HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LOLA KRAUSE

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Lucille Fisher
Date: October 19, 1981

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LK - Lola Krause[1] [interviewee]
LF - Lucille Fisher [interviewer]
Date: October 17, 1981

Tape one, side one:

[Slight delay in beginning]

LF: You want to begin this interview by telling me where and when you were born, and how many were in your family and so on.

LK: I was born March 1, 1916, in Vitebsk. This is Russia, but this is White Russia. And in our family was, I have an older sister.

LF: When you say White Russia, what do you mean?

LK: This is like Ukraine, and then they have Belorussia in Russia, and this is like, it's when you translate it's like Belorussia. This is like White Russia.

LF: Belorussia.

LK: This is like a state, like Ukraine. Their state, and this is another state.

LF: I see. I see.

LK: Like Minsk, and this is belonged to Belorussia. You know, it's a big state.

LF: O.K.

LK: And I have an older sister four years older, and I have a brother four years younger.

LF: You were the middle child.

LK: I was the middle one, and my mother and my father, all my family.

LF: Did you come from a family that had strong Zionist leanings or religious or Socialist traditions?

LK: I didn't know about Zionists, you know. I was small. My mother died when I was ten years old. I know my grandfathers, they were, I think, religion. They even had their own *shul*, temple, private, you know.

LF: What do you mean, in their homes?

LK: Not in their homes. They had a couple of houses before the Revolution, and then they had a separate house was the *shul*, from neighborhood people.

LF: Oh, a neighborhood...

LK: They had a--well my father comes from a big family. And I remember when I was little my father used to go for the holidays, but I don't think we were religious, very religious. We knew it was holiday. But we were, I don't come from a very extra-religious family.

LF: What did your father do?

LK: My father was a photographer, and he was an artist too. He was one of the best. They offered him one time to move to Leningrad to like, here 20th Century Fox, there

[1]née Miestschanimoff.

[unclear], to be a photographer there for the movie. He didn't want it. And we were more than middle class people. We were close to pretty well-to-do people. We had a governess; we had a maid. We were, before the Revolution.

LF: Before the revolution. What about your schooling, and whatever work you did?

LK: Schooling? We went to school. And, to a public school. It was next to our house. And when we have the governess, then we all speak German. Why my grandmother lived in Riga, Latvia. My mother comes from...

LF: Riga?

LK: Riga.

LF: Yeah.

LK: My grandmother comes from there. And we used to write her letters in German. And we all, from six years old we take piano lessons. My mother was playing very well. And...

LF: You went to, how far in school?

LK: Oh I went to public school and high school and then when I was 14 I moved to Leningrad to college. In Russia I couldn't go, in the little city, I couldn't go to--there were a few colleges but they know my father was wealthy and they wouldn't take me in. Then I went to Leningrad.

LF: This is in Vitebsk?

LK: Vitebsk. Then I went to Leningrad. See meantime my mother died. My father remarried, and I went to live with my aunt and my uncle.

LF: In Leningrad.

LK: In Leningrad.

LF: And that cut off your relationship with your father?

LK: Well, every summer I used to come for vacation, to Vitebsk. And we have a big group of students. Now one is the biggest composer in Russia. One is director of theater, and one is big on television. We are a whole group of people used to, I used to play; I used to play in college in the band, piano. And we used to, from a whole group of people for two months vacation.

LF: And when you were in Leningrad what did you study there?

LK: I went to Electr--Mechanical.

LF: Electrical Mechanical, like in...

LK: Yeah.

LF: What, in engineering?

LK: Engineer, the technical mechanical part of a engineer.

LF: You went...

LK: You see we have two school, we have like two schools. But you finish public school you can go to college and you can go to high school, you can go to technical.

I finished public school. I have to get out from Vitebsk. I can't study there anymore. Then I went to Technical and then I went to college.

LF: And then you went to college. For how many years?

LK: Four year college.

LF: Four year college. And then you were trained...

LK: I went to work. I was working.

LF: What did you do?

LK: I was working engineer.

LF: As an engineer.

LK: You see they are this way, like here Drexel...

LF: Yeah.

LK: You study, and then you go to work to the factory. And you start from the bottom. You start on every machine to know what's, you know, to know what to say to the people when you look on the blueprint. And I was working in then, in this.

