yeah, and my name was Leib and the father's name Leib, so I was born as a Gershel Leib Liberchuk. But by the -- by the passport documents my name was like Grigory -- Grigory Leibovich, and Liberchuk. This is how I was -- my passport documents.

Q: And now you're known as Gregory as opposed to Grigory?

A: Now yes, now it's -- well, when we came here and we start to understand how we have to put Gregory, so they put Sam Grigory on the first -- on the white card, on -- on the green card, Gregory. [indecipherable]

Q: So does -- does Gregory feel comfortable for you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yes?

A: My li -- my driver license -- license I am Grigory.

Q: You are Grigory.

A: My driver license.

Q: I see.

A: But I am Gregory.

Q: When were you born, what's your birthday?

- A: I was born in -- in January 25, 1938 in Dnepropetrovsk. This was a industrial city in Ukraine, it's -- maybe it's the second one.
- Q: Near the Nyepper river, yes?
- A: Yes, the Nyepper river, yeah. And my father came to Dnepropetrovsk from a small Jewish shtetl, from Polonnoye. It was close to the Polish border. And the --
- Q: But still in Ukraine?
- A: It's still Ukraine. And my grandmother, she was very, very religious, very, very religious. But when all this revolution came to this place, and with all this [indecipherable] that they give some freedom to the people, so my father, who was actually a -- a -- a head of school student, so he went to the school in Dnepropetrovsk, and he is got a job in Dnepropetrovsk, and this is where he met my mom. And when the war start, I wasn't more than three year old. I was not so little, not so --
- Q: But then you certainly were not big, you were --
- A: [indecipherable] was still a [indecipherable] yeah, not so big. And I had a brother on this time, his name was Jakob. So from Dnepropetrovsk, it was a little bit more organisi -- organized, the system where they tried to put people -- evacuate when the Germans was close to Dnepropetrovsk. So this is why we was able to get on the train, on the -- and move somewhere and on the sa -- to the safe place. And with my mom was her younger sister, with my brother, because she went to help my mom. The -- my brother was about four months old.
- Q: Ah, so he was even younger than you.
- A: After he was born, I wen -- wor -- yeah, he was about four -- four months old. So -- and we is trying to get somewhere to the flash -- safe place. Actually, we didn't choose it, but the -- the train know the direction and they tried to bring us somewhere where it's safe. So during this sis -- time when we tried to get at the safe place, so is -- our train was destroyed by the Germans a few times. And once, Mom's sister came without the baby. She said he did not had food and he died. And she left him somewhere, and she came alone, without [indecipherable]. So what we can do. So -- and the time was very, very pressed, so they manage give us a few -- a -- a new train, so -- and train went somewhere else. So on the time when we came to this place, where can see that it's like very safe. So it was me and my mom and her sister.
- Q: So let me ask you something. From Dnepropetrovsk --
- A: Yeah.
- Q: -- you and your mother left separately?

A: No, no, we went together. We went --

Q: No -- y -- with your sister?

A: -- family of four, my mother's sister --

Q: Yes.

A: -- me, and my little brother. And the sister went to help her because she was with me, I was three --

Q: Right, right.

A: -- my mom, and she was with a child, four months old. So the sister came to help my mom because -- we lived in Dnepropetrovsk.

Q: Right.

A: Mom's sister li-lived also Dnepropetrovsk. Mom's -- my mom's mother, she got fi -- she got five daughters. My mom's -- my mom was the second one, so rest of the family moved with the older daughter family. And this sister stayed with us, and she helped us [indecipherable] from Dnepropetrovsk area.

Q: So how did it happen that your mother's sister, with the baby --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- was separated from you?

A: Because when it was bombed --

Q: Bombed.

A: -- every people di --

Q: They just discr -- uh-huh --

A: -- you know the -- there nowhere that ki -- everyone tried to find out a place where they can stay safe. Later, when this flights, when it was over, so they came together to one place and said, what will be next? So she met again me and my mom --

Q: And said --

A: -- and she said there's no kid.

Q: Your mother must have been devastated.

A: Yeah, she was very devastated, and she never know anything about this, and this sister -- mom's sister, my aunt, actually she never talk about it any more. And well, this is another story because as I said that it comes to me -- it came to my mind that no, maybe he is alive somewhere, because when I was more than 20 year old, after my technical school, I was sent to one place in Ukraine also, but it was somewhere, and this is between these places where our train moved. And I met one guy, and he said, "Listen, my village, I have a guy, he looks like you." And I said, "Well, how a guy can look like me?" What he said, it's -- he said, "Yes, he looks like you." And I went away from him and later I came to -- when it comes to my mind what it can happen, I came back to meet him, and I can never meet him, so this is -- well maybe in another life.

Q: So, are you really suspicious that somebody --

A: Well, I really suspicious because alya -- my mom died about six years ago, and the sister, she died recently in Israel. When I call her, I said, "Can you tell me the story, exactly?" She says -- where you -- had you seen him die, had you -- you put him, and you bury him? She said, "No, they came and they put him to the -- they pick him up and they put him somewhere to the hospital or something like this. So that's why it's come to my mind maybe.

Q: Maybe. Now what -- where was your father?

A: My father was called on the front -- on the -- at the army, on the [indcipherable] from the -- when war began -- began. So -- and he was -- all those five years, he was in the army.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: All those five years. Thanks God he was not wounded, he came -- not -- not just he, my -- my grandmom from his side. She got three sons and all of them was in the army, and all of them came alive --

Q: Really?

A: -- without any injury. Without any injury, so they --

Q: Amazing.

A: -- got [indcipherable]

Q: Now, what did your father do before the war?

A: Before wars, he got like a position in the court, because he got like a middle [indcipherable] from the judge, and he worked in the court, like I don't know it was a big judge, or [indcipherable] judge, but he worked something in this -- in this field, and my mom was a bookkeeper.

Q: Uh-huh, so they both worked?

A: Yeah, they both worked.

Q: Was that usual in Ukraine, and in the -- in the Soviet Union, that both mother and father would work?

A: Sure, sure it was, you know --

Q: Because it wasn't the case --

A: Yeah, it was usual -- ist -- it was unusual if su --

Q: If someone didn't --

A: -- if -- if wife, if she was just a housewife, it was questionable.

Q: Right, right.

A: How they survive, where they get money to live. But it was usual that they work together.

Q: Right. Do you know where -- do you remember any of this -- this train trip? Or do --

A: Well, I -- I remember a few things that first of all -- I don't remem -- it's very strange, but I don't remember my brother, actually, that I can tell them that I remember my brother. But I remember a room really, I remember some toys, I remember the horses they brought me as a gift. I took enough, and took a look what is inside. And I remember that was -- it was like a trip, so it's a few times. I remember the noise of these planes. I remember the fire, and I remember that when -- a few times I saw that when all these people from the train, when they go some, no one know -- knows where to go. Some [indecipherable] goes ahead, and no one knows where -- what we have to do. And it was like -- it's very strange, it was like -- I don't know, is -- or they made it like by military sanction. It was like on the sky, different colors like a half o -- of the si -- what is it? How do they call it?

Q: A rainbow?

A: Like -- like a half of the moon, you know, but it was like different -- different bright color. And someone said because this is here -- this is the point where we can go, we have to go back. There's no way to go -- to go further, so -- and we went back. And it lo-look -- look like -- it looks like some house, or some -- I don't know what -- all people will -- they listen what they said. One of the guys said where we have to go. Because it's not like you buy a ticket and you go, this [indecipherable] and say go.

Q: Do you remember being afraid on that trip?

A: Yes.

Q: You do.

A: I remember that I was afraid, and I remember that -- the noise in this bombing is still in my -- sometimes when I sleep --

Q: You can hear?

A: -- it comes here, yeah, I can hear it sometimes.

Q: Do you have bad dreams now, with remembering it sometimes?

A: About this time -- well, I just more remember that it was a lot people that going, they don't know where to go, and this is different color, like [indecipherable] that people say you cannot go here. This is what I remember.

Q: Now you were going in a southeastern direction, right?

