

ALEXANDER UMAN
RG-50.405.0045. (rec. 1990 in Chicago)

Alexander Uman was born in Kiev in 1948. His wife Irena was also born in Kiev in 1957 and they have 2 sons, Vladimir (1981) and Igor (1988) His father was a truck dispatcher and his mother a cashier. He had an older sister, Nellie. The family lived in a communal apartment that contained 3 families. Alex describes his extended family and where they lived. There were a lot of Jewish kids in the neighborhood but there were anti-Jewish feelings in school.

Alexander wanted to be a physicist but it was difficult to get into those schools due to antisemitism, so he went to a correspondence school in Kiev and became a drafter. He worked for a large company and went to school for 5 years to get his degree in engineering, which he said was a low paid profession in Russia.

Alexander met Irena because she worked at the same company. After their marriage they lived in one room of a communal apartment. He describes how one gets an apartment in Russian. He describes an incident that he had when the KGB were suspicious of him even though he hadn't done anything, and he was afraid that he would be sent to prison, but he was released with a warning. Alexander discusses the impact of Chernobyl. Irena and their child left Ukraine for a while for an area further east.

Alex and Irena applied to leave Russia in 1978, but when Brezhnev came to power emigration was halted for several years. They reapplied in 1988 and left by the usual route of Vienna and then Italy. They were met by HIAS in Vienna and originally were going to Israel, but his wife had a cousin in Chicago so they decided to go to the US> They arrived in July, 1989.

Alexander said they left Russia so that they and their children could practice Judaism. He had been impressed by the help they have received by American Jews. Right now, it is difficult because he has not yet found a job, but he feels life here is different in a good way.