HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ALEX KRASHENINNIKOW

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Edith Millman
Date: December 18, 1989

This page left intentionally blank.

AK - Alex Krasheninnikow [interviewee]
EM - Edith Millman [interviewer]
Date: December 18, 1989

Tape one, side one:

EM: This is Edith Millman interviewing Mr. Alex Krasheninnikow. Mr. Krasheninnikow, could you tell me when and where you were born?

AK: I was born in the Soviet Union, in a Soviet Ukrainian Republic, in the city of Kiev, August the 30th, 1934.

EM: In 1934. Now, could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, and about your family?

AK: Yes. My childhood before the Second World War in Kiev, yeah, I was going on a--the first years of my life to the Kindergarten in the Soviet Union, you know? And it lasted for long until June 22, 1941, until the Nazi German invasion took place on this historical date.

EM: Would you tell me a little bit about your family?

AK: My family? My father was a Ph.D., degree in science. He had the Ph.D. degree in science. He was a biology, zoologist and paleontologist. He was teaching in the Ukrainian Academy of Science of the Ukrainian USSR, before the war. He was also teaching in the little town which is southwest from Kiev, which is called Bielaya Tserkov.

EM: How do you spell it? Belaj-...

AK: Bielaya Tserkov.

EM: Bielaya Tserkov.

AK: Tserkov, yeah. He was teaching, my father was teaching also there in agricultural institute, yeah.

EM: And your, did you have brothers or sisters?

AK: No, my brother died as a little baby before I was born. He was only one-and-a-half years old. He died from serious diarrhea. And I was the only one in the family.

EM: Did your mother work?

AK: My mother worked, yes. She was an artist, a painter, yes. And she was working in the Kiev Institute of Art before June 22, 1941.

EM: Could you tell me something about your religious upbringing?

AK: There was no special religious upbringing, because in that time of the Soviet Union there was as you know from history, after the October Revolution there was a strong propaganda of atheism. And that's why we Jews and non-Jews, you know, the Christians, you know, were brought up in a non-religious spirit, you know.

EM: Yeah.

AK: Especially the younger generation which was born already in the Soviet Union in 1934 like I was born. You know, I was not brought up in a religious spirit at all.

When I was going to the Kindergarten there the little children were never taught any religion.

EM: Was your father, your mother Jewish by...

AK: Yes, yes.

EM: They both were?

AK: Yes, yes.

EM: Do you remember your grandparents by any chance?

AK: No, I don't know my grandparents, only just from their photographic pictures. That's all I know them, you know. They were already both dead on my mother's side, you know. But my father's side my grandmother my father's mother, was still alive. She lived in Moscow, yeah.

EM: Could you tell me something about your recollection just before the war in 1939, about life in Kiev in 1939?

AK: Thanks to my excellent memory which it is a very part of my childhood, I can tell you a little bit, even more than a little bit I would say. Because my memory is very excellent, you know?

EM: Good.

AK: My childhood was like the childhood of all children who were born, you know, in the time of the Soviet Socialist system, you know. I went, as I told you, I did report to the kindergarten, you know. I played with the children, you know, about the whole politics, you know, about this what was going on with the domestic policy of the Soviet government or foreign policy I didn't have any slightest idea because I just began to live in this world. And so I can not give you any details. But anything else you may ask me about my childhood I can even in single details all the satisfactory answers.

EM: Well, could you tell me a little bit about the economic conditions? I mean, were you well-to-do or how large was your apartment and so on, since your father was a Ph.D. Did you have any special privileges?

AK: O.K., our apartment was a communal apartment, a collective apartment. You know, in other words it was a big apartment where all together five families lived in all, married families with a husband, wife and their children, you know. Each family was entitled to have only one room as under the Soviet system. This was the majority of average Soviet citizens who lived, you know, but my father, thanks to his Ph.D. degree, in order that he should be able to keep his scientific books, he was given a privilege, he was allowed to have two rooms instead of one, yeah, so.

EM: All right. So you all lived together in one apartment.

AK: One apartment, a collective apartment, yes.

EM: A collective apartment.