LF: In heavy machinery, or light machinery?

LK: No, we were working, I was working a couple ways, for a while working, they are making all the kind, like amperemeters for the current [electric current], for the ships.

LF: Wires.

LK: And planes. And then later I worked where they make cinefilm, opera, movie, for the movies, which...

LF: Film.

LK: Yes. My first husband was working there and I went to work there right, just the war started.

LF: Were you aware of any anti-Nazi propaganda before 1939?

LK: I wasn't aware, we knew it was going on, but...

LF: What do you mean, you knew what was going...

LK: You know what Ribbentrop then came to Russia and they, Stalin signed the papers and everything. But...

LF: The peace treaty, you mean.

LK: Yes, but I don't pay too much attention. You see in this, Central Russia, I wasn't on the border. You see I was in Leningrad. This is close to the border too but we don't hear. We hear talks, talking, talking, you know, but--we know when they went to Poland. You know, you read the papers, you read things like this. In Russia you can read whatever they write, not what you, you know, like our papers here. But the other way, you see I went to college, we were just, I and my cousin, and maybe one or two Jewish, the rest was all Gentiles. I was mostly with the gentile people than the Jewish people.

LF: So that you really weren't aware of anti-Nazi propaganda or pro-German propaganda about the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact?

LK: No, even, you know, the peasants used to say on the border, they used to say--in the beginning the Russian Army, they went the whole battalion, they went to Germany. They don't even fight. When they start to cross the border--Minsk, Vitebsk--they hard--they didn't fight there. They was thinking be better than the Communists. But then when they saw what's going on, they start to fight. In the beginning, why they're pacifists.

LF: They, I don't know what...

LK: Why German they went so fast through.

LF: The Germans.

LK: Russia didn't fight hard enough, you see? The peasant who live there, they was thinking they be better than, they weren't happy with the Communists.

LF: They were unhappy with the Communists.

LK: Right.

LF: You didn't...

LK: But then when they saw what's going on, then they already turn everything.

LF: So that they didn't put up too much resistance.

LK: Not too much resistance.

LF: I see. [coughs] Excuse me. Did you experience any Soviet antisemitism?

LK: I don't experience...

LF: No I mean before the Nazis came in.

LK: I didn't experience too much antisemitism. I was most with the Gentile, you see, most start in Russia in the war, and right after the war more antisemitism. We don't have no temples. I don't know of a temple in Leningrad. I didn't know about the holiday. I know when my aunt said there was a holiday. I didn't know nothing. I live with my aunt and my uncle and he was a dentist. And they weren't too religious people.

LF: Well, do you think it was because you were part of the so-called intelligentsia that...

LK: No, was a lot of intelligent people who know, but you don't have no temples. My oldest son was born; he wasn't circumcised. I never had a *chuppah* in my li--when I got married.

LF: That didn't--you didn't know about it?

LK: Well I know; I remember my aunt got married with a *chuppah*. I know about circumcision.

LF: And it didn't bother you.

LK: But then in the hospital they don't do it, like they do in here. Now they're talking about maybe they need it or don't need it, whatever they do. But to go and get a *mohel* or something, I didn't know nothing about it.

LF: Was it legal? Had you wanted to? Or don't you recall?

LK: To me, I don't think I, I didn't want care. I didn't know it have to be this way, it really should be this way. You see, I should, I got married I don't have a *chuppah*. We went like to city hall and that's it.

LF: I see. Well...

LK: See this time was already, religion was strict, you know. They don't have many churches. They don't have, maybe some place, you know, in the house somebody has a *shul* or something. But I didn't know nothing about it.

LF: And this is around 1939, 1940?

LK: This is, yes, between '38. My son was born New Year '39. And this was between '38 and '41. '41 the war has started.

LF: Did you get, you weren't involved, or were you involved in any war activity, in any defense work, and in the army and civil defense and all?

LK: You see, I have a little child. Then usually they sent you dig a, trenches, you know, before the army come. The whole factory used to go and dig everything.

LF: What do you mean?

LK: You see, in Russia like this, like all, a lot of potato fields. And the German was coming in. They can take 300 people, 400 people from a factory and say, "Go ahead, pick up the potatoes, for a day, or for two." You know what I mean?

LF: Because they wanted to get it before the Germans.