A: Yeah, we -- we went to west -- west south -- southwest direction, because it was far away from the German border and thing like this. So -- and we stay here almost a year before German came to this place. So because German came to this place where you finally [indecipherable], in August, 1942. So the war began on July '41, so it was more than a year. So the war was very, very -- on the high level on this time. And -- but because -- I don't know the -- how they call it, they call it like Voencomat -- Voencomat, it's military commission in these places. So they got an order to take care about families whose fathers on the f -- on the ar -- in the army. So because this is a help, this apartment, a help is found the job for -- for Mom, and some -- every month Mom receives some money from the -- like from the government because our father is in the military. So -- and we stay here, mom -- it was very difficult, but no one knows -- everyone knows that this is a war, no one knows if your father will be alive or not. And we spent like a year like this. And --

Q: And where -- do you know where you were for that year?

A: Yeah, I know I wa -- it was a -- near Stavropol.

Q: It was near Stavropol?

A: Near Stavropol, yeah Beshbagir they call it, Beshbagir, like suburb -- suburb sa -- Stavropol.

Q: A suburb?

A: Suburb Stavropol, and it's agriculture actually, a place -- agriculture most -- in this time it was most agriculture places, not industry.

Q: Right.

A: And so they got a new friends, and the people who was here, from -- the Russian people, well, they was not -- they actually afraid to be anti-Semitic, very, very, because actually they should take care about families who was -- came from this -- the territory that you know, like the -- they ra -- ran away from the Germans so, it was -- everything looks not very friendly. So -- and what happened when ger -- when Germans almost came to this place, so Mom took me, and we tried to run away from this place. No one knows where, but someone said that we'll -- we will got the directions. Germans here, let's go to another place. It was again when we came, I see the same line, with the same -- the same [indecipherable] as I said, no place to go. And where to go, no one knows where to go. So we came back to the same place in this Stavropol, and my neighbors said to my mom, "You know what? This is what I can tell you. You look like Russian village woman, so no one cra -- can recognize you that you are Jew, and no one will ask you. You can take a name, like Russian name, like Vera, and tell that you are Vera, you don't have passport. The passport -- passport was somewhere destroyed. And let me take care about your son, because together you will never survive. You will never find a apartment to stay together. Who will take care [indecipherable] keep. And between these Russians villages, you will find something and you will survive." So Mom decided -- and Mom told me that, "You know what, I will leave you with this very nice -- very nice person, don't worry, I will come back to pick up you. And because Germans want to kill us." She afraid to told me they want to kill us because we are Jewish, because she afraid that -- if I will play with kids, sometimes I can tell them that I am a Jew. And I also look like -- like a -- like a Russian boy. I was a blonde, with a -- this --

Q: With round fa --

A: -- hair, yeah, with a round face, with this all -- my hair was like this.

Q: Long hair.

A: Yeah, long hair.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And -- and Mom said what I can do, this is the way -- this is what I can -- can do, I am very sorry but --

Q: Do you re --

A: -- and she left me with this woman.

Q: Do you remember her talking to you?

A: I -- I remem -- I remem -- I remember sh -- sh -- she talked to me, and she told me why, and what's strange, I was like -- like a person who obey orders. I did not cry, I did not ask why. I did not cry that I want go to my mom. She said me that we have to do it, I said okay, we have to do it. And ali -- I often ask me how come, because now, when my grandkids stay -- the first time our gra -- when they wer -- w-we told them, "Can you go somewhere to vacation, and we will stay with your boy." He was just born. And she cried first day, we cannot stop him. He want mommy and that is it. And I never said that I want mommy. Mommy told me that we have to do it like this. So we did it like this.

Q: Do you remember her hugging you?

A: Mom, yes, sh --

Q: Was she --

A: -- I remember her hugging me, I remember her kissing me, and I remember her -- her crying.

Q: Wa -- but she was crying?

A: She crying, but I was not. I said, "Well, Mommy says that we have to do it, because someone want to come to kill us." So -- and two days I was in this --

Q: And you were four years old?

A: I was --

Q: Or is this five?

A: -- only three -- three -- four -- four --

Q: Four.

A: Four -- '42nd, I was four.

Q: Right.

A: So -- and on the second day, this woman, she got a German boyfriend, a big one. For me it was like a -- I said a very, very big one, with the big shoes, so -- and he came, and he pick me up, and he said, "I know that you are Jewish, you will go with me." And even -- even this time, I don't remember me crying. He said, "Let's go." I said, "Let's go." So he put me on -- on his vehicle, and he brought me to --

Q: What did he have, a motorcycle?

A: Yes, h-he got a motorcycle with this -- with carriage.

Q: Right.

A: So he put me on the carriage, he put me in this motorcycle, and he brought me to one place. To be honest with you, I am not sure it was a synagogue, or a -- previous synag -- or it was something -- what kind of place was it, but it was about hundred people inside. Overy -- everyone was part of the family. They collect them from different places, they brought them all them together, they assembled them together. So -- and I was just by myself. And --

Q: Can I interrupt for one minute? Take off your ring.

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Take off your ring.

Q2: It's his watch.

Q: Is -- is it the watch that's doing it?

Q2: It's the watch that -- yeah --

A: The watch?

Q: So take off the watch, because you're banging it --

A: Oh, I'm sorry.

Q: That's fine, that's terrific.

A: I'm sorry about that.

Q: Okay. No, no, no, no, no, don't be sorry, I didn't want to interrupt you.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Okay, so they took you to -- and you're not s-sure if it's the synagogue, or --

A: I -- to be honest with, it -- member -- I tried to understand, it looks like it was a small -- not big synagogue.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Because I don't remember any church let's say equipment like crisis or something like this. It looks like -- seems to me that it was a synagogue.

Q: Mm-hm.

- A: And my wife said me, "Where they got synagogue in Beshbagir?" And I said, "Well, if they got hundred people to bring them together -- or more than hundred, maybe they got," -- anyway it was -- it was in service, or it was --
- Q: Right.
- A: -- previous synagogue.
- Q: Let me -- let me go back for a moment. How do you now understand this woman who clearly seemed to be trying to help your mother and you, and in a day she gets a German boyfriend?
- A: Yes, why not?
- Q: Okay.
- A: It's their philosophy, she got -- well, you know, when Germans came, so they came there let's say [indecipherable] they -- they believe that is forever. If she knew that is for a half a year maybe her behavior will be di --
- Q: Different, right.
- A: -- was be different, but she believed that is forever. So that is why she said well -- no one force her, teln her this Jewish guy, but she has to explain him where she got this guy -- where she got me. And as a Jewish boy, maybe I got something that if they will take a look at this, they will found that I am a Jewish.
- Q: Yeah, right.
- A: So -- and so they brought me to this place. No one gave us food, no one, but because it was families, they got something with them. And I remember me that I go -- I am alone, no one else, four year boy, no one else. So and I took a look one family, another family. I took a look one family they -- I remember they eat things like bread with honey. So I took a look on him, he said, "Maybe -- wh-where is your Mom?" I said, "I don't have my Mom here, by [indecipherable] self." He start crying, and sa -- it was a -- a Jewish man with a build -- I -- I don't know his name, what -- I don't know how he looks like, his glasses. So -- and he -- he gave me a piece of bread with honey and said, "Take it, please." And he is crying, and I said, "Why he is crying?" I did not understand what they going to do here. I don't understand why all these peoples here, I even don't understand why this guy brought me here. Well, I understand maybe she doesn't want me stay with her, she gave me someone else, and that is it. And it was like, you know, like a sign, I don't know, that I said to them, "I want to go to make pee-pee." And the guy who was in -- on the door, he said [indecipherable] it was a fence around, it was not just -- he said, "Okay, you can go." So when I came and wi -- to make a pee-pee it was like a wooden cabin with something in the floor.

Q: It's a -- it's an outhouse.

