

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview of Liya Kaplinskaya. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on May 29, 2018 and is taking place in Rockville, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

My full name is Liya. In Russian, we usually have two parts of the name. The name, my own name, and the second, the name of my father. So in Russian it sounds Liya Naum Kaplinskaya. In America I'm Liya Kaplinskaya.

And where were you born?

I was born in Moscow in 1936.

What day and what date?

August, the third, 1936.

OK, let's talk a little bit about your family. Who made up the members of your family?

I was the first child. My father was Kaplinsky Naum. My mother was Ida Wolfson.

They were working. They worked in the Ministry of Trade. Maybe something like that.

They worked for the government?

Yes, yes. Absolutely. I was almost five years old when the war began.

No, we'll get to that later.

So later.

Yeah, not now.

So we were three and in 1940, my sister was born.

OK, and her name?

Her name is Fania.

OK, and were your parents also from Moscow? Were they born in Moscow?

No, no both of them were born in Russia, in different parts of Russia.

Do you know the names of the cities, and the towns?

My mother was born not far from the town [INAUDIBLE]. It's a village which was called Slavnoe. My father was born close to Mazyr.

OK. And did your mother work also or just your father?

Both of them.

Both of them.

In Russia, all women work. It was impossible to keep have only one person in the family working.

How much education did they have?

Both of them had a higher education.

College level?

Yes, both of them.

And then your father worked for the Ministry of Trade, you said.

And, my mother also.

And your mother also.

She was a counter. She was an economist.

OK, and how did they meet? Is that where they met, in the office?

It's awful. I never asked my mother.

OK, did you live right in the center of Moscow?

Yes, yes. At that time, it was only center. It was not a huge city as it is now.

Yeah. And did you live in a house or an apartment?

No, no.

An apartment?

It was a communal apartment. It was a small wooden house with two floors and there were 10 rooms in this apartment. In each room a family of two, three, four people.

OK. And did you have aunts and uncles and cousins? Did you have other relatives? In Moscow?

Yes, all of them came to Moscow. All the relatives of my parents. I had two uncles from the side of my father and with their families.

And, yes two. And two sisters from my mother's family. One of them lived together with us, all of my life because she had no family. And the family of the second lived separately.

Not your relatives, OK.

And so I have two families. From my father's, two uncles with families, from the side of my father. And two sisters from the side of my mother. One of them lived together with us. And the second lived separately.

So this obviously was under communist rule. And so what about religion, being Jewish?

No, no religion. Absolutely.

No holidays? No?

While I was a child, my aunts from my mother's sister's side spoke Jewish.

Yiddish.

Yiddish at home because they didn't want me to understand what they were talking about. But after I began to study German at school, I began to understand. And they stopped. It was the only Jewish side of our life.

Did you know you were Jewish when you were very little?

Oh, it's an interesting question.

When you were very little, did you know?

Well, I was a child. I didn't know anything. But when we returned from immigration to Moscow, it was 1943. I was seven.

In our backyard, two boys came to me, and asked me. Repeat. I will explain it to you after that. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] because there are a lot of [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

And I answered correctly. They were very surprised and after that they put it on me and said, all the same. She's a Jew. It was the first time that I learned that I'm not like all the others.

So, what is your first memory. You were born in 1936. What is your first memory of the time spent when you were little? How old were you?

About what?

Well, just generally. Your first memories of childhood.

Maybe four or five.

OK, so that's in 1936. And 1940, 1941.

Yes.

What were those memories? What was it that you remember?

Not special, maybe I remember the very last days of my summer being in the kindergarten, in the suburb of Moscow. When my father came there and said that the war began.

This is 1941 we're talking about.

Yes, it was necessary to come home because they thought about the evacuation at that time. I remember it very well. But before that--

You just went to school and played with friends.

Sorry?

Before that you just went to school and played with friends, right?

No.

That was the first memory you have, you said.

The first very important memory.

No, that's fine. Yeah. So your father came and then you went home with him. Then what happened?

Very, very soon after that, he went as a volunteer to the army because he had very bad sight and he couldn't see anything without glasses. So he couldn't be mobilized. And when the Germans came close to Moscow, they begged the government to persuade people that it's necessary to defend the country.

And all of them who could, went to the volunteer army. Because nobody thought about their health at that time. And he went as a volunteer and all of the Moscow volunteer Army was surrounded by German's, not far from Moscow. And they destroyed all of them.

Right, we're talking about June '41, June 1941.

It was close to November, December of '41. But at that time the Ministry, where both of my parents worked, was evacuated to Siberia. And my mom, together with both of us. My sister was less than one year. We went together to her job.