LK: Before the Germans, yes. And then they were digging trenches for the army.

LF: The workers.

LK: All around the city.

LF: The workers were digging.

LK: The workers used to go and work every Sunday, every Saturday, in the middle of the week. But I have a small child, and I was breastfeeding him. Then I used to work like more hours on the factory.

LF: And your husband, your first husband, was he involved in that?

LK: My husband, they won't take him to the army. He was too valuable.

LF: What did he do?

LK: He was the head engineer in the color movie.

LF: In the where?

LK: In the production of cameras. He had his own patents.

LF: Cameras.

LK: Cameras, movie cameras.

LF: Yeah.

LK: He has his own patents. They have five Stalin scholarships in the whole of Russia. He had one of them in mathematics.

LF: In mathematics.

LK: We grew up, we lived on the same street. We ride with his brother, went to school together.

LF: In Vitebsk. And, so that he wasn't involved in having to dig trenches or...

LK: No, he had the--you see, for such people they have special things to protect them. They don't, they didn't take him, they don't take him to the army.

LF: Did you personally observe the mass execution, mass killing of Jews by the mobile killing units that...

LK: You see, Germans, they went, see I lived, I used to live, Pushkin, where Pushkin lived, say, this is about 25 miles from Leningrad. I lived there, and then commuted with the train. We used to go to the city to work. And German was coming in. And I was at work, and they say, "The last train goes. There won't be any more trains." The Germans already too close. And a nurse with my son were there. Then I went from work, and I took the, I got the train. But coming back we had to walk, all the way under the fire. And I have to carry him. He was two, two-and-a-half years old.

LF: Under fire.

LK: Under fire. The German was coming and...

LF: Yeah.

LK: Bombing and everything. And we, everybody came to the city. Was no place to go. Army came to the city, and everybody came to the city. And then I have, my aunt, it was a empty apartment--somebody--for two years already. I'm supposed to get out from Leningrad too, with my son. But my husband came home and he say, you know, "In three days we're going to leave with the factory. Everything's already on the platform. And we're going to leave."

LF: The factory was going to be moved back.

LK: Moved back. Some went to Siberia. Some went to Iran border. Then I said, "Why should I go by myself?" I said, "We'll go together." A day before we have to leave the German closed the ring. We couldn't get out.

LF: Oh my.

LK: So we were left then inside the city.

LF: Well, during this time, what happened to your husband when this occurred?

LK: We're always in the city, we're always in the factories. They bombed the city. And the food's diminishing. Was no food. Start to get cold. October, November, December. No water. Nothing. We used to get 100 grams of black bread a day. And wasn't just bread. They mix with paper, with anything. Very little flour.

LF: The government gave this out?

LK: Yeah. They have coupons whatever there is. Whatever they have put away, everything they used to bomb them, and everything went on fire. Sugar and flour and whatever was there. Was no food at all. My son used to lay and cry, "Mom, give me a piece of hard bread." I didn't have it. You can imagine how you feel?

LF: Oh, terrible, terrible.

LK: And then you get so hard that you just can't talk anymore.

LF: You shut out your feelings.

LK: And then my son got measles, and pneumonia. Two-and-a-half years old.

LF: No medications and...

LK: Was nothing to eat. One of my uncles was the head of [unclear] hospital. And then sulfadine just came out.

LF: Who?

LK: Sulfadine.

LF: Oh, sulfa, sulfa, yeah.

LK: Before the penicillin.

LF: Yeah, yeah.

LK: And they used to get in the army hospital. I used to, he gave it to me. And this I save him. See my husband, we all start to look a little bit, we start to lose weight. I was 60 pounds.

LF: 60 pounds!

LK: 60 pounds, a skeleton.

LF: How did you, did you keep any contact with your family in Vitebsk? Were they able to...

LK: You can't keep no contact. German was there. We don't know what's where, who. We don't know nothing. And...

LF: Your aunt and so on, then you were all in the same position.

LK: They're all in the same position. Then a man start to lose weight and then he start from hunger to swell. People swell from hunger. But first you lose weight, and then you swell. One day Lake Ladoga froze. Then they start to bring with trucks. They start to bring food, what America start to send food, with the trucks, to Leningrad. See the only place they put the Germans a little bit apart--Lake Ladoga.

LF: What, how do you spell that?