AK: They had to share their collective kitchen, the collective bathroom, the collective toilet. So with all five families all together, yeah.

EM: And you say there was no religious upbringing for you.

AK: No religious upbringing in the 1930's, not at all. Yeah, for the little, newborn, younger generation, no, not at all.

EM: How did you know that you were Jewish? Or when did you learn that you were Jewish, or Jewish background?

AK: Always. This to me, your question seems to be a little bit funny. Because all people of Polish [unclear] they are born, they are being taught by their parents who they are. You know, what their first and last name is, you know, what kind of nationality they are. And so I was taught the same way, you know, since I started to walk from the carriage, you know, and to walk on my feet, you know, I was taught who I am. Yah?

EM: You were taught you were Jewish.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: But you didn't have any religious education.

AK: Not at all, not at all. Not in the 1930's. As I said, in the Soviet Union in the 1930's you know, all Jews and non-Jews were all brought up young Soviet citizens under the Soviet system in non-religious spirit all the time. Yeah, yeah, in those years. It was a decree of how a person then Joseph Stalin was ruling the country, you know, and especially it was also very popular the propaganda of atheism, of scientific atheism so-called, you know, in those years, you know, where people they wanted the people to believe there is no God, no miracles, no anything which is beyond the human mind, the understanding, the comprehension of the human mind. Especially this propaganda was taught to the collective farm workers, to the peasants. You know, they wanted to bring especially the peasants in a non-religious spirit, in a spirit of scientific atheism.

EM: Yes.

AK: Yeah.

EM: Could you tell me what you remember of 1940, 1941?

AK: I just remember 1940 when I was six years old, I was still continuing to go to the Kindergarten, you know, in Kiev, you know? And my childhood passed like I told you like all children's childhood, happy, you know, without any worries, without any special problems, you know? And then when the year 1941 came, the June 22nd, this historical date, when Nazi German invasion took place on the Soviet Union, you know? This date I remember very well which is left in my memory forever. This was early in the morning, 7:00 when I woke up, you know, and I saw, you know, that my mother was sad, you know? Trying a little to be crying, you know, and something I understood even though I was not even seven years old. My seventh birthday was on August the 30th, 1941. So on June 22nd I was still six years old. And I understood something has happened that tragic. Even with my childish mind I understood. And my father came to me, he said, "Listen, now the war begins, began, you know, seems to be." You know, even it was not officially announced. But then at 12:00 noon, you know, the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Viasheslav Molotov, who was there at that time the Foreign Minister, he has announced, "In all Soviet broadcasting stations that now that the war began Germany has broken a

peace pact with us and has invaded us in a very betraying manner," you know? And since at that time he also has announced a mobilization, the recruitment of young fellows who are in the recruiting age who have to go to the military service and to fight the war, to fight the Germans, yeah. This was 12:00 noon on June 22, 1941 they announced. [tape off then on]

EM: How old was your father at that time?

AK: He was 35 years old at that time.

EM: Was there any danger that he might have to go into the army?

AK: It was a danger, yes. They wanted to recruit him but fortunately he made, you know, went, had an acquaintance, a medical doctor, you know, who gave him a false certificate that he should be released because his heart condition is not so good, you know. Because he, actually he didn't wanted to go to fight, you know. But you had to have a good reason for that, you know? So, he had an acquainted woman doctor in one of the Kiev hospitals. He, she gave him a certificate that his heart condition is not in such good way that he can go to fight, to become a soldier. And so he was immediately discharged.

EM: He was rejected.

AK: Yeah, mmm hmm.

EM: Now, when did the Germans march into Kiev?

AK: The Germans marched into Kiev, this was exactly either September 18 or September 19, 1941, either one of these two days. I don't remember exactly, but either one of these two days: September 18 or 19, 1941, yeah.

EM: Could you tell me what happened at that point? Was the civilian population evacuated or did you just wait in Kiev till the Germans marched in?