Just the three of you went. Your father stayed in Moscow?

Not in Moscow. He was in the army. And in December, all the letters stopped from him. And my mother began to write to understand what happened. And only in '42, she began to get the information.

It was a special expression. He had disappeared and we have no information. So we went on without it.

So you went to Siberia?

Yes.

Where in Siberia?

Novosibirsk.

And how did you get there? By train?

Yes, by train. In a very, very long train.

Do you remember the train ride?

Yes.

Tell me a little bit about it.

It was not a wagon, as we like to see the train. It was a special car for animals. And inside them, there were shelves. Three rows of shelves and a lot of people inside.

And by that time, they began to bomb Moscow. And there was an order for everyone to remove the children from the city, who could, to the Asian part of the country. It was a very long, very long travel. Something like a week maybe.

What did your mother bring with her? Do you remember what your mother brought and what you brought to take with you? What did you take with you from home? You don't remember?

I only know when we came back our room was almost empty.

Was there enough food? Did you have enough food on the train?

No, no. We didn't have enough food. But I don't remember the details.

Well, you were very young. Yeah.

I don't remember.

And do you know if you-- did you take anything special with you, a special toy or?

No, no. It was in a hurry and everyone was very tense.

Were there a lot of other children with you in the train? Were there other children?

Yeah, there were children but I don't remember any special contact them. We were so afraid, so frightened, that we were with our mother.

And what kind of, do you remember anything your mother said to you, especially? Did your mother say anything?

I don't remember.

Was she crying or was she strong?

Certainly, because it was an interruption of usual life and nobody knows what will be had. And she was very nervous because of my father.

Yes. Where was your father's station and where was he? He was in the army, you said. Where your father was? Do you know where he was?

I know where the army was of volunteers. Where they were surrounded. I know it was Vyazma. All the Moscow volunteer army was surrounded, just straight off.

So now, you said it took a week?

Or something like that, maybe later.

And then what? You get to Siberia and what happens?

We went to Siberia and many inhabitants of Novosibirsk were enclosed. And part of the houses, part of their apartments, houses mostly, because they were small houses, were given to evacuated people. And so, there were no police as you understand. And they were, I can't say they were aggressive, but not nice.

Were there any of your friends that came with you then? Any other children that you knew?

No, no.

You did not know anybody.

Absolutely not.

And your mother did not know anybody. Did she know anybody? Probably, my mother had because it was their organization where she worked before the war. And they worked together there. I remember only a very nice woman who lived in the big backyard of ours. She was also very creative. She was a musician and we continued this acquaintance when we came back.

So now you have a place to live. And what do you do every day?

I went to kindergarten.

You went to kindergarten.

Yes, and my sister was too small for that. She was there and she had a baby sitter.

Yeah, and your mother went to work. And where did she work?

In this organization, which was in Moscow.

That had been moved to Siberia. OK. And so, you would come home. Did you have enough clothes? Were you warm enough?

I can't remember.

OK, well, you were very young.

I don't remember. One I remember, was that it was very cold in winter. And I remember the baby seat of my sister, who was going together with me to bring me to the kindergarten. And she had a bare leg, with only, I don't remember. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] just it's interesting.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

A pair of boots.

Boots?

Boots, but boots but not from the skin.

From the fur? The fur OK. That's all right.

Wool.

Wool boots. OK.

Wool, something like that.

Yeah, and did you play with the other children?

In the kindergarten.

In the kindergarten.

Yes, it was probably necessary for my mother, not only to give me place but they know I won't be afraid. Oh, I'm sorry.

So, and they taught you how to write and to read. In school, what did they teach you? How to write and read? You just played?

No, no.

Play?

Only play, to give meals and nothing special.

Yeah. Was it a very frightening time for you? Do you remember it being frightening? You were a little girl. Were you scared?

When we came there, no. No, it was our everyday life. and I was not frightened. The only moment when my sister, the day of her birthday, the second birthday, she got sick, extremely, seriously.

She went to the emergency and they said there's almost no hope she would be alive. And she spent two months in the hospital. She stopped talking at all. When she came back she couldn't say anything.

It was awful for my mother, especially. It was awful. But all the rest, no.

Did she recover?

Yes.

She did? Did she get her voice back?

Yeah.

She did speak?

Yes, she did talk the normal way after that. Yeah. But it was a very difficult time for all of us. And all the rest, day by day.

So each day went on. What did you do when you were not at school? Just play outside and?

Play outside with the children. Yes.

And you were there for how long? How long?

We returned to Moscow in the summer of 1943. When that organization returned to Moscow, was allowed to return. When the Germans were out put.