LK: Lake.

LF: Lake?

LK: Lake.

LF: Yeah, L-A-K-E.

LK: Ladoga, L-A-D-O-G-A, Ladoga. And there is so cold, and ice is so thick, you can put right on a thousand trucks together. They used to start, come in, and bring some food, and take out people out of Leningrad. They were afraid, in the spring, that so many dead people in Leningrad, laying on the street, can be cholera, you know, sickness, anything.

LF: Cholera, sure.

LK: Anything. Meantime, my husband, they open a sanitarium in the factory. And they took, you know, the first, they start to give them food. I don't know what they gave it to them. They used to, they should start from a little bit something, I don't know. Somebody told me they gave them fried hamburgers. Well I don't know what they give them. I wasn't there. I used to go just to see him every other day. One day my friend went.

We have to walk about 20 miles, across the frozen lake. And when you're 60 pounds you don't have no strength, no nothing.

LF: Of course.

LK: And water we have to bring ten blocks from the river. And everything was frozen. You take a bucket, you come home with so much. To make fire I have to chop our concert piano. You know, this was no meaning. I took off two-and-a-half karat ring for a little piece of bread and a little bit cereal. Who need it? Nobody needs nothing. Then one day I come in and I see his bed is empty. He died in the night. See, the body couldn't adjust, take anymore.

LF: Over how long a period did this happen?

LK: This happened maybe two weeks he died.

LF: And the starvation before that had gone on...

LK: The starvation was going on from October.

LF: And this was like...

LK: I never remember a New Year of '41, this birth--my son's birthday. In the beginning when, in September when they sent everybody to dig up potatoes, then my husband went too and he brought home potatoes. This was more than money. Then when I cleaned the potatoes, the skin, I wash it out, and I dry it out. I don't know why, but I did it. Then for New Year I boil a big pot of water, and I put some of the dried, and two sardines in a pot of water, and a lot of pepper.

LF: You made some kind of soup or something.

LK: I don't know what was it, whatever was it. And when I came in I see he is not there. I say, "Where he is?" He say, "He died in the night." But there's a funny thing; when the war...

LF: How old was he?

LK: 27.

LF: 27 years old.

LK: When the war started, he told me a funny thing. He say, "You know, Lola, I don't think I'll make the war. But I know one thing. When the war finish, everything will be different. Everything will be better. But I don't think I'll see the day." That's it. And in Leningrad was the situation like this. People were dying, laying in apartments, and nobody did know if they're alive or dead. Then they don't see anybody for ten days. The police, special units, used to come in, army, break the door, and the family, five people, they're all dead in there. Nobody buried. We just have to take a frozen bo--to take a body and put outside. And the big trucks be coming and taking them and take them to the mass graves. My husband died. I came home to my aunt, and I was, I don't even know, all my legs with wounds, everything was in blood. When I was crossing the river, the German was shooting. They were so close to Leningrad. And people was dying, falling and dying, around my legs. And I don't care. I just walk. I said, "But I have to live." My son tells me, "Die, we'll die today or tomorrow." Sick with measles and pneumonia. My husband died. I don't have

anybody. My parents, my brother, my si--I don't know whatever they is. I want to die. And when I came to my aunt she said, "What happened to you?" I said, "I don't know." And she said what happened with my husband. I say, "He's dead." And you know, quiet, no tears, no nothing, like you...

LF: You, your feelings were cut off.

LK: You know, you're like a stone.

LF: Sure. Maybe this will be a good place. We'll turn the tape now.

LK: O.K.

LF: All right?

Tape one, side two:

[There is a six-minute delay before LF is heard.]

LF: You say they did not want to bomb Leningrad.

LK: They bombed. They bombed the outskirts of Leningrad.

LF: The Germans didn't want to.

LK: The Germans, but they don't want to bomb the center city.

LF: Because?

LK: Because was too valuable, too beautiful. You see, they have a chance to take out all the paintings from Hermitage.

LF: The Hermitage, yes.

LK: Yes. Then they have beautiful sculpture on the bridges of Nevsky Prospekt, the center of the city--horses with many, and they buried them in the river. And everything was very valuable. You know, where Rastrelli used to build, you know?

LF: The what?

LK: Architect Rastrelli.

LF: How do you spell that?

