

Gennady Zaster, interviewed June 4, 2011

Family

Gennady b. Nov. 8, 1932

Father, Peter, Latvian, an engineer, well off; Mother, Galya (Galina), Jew, one of 8 children

Parents divorced after 2 years of marriage; Gennady lived with father in Kharkov

Mother remarried to a Jew (Lipman?); they had a daughter, so Gennady had a half sister

Gennady's aunts were communists; Gennady didn't feel Jewish in 1930s [In the idealistic 1920s and 1930s, ethnicity was not supposed to matter. – JB]

World War II

Father disliked Soviet power and avoided the draft

Mother evacuated from Kharkov [not clear where]; stepfather killed

Gennady describes air raids; looked out window and saw Soviet soldiers fleeing (Oct. 1941); saw local population greet German soldiers with bread and salt

Germans hung "partisans" in front of "Medvedik" [Bear] candy store on main square

When Germany occupied Kharkov, Feb. 1942, father taken to Germany, as was one of Gennady's cousins [no name]

Gennady's father's girl friend's mother, who lived in countryside, took Gennady in January 1942;

then sent Gennady to children's home in German occupied territory, Jan. 1942-1944; children's home located in village of Akhtyrka (Okhtirka in Ukrainian) in Sumskaya oblast; near the children's home was a German hospital

Gennady describes children's home; he had little knowledge of treatment of Jews; periodically Germans took oldest children [presumably for labor]

One of the teachers was Maria Filippovna

In summer, children ran off to forest and begged for food; Ukrainian peasants helped them; once he saw a pile of bodies in the forest but he didn't know whether they were Jews

Once a German thought he was a partisan, interrogated him (his scariest moment, along with bombing, during the war), but then returned him to children's home

Akhtyrka liberated in 1944; mother found Gennady

Gennady knew his father was in Germany but didn't know until after the war that he had probably been killed in Allied bombing [Dresden?]

Postwar

Describes terrible postwar years, trading at bazaar, American packages, games

Even though his father was regarded as a traitor, Gennady attended Suvorov Military Academy

Knew little of fate of Jews; in Stalin's time, people couldn't talk about it, though he said he experienced discrimination after attending technical school in that he could not advance higher

On his passport his nationality was Russian; no nationality on his birth certificate

His daughter [no name] married a Russian, his son [no name] married a Jew

In 1960s became electrical engineer but quit to work as a camp counselor

Summary by: Joseph Bradley, December 7, 2018