A: Yeah, outside, but you can make a pee-pee. So I came to this place, and another guy. I look at him, and he worked with horses. He clean a ho -- a horse. He look at me, he look on this door, he looked at -- I came along from this place, and he came to me, and he said, "Listen, all these people will be killed. And I will try to save you. Don't say a word. I will bring you a carriage, and I will bring you to a safe place." S -- and he -- he work -- he work like with them, but it was -- he was like part on something like underground or something like this. So he put me in this carriage, and he brought me -- it was about, in my understanding, at least 30 minutes, 40 minutes drive on this place. And he reveals a big, big forest, and he said, "Stay here. I be back." And what I remember, it was very, very, very ti -- this was real time, and I start to worry, because he did not come back, and I don't know where to go from here. And it was a forest, and just me and the -- and the horse. So I don't know what I have to do, where I had to go, so --

Q: So the horse was with you?

A: Yeah.

Q: The horse and carriage?

A: He left the horse with me, and said stay here. He put this horse around the tree, and said stay with me.

Q: Right.

A: So he came somewhere. It looks like he came to get some orders, or some direction what he has to do. And he came [indecipherable] that he save one guy. I don't know if he told them that he's Jewish or not Jewish, maybe [indecipherable] and he said what -- what is next I can do. So a -- now he came back. He brought -- he put me -- he -- we continue our -- this journey, so we came to one place in different town. And we ca -- he came to the woman, the woman was pregnant and she got four kids. And he said, this kid I brought you, this kid has to stay in your house for a couple days, and we will find for him a place. She start crying, she said, "Take him away, I don't want him because I have three and I expect another one, and it's very dangerous for me and for my family. I don't want him, take him away." Because I understand for Germans is [indecipherable] said, "Don't worry. We will find place for him." So they put me under the bed, and they put watermelons around me. They cover me --

Q: Watermelons?

A: Watermelons. It was time -- it was like the end of the autumn, it was about maybe August, the end of the August, September, so they put a lot out, and they said, "You have to stay here, don't go, and don't cry. But you have to stay here unless we will call you.

Don't go away, stay here." And it was about maybe two days when I was in this position. So later someone came, and the -- it was almost --

Q: Well what did you -- do you remember being in that --

A: Yeah, I remember like now, I remember y -- ow --

Q: So you --

A: -- I remembering how this bed was covered with something like -- like gray cover, and it was a long one, so when someone come in, and they would like to take a look, they open it and they see just watermelon [indecipherable]. So they did not search. I remember that one guy came and said, "What do you have?" And she said, "Nothing." So he -- he open it. I remember the -- how -- he open it, because I see -- I saw that something -- light came to me, but I says I was told.

Q: You did exactly what you --

A: Don't -- don't be -- yeah, don't -- don't open your mouth. So -- and this [indecipherable] me, and later they found the couple, and as I remember it was a Polish couple, they were not young, but they were -- they was without children, childre -- childrenless -- how's it go?

Q: Childless.

A: Childless.

Q: Yes.

A: So and they look at -- at me, and they said well they -- they understand that action is not - - it's not safe to have a child, because rumors can be around. But because they did not have kids, they decided that they want me to be in their family, because as this guy said, her mom is died, no one [indecipherable] he did not tell that Mom around, she will pick him up. And --

Q: Did you tell him that your mother was alive? Were -- could you speak well?

A: Well I -- yeah, sh-she ask me, "Well, where's your mom?" I telled her then that my mom, she went, and I don't know where sh-she's --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- she [indecipherable]. I know what she told me that she left -- I told them the story, how I came to there.

Q: Right.

A: And I remember the woman said, "You -- I'm asking you, I'm begging you, don't tell anyone about this. Tell everyone that we are your parents, and this is just the way that you can survive. Because if not, they going to kill you, and they going to kill us." And when I was in this family, as I remember, it was long enough, because when -- when the Germans was in this place about a half a year. It was -- they came like suddenly from the sky as paratroopers. They put the paratroopers to take this place from the Russians during the war. And, you know, half a year, they forced leave this place. Half a year. So they occupied this place like half a year. But from thi -- I believe it was more than half a year when I first saw my mom, because when she came, I did not recognize her. She was alive, and because she was -- she looked like Russian, so with this name like Vera, so she survive. When she survived, she start looking for me. She start ask one, another one, you know? And finally she find the family where I was. And this family tell to them, "Listen, you know if your fa -- if your husband will come. You don't know how you can survive, okay? And you are actually, you are not old woman, you can have kids more if your husband will come or not, you will have in your family. Let him stay with us. We will like him so mu -- much, and he fa -- he forget about you." He forget his mom. And Mom -- Mom came to me, and someone called me. I remember the face of this woman that I live in the family. She was very, very like sa -- a very -- very worry about this moment. And she said, "Do you know this woman?" And I came, look at her, I said, "No. It's -- it's -- I don't know this woman, she just came to take me. I don't want go from here. I don't want go anywhere from here." And as I told you, she -- he doesn't remember you. And it was time that -- actually it was for Mom was difficult even to prove that I am her son, because no documents, nothing. Maybe they s -- in some ways they believe maybe it's not my mom also, but they was not happy to give me back. It was a sad day. And -- but I believe it was about -- about a year, maybe like -- that I stay in this family. So in a couple months my mom came back. And she ch -- she change her dress. She came in the same dress that she left, and she make her hair in the same way. And I took a look on her, and I said, "My mom came to pick me up." So I came to kiss her, and she asks I want to st -- with their permission that I have to stay additional month, she has to prepare somethi -- somewheres to take me.

Q: Right.

A: And this is how it was.

Q: Right. We have to change the tape.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: I think I asked you a question before --

A: Yeah [indecipherable]

Q: -- you had this little coughing spurt.

A: Yeah.

Q: Which -- a question you couldn't possibly actually figure out an answer to --

A: Well, I --

Q: -- was how would they explain this four year old boy?

A: First of all they was not -- not so old. They was ma -- maybe in their 30's.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And the second -- the second thing was I remember -- I know -- I don't remember even ever play with any kids, so I think they did not let me go, they want keep me in -- in -- in house mostly. And well, i-it -- it -- it was dangerous because maybe if someone --

Q: Would see.

A: -- gives them a -- give alert to the Germans, so maybe they have to explain this in some --

Q: Right.

A: -- in some way -- in some ways. But well, from -- from the understanding, ma -- from my understanding, they got like an excuse, they never know that it's Jewish boy, they ne-never check it. Someone said it's a boy, no he doesn't have parents, they want them to keep him. So it would be like -- for them it could be like an e -- they can -- can admit it like an excuse for themselves to -- if someone will question it.

Q: Right. And do you remember staying inside most of the time?

A: Yes, I remember I'm staying in -- stayed mo -- most of the time.

Q: And were you unhappy about that, or did they explain to you why?

A: Well, they tried to entertain me in the house. They got a lot toys, that I never got. And they tried to take care about me very, very well, because as I said like -- they guess maybe it will be their child, so I remember that well, they tried to give me -- where they got it I don't know, but the food was very, very nice.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, but as I said, it was like agriculture place, so the ground -- they got some food from the -- from the ground. I don't know their occupation, I just remember that from my view they look like real European -- European couple.

Q: And they were nice to you?

A: They was nice to me. They was very nice to me. They was very nice to me, but what -- as I said what happened, and when -- the second time when Mom came to -- to -- to pick up me, so it was a big difference in me now because they start to do something with me. Something happened inside me that I stopped eating, and they said that, "He doesn't want to eat, I don't know what happened to him, he -- he usually was a good eater, now he stops," -- like he stopped eat [indecipherable] was like a half left for me what I was before, on the time when Mom came to pick up me a second time.

Q: And they didn't want to give you up?

A: They did not want. They did not want the -- and they try -- well, they not bring this case to the court or something like this, first of all, because as I said it was a situation when you was on this territor -- territory, you're guilty. So -- and my mom, let's say she got like a privileges because she was a wife for a person who fight for -- in the army, so for that it was better don't deal with it. My mom said -- but as I said, when my mom said that she want me to stay a little bit longer be-before she will prepare for this, they was agree with it.

Q: And when was it that you stopped eating? Th -- when she came the second time and said she would come back for you, or --

A: No, when the -- when the -- when she ca -- said that she will come back to me.

Q: So then you stopped eating until you were going to be with her?