LK: Italian. Rastrelli, R-A-S-T-R-E-L-L-I, something.

LF: That was an Italian architect who came to build...

LK: Yeah but he came with his family, then his son was born there. And they built all the palaces in Leningrad, around Leningrad. Beautiful.

LF: Oh, this beautiful, beautiful city. Were you having any contact with any Jewish anti-fascist committees or organizations?

LK: No, let, I'll tell you something. Then, when I have to bury my husband, you can't have no coffins, no nothing. Then they gave me a man who helped me to go to the cemetery. I put him on the blanket. And I, with the man on the, what do you call them with the children's slides, they're going, sliding in the snow?

LF: A sled.

LK: A sled. We went to the cemetery. And we left him there, in the cemetery. And then the machine was digging graves and they were putting them. And when you come to a cemetery, you know, for fifteen years when I came here I couldn't go to a funeral. I don't see one person laying down. I saw the whole place with frozen, dead bodies, like a mountain of frozen, dead bodies. I never saw one person. I saw the whole thing.

LF: Is it pain; is it too hard for you to continue to talk to me about this?

LK: That's all right. It's all right.

LF: Would you like to stop a little bit?

LK: That's all right.

LF: It's all right. You, it doesn't seem real to you yet, I guess.

LK: Oh, real. I wake up in the night and I see and I think, well I was already here. Everything was good. And the cold sweat coming. That's all right. And after this I have to leave Leningrad, in March. I left with my son.

LF: How old was your son then?

LK: He was three years old. He weighed seven-and-a-half pounds from starvation.

LF: Three years old and weighed seven-and-a-half pounds!

LK: And nine months old he was a child like this. He walked, nine months. He talk one year. He can me the whole children's story. But from sickness and no food. Then I was lucky. A friend of mine gave me, like a Jeep, and took me to the train station. When you couldn't get for a, I don't know what you couldn't get anybody. Everybody say, "How do you do it?" We came there, we were staying 24 hours. We couldn't leave. They was bombing the station. We went with the cattle train.

LF: Where were you going?

LK: We were going to Samarkand, to Iran border, the factory.

LF: That's where your husband had gone, to Samarkand.

LK: That's what I meant.

LF: Yeah.

LK: Then...

LF: That was S-A-M-A-R-K-A-N-...

LK: Samarkand. S-A-M-A-R-K-A-N-D.

LF: Yeah.

LK: We were about five weeks, six weeks in the train. We were going, we were stopping. And the hair was frozen to the, you know, to the wood of the train. And hardly any food. We have lice. We're dirty. We don't wash, nothing. Finally I came, before Samarkand, was city of Tashkent. I had an uncle there.

LF: How do you spell that?

LK: Tashkent?

LF: Yeah.

LK: T-A-S-C-H-K-E-N-T. [Tashkent] And my uncle was the head of a army and navy hospital. He was professor of nose, throat and ear. And when he came and he took a look on my son he said, "Where are you going? He'll die today or tomorrow. Where are you going? Stay here." I say, "Look, I do the best what I can but I don't want to stay here." I said, "There is a factory and I'll have work to do, and I'm going there." And there was the biggest army and navy medical academy, [unclear] from Leningrad in Samarkand.

LF: In Samarkand.

LK: I say, "When I'll come," I say, "when they can't help me, nobody can help me." And you know, is a funny thing. My aunt asked me what happened to her sister. And I don't know, I don't have no feelings, or we were sorry. "So what do you mean, what happened to your sister? She is dead like anybody else." And when she started to cry, I was

looking on her and I was thinking, "*She is crazy. What she is crying*?" You know? I don't know what. I think we weren't human anymore. We lost the period. We don't--we were skeletons. See, in Leningrad was the register of dead, was dying on the street 30,000 a day, just registered.

LF: In Leningrad.

LK: Yes, just registered. When we came there, when I left to know, my husband's friend was the director of the factory become, and he ask what do I want to? I say, "I need somebody to take me and my son to the hospital." I came to the Leningrad army and navy hospital was there.

LF: Was there starvation there like there was...