So obviously, your parents were members of the Communist Party, obviously.

No, never. It was not necessary. Usually the people who would like to have a career, it was necessary for them. But not for everybody.

Just to have a regular job, yeah.

But when you are young, probably most of all, have to be the member of the Komsomol organization. Because when you entered the new job or were looking for a new job, or went to the Institute or something like that, we have a very long form. Where you should write everything about you.

The fifth point was your nationality. So, then you know, whether you were a Jew.

Because your nationality is Jewish.

Yes, is Jewish. It was necessary to fulfill it and there was a special line, are you a member of the Komsomol Organization? And if you're not, the first question was why. So it was much calmer to be.

Yes, of course. Of course, Yeah. But at that point when you were there in Siberia, you did not know you were Jewish.

No, no. And nobody was interested in it really there. Because it seems to me that in Moscow, in St. Petersburg in the Central City, this question was much more sharp than in the province.

At least when we finished the school and I had a gold medal and my husband also. But you always knew that you want to be accepted to the University. To the best institute.

And when I finished the school it was '54. It was a year after Stalin's death and that year they began to accept Jewish. Not for the very best department or institute but if your parents were killed during the war, especially at the front, then you have some advantage. It was the first year.

Let's get back to Siberia. So, you're there. You're going to school and then you said to--

To the kindergarten.

To the kindergarten. And then, did your mother have contact with your father at all when she was in Siberia?

The last letter from him was from October '41.

October '41.

Then nothing more.

So then. So then, she hears that she's supposed to move back to Moscow with you all in 1943?

Who?

Your mother.

Certainly, because the organization.

Was moving back.

Was moving back to Moscow.

OK, so then, did you take a train again?

Yes.

The same thing.

But I don't remember what kind of train.

Well, that's OK. That's OK. Were you excited about going back to Moscow or you were too young?

Not because it is Moscow because I remembered not too much about Moscow.

Not too much because you were so little. OK.

For us, it was important to be close to our mother.

Of course, of course. So the three of you go back to Moscow and you go back to your home?

Yes.

And what was there when you got there? Do you remember that? Do you remember?

Yes, Yes. I remember that. It was a big apartment, as I told you, a long corridor. And we were at one end of this corridor. We had a very small room for three of us and one of my aunts lived in another part of this corridor.

And we had a lot of neighbors there. Not everyone returned by that time to Moscow but soon the apartment was full. And I remember the first salute. Fireworks.

Fireworks?

Yeah. They were the first big cities which were taken back by the Red Army. And they decided to have fireworks. It was very interesting.

And on the day of their victory, they do huge, huge fireworks there. And then I remember that everyone was joyful and my mother was crying. And I understood that day that my father wouldn't come back.

He did not survive?

Namely, that day because the most part of the men returned today by that time. I remember it very well because I was looking at her. She was crying. It was awful.

And she had not heard from him since 1941. She had not heard from him.

Yes, yes. But she tried to find some trade but couldn't.

So he did not survive. Do you know where he died or did you have any information?

No. No but as we know all the Volunteer Army was surrounded in one place. Probably it was there. It was not far from Moscow. And I went to the kindergarten after that.

In Moscow.

And my sister, also in Moscow. It was not close to our house but this kindergarten belonged to the ministry of this organization. So, I returned home every day and my sister was there during five days of the week because she was too small to bring home and then back. Five days she was there. And in 1944, I went to school and this school was the next building to this kindergarten because it was convenient for my mother to bring both of us there.

So then you went. Did you know there was a war going on in Europe?

Yes, certainly. The war was all around. Our life was in the war time. Certainly.

And what did you know of it? What did you know? Did you know of a man named Hitler?

Probably, I know this name but it was very interesting in 1945, after the end of the war. It was a day when a huge column of German soldiers were going along the street in the center of the city. And I remember that many women brought them bread or something like that. And for me, it was awful. I looked at them and I thought they killed my father.

Right, right.

The life of people was different.

So, when you would see a German soldier on the street, what did you feel like as a child? Were you scared? Was it a frightening sign to see a German soldier?

No, no.

Because they left you alone?

I can't remember. They were very poor and very unhappy. And certainly they were not aggressive at that time. But probably for me it was like animals or something like that.

So, how was your mother's state of mind? Was she able to do her work? Was she able to?

She has no other way to live.

To hold you two girls, to hold the family together. And what about extended relatives? Did they come back also?

One of my aunts was together with us in the recreation and we lived together. So the other sister of my mother, she has grown in heaviness. Just before, maybe less than a year before the war, her only daughter died because of diphtheria. And when they came back it was too late for them to have another baby. So all her life she was very depressed and crying. And so on. I'm sorry.