A: Yeah, yeah, because I start very well -- something start inside me, and I start --

Q: It's interesting because when you appear to be safe, then you seem to have an emotional reaction.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you know? You didn't have a reaction before, and now --

A: Yeah, because before, as I said, it looked like I don't see the changes because well, I was safe in this place. It was not this time when it was under the -- covered by watermelons --

Q: Right.

A: -- it was totally different situation now. And as I said when -- when -- when Germans left these places, so they start a -- I remember that -- well, in -- in my -- in this sheltered life, I never got the same kind of dress, of something like -- like they [indecipherable] to me, because they believe that now they are safe, they don't have to do anything, and God gave them a child, so this is -- was the situation.

Q: Before your mother came, when it was finally safe --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- were you able to go outside, and were you playing with other kids, or you still --

A: When Germans was?

Q: No, when the Germans left.

A: Yeah, when Germans left, I was -- I -- I -- I -- I wa -- I played in -- they had like as their property, I don't know --

Q: No.

A: -- it was their own or something like this, and I -- yes, I played, but mostly I played by myself.

Q: Right.

A: It was no -- no kids my age around.

Q: What did you call them?

A: These people?

Q: Yeah.

A: I called them Mom and Dad.

Q: Mom and Dad?

A: Yeah, Mom and Dad.

Q: Did you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you do that from the beginning, or did they say this was just safer, to do it that way?

A: Well, it's almost -- it's almost from the beginning because when she explained me that I have to tell them that all -- everyone has to know that this is my dad, this is my mom. This is how I have to call them.

Q: Right.

A: And I start to do it.

Q: Do you have any idea how your mother actually found you? It seems almost impossible.

A: Well, I -- I have an idea because as I said, it was not so big place. All these villages was around.

Q: Around Stavropol.

A: Around Stavropol, around -- it was not far away from this place. So, and you know, when the Russians came back, so everyone who was survive around, they try to find as much as possible excuses for themself. I don't know what happened to this woman who gave me to Germans. Maybe -- maybe as a -- she went to the prison, and she said where she went, okay? Maybe the peop -- the family, where I spent a few nights under the melon, maybe they wanted also have some like [indecipherable] advantages, and sh -- they reported somewhere, because Mom, for the first thing where she -- as I said, I -- as I mentioned Voencomat, so she -- she puts [indecipherable] and this way and come on, they -- it was very powerful --

Q: I see.

A: -- powerful organization. So they put the question to any others places. And as I said, they -- they got -- in Russia it was a special -- special way to watch on you. So this 10 buildings assigned to such and such police worker. So he came and he said, "Well, you got two. Where you -- where you got this boy?" Like you said, "Where you got this boy? Before war you did not get it, where you got it?" So you had to tell them where you got it. And they compare all this information, finally she find me. It was not easy, but she find me.

Q: She find you.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you know how long it took her? Five months, four months, two months? Do you have any idea?

A: It -- about -- about six months.

Q: Six months.

A: About six months.

Q: And she was sure you were alive?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: She was sure you were alive?

A: Yes, becór -- because -- well, she got a hope that I am alive. And well, I understand her when -- when someone -- everyone knows what happened to this place where ---

Q: Yes.

A: -- I was, but someone maybe -- I -- this is -- this a very interesting question where she got this information from whom? Who did tell her that one guy, and I believe just [indecipherable] myself, because no one else was able to escape.

Q: Right.

A: This is -- was like a miracle, that let's see, this [indecipherable] he went out from this -- from this places where they got a guard, and they said don't -- don't let them go. But they said, oh this guy can go. He doesn't need someone to take a look on him. And this is how it happened.

Q: Does your mother know that you -- that this woman had this German boyfriend and that she s -- he just sent you away?

A: Well, she came and she said, "Where's my -- where's my child?" So she said -- maybe she did not tell them that it was her bo-boyfriend --

Q: That [indecipherable] right.

A: -- she said like the German came --

Q: The German came and took him.

A: -- and he took him. And what I can do? He just came.

Q: And you, of course, never were able to find that man who saved you. You have no idea who he was.

A: No, I don't -- I don't know -- I -- I remember like he looked like, but I don't know -- not his name, not --

Q: He wasn't Jewish?

A: He was not Jewish, no.

Q: He was -- you th -- but you think he was in the partisans?

A: He was he -- he work -- I believe that he told them that he agree work with them, but he got a connection with these partisans, with -- with underground resistance.

Q: Right.

A: He got the connection, and the say -- the pri -- the story is that the Germans, they was not long time in this place maybe, this is -- this is why it worked. They did not get a lot time, let's say, to -- you know, t- to be -- they still was under this impression to say that Russians their bosses, not German.

Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

A: So in Ukraine, it was different story, they got a lot people that they was not in some ways, they did -- was not agree with what was going on. In this place in Stavropol it was a little bit more loyal to the government. So that is why -- maybe the people they said, well we have to do something.

Q: Something, right.

A: And as I say, they did not got a lot time to do something wi -- it was -- was consider safe place, and was [indecipherable] if someone came, like you wake up, and you hear Germans here.

Q: So where did your mother set up home then, when she left and then she was going to come back for you, where did she go?

A: She in the same -- in the same place where besh -- Beshbagir, she -- she went to this Voencomat and they gave her place where she has to live. And her sister was with her also. And this is three of us, we stay together. And it was time when Germans a little bit gave up. And Mom's family -- Mom's family, with her older sister, with her sisters, they moved to more safe place in deep Russia, in Kazakhstan.

Q: Mm.

A: So later, when they knew the story, that she survive, blah, blah, blah, so they got her permission to come to Kazakhstan, stay together in this family. And the rest the years in the war, I was in this Kazakhstan with my Mom.

Q: Kazakhstan. And that's for about another year until the war is over?

A: Yeah, it took us ara -- another year. So, because in the week that is the end of the war, we met in Kazakhstan.

Q: And does your father know where you all are?

A: Yes, my mom, my -- well, it was a like -- a system where they send letters. They -- the -- it was like P.O. box.

Q: Uh-huh, yes.

A: The address was like P.O. box.

Q: Yes.

A: And she send the letter, and it was very interesting letter, was -- it's for -- it was like triangle, they did not have envelopes. So they made it the -- is they write something, and one page was without writing, so they made the triangle, and they -- on this triangle they put an address where this letter go, and who is the sender. And because it goes to the army, you need -- you don't need to put a stamp with it.

Q: Right.

A: So it was like for free, but it was rush -- military time letters. So she save -- I remember these letters when they saved them up.

Q: So you knew that your father was alive?

A: Yeah, we knew that our father was alive.

Q: A-And the brothers.

A: And his brothers.

Q: And --

A: We did not know about his brothers.

Q: Okay.

A: We knew it when the war was over. But we knew that our father was alive.

Q: And how was it in Kazakhstan, was that difficult?

A: Well, in Kazakhstan it was not -- not bad. We got [indecipherable] life in Kazakhstan, because my mother's old sister, she was married for a guy who was let -- don't go to the army. He got some health problem before the war.

Q: Right.

A: So they let him stay. And he worked in a place that gave us some privileges and food. He was close to the meat.

Q: Aha.

A: His position was close to the meat.

Q: Right.

A: He was some kind of boss in the -- they got a special -- a special business in Russia, when they have to prepare meat -- how prepare, they have to buy something, this animals, cow or some -- something, and make -- put them somewhere to k -- to kill them and have meat. So he wa -- he was in this kind of business. It was not his business, but he was close to the meat. So -- and because he was close to the meat, so we got the la --

Q: So you were close to the meat.

A: We was close, we got -- we got some meat also.

Q: Right.

A: And my mom was -- find a job as a bookkeeper, and as I said, it was -- this -- this Voencomat, they put an order to help, to support all those families, to give them jobs, to take care about them. So that is welse -- that how we survive, well it was -- you know what, if you take a look actually, what was -- it was not, but if you compare what other people got, we got not -- not bad.

Q: Not bad.

A: We got not bad.

Q: Were you -- when you were in Kazakhstan, were you able to finally play with other kids?