AK: The civilian population was a lot of them were evacuated, you know, from June 22nd until September 18, until the German Army marched into the city, you know. Especially many Jewish people like us were evacuated, you know, who didn't wanted to remain under Nazi German occupation because they deeply believed, you know, that like the Soviet press on the radio said, that in case some Jews will stay in the city in case of temporary occupation of the city, all Jews will be annihilated physically. So all Jews had to leave the city. My father and my mother didn't want to believe that. They believed it was just an official anti-fascist propaganda, you know? And that's why they decided to stay, you know, like many of our other compatriots decided to stay, which as you know, later on in September 29th, you know, went to Babi Yar and were killed there. 33,000 about was over there, because that number is not exact, 30,000, because so far as they know from the Soviet press before, under Khrushchev, you know, rule, and also under Brezhnev rule, when I received free literature from my native city of Kiev, in the Ukrainian language even, I received, you know, about the Holocaust, Jewish Holocaust. It said...

EM: When did you receive that information?

AK: From Kiev, as I say, you know here in Philadelphia. I, we were living since 1950, you know. And I got induction with the Committee for Cultural Relations, with the

compatriots abroad in Kiev, and in Moscow also. And they have sent me literature for free there. Newspapers, a regular weekly newspaper and also other little brochures, pamphlets, you know where it was mentioned also about the Jewish Holocaust, you know. So it was mentioned over there, you know, that in Kiev Babi Yar were liquidated 70,000 Jews. But this was under Brezhnev and Khrushchev, you know, that it was mentioned 70,000 Jews. Now, when Gorbachev came to government, I believe this number, they started to publish about the Holocaust at Babi Yar more exact. They said it was all together 100,000 liquidated, not even 70,000 but 100,000. But from the Jews were liquidated only those who decided to stay in the city and not to evacuate themself with the Soviet authorities. Was, were only 33,000 so about. Yeah.

EM: So the Soviet authorities warned the Jews that the ones that will stay will be annihilated?

AK: That's right, correct, yeah.

EM: Now, your parents stayed. Did anything change in your way of life under the Germans?

AK: Yes, it...

EM: Did you stay in the same apartment? Did your father work or did things change, and how?

AK: The things changed tremendously, yeah. Fortunately, you know, when the German's Army entered the city of Kiev, my father and my mother had good friends in a little town which was on the other side of Dnieper River, which is called Darnitsa.

EM: Darnitsa.

AK: Darni-...

EM: Darnitsa.

AK: Darnitsa, yes. They had good friends and who decided to hide us in their home, you know, that we, in order to prevent us to being liquidated from the Germans in Babi Yar, like all our compatriots in June, I mean in September 29th, went to Babi Yar, as you know, who were not hidden, you know. But we were hidden by some of our good friends in Darnitsa, you know? And we were hidden until almost we were ready to meet the Soviet Army back, you know, to Kiev on November the 6th, 1943. But unfortunately, you know what happened? The Germans found our hideout shelter, you know, and they immediately put us under arrest. And me, when I was nine years old, shipped us in the freight, cattle train to Germany, and straight to Brätz concentration camp, which was on the previous border of Poland and Germany, yeah.

EM: Now just a second.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Now you were hidden from, by non-Jewish friends of your parents, right?

AK: That's correct.

EM: In Darnitsa.

AK: In Darnitsa.

EM: Before September of 1941. When did they hide you?

AK: Just in the few days when the German Army entered Kiev, after September 18th, 1941. Just before September 29 when the Holocaust in Babi Yar took place. Yeah, so...

EM: Just before that time.

AK: Yeah, in order to prevent us to be killed, yes.

EM: Where were you hidden? In a home, in a hut, underground?

AK: In a little, a two-floor house with a roof, you know, on the roof we were hidden. Me, my mother and my father were hidden on the roof.

EM: On the roof.

AK: Yeah, by these good people which was very so artificially isolated from their human eyes, you know to prevent to find somebody over there, you know.

EM: And these people lived in the same house?

AK: Yeah, these people lived there in the same house.

EM: In the same house, and they hid you in the attic, under the roof?

AK: In the attic, yes.

EM: In the attic, under the roof.

AK: Yes, yes, right.

EM: How long were you hidden there?

AK: About two years, as I told you, almost until November 6th, 1943, you know. But unfortunately, as I told you, something happened that you know, we were discovered.