And she was a doctor. She was a pediatrician before the war. And she and her husband were relocated to Almaty in Kazakhstan.

And after the death of her daughter, she couldn't work with the children and she changed not the preparation, but the direction. And she became a physiotherapist until the end of her life. And because she had no children, I and my sister were the only children for the family. And all of them tried to help my mother as much as they could.

So, things just went on. You went to school. You knew there was war going on in other countries.

I'm sorry?

So you did know there was a war going on in other countries?

Absolutely.

You did know. You did not know? You did not know?

There was no contact with the other countries.

Any radio? Did your mother have a radio?

Yes, but the Soviet radio is special so, all around it missed.

It was all controlled. It was all controlled. Yeah. So you did not know, let's say in 1944 or '43, there was a war going on in Europe?

We know, we know how the war.

The Germans had invaded Poland.

Yes. Everything, we know.

I bet you did know.

No, no. I didn't understand your question. We always knew what is going on with the war but there were no contacts.

No contacts.

No, the first foreigners which we saw in Moscow was the Youth Festival in 1957.

Oh my goodness. OK.

No foreigners.

We're still back in 1943 and 1944. And then, the war is over. Then the war is over in 1945.

Whether it was in Europe, no. It was in the--

It was over earlier for you. It was over earlier for Russia.

Yes. They came to Europe, it seems to me, after the end of the territory of the Soviet Union in '44.

Life goes on for you. And 1945 comes and the whole World War 2 is over. And you knew that.

Certainly.

Did you know anything about an atomic bomb or you didn't? Did you know anything, you were young. You are only about nine years old.

About what?

So you were very young. The atomic bomb.

Yes.

You knew about that?

Yes.

OK and did you feel very Russian? Did you feel Russian or Jew? You said you didn't know you were Jewish until a little later.

It's difficult to say because probably until the end of school my Jewish nationality didn't interfere with my life, only after. Only after the end of school.

Do you remember hearing anything about concentration camps and what happened?

Yes.

When did you hear that? Or your mother must've heard.

I think after the end of the war and maybe not immediately.

Right, right. I mean, you were young.

Later, later.

Do you remember your mother's reaction? Do you remember how she felt about that? When she heard what happened to all the Jews?

It was much later. Much, much later.

Much later.

Certainly.

So now it's 1946, 1947. You're at school.

Yes, we changed the place, [?of living?].

Did you stay in Moscow?

Not in this house because it was in '45, the brother of my father knew that a woman in his house was looking for the opportunity to be divided with her parents. And as we have two rooms of our own, he organized this changing. And we went close to my mother's work in the very center of Moscow. It was a big stone building. It was also a big communal apartment but there was a guest there and in spite of the fact, we got two big rooms which they divided into two parts. And not separate but nevertheless, it was much easier for her to live there.

But the first years after the war, we had a stove in our room. And a lot of wooden pieces and no central warming in the house. And there were a lot of not mice, the big animals. Mouse is little.

A rat.

Rat. And a lot of rats everywhere and I remember. I remember it for all my life. Close to this stove, there was also a pile of wood to be dried. And suddenly a rat was there. And the special device who had to catch the rat--

A trap.

Was too small for her. She was not killed and she began to cry. And I remember my mother took this wooden piece and killed it. It was awful. Especially when you're a child and you see it. And understand she was dangerous for us.

I remember in the kindergarten, there was a girl who was sleeping at home. Can I continue?

Yeah.

She was sleeping at home at night and the rat ate a piece of her. Yeah. And she was absent for a long time. She went to the hospital. And so we were afraid of them. So I remember this, seeing this.

I can image. I can imagine. So now it's 1946, '47. You're going to school. What was next?

Very important event?

The next change, yeah.

Probably it was the end of the school.

The school.

I got the gold medal. And it was a year after that they took Stalin. And they opened the Kremlin. And it was the first time when they decided to organize a ball. A ball for the children who got medals. It was very impressive, very impressive.

And after that, it was necessary to enter the Institute after the end of the school. And when you have a medal, you could not pass the exams, only the talk. We did do some research, and I was accepted to the Institute without problem really. But there were a lot of departments.

It was a very famous Institute, the Moscow Power Institute. It was a huge one. And the head of the Institute was the wife of Malenkov, Malenkov who was a prime minister. So it was a rich institute but we knew that if you wanted as Jew, to be accepted, you have no right to choose the very prestigious department.

So nevertheless I was accepted. And from that year they began to give pensions for the children whose parents were killed during the war. So I have, it was not a big sum, nevertheless, it bode some help for our mother.