A: Yeah. And I was --

Q: So that must have made a big difference to you.

A: -- yeah, it was very funny story. When -- when I -- in -- the way how they check if this, let's say cow is good for them, for a meat, or if it's -- I don't know, they -- they put their hands something behind the -- the tail, you know, the tail of the -- so they -- they touch it, and they know what does it mean for them, it's good or not. I don't know why. So -- and I saw how they did it, so I went once, and I did it by myself. And the cow, by her feet, she put me here in the stomach, and I --

Q: The cow kicked you.

A: -- I lost -- yeah, and I lost my breath. I don't know -- I -- it was like I -- I al -- almost died. Well this is -- was the play. And another time some people, they -- who -- they got horses also in this -- with this business, so they put me on horse, and I --

Q: And you rode a horse?

A: I rode -- yeah, I rode a horse. And it was -- and we played with all these people.

Q: So it wasn't so bad?

A: Well no, it was not so bad.

Q: Now that you -- it was [indecipherable]

A: It was much, much better than a ghetto.

Q: Than a ghetto, yes.

A: Yeah, it was much better.

Q: Was it worse than what you had with this Polish -- I mean, with this Ukrainian family?

A: It was like a Polish family. Well, it wasn't -- it was worse because they -- when a they -- when they believed that I will be their son, it was like luxury.

Q: They gave you everything, yeah.

A: It was like sha -- luxury, but tha --

Q: Were you wor -- were you scared?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: When you went to Kazakhstan --

A: If I scared?

Q: Were you scared? Were you fi -- still frightened? Or did you feel safe?

A: Mm, well I s -- feel that -- well, I have some -- I got my cousin here in Kazakhstan, so I did not feel that it -- it will -- I -- I wanted this war will be ended because I --

Q: Right.

A: -- remember what -- how Germans look like. The people who was in Kazakhstan, they never seen a German. But I remember how it looked like and how to go to drive in this general's motorcycle, and things like this, and -- but it was not -- not -- not very difficult time.

Q: Not -- uh-huh.

A: It was on -- you know, the time was difficult to make sure that your father will come alive --

Q: Right.

A: -- or -- and when the war will be over.

Q: Did you meet your father again in Kazakhstan, or not?

A: No, no, no, for -- we me -- we meet my father -- my father came maybe home half a year or s -- eight months later, when the war is over.

Q: Over.

A: Because from this front he was sent to far, far west. Front is close to Japan. Because General Noye, Japan will fight this. And it was the idea to ba -- to bring their army to this place also.

Q: Right, right

A: So he came back from this place, and we came to this -- we came to this Dnepropetrovsk, the place where we left before. But our house -- house where we live, was destroyed. And our -- no one promise him something else with the place we had to live. So -- and -- but his parents, my grandparents, they came to ki -- they was also in Kazakhstan during the war, in different place. A-And they came to Kiev. And my grandfather, he was a carpenter, and h -- they got something like a garage or something like this, and from this garage, they built a -- an apartment building. Not building, apartment.

Q: Rea -- really?

A: It was apartment with a basement, with a -- with -- and it was very, very, very, very ni -- it was not bad, according to the Russian standards, because it was a separate apartment. After the war they did not -- most people they did not have a separate apartment, they got a common restroom, a common shower, a common kitchen, and six, seven families, they shared.

Q: Right.

- A: And we got, because my grandfather build it by his hands, so it was something -- it was a place that no one believes that it could be place for -- for living, but he managed to make it. And it was two small rooms, two small rooms, and -- but my grandmom said, "Well, bring your family here." And -- but I stay with my mom's relatives in Dnepropetrovsk another year.
- Q: Mm-hm.
- A: I went to school in this place, and I stay almost a year in this. Later I came to Kiev, and I start my life in Kiev.
- Q: In Kiev. Is --
- A: From the second grade in school.
- Q: Is Dnepropetrovsk the first time you've gone to any school?
- A: I'm sorry?
- Q: In Dnepropetrovsk, after the war, that's --
- A: Yeah, in Dnepropetrovsk, I want in the school, but I got sick. I got -- I got sick, and I could not finish this year.
- Q: Really?
- A: Yeah, I got some -- well, it was no food, and s -- well, it was another miracle that I survived because no medication, no food. So -- but -- and my mom, she -- she drive from Kiev to Dnepropetrovsk and back, because Father was in Dnepropetrovsk, he tried to -- in Kiev he tried to find a job and start something to do. And this -- but when I came to -- to the -- to Kiev, so my mom went to the school and said, "He almost finished the first class." So she gave me a test, then says, "Okay, he can go to the second." So I went to the second grade.
- Q: What disease -- what did you get sick from, do you know? What was it?
- A: No, no, it was -- what the -- how they call it? Like pneumonia, something like pneumonia.
- Q: Pneumonia, really?
- A: Yeah, pneumonia, and after war it was very di -- they did not got -- have any medication.
- Q: Right.

- A: So -- and as I said I was like -- like a finger, because no food. I -- I could not eat it, and it was a big problem. But I survived.
- Q: You survived.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: As you kept doing.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: So when you went to Kiev --
- A: Yeah.
- Q: -- that's when life really started again.
- A: Well where when I start -- when I stayed the next 10 years, because in Kiev, well, i-it was my -- the story was that the class where I went, it was only Jewish people.
- Q: Really?
- A: Really. And it was happen, I don't know how. Maybe a lot people was around. When I start it was not, it was most go -- mo-most Russian people, Ukrainian people. And later they change something because the -- one school was overcrowd, they open a new school, and th -- no one knew about the school, it was school without name, so everyone who has choice to put you in better school, they did not go to this school, so the school left for -- for us. And we got school, we got 30 people in the class, 22 was Jewish. And a lot teachers was also Jewish. So it was up to -- up to the years on the '50 - '52, and on the '52, they -- all the Jewish teachers, they -- they put them on -- they pu -- took them away from us. They get -- they [indecipherable]
- Q: Were they fired?
- A: They fired. All Jewish pe -- teachers they fire, all Jewish teachers.
- Q: The 50's wasn't good.
- A: Fi -- '50, no, '50 was not good. But what Claudia said, that she said that she cried when -- when Stalin die, and I remember that I did not cry absolutely, because on this time I start understand what is it about. And there -- what was my concern was in this time, it was -- it was a tennis -- a tennis championship, Ukrainian tennis championship, and they gil -- they said, "No, it's cancelled because Stalin die." And I was very, very upset about it. This was what I remember, how I upset that Stalin was die -- wa -- die -- and I -- I remember that I -- I -- all times that I ask well, why they put him like -- always like a

God? Why they put him -- this question was always [indecipherable] said, "Don't ask this question. Don't ask this question."

Q: Don't ask.

A: And this was a question that I actually ask myself.

Q: So when you were little --

A: I'm sorry?

Q: When you were little, during the war --

A: In the village?

Q: No -- ye -- yeah, in the village. You were very conscious you were Jewish, but you knew you shouldn't say anything. Di -- or when -- or let me ask you this question in -- in a different way. When --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- when did you become conscious of being Jewish, and want to identify --

A: Actually it was in Kiev, when -- when I s -- came to the second -- to the second grade, so I understand actually that I am Jewish, and when I take a look what -- how my -- my grandmother, because she [indecipherable] had Judaism all her life. And because even that my father did not want it, and she said, "Okay, you can live how you want to do it, and I will manage how I can want to do it."

Q: Right.

A: So -- and my grandfather, he said, "Well, I'm working with Jew -- with Russian, with Ukrainian, I not -- I'm not going to keep separate. And if you want, I can do what you want. It's holiday -- it's holiday. Shabbas is Shabbas, it's -- you want to -- to buy a -- and go to the [indecipherable] to hear discussion [indecipherable] okay you can do it, I will do it." But there was story that like a survivor situation, that in two rooms, and with one kitchen, it was my mom's kitchen, without anything kosher. It was my grandmom kitch -- kitch -- part. In Mom refrigerator is a kosher.

Q: So the refrigerator was kosher, or part of it was kosher?

A: No, no, no, it's part of them.