EM: Yeah, yeah, well we're going to get to that point.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Was your mother or your father or you able to leave that attic? Or were you the whole time in, hidden in the attic? Were you able to get out at all?

AK: No, we were not able to get out at all. We had to sit day and night like in a prison over there. We were not able to get out.

EM: And was there enough food that these people could supply you with?

AK: These people, you know, didn't have enough food because as you, to be honest with you, during the Nazi German occupation everybody had a scarcity of food, you know. But they would share whatever they could, you know, especially for me, when I was a little kid, that I should survive, you know, so much as they could share with me and with my parents, with this little quantity of food they had.

EM: Did your parents have to pay them for hiding you? Or did they do it for, out of the goodness of their heart? Or do you know if your parents paid them?

AK: My parents paid them a little bit, you know, our valuable belongings, which we had, a valuable engagement rings, you know, earrings of my mother, you know, with a, made of pure gold. And that's all we paid them, you know. Not too much. Not too many, but those even little quantities we paid them, these were things of high value, you know,

so they accepted that with great gratitude, you know and were very glad, you know, and continued us to hide over there in the attic.

EM: What was the punishment for non-Jews for hiding you? Was there an announced death sentence for people who were hiding Jews? Do you know? What was the punishment?

AK: The punishment was exactly like you said, death sentence, for anybody, gentiles, Christians, who are hiding Jews. You know, it was immediately a death sentence, yeah.

EM: Do you know if there were many non-Jewish Ukrainians who would point out Jews that were in hiding, collaborators with the Germans? Or...

AK: Yes, I know. There were a lot of young fellows, you know, who went voluntarily to serve to the police force from the Ukrainians, you know, as soon as the Nazi German occupation of the city of Kiev, and of this little town of Darnitsa that took place a lot of young fellows volunteered to go to the police force, you know? And among them almost everybody of them was very enthusiastic about pointing on the Jews, who is a Jew, you know, and where he is hiding, you know, for the German S.S. henchmen that they should find them, discover them immediately and you know, and liquidate them, yeah.

EM: Liquidate them. Do you know of any gentiles that were punished for hiding Jews? Did you hear of any gentiles that were punished? I know what the punishment was, officially, but have you heard of anybody being really punished for it or being caught for hiding Jews?

AK: Yes. Our saviors were all punished by death sentence after they were discovered that they were hiding us, you know. We are not punished as Jews by the death sentence because they wanted us to use--in the first place for hard physical labor, whatever punishment, you know? But those all belongings probably my mother and my father gave to them valuable belongings went to the Ukrainian police, you know, into their pockets, yeah.

EM: Now tell me when you were, something about the time when you were discovered. How come the Germans discovered you?

AK: There must have been some informers living in this little town of Darnitsa, you know, who were neighbors of that family who has hidden us, you know. And they must finally have pointed you know because they believe that the Germans are leaving pretty soon, you know, because that was before November 6, 1943 when the Soviet Army was almost, almost about to liberate you know that four of the left territory of the Dnieper River was on the right territory, yeah.

EM: Which river? Is it the Dnieper River?

AK: The Dnieper, yeah.

EM: The Dnieper.

AK: It’s called Dnieper or Dnepro, it’s the same, yeah.

EM: O.K. Dnieper River.

AK: Yeah.

EM: So the Russians were approaching.

AK: Yes.

EM: The Soviet Army was approaching.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: And somebody denounced the family that they were hiding.

AK: Yeah.

EM: Right?

AK: Right.

EM: Could you give me the name of the family that was hiding you?

AK: Was, the name of the family I remember very well. It was Vassili and Ina Baranovski.

EM: Baranovski.

AK: Vassili is the first name of the man.

EM: That, yes, yes.

AK: Vassili, was in English.

EM: Yeah, I know.

AK: Vassili, and then Ina Baranovski.

EM: Baranovski. How large was that family? Did they have children?

AK: They had married children somewhere else who didn't live with them already together, you know. But they were just living as husband and wife. The children were not present in that time when we, they said that they have some, a married son or married daughter but I was little. I just listened then I didn't pay too much attention where the children were and where they lived, you know, because they must be grown up adults already.