Yeah, OK. And you stayed there studying?

Yes, it was almost six years.

So you were how old when you graduate, when you finished?

How?

How old were you when you finished?

About 23.

And what did you study?

Electrical engineering was my designation. And when I began to work, I changed the direction for computer service.

So you went to work after you graduated?

Yes, but you couldn't choose what you like because every person who graduated from the high school had to work three years at the place where you'll be sent. And the main idea was to get work in Moscow, not to be sent to another part of the country. And so we have not a big choice, first of all. And the second, it was a time where you had to remember your age. Because first of all, there was a huge number of organizations with the secret, special secret allowance. And there was no interest there.

But nevertheless I stayed in Moscow. And I go to the Institute of the organization of coal industry. And as it was not a very important organization, there were a lot of Jewish there. A lot of Jews. So, the atmosphere there was very pleasant.

Yeah. Did you do anything Jewishly at home? Did your mother? Your mother did not do anything?

Absolutely not.

Secretly?

Only the line in my passport.

That was the only thing?

Only.

No Sabbath candles?

No, no.

No wine?

No, no. I suppose they didn't know it themselves. Not my mother. Not her sisters. Because the Soviet power from the very beginning. Religious is the old time, not for us.

Right. So then you started working you said. And then what happened?

Before that, it was a very different experience. In 1957, when I graduated there were three years.

When you were 21.

No, no.

'57?

'57 was a Jew Youth Festival, International Youth.

You were 21 then.

No. It was '57.

I thought you were born in '36. When were you born?

I was in '36.

Yeah, '36.

But this International Festival was in 1957.

When you were 21.

I didn't understand, sorry. I thought about this one. And a lot of foreigners came to Moscow from various countries. And there was the place then, I met my future husband, when we were schoolchildren. Because we had a very bad teacher in our school. A very bad teacher in physics. And I understood that even if I would have the gold medal, I would have no knowledge in physics.

So it was necessary to get some knowledge. And in the Moscow festival, in Moscow University, every department had the special circle for the school children. And the physics department.

Physics department.

Physics department had the special studies for schoolchildren. And I went there to get some knowledge, real knowledge, in physics. And there I met my future husband. So the next time we met in Camden, because he also had the gold medal.

And after the end of the school, we met in this huge meeting for Middle East, in Camden. And after that we began to meet regularly. So in 1957, when there was a festival of the youth in Moscow, we tried to get everywhere. And to see as much as possible. It was in summer. We were free.

Did you speak any English? Then?

I studied German in school.

German.

He studied English but I, German. And when we went, there was a special park, a great park in Moscow. When your delegation organized concerts for public and there was an allegation from Israel. And certainly we went there. Both of them were Jewish Jews.

And after the end of the concert, the members of the delegation went to speak with the people. And you can't imagine what has happened there because the Soviet Jewish never, never saw other people from Israel. And they tried to get something, a handkerchief, ties, some signs and they reminded me of animals.

They were so excited that they began to take apart their dressing. But these people were so frightened. It was awful to see. I'll never forget it.

It was not only shameful, these people couldn't control their behavior. Because it was the first time that they see Jewish people. But it was very interesting to experience.

Yeah, I can imagine.

We saw a lot of delegation from various countries but there was a special event because many Russian girls were very excited seeing the black people. And they behave awful, awful because after the end of this festival, there was born a lot of black children. And they organized this special home for the children. When you're there absolutely unexpected things happen. It was a great event really.

Then on to the end of the Institute. And you have to work three years in a place where you were sent. And after that you can stop working there and choose something else if you want.

And so what did you do?

I changed the Institute but what was very interesting, some part of the Institute have a secret job, my second place working. And it was limited but special big factory, a big difference.

And each organization had a special a department. The head of the Physics Department was a member of KGB or [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. So not everyone could be accepted. But if you were accepted, it was something. Not the main direction but it's something. It was not a secret job certainly. Something, two or three years and returned to the first place after that.

And I visited the main part of the country because we worked for the automation of the coal industry. And had to go to the mines to bring the products of our creation. I was in Kazakhstan. I was in Ukraine.

I was in the far east. So it was interesting. It was not abroad but nevertheless, in a different part of the country.

When did you get married? What year?

Just after the end of the institution. In Russia it's very early not a few years.

So what year was that? What year was that?

It was in 1959.

And your husband's name?

Vladimir [Yentoff. ?] He had a special story that's interesting. I'll tell you. He was a very famous scientist. Write that. He was involved in physics from the very childhood. And he got the first place in every Olympiads for school children in Physics.

And so he couldn't imagine a life without physics. And when he got his gold medal he went to the University, to the physician department.