Q: I see, so --

A: One shelf, and another shelf.

Q: -- one shelf is -- I see.

A: This is -- this --

Q: And so what did you identify with, your parents or your grandparents? Your grandfather, your grandmother?

A: My nifi --

Q: Did you want to be kosher, and to be religious, or no?

A: No, to be honest with you, I did not want be re -- I actually, I very, very honor what my grandmoth -- mom do, I know h -- how she reads books, how she makes prayers. But actually, I -- I -- I did not believe that it would be part of my life --

Q: Right.

A: -- or something like this. We -- we got Jewish friends with all Jewish -- like life, it means not Jewish culture life. We got all the friends around that was Jewish, girls, boys.

Q: Right.

A: We did not deal with not Jewish people. They s -- they stay now, class like -- like separate.

Q: And you say separate.

A: And we said separate, but we did not fight.

Q: So what was making you Jewish?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: What was Jewish about you?

A: What was Jewish about me?

Q: Yeah.

A: What was Jewish about me, because I know just I am Jewish.

Q: That you were Jewish.

A: And I know that m -- the fir -- well -- bay -- because when -- when you said -- in Russia when you call, you said your first name, your father's name --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- and your last name.

Q: Right.

A: So because my father's name was Leib, so I was Leibovich, so is no question about that I was a Jewish.

Q: Right, right.

A: So -- and I -- that is what I was.

Q: But you were not identifying religiously as a Jew, right?

A: No, I did not.

Q: And f --

A: I helped my grandmom to make matzoh, sometimes I help her to go to synagogue.

Q: Right.

A: You know, to -- to do something what she want me to do.

Q: Right, right.

A: But is not because I wanted to keep this religious life.

Q: Right. Did you think of yourself as a Ukrainian Jew, or a Russian Jew, or just Jewish? Do you understand, because as an amer --

A: Maybe just Jewish.

Q: -- as a --

A: Maybe just Jewish. I did not seem --

Q: Just Jewish, uh-huh.

A: -- later -- later, when I si -- when I become older, when we met some Jewish people from different parts, from Russia, from Moscow, from Saint Petersburg, we understand this, we are different. And we are ti -- we are totally different because the people from -- they have different philosophy, and different way to behave themself. And maybe different way to survive, I don't know. To -- because they -- we -- sometimes for us, to be honest

with you, to understand people, was easy to understand Ukrainian people from Ukraine, than Jewish people from Russia.

Q: Right, right.

A: And to find out the common -- the common point or -- we -- we better understand them, the bi -- the Jewish people from -- from Russia.

Q: Right. Okay, let's change the tape.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Do you know anything about the family that saved you?

A: No.

Q: You don't?

A: I don't know anything.

Q: You don't know their name?

A: I don't know the name, I don't know anything. I don't know because as I said, well, it was like -- it was not -- it was -- the be -- the [indecipherable] was don't go somewhere and tell them that we was under Germans, because it can, as I said, like be a stain on your -- in your personal -- so -- and my mom never [indecipherable] and I don't know anything about them. I'm very sorry about that.

Q: Yeah. Even though your father was in the army --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- it still would be a problem.

A: It would still be a problem, yeah, it still will be a problem.

Q: Were you ever sympathetic to the Communists?

A: Well I -- I was never sympathetic to them, because the -- the question is that their promise was totally not what they actually did the people. Let's say they said that you have right for speech, you have freedom -- I don't know, a lot of freedom actually, when it comes to realize these rights, you don't have them. So -- and the question is, they did not left anything for you, let's say, to think about, or to tell them let's -- let's to improve something, let's do something in different ways. So --

Q: And at what -- what age did you become -- did you realize this? At a young age?

A: Yeah, I realize it at -- at very young age, and the question was just what you have to do, you have to start to be like [indecipherable] resistant to this, or you have to find some way -- ways how to in future support your family, and things like this, and do anything against, let's say, your family. So that is why you stay, that's it. But what -- what -- about criticism, what is doing, the government, what they doing wrong, it was always in conversation in our house. So that is why when I -- when we -- when I got married, and we went -- got a son, so we decided that our son's life could not be here, because he grow up in the situations that he cannot -- he cannot accept it. And well, when we got married - - so my wife, she -- much earlier than me she realized that for us is no room here, and we

have to leave this country and find something else. And -- well, why I was not very support -- why I did not support where he decided, because I said, "Listen, [indecipherable] what we have now because I am working with a com -- with the company that they can tell me there are no secrets, we will be -- we will stuck between leave this one and don't have anything else, and just don't let us go. So this is why I let -- I cannot do it right now."

Q: So you were working for a --

A: Well, I worked --

Q: You were -- you were working with some other company so that you knew government secrets?

A: Well, they said yes, but the branch where I was, I did not have any secrets.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And later -- later, when they decided, when they open a little bit mind, they let leave the country people who really knew much more secrets, and they did not said that you cannot. This is -- was just a plan, was a government plan, the plan with the government level. Because as I said, it's for the history no one can explain that when they decided that they would like -- they let Jewish people to leave the country, they have to found an excuse, why Jewish? Why they don't let Russian --

Q: Right.

A: -- or Ukrainian, or someone else. So they make up that they g -- they support the fa -- united family, as a --

Q: Right.

A: -- you know, the family was -- and it was licenned. They put a paper there, they miss her [indecipherable], they have not see her from the year 1930 -- 1913, they never know her, they nev -- ni -- like next time they m-ma -- make their decision a different way, they said all sister is not a relative, something else is not a relative. And as a -- as -- as you know it was situation when they -- the way how they explain to the rest of the people that they want leave, let them go, because this is to Israel. Jewish people, they unite with someone. This is why old people that they won't -- don't like them, so they -- officially they put some documents, and they let them go to Israel.

Q: Right.

A: It was like -- I think it's -- even Solzhenitsyn they sent it like this, sent him to Israel in their time. But -- and that is why maybe -- maybe, if I decided that we have to do it, maybe I -- we got this -- I am not sure they will let us go, but I will -- I spent about 18

years on this factory -- on this enterprise, and -- because from this enterprise when -- when we -- they did not even take your documents when they see where you worked. It was none, but it was excuse for them. So when I left it on the next month, I got another enterprise. It is no with military connection, so we -- we start over from this point. And -- bu -- it was the year 1979, and we believe that because it was like Olympic game in Moscow, maybe they -- they a little bit open the door, and maybe we will be lucky to go through this door. And well, they said no. They said no, no, no, no, no. Some people they managed, I don't know how they gave under table money to someone, they -- everything was corrupt, so maybe they find the way. But we did not -- we was unable to do it. But what we said, so it was like a legal situation, was you can do like you are on the level, not -- not fighting. Cause the government, every six months you can to send documents that you apply -- that you did not change your mind, you still apply. And they send you a postcard they know. Th -- they did -- the -- a division of visas permission, they said you cannot go, no, your -- your request is denied, your request is denied. And it -- as I said, it was when we start -- our problem was that when we start first time to do it, our son was about two year old. No, not two -- yeah, two year old when we start first time there. When he went to the final stage, he almost finish college, and even in this situation, when they play games, a open society, blah, blah, blah, they did unbelievable thing because they played games and said, you know, mom can go, you cannot go. Later they said you can go but your son cannot go. And in this time, the chief -- the chief of this department, he gave interview to some foreign newspapers and he said, "Everyone who want go, we let them go. We don't keep anyone. There's no one want to go." And I came to him, to his office with this newspaper, and I said, "Let me ask you a que," -- it -- in Moscow his was very, very, very hi -- high level guy, and it's -- you know, you never know what happen to you when you come back from this -- from this office, because he was very powerful. So I came to him with this newspaper, I said, "May I ask you a question please? What does it means? This is an interview that you gave to this reporter. He did not understand you right? Or it's a -- a -- a mistake in newspaper?" And he said to me, "No," he said, "he understand me right, but we make a decision, not he." And he said, "Your son, we cannot let your son go." And it was a sp-specific system in -- in Russia that everyone -- every man, he has a gi -- duty to serve three years in the military. After military it's -- besides there's a -- the life in the military, it's more than in prison. But after military they said to you, you cannot go because you know secrets, you was in military. And no one knows what kind of secrets and how long it lasts to keep you because you was in military. And my son said to me, "Listen, I better die than I go to this military." And with these words, with understanding this, we have to go to this guy a few times, it was very, very difficult. And finally, as I said, when we were -- when the wind was a little bit warmer, and they let him go, and later we left, and in Italy, when he came to Italy, he decided he would like to help young Jewish kids to go to Judaism. So he got a [indecipherable] like this, he listened to -- they got like -- a rabbi came to Italy, and they tried to introduce to the culture, to the tradition the ju -- Judaism. And everyone was on the beach because it was months, we are not working, you got food, and they make a decision when -- when sk -- they scheduled to bring you to United States, and he was busy with kids, wi -- wi -- because he said that this is what he has to do. And when we came here, so very soon he said that we don't -- we -- we not the right life -- the right life, this is a philosophy. And he changed his life, he become religion.