LK: Not, you have just to have money there. You can buy on a market there everything. Just you have to have money. I came to the hospital. I didn't know where I will sleep tonight. You know, but so many people came from all over. There's no place to go. I came to the hospital, and a big professor came out and I told him, I say, "I just came from Leningrad." And they were all interested. They came out before the siege, blockade of Leningrad. I came already after. I told him what's happening there and everything. He say, "You know, we don't have no place even to keep him." I said, "Listen, you don't have a place to keep him. I don't know where I'll be even sleeping tonight." I say, "I hardly can move. We were six weeks in a cattle train." He say, "O.K., I'll take him. I'll put back in the hall. Meantime we'll see what we can do." They took him. He was there a year-and-a-half, in the hospital. They used to take my blood every other day. They don't have no father. They need my blood or the father blood, whatever they--And they told him, "Whatever he want, he asks something to eat, give it to him." His stomach couldn't work. He just don't want nothing. He wants fried potatoes.

LF: He wants what?

LK: Fried potatoes!

LF: Fried potatoes.

LK: He wanted to--half the night they used to bring him, whatever. Then I signed the papers. See, one of his assistants write a dissertation, you know, for the professorship.

LF: Writes what? I don't...

LK: Well I don't know how do you mean. Just they write a book for the profess-...

LF: You write a text, yes.

LK: For the professorship.

LF: Yes.

LK: And I signed the paper he can do all the experiments what he wants to do. I know I have nothing to lose. I saw it. And after a year-and-a-half in the hospital I took him home.

LF: At that, and what did he...

LK: He couldn't walk. He couldn't sit. He just learn a little bit to sit. When I, he was just like this.

LF: And what did he weigh then?

LK: He weighed then maybe eight pounds.

LF: He was to that, oh. He gained a little weight.

LK: A little weight, but...

LF: How is he today?

LK: Wonderful. Fat.

LF: Fat!

LK: Not fat, but plump.

LF: Aw.

LK: And he--when I took, carried him home, the people on the street used to go on the other side. They was thinking a skeleton, like a skeleton. But he came to himself. He start to walk, and that's when I put him to the kindergarten.

LF: Where your husband had been working.

LK: Where my husband, and he saw he's a tiny little. And he tells stories like, he was a very good-looking kid. And he was there; I was working. And I used to take him home once a week, just Saturday for Sunday. And Monday I, in the morning, take him back there.

LF: What kind of work did you do?

LK: I was a engineer.

LF: Still an engineer. And he was in like this nursery for a week and you would get him...

LK: We were connected with our factory. A lot of our kids were there.

LF: Oh, I see, like a daycare center.

LK: Yes.

LF: But except it was for the week.

LK: Yes.

LF: Tell me, during those years, during that time, did the name of Ilya Ehrenberg mean anything to you? Had you...

LK: Oh, Ilya Ehrenberg, we read his books. We know. You know, we read his books and we know. He...

LF: What did you know about his books?

LK: He wrote the, what do you call, eh...

LF: *The Black Book*?

LK: *Negaytash in America* What do you call, *Multi Floor America* or something. I don't know. You have here the book or not. And that's how it went on, but...

LF: How do you spell that?

LK: What?

LF: Multi?

LK: In Russian they say *Negaytash in America*. This is like the United States have so many big buildings, you know, like the whole country is just building with a lot of floors, something.

LF: Skyscrapers.

LK: Something like this.

LF: But *The Black Book*? That did not mean anything to you?

LK: No.

LF: That, his collection of material for *The Black Book*?

LK: You see, you couldn't get in Russia the things like this. When they don't want to have you read, you can't get it. You can't get this. And you have a library. Here you can get anything--a good book, junk, anything that--you have everything. There, in the library, you have what they want you should have it.

LF: So you didn't know about his collection.

LK: I didn't know about collection, but I read this book and I know about him. He is a, he was a writer, and a very good writer. And that's all that I know about him. I know he was Jewish.

LF: How did, how would you describe the attitude and the behavior of non-Jews toward Jews?

LK: You see, in Samarkand we lived in...

LF: During the war, I mean.

LK: Yeah, that's what I am talking about. You see, in Samarkand was the war. I came there in March, '41 and I was there till '46. But now a lot of people start to get packages from the front. The soldier used to send home. And talking about Jews and everything. Then you start already to have a little feeling. Where I worked was no feeling. We have a lot of Jewish people. You know, there was nothing. But one funny thing, I went on the market one time, and I bought soap. And I came home and I washed the clothes and the soap has such a funny smell. And doesn't have no suds. And I used to say, "What? What the hell? It, what is in it?" Then my husband came home. I said, "What is it?" I wasn't married then, but I know him.