Physics.

Physics department and they loaned him because of Olympiads, but he wasn't accepted. And he told the person it was not exam's, it was the talk because he had the middle. And he said I can't accept you too.

Because he was Jewish.

He didn't explain the reason. But he has his form.

I'm saying it was because he was.

But there was not only that. His father was arrested in 1941 because he immigrated with his mother. And his father was, to that general he was the army person. And it was a huge number of arrests, which began in '37 until the end of life of Stalin.

So he had two disadvantages. He was a Jew and his father was arrested. So, he was told, we can't accept you. And then he said, OK, I will pass through exams with all the rest of the children.

And this person looked at him. I don't advise you to do it. The result will be the same. So he went to the Institute of Oil and Gas and graduated and went to the Graduate School there.

And after that he got the degree. The second degree. And we have two scientist degrees in Russia. The first after the graduate school and the second was Doctor of Science.

So he was a member of correspondents of Academy now, of science later. But after the end of the Institute of Oil and Gas, he went to the mathematical department of the University and was accepted there. It was another time already. It graduated from the University also, as a mathematician. So he had a long way.

Did you talk about coming to the United States at all?

No, no. How we got here, I'll explain to you. When our daughter graduated and her husband also, they studied in the same group in the chemical department of Moscow University.

When was your daughter born?

She was born in 1964. And a son in 1969. When she graduated from the Moscow University and began to work already, her friend, also from the University but she was a mathematician, she got in contact with an American scientist.

And this professor came to Moscow, to the Moscow University. And said I would like to accept some students. I understood all of them, all of you, had a very good education. I would like to invite some of them.

So she, both of them, my daughter and her husband, went here to the Catholic University to the chemical department. It was the first child. The second was another story.

My husband organized the conference in Moscow, an international conference, by hydrodynamics. And one of the professors there was from Penn State University. And it was necessary at the end of their working day, to show them Moscow, to invite them to the theater, to the concert.

And so he used my son and his friends to spend the time in the evening together with them. And soon after coming back, this professor wrote my father that if I have the grant only for three years, if your son is ready to go be a graduate student for three years. I am ready to take them.

So my son went to Penn State. And after that the children began to persuade my husband that its necessary to think about going to work here. But he was not ready and for six years, he spent half a year in Moscow and half a year here teaching students, back and here.

And in 2008, it was clear that he had a cancer. And then we went here because our good friend in Moscow, she was an oncologist, said you have no time to think. It is if you are going to have a treatment in America, immediately you have to go here.

And he got some treatment. And maybe a year and a half additional time to live.

He passed away when? In 2000?

Yeah.

In 2010?

2008.

Eight, OK. He passed away in 2008.

So during six or seven years, we spent half a year. At the very end of half a year.

And then after he passed away, you stayed here?

Yeah.

You just stayed.

I sold my apartment and came here.

And came here. So you've been here since 2008?

Permanently, yes, 2009.

OK, can we just talk about some of your feelings? Some of your thoughts?

Here?

Well, just generally. Do you feel Russian?

Oh, it's a good question. I can't feel Russian because I was reminded all my life that I'm not Russian. There was a very interesting episode, when my husband, because he had special security back at the Institute where he worked for a long time because he was a Jew, only because of that, he was forbidden to leave the country.

The first time, it was an international conference in Poland. Something '87. Not early. And after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

And they had a label at the conference and a scientist, I don't remember from what country, went to him, saw the label and said, oh I know your works. I am happy to get acquainted with you.

And they began to talk and after that he said, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] It's details of my explanation. And absolutely, automatically, he doesn't think about how he answered in Jew. And he told me when I saw a great, he understood what I answered. Because here, it's another answer.

And this person thought a bit and said, from what country are you? A great from Russia. Is it possible to be at the same time the Jew and the Russian? In Russia nobody could quite imagine such a question. It's impossible. So, it's my answer for your question.

Do you feel Jewish?

Yes, but only because it was minority there. Suppressed minority. We never could forget it there. Here, only here, the first time I go to the synagogue.

Oh, really?

And only here I, alone, went on the Jewish holidays.

So it was all new to you. When you came here it was all new?

Yes, absolutely.

When you came here?

Again, the new story. When my husband was teaching in Moscow, there was such a story at this Institute. When the student graduated the Institute, they have at least, the best people, were at the top of the list. And they can choose the first work. Where they can go to work after they graduated.

The better was your marks. That's how you weigh in this list. And it was after the end of the Institute of Power. And many youth began to visit synagogues during the Jewish holidays. Not in sight, but all around they were dancing, singing songs.