Q: Religious person, yeah.

A: Very religious.

Q: So you, even though you tried -- you started later, really for almost 20 years you were trying to leave --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or thinking that -- so is it -- must be very difficult to live under those circumstances.

A: Yes, yes, because as I said, they -- it is become a common -- let's say what, like refusniks -- refusniks, except the person whom they refuse give a permission to leave. So -- and as I said, diff -- different pe -- different category of people, they -- or by their belief or by some circumstances, they did i -- they take different actions to this, you know, they got some of them, they -- every month they go -- went to demonstration, and to the Moscow, or to foreign people. Most -- a lot of them, they put them in prison, they -- they make up - a lot guilt about this, like rape, like drugs, like things like this. But we was like on the level that they said okay, you can -- you can -- every six months you can just send us a request, and we will refuse. But it was a -- a -- a mark that you are -- belong also to this category.

Q: Right.

A: And -- I don't -- they -- every be -- maybe, I don't know, month or two months we got someone from the police, or from the KGB, he was -- had a police uniform. And he said - he make up a -- a -- any kind of excuse to come to check what we are doing, run, or -- or [indecipherable] like this. And -- and he reported from our phone, that , "I'm here now checking this family, everything looks -- looks not bad." And once time he came to us and he said -- I said, "Why did you come to me?" He said, "Well, we got a letter that your neighbor is drunk." I said, "Okay, why you did not go to this member -- to this -- my neighbor? He drunk, go to his apartment, why you came to me?" "No, I would like to know if you know something about it." I said, "No, I don't know anything about it." "Okay, just write that you don't know about it." I said, "Look, how it help you? What is the reason?" But they mi -- make up everything, and the problem was when I -- my second job when I -- it was not a manager position, but sometimes I have taught them the director's meetings, because I was in charge for supplies, some important things to the factory. And it was -- sometimes is not your fault but you cannot manage it because it's -- it was like a circle. To have the supplies you have to give them something that you are unable to give them, some material and you don't have it. And the -- the director said to - on this meeting, listen, if I will not have these supplies, I will call KGB that you did it on purpose, you don't want me to do this production and this one ki -- the government want me to do. And I believe they will make you bah bah bah, like this. And that every day was like this, and especially you can understand when our son was in Moscow, and when we still try to let him go, one days we came to -- to this chief, this department, and

we ask him, "Look, what is your logical? Is -- from such and such here, we tried to go all together. So now what -- how is the family united? If you said -- you advise them to go and bring him invitation, later he will have relatives here, and we -- he will have permission, what is the [indecipherable]? What is the -- what is the logic?" And he said to me, "Listen, the students are very patriotic people, so we cannot guarantee he will be safe in ma -- in Moscow." This is -- was the life.

Q: When -- when you switched jobs, you left your job?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And they knew that you are refusnik. Somebody knew.

A: Yeah.

Q: The next job you had you were not earning as much money as you were the first time, right?

A: Yeah, I got maybe half what I got before. And the -- the guy who interview me said, "Listen, when you move from this place to our place, it means you keep in mind something. Tell me right away. You know, if you go somewhere, I will have a problem with the -- it will be problem for me. So in order to give you permission or not, I have to know -- tell me right away what you going to do." And I said to him, "Well, I am telling you right -- right away that I did not change my mind, but because they said that I cannot leave country because I used to work on this military, I don't know how long they will keep me here. Do you know what will happen to you in three years? You don't know." So -- and you don't know what people it's around in your department, you know what in their mind. They can make a decision tomorrow. So this job was not very, very -- let's say presti -- with a prestige, with a lot money, and it was difficult, if need some special skills, and someone recommend me to this job. So he said okay. He -- he closed his eyes. [indecipherable] did that because when you go from the place where I work bef-before, this place was famous place, with a li -- benefits, with a lot opportunities for -- just for benefits, not about salary, but benefits was really much higher than any other company have. So they understand what you keep in mind, or you fired because you did something wrong, against them, and you just manage they -- they don't put that they fire, or not. In United States when you find the -- try to get a job you put your resumé. In Russia you got a -- like a certificate, your certificate. Every job that you go they put a seal here, and they put the reason why you left this job. So -- and if they put the reason that they fire you because you are bad worker, or you late, or you drunk, or something like this, so later on it'll na -- no one when -- will take you, and this i -- was the requirement, you have to show them the certificate. Without this certificate, no one talk to you.

Q: So what was on your certificate when you left this other place?

A: Nothing, that I decide by myself, and that is it.

Q: Nothing. And were you doing mechanical engineering at this place? That's what you studied in college.

A: It was close, it was -- it was --

Q: Close?

A: -- it was a mechanical engineering field. I have to explain my boss in my company why I decided to leave. So I cannot tell -- I could not tell him that I want to go to abroad --

Q: No, no.

A: -- I just tell him that I have relatives, and -- and we in contact with them in the United States. So I gave then information that he knows all -- or -- or -- if not he, but special department knows it already.

Q: Right.

A: And that is why I said I would like to leave this place, and I will go. And he said, "Don't worry, stay, I will manage it." He said, "A couple bottle with vodka, everything will be okay, don't worry." Because my position in my previous job, it was not very, very big level, but I was like assistant to our big boss. He was a chief in quality control production, and it was a factory about 5,000 people. And my job was like statistical job, to prepare him for the meetings, for -- for reports, for something like this. So he was very comfortable with me because I tell him what his action, how this [indecipherable] should be, what he has to mention. And he doesn't -- he did not want me actually, to leave. He did not want me to leave. And he said well, one -- one Jew -- one Jew, he can keep one Jew. I was just one, no one else. It was like under the percentage. And but this what -- how I explain him, I said, "Well, I am going to leave." He said, "Oh, stay with us, blah, blah, blah." I said no, because from this enterprise, I never leave.

Q: You never go, yeah.

A: So I left, and I came to another one and they [indecipherable] they remind me very often where I come from, and what I keep in mind, because they knew that my papers every time, when I -- and the last time -- not -- it was not last time, before this -- before this time, I fill out the papers again, and -- and the director of this, he was a Jewish guy, and -- but he got a Russian name, he -- by documents he was Russian. So he said to me, "Listen, because you put this documents that you want in U.S., I have to transfer you from this engineering job to ship -- to like shipping receiving, something like load and loud [indecipherable] or something." I said, "Well if you feel that it's constitution, you can do it. I'm not going to put you any -- any request about this." Well, and he decided okay, let him stay like this. And this -- well, I stay like this. But as I said, all pe -- a lot people who are brought for fight, who f -- f -- to give us this opportunity, they help because this one -- one -- wa -- one [indecipherable] did not come back to self. So -- well, [indecipherable] Gorbachov came, and he got an idea that let's say let's have better relationship with --

with the west, with something else, but all people who fight hard, work hard to bring this day, to let us go, they -- peop -- we remember [indecipherable]

Q: Do you think that a lot of people who were in the Soviet Union would have left if they had the chance, whether they were Jewish or not Jewish?