LF: You knew him.

LK: And somebody finds out this is made *Rein Judenfett* [pure Jew fat]. This was made from concentration camp. They used to, after the crematorium, the fat of the people, this was, the soap was made from from human fat, meat. I don't know what they put in it. Then somebody organized. They bought up whatever they can, this soap, and they bury.

LF: They...

LK: Buried.

LF: Buried it.

LK: Yes.

LF: Who did that? Was that a Jewish merchant?

LK: A Jewish, sure Jewish. See, we start to know more about Jewish*keit*, when the Pol--was a lot of Polish Jews in Samarkand. And they used to keep Saturday and they used to, they were more religious than Russian. Russian Jew were religious. They have, like Lubavitcher *Chasidim* used to be in Russia.

LF: Yeah.

LK: But my generation, we weren't just religious.

LF: You weren't. So you were then aware of the destruction of the Jews.

LK: Oh, oh, look. Sure I was aware of destruction of the Jews. My father was killed. My sister was killed by the Nazis. They just, they came out from Vitebsk. In the beginning my father didn't want, I told him, I say, "Come over." I say, oh, this and this when he decided to go. My sister didn't want to go without my father. She wasn't married.

LF: Samarkand was how far over the border from Poland?

LK: Oh, this is the other end.

LF: The other end.

LK: This is, well this is so, this is the other end.

LF: Yeah.

LK: But my father was in Vitebsk. And I, when the war started I said, "Come to Leningrad." "No," this and this. Vitebsk fell very soon, right after the war. And when they start to evacuate, the German took him. And we don't know what happened.

LF: Were there camps that they took them to or...

LK: No, I don't think there was a camp. I think, we really don't know. I think they were on the way or bombed or shot or something. See my brother was in the army. My brother was in the army.

LF: In the Russian Army.

LK: In the Russian Army, sure. See my moth--my mother died when I was ten years old...

LF: Yes.

LK: From accident. Fire, we were in the country and they were like kerosene stoves and there was a bottle of gasoline on the top and...

LF: This was years ago.

LK: This is in 1925.

LF: So then your...

LK: My father remarried. His second wife was a doctor, but she died. And my father remarried. When I was getting married he said, "What should I do?" I said, "Listen, I don't live here. My sister," I say, "she is old." I say, "How long we'll be with you? You'll be alone. You better get married." And he marry again and when they were caught, we don't know what happened.

LF: You don't know what happened. And that was approximately what year?

LK: This was '41.

LF: '41. So, you heard the news from the Poles that were coming in to Samarkand about what was happening in Europe?

LK: Oh, we hear people was talking, but we really don't know too much about the crematorium. You see nobody came there so far in '42 from crematorium, you know. Later they start to talk about it.

LF: But you had your own killings in Russia, like your father and his family, from the bombings and the...

LK: The whole my family. This, we had a family maybe 100 people. Not many left. I don't even know. Now I found out when I was in Russia I still have a couple cousins. But we were a very, very large family. You see, my grandfather was like a merchant, a first-class merchant. And Jewish people wasn't allowed to live in Petersburg before they renamed Leningrad. And our family always have a right to live there.

LF: So you had special privileges.

LK: Yes. They were all doctors. They were all...

LF: So, were you ever deported from this town you were in, in Samarkand? Were you...

LK: No, I...

LF: Deported from there?

LK: Was no place to be deported. The German wasn't in Samarkand.

LF: No, the Germans never invaded there.

LK: No, they never, no.

LF: And you never did, then, return to your hometown?

LK: No.

LF: You never went to Leningrad?

LK: I returned, and the first time I returned in 1974, from here.

LF: From here you came back. And you never went back to Vitebsk?

LK: My brother was there. I find my brother after many, many, many years.

LF: You mean before you came to the United States or after you came?

LK: Oh no. I found him, I think, in '70.

LF: Oh!

LK: I don't know nothing. I got one letter from him. You see, one aunt was living in Leningrad and everybody know the address and everybody whatever want to find wrote to her. And when my brother came from the war, after the war, end of the war, and I was then in Germany, and my aunt have the address. And I got one letter. You see, he came from the war. And nobody, just one aunt is there.