And the people from the Komsomol organization of this Institute went there and made pictures of every one of their students who was there. And after that, the best students went to the very bottom. And I was lucky because we needed the people with such profession to pick applied mathematics. I know about this story when it took to our office.

But I remember, there were several Jewish people there. They were always depressed after that. So, it's the answer for your question.

What are your thoughts about Germany? Do you have any thoughts about Germany?

Yes, for many years I couldn't imagine I could go there. I couldn't hear the speech. Now it's better. It's not so sharp. But for many years I couldn't hear it because all the films from my childhood with German speech.

The pronunciation. It was in my ear because I studied German at school but only after that I understood that our pronunciation was, as you like my accent, just the same it was with German.

So, I understand you volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. What do you do there?

We usually talk with the visitors in the information desk and close to the elevator.

So your in visitor services.

Yes.

Yeah, and do you do any translating at all?

From time to time.

From Russian or from?

From Russian to English.

Yeah. Are you more comfortable with people who lived through the war like you did as opposed to those of us who lived in the United States and didn't?

Once more.

Are you more comfortable with people who lived in Europe, who lived in Russia, than someone who didn't?

Not because of the mentality but because it's easier for me to understand. Michelin and Margaret I understand much better than the native American. I can't explain it. Maybe it's not so fast but I meet Margaret every day, every week. And there is no problem for me to understand her but when the people are talking fast at the Museum, at the information desk, I can't understand. Only an idea.

What language do you speak in to Margaret?

Oh, it's very interesting. I try to speak English. She tries to speak Russian.

Do you feel at home in the Museum? Are you comfortable?

Absolutely.

When you walk into the building, do you have a special feeling?

If I come, if the people address me at the information desk and speak very fast, sometimes I need help with somebody close to me. But not regularly.

But I just meant when you walk into the building, do you feel like you're at home? Do you feel like it's a strange building?

No, not strange.

You're comfortable?

Yes, but I have seven years or something like that.

What made you decide to volunteer?

It was the idea of my daughter.

Oh, what did she say?

It's reasonable because the main problem for me now is the very limited contact with English speaking people. And it is necessary for me to understand it. There it's the only opportunity for me.

Because it's difficult to find people around to get acquainted with them. And I am very confused inside because certainly if I feel relaxed, I could find people. But I am very tense to address because I'm always afraid not to understand.

Have you been back to Russia? Have you gone back to Russia?

Yes actually, last time I was there in 2012 and don't want to go no more.

Because?

First of all, I have only two close friends who are left there now. But probably because the situation, the air there. The haters. You feel it at every step. Foreigners. All the world is a mess, I tell you. Maybe you can understand.

My mother had a brother. Should I still go on? He was a student of the Institute in the end of the '20s. And was involved in the Zionist movement and was arrested. And went to the concentration camp, to the Asian part of the country.

There in the camp, he met a beautiful woman who got there by the same reason. They fell in love. They had a baby who was together with them in the camp. And when she was pregnant the second time, she began to starve to get the permission to leave for Palestine.

And then she got this permission. And she left with the child, being pregnant, to Palestine and he was left in the camp. In a year, he repeated the same experience and also got the permission to go over there.

They had a very difficult time as newcomers. And in five years, she died. She passed away because of starvation, being pregnant. And he was left with the children.

And to the end, by the time of the end of the war, it was dangerous for my mom and your sister to have the correspondence. It was dangerous for them because in every end-cap and every form you have to fulfill going to the new job, to the Institute. There was a line, do you have relatives abroad? In every form, everywhere.

And so it was then I remember, when my mother was broken the letters from him because it was dangerous to keep it at home. So in 1962, he went with his second wife to Moscow by private visit through a tourist. And I wasn't in Moscow at the time. It was the summer. We were at vacation.

And my mother, and my sister, met them. And I came to Moscow the day before they were leaving back. And my mother told me about it and I went to the relatives of his wife, to meet them there.

It was the last evening for them. And it was the time of protests of Eichmann in Israel. And I asked him before that when I was in Moscow. He was eager to visit his sisters, three sisters, and to see how they live but all of them lived in the communal apartments. And they were afraid to invite foreigners.

He was so upset. He was so depressed by this situation. It was this state when I saw him and when I asked him about the process of Eichmann, I didn't know about those days in Moscow before I came here, and suddenly he became with such color.

And cried, what are you asking me? You live in [?precious?] country. Do you understand it? You were afraid of the walls and you ask me about Eichmann? So, you can understand.

What was your reaction with the fall of communism in 1989, 1990?

We were happy but nobody knows what will be had. At that time we were happy. We couldn't believe but we were afraid of the future.