A: Yeah, I s -- I seeing personally, if they -- they was not so stupid, if they decided what is the deal. If they want to go, let them go, let them go. What -- what happened? Everyone who want go, let them go. A lot people may be going to do so, but I think that's not -- a lot people --

Q: Would have stayed.

A: -- will later -- will go back. Why? Because, you know, it's -- to grow up in this society, and find your place in new society, is not easy --

Q: Is very -- yeah.

A: -- it's very hard. It's totally different, you have to f -- you have to know exactly what you want to do, and why you leave this country. If you would like to leave this country just because you can have here [indecipherable] jeans, or I don't know, or cheese every day, or something like this, very soon maybe you miss it, and you like to go back, because you remember some not bad things in your previous life, somethings. Department -- apartment, education system, something like this. But the problem was th -- the -- that they did not let them go, and the problem was true because they did not o -- they di-did not honor your right to exercise your roots, you religion.

Q: Right.

A: And this is the problem. And what I want for -- what I just -- I don't know, if you goes to the -- I -- I want just mention one thing, that when I came here, so my first job was also we have to find something to live, so I start to working for shipping receiving. And in the -- in the store -- in store, is it -- they sell some equipment for the kitchen. And my first boss -- fir -- fir -- first supervisor -- wa -- was first supervisor, I'm sorry, he was American African guy, who grow up in tradition with people who remember -- in this time the movement start in 60's, and you know --

Q: In civil rights.

A: -- civil rights, and he remembered his family was very, very in -- in this movement. And he was actually this very gift -- gifted guy. He was smart, he listened, he was li -- good very listener and -- and I said, "I would like to know actually, when you go to school, these people -- people in your country, they -- they know what is the advantage to live in America. Why people from around the world actually try -- want to come to here and stay here?" He said, "No, no one -- I don't know, I don't remember even one lesson that my teacher told me what is the advantage, what we have here." If you don't have -- if you

don't teach them what is the advantage, so -- you know, it's -- it's -- is not the best things to do because they -- they don't value what they have. This is the --

Q: So did you tell him?

A: Yeah, I told him, I told him -- well, I told him a ver -- very simple story. I said to him -- you know, when it -- I remember this time when it was little bit idea that we had to bring American experience to the Russian. It was some government decision, it was time. In this time -- and I remember that one -- once -- one -- he was the guy, his was [indecipherable] that he came from very rich sugar production family before revolution [indecipherable] was here. So he came to -- and they invite him to introduce some people [indecipherable] to the American life, to the style, and he said, "If you will tell American that," -- Russian has this word like [indecipherable] or president, they call it prepeeska. Oh stop, forgot about [indecipherable] that your lifestyle is good, because American cannot understand what is it. It's like [indecipherable] even accept it. So -- and I explain to him what -- what we got, and we -- how -- what we -- wh-what is the salary, what you can do, and how it works, and what does it mean the freedom, and what does it mean the speech and everything. And so he understand that this is --

Q: [indecipherable] right. So you never regretted coming to the United States?

A: Never.

Q: Never.

A: Ne -- thanks God.

Q: You love being here.

A: Yes, I love being there, I love this opportunity that everyone has, and the most advantage when you [indecipherable] the -- the [indecipherable] of the advantage when you go somewhere, and -- and when you -- when you have an American passport, how it looks like. And the [indecipherable]

Q: Have you ever been back?

A: No, we never went to -- to Russia.

Q: And you don't want to go [indecipherable]?

A: We went somewhere, in another country for vacation. I do -- I cannot -- I cannot go back. I cannot go back.

Q: Right.

A: I remember that what they did to -- you know, when you worked all your life, finally when they give you permission, so -- they put so restriction you cannot take your -- what belong to you. And they put limits, let's say, this picture? No, you cannot take it with you. This book you cannot take with you. Even this piece of jewelry, that you work hard, I don't know, to get it, no, you cannot get it with you. And for all what they give you, they said they give us all this money that you have, and give 150 dollars and go. What country else can do it to the people? You're working, working, working, working. All your life you save your pennies, and later when you decided to go, you cannot get it --

Q: You can't.

A: -- and it's yours.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much for talking about --

A: Thank you very much for inviting us, and actually I'm very thankful that my story makes sense for you and I feel that I have like obligation to take a [indecipherable] this place, like Beshbagir, like Zhmerinko has to be more -- more [indecipherable] museum, and I will do my best to help you with it.

Q: Good. Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome.

End of Tape #3

Tape #4

Q: Who is this?

A: This is my grandfather and grandmother. It's right before war, before second war.

Q: And this is on your mother's side, or your father's side?

A: This from father's side.

Q: Father's side. And their names?

A: It's Lazer, and her name is Dina -- Dina.

Q: Dina. And this picture? Whereabouts is this?

A: This is -- this is my father during the war, during the second war.

Q: And did he have a special position?

A: In the army?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes, he worked in the -- in -- in the military court.

Q: And what about this picture?

A: This is me and my wife -- and my -- I'm sorry. This is me and my mom, before the war.

Q: Do you remember having that picture taken?

A: No, I don't remember. I -- I just remember that my mom said that it was right before the war, a couple months before the war.

Q: And is this how she -- sort of how she looked when you re-met her?

A: Yeah, this is how she looked when I -- when I met her. Sh-She got a little bit different -- different hair in the -- in Stavropol, but this is how she looked like.

Q: And this picture?

A: This is me and I was -- it's about seven year old, just after the war in Dnepropetrovsk.

Q: Is it a toy, or real?

- A: Nice toy. It was fam -- it was the toy that everyone play in this time.
- Q: And who is this?
- A: This is me and my cousin. It's -- I -- I am a -- about eight year old, and my cousin, she was older than me one year.
- Q: So this is a girl next to you, girl cousin?
- A: She's -- she's a girl, yeah. She's a girl. It's in Dnepropetrovsk also.
- Q: And how old are you here?
- A: This is me, and I'm about 15 year old, and --
- Q: In Kiev?
- A: In Kiev, yeah.
- Q: And who is this?
- A: Okay, this is me with a friend, and this is when I was 23, and I -- I was in army in Russia, in Ukraine.
- Q: And who is the friend?
- A: This -- it's my fr -- my friend from the school.
- Q: How come he wasn't in the army?
- A: Well, becau -- he went to the army later.
- Q: I see. And who is this?
- A: This picture was made in the year 1965. This is my father, okay, this is my mom, this is me, this is my wife Claudia. This is her sister.
- Q: What's her sister's name?
- A: Her name is Dina.
- Q: Dina?
- A: Yeah. And this is my sister.
- Q: And her name?

- A: Her name is Rema. This is my wife's father, and this is my wife's mother.
- Q: And why was this picture taken?
- A: This pictic -- picture was taken when we got married, we got -- they got a picture to memorize this date. So you --
- Q: This was the marriage date.
- A: It was marriage date, yes, actually it was a marriage date.
- Q: Were you married that day?
- A: We married a week before this, but it was like celebration.
- Q: I see.
- A: At night we got celebration, in the morning we went to make a picture, this is why I am a l -- look a little bit sleepy -- sleepy.
- Q: You do, yes.
- A: And my wife, also. But this is picture, was original picture that was made in the year 1965.
- Q: And the top picture?
- A: This is -- this is my -- my grandmom in -- in the 60's. In the 60's.
- Q: And this is from [indecipherable]
- A: This is Kiev -- no, this is Kiev.
- Q: Kiev?
- A: This is actually -- this is the apartment that our grandfather build by himself. And this is - - it was a -- a little isolated place.
- Q: A-Are these -- this is your grandmother from your father's side?
- A: Yes. I don't have no other side.
- Q: And who's below?
- A: And this is my grandfather from the father's side.

Q: And he's the one that rebuilt [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, this is -- he's the one who build this apartment by himself.

Q: And his name?

A: His name is Lazer.

Q: These are the people we saw in the first photograph, right?

A: Yeah, this is the people, but much -- much later, it's --

Q: [indecipherable] much later, yes.

A: -- it's about 20 years later --

Q: Right.

A: -- from this photograph.

Q: And her name again?

A: Dina.

Q: Dina, right. Dina and Lazer.

End of Tape #4

Conclusion of Interview