EM: Do you know the occupation of Mr. Baranovski? What was he doing?

AK: The occupation of Mr. Baranovski so far as I heard, he was, before June 22nd, 1941, he was living in one of their sulfur plants in Darnitsa. There was a little sulfur plant built in Darnitsa where the sulfur was made, and he was working there.

EM: So was he a blue-collar worker? Was he a somebody from the bureaucracy? Was he a...

AK: No, no.

EM: White-collar worker?

AK: No, he was not from bureaucracy, you know. He was just working in a chemical sulfur factory where the sulfur was produced.

EM: A worker.

AK: And matches were produced there, you know, and he was a regular, ordinary worker, yeah.

EM: Do you know by any chance how your parents knew them?

AK: That I--for me is hard to say. I think my father must have met them before the war, in Darnitsa, because he visited very often with a scientific expedition. He was sent, you know, as a delegate, you know, to investigate something there because he was a zoologist, paleontologist, he had to deal with fishes in the river, you know, discovering parasites in the stomachs of the fishes, you know? And very often he was sent there, you know, as a delegate with a scientific expedition. And he must have met this Mr. Baranovski over there in Darnitsa by some incident I would say before the war time, before the Nazi German invasion took place.

EM: O.K. Now, let's go back to November of '43. What do you remember? What happened?

AK: I remember a very tragic thing, that German S.S. henchmen came, you know, to our hideout shelter, you know, grabbed us tight, you know, put us immediately under arrest, searched all our pockets including me as a little kid, you know? And then with a big escort of other captured Jews who seemingly were also hidden by somebody in Darnitsa, you know, put us on to the Darnitsa little rail station, where the freight train was waiting for us, you know, to ship us to Germany, yeah.

EM: Could, do you have any idea how many other Jews were caught at the same time approximately?

AK: Approximately, I believe there was two or three Jewish families caught with us...

EM: Two or three...

AK: Three, also with little children like myself, yeah, in the town of Darnitsa, yeah.

EM: O.K.

AK: Yeah.

EM: Now, what do you know, what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Baranovski?

AK: As the rumors start spreading, we didn't see what happened in that moment when we were captured, you know, but the rumors were spread later on. You know, we found out, you know, somebody gave us a message when we are already, you know, in this Germany, in Schwiebus concentration, in Brätz concentration camp.

EM: What was the name of the concentration, do you know how to spell it?

AK: Brä. B-R-and then R umlaut like in German...

EM: Brätz? B-...

AK: You know a D and Z. Brätz.

EM: Brätz.

AK: Brätz, yeah.

EM: Do you know where it was?

AK: Near Schwiebus. There was a little, a town called Schwiebus, which was 29 km from the previous border between Poland and Germany.

EM: Yes.

AK: This border actually didn't existed anymore in that time, you know, because this border existed...

EM: Yes.

AK: Before September, 1939. You know, in that time the western Poland was united to Germany, yeah. And 29 km on the German already territory from Bedzin, you know, from the town of Bedzin was Schwiebus located. And maybe 5 km from Schwiebus [Schwiebus is Swiebodzin in Polish] was the Brätz concentration camp...

EM: Brätz concentration...

AK: Located.

EM: O.K.

AK: Yeah.

EM: All right, now you came to the railroad station in the little town?

AK: Yeah.

EM: And you were taken with your parents?

AK: Yes.

EM: With both, and other Jews that were caught.

AK: Yeah.

EM: To Brätz.

AK: To Brätz.

EM: Could you tell me what you remember of Brätz?

AK: Well Brätz I remember, you know, before I will tell you about Brätz, I think you missed the point, one point that I will tell you, the long trip to Brätz with the cattle train. It was a horrible trip, without water, without food, almost nothing. Just they gave once in a 24 hours a little bit, a glass of water, a little bit of bread, you know, to survive. That is all, a captured people, you know, in the freight train. There was about maybe left for three or four days, if I remember, three or four days that they let, you know, without normal food, without normal eating, without normal drinking, you know? And finally we are all, arrived to Brätz, you know? And we met over there, you know, of course, when the gate was, we were...