Yeah. Have you been to Israel?

Yes. I was there twice and I saw the granddaughters of my uncles.

Do you have any grandchildren?

Yes.

You do?

I have five.

You have five grandchildren?

This is the youngest.

OK, and do they live?

The eldest brother lives in California. Next, the sister just now graduated. They will be June eighth graduation at MIT. And now, right now she's in Mexico teaching the children there.

Do you talk to your grandchildren about your experience when you were a child?

It is not interesting for them. I understand now the former life of your elders, it's interesting for you when you are not young. And as a rule, by that time, there's nobody to ask.

I know.

They agree with me. Yeah. I try sometimes and I see that it is not interesting.

Are your grandchildren fluent in Russian?

They can speak, all of them.

Can speak Russian?

And the two of them I have in Boston. They speak without problems. But they couldn't write. But my granddaughter in Boston, she took the special courses, being in Brandeis University. And she can speak and she can write. And she has probably the best tradition among all of them.

Did any of the grandchildren, were they brought up religiously? Did they go to Sunday school or have bar mitzvahs?

It's interesting. My Boston children visited the Jewish school, Sunday Jewish School.

Bar and bat mitzvahs? Did any of them have a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah?

Yes, both of them. Both of them. But here, my daughter explained to me, such is the tradition. All Saturdays were used for painting, for visiting Russian circles here.

Yes and she said, if I went down on Sundays to the Jewish school, I have no-- We can't at all. It was the main reason, not because she had rejected the idea. Not because there was no time.

Do you feel that the Holocaust could happen again?

I am afraid. I am afraid because the hate is very high. It may be not in such size as it was in Germany.

It was the only country, Germany, who accepted the past as something awful. In Russia, in Ukraine, in Belarus, a lot of people were killed by the native people. I'm not sure Holocaust as a whole but the hatred. I can't understand why. Why this tradition is so alive.

When you were talking so much about refugees now, from the different countries, when you hear about that and when

you read about that, does it bring back memories for you? I mean you had to leave quickly to go to Siberia. It wasn't a choice. You were forced out. Does it bring back any memories of childhood? When you hear about refugees today?

It's another kind.

Yes.

It's another kind.

It is another kind, right.

Because we had no aggression. We were always the victims. Always, but when I read it today in the Washington Post about the situation in Germany, with Muslims, they're very aggressive. And they change the situation in the country. It's not German aggression but well, its difficult for me because it is a theme I try not to discuss with my daughter.

She is more Democratic. She is sure that we are here, and most of the Russian Jewish are here, because they were accepted by American embassy as refugees. But we were not aggressive.

Yeah. Are you an American citizen?

Yeah.

What was that like to become a citizen of the United States? Do you remember that day?

Yes, I remember that day certainly. It was, just a minute, just the minute. I had got a green card in 2000. So it was 2005.

2005, you became a citizen.

Certainly.

What was the ceremony like for you? Was it a very emotional?

Yes, certainly. It was very emotional and it was very interesting.

And your husband became a citizen also?

Two months before he passed away.

Well, is there anything we haven't talked about that you wanted to say? Any memories that you have or any?

Probably, I will recall a lot of things.

Any messages to your grandchildren that you wanted to say to them?

It is not very interesting for them. Sometimes when I can, by the way of our talk, to remember some thing, but it is too far from them. They have very active lifestyles.

Wonderful. Yeah, that's wonderful.

I'm happy about that every day. I thank my faith that my children and my grandchildren are here not there. Everyday. Though there is no Stalin now and no depression now, it's nevertheless. This country is going like a circle.

And I can't understand the people. I used to be ruled. It is here when-- It was interesting, my eldest grandson was four when they came here.

And they rented the downstairs close to the University, where they were a graduate student. And all our savings were spent to buy the tickets for them. Our professor's savings. And suddenly, it was a basement and the floor was covered with carpet.

And suddenly I saw him with scissors. He was doing a hole. And I imagine that absolutely, without minding it, and they had to pay for that.

And I cried in Russian. You are a very bad child! It is special to go to Russia.

He spent one year here before this talk. Before I came and saw. He looked at me and said, you shouldn't say so bad words to a child. Only bad people speak such a way.

He spent only one year here. It's impossible to listen such words in Russian. He is a person. He's an individual. There, you are a crowd.

A crowd, right.

A lot of special expressions. Why are you not all the same as the others? Why do you think you are better? It's the answer for your question. I am happy, really, to live here.

Well, that's a wonderful note to end on, that you're happy that you're here.

Yeah. You are right! It's a very good end!

A good note to end on. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Liya, Liya Kaplinskaya.