LF: Where was he?

LK: He was in the war. I don't know.

LF: No, but I mean what city was he in?

LK: Oh, in Leningrad.

LF: He came back to Leningrad...

LK: Yeah.

LF: Too, yeah.

LK: And he say now he'll start, he, before the war started he was admitted to architectural college. And the war started. They all went. And he say, "Now I came. I went back to college. Nobody there. Nobody to help me. I am all alone." And this is the last letter I got from him. And then I didn't know a thing till 1970. Then I have an aunt in New York from my father's side. She used to sing with Chaliapin.

LF: She used to what?

LK: Sing with Chaliapin.

LF: With Chaliapin, yeah.

LK: She, when she came from France here--they came in 1940--she was singing on the radio many years. When Roosevelt died, whatever, she was, has a program. My uncle is a sculptor, and decided he was an art collector. He used to buy and sell.

LF: Here in the United States?

LK: Yes. And she went to Russia. She has a big family there, all her brothers was conducting. One brother he was conducting Metropolitan. And then he was in Louisiana. He conducting Chaliapin, in *Boris Godunov*. And she went to Russia. She had a sister there and a brother. The first time she went she couldn't find my brother. See, Moscow doesn't have a telephone book. Then she went the second time, and she ask her brother maybe he will have a chance to find what happened to him something. Well I didn't know I had cousin in Leningrad. Nobody told me anything. And her brother found him.

LF: Where did he find him?

LK: Moscow.

LF: In Moscow.

LK: Yeah. And when she call him up, and she told him I am here and I am alive, he just couldn't believe it. And then when she came back, she called me on the phone and she told me, "Misha is alive." And you know, I passed out.

LF: Really.

LK: Then when I, I ran out outside and I just started to scream, "I found my brother!"

LF: Oh my. And that was what, like 30 years?

LK: 34 years later.

LF: 34 years. And then soon after that you went back to...

LK: I went '74.

LF: To see your brother. Well, let's get to that later. So you never returned to your hometown. You just--and you met your husband...

LK: In Samarkand.

LF: In Samarkand, your present husband.

LK: My son marry me. You know, he was good to him. He see a cute child and talking like a grown-up boy and everything. He start to give him, see, there are grapes

growing all over there. He used to bring him grapes. He used to bring him, extra something. You know, a child. Give him something. Three, three-and-a-half, four years old.

LF: Your husband was working in the nursery, yeah?

LK: Yeah. And he start, he comes home one time, he say, "You know, this and this I want he should be my daddy."

LF: Oh my.

LK: I say, "What are you talking about? Your father is dead." So he don't say nothing any more, but we, sometimes we used to walk on the street and he see a man walking before. "Take a look, my daddy is walking there." From the back, you know? And one day I didn't feel good, and we have to go maybe eight, ten miles. And somebody, they're all passing my house when they go to pick up the children. I say, "Will you do me a favor, to bring Mark home?" He said, "O.K." And they pass by. You see, we lived like so many evacuated people were there. Somebody has a room, then they gave me just a corner in their room. And I have just like one bed, and a little table and a chair. That's all that I have. And another woman was living on the other side. Was no place to live. Too many people came to this city. When they pass on the way back they told me, "Somebody working there, and he'll be coming back later and he'll bring him." So, and when he, my husband, came and he brought him, he say, "This is my daddy. I want you should be my daddy." I was, you know, I didn't know what to say. I said, "O.K." "I want you should be my daddy." I say, "Your daddy died." He say, "O.K.," he say, "get a--I want another one. I want a daddy." Then the Polish Jews, they start to apply with a law they can go back to Poland. And he comes to me, "Marry me." I say, "I don't want to get married." I say, "I am going back wherever I came from and I don't want to." "You don't know nothing. They, whatever they write here on the paper, everything is a lie. Poland doesn't have nothing." I say, I told him I have a relative in United States. My, I had an aunt--she died now--in Brazil. And one time I sent a telegram there that I am alive, when I came, when I was in Germany. No, when I was in Russia. And she send me, she send, maybe fifty packages. They're allowed to send a pound a package. From the fifty I got maybe three. But whatever I got [unclear]. My aunt from here sent me money. She sent-