EM: Were many people in that cattle car with you? Was it very crowded?

AK: There was many also people you know besides Jewish people, you know. Also many people who were taken to slavery work to Germany among non-Jewish people, you know. Young children, 14, girls and boys 14, 15 years old who were captured, you know...

EM: From the same area?

AK: From the same area, from Kiev, from Darnitsa, you know, and were captured and they wanted to, then to use them for slavery work in Germany, to work with the German farmers, you know? In some agriculture, you know, hard physical labor, you know? They were in the same train, you know. But we when we were delivered you know to Brätz concentration camp, there were only these Jewish families remained in the train

who were in imprisonment, you know, in the concentration camp. So we came to the concentration camp and we were met by the *Wachtband*, you know, by these German big, strong guys, you know, in a uniform, you know? And first they greeted us, you know they, with beatings, with the clubs, sticks, you know, like always they did, you know, that we should once and forever remember that this is a concentration camp and nobody should dare or think about any resistance, about any rights or anything you know to kill the whole courage and the spirit in the people, you know. From the first meeting the beatings hard you know with the club sticks. Everybody like cattle, yeah. And then we were...

EM: Excuse me.

AK: Yeah?

EM: Now, the other people that were in that car, the ones they were non-Jewish, did they also get unloaded in Brätz or did they continue somewhere else? Did they go somewhere else?

AK: Most of them as I said they were unloaded before, you know probably were appointed to work with the German farmers some places usually they did...

EM: So...

AK: Or in the German industry, military industry, yeah.

EM: I know, but, so they were taken off the train?

AK: Before, yeah.

EM: Before.

AK: Before, yeah.

EM: They were taken off the train before.

AK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

EM: And your mother and father and you...

AK: Yeah?

EM: All were unloaded in Brätz?

AK: Yes, yeah, yeah.

EM: You were together. Now, where did you live, in barracks?

AK: In barracks, yes, in barracks, very cold barracks, you know. In the summer time was hot. In the wintertime was cold, you know, and the hard physical work exhausted many of the prisoners, you know, because again the nourishment was very bad, you know. And the constant beatings, beatings, beatings and beatings, was especially provided regime, be a sport, they called this. Every day gymnastics, you know, when, yeah...

EM: Tell me, was your mother separated from you or, I mean, or were you, did you go with your mother? Did women and men stay together or how...

AK: Well women and men were separated, were another section of the women's concentration camp, where all women were. They were separated from their husbands and their husbands were separated from their wives. And the boys, the little boys, stayed with their fathers, and little girls with their mothers, like usually in this case, yeah.

EM: And so you stayed with your father?

AK: Yeah, mmm, yeah.

EM: You stayed. And what kind of work did your father and you have to do?

AK: Oh, a lot of work had to be done. To build some cement roads there, you know, which were appointed you know for the automobile machines, you know, and to carry heavy stones you know for the building material, you know? And for me they gave me a little bit because I was a little kid a little bit easier work, you know. But that was also a hard physical work for my age, for my little kid, you know, to carry stones, you know, or something like that. You know, it was not easy, you know. But the main important thing as I told you, you know, there was provided a special regime every day in the camp, you know, which they called it gymnastics, you know, sport, you know. Were all prisoners, you know, including such little kid like I was. You know, we had to run. They would say made us run and fall down. Run and fall down. And so for one hour, for two hours, for three hours. As soon as somebody didn't fall down and after the command sounded over there, so-called cops of the concentration camp ordered him get up, you know, he was beaten like worse than a cattle, you know? You had to fulfill their the commands in one second immediately when the command sounded, you know. It was very exhausting physically of course. It was one, two or three hours to run, like that being very bad nourishment after a hard physical work. It was a very big tough experience a tough experiment which they made on the people, yeah.

EM: I understand. Now the work that you had to do, was it in the camp itself or did they take you out of the camp?

AK: That was in the camp itself, you know. They were all isolated by the barbed wires and by their towers, watchtowers which were there where the Germans had a light, electric light lanterns which lighted the darkness after the sunset so nobody could escape. Immediately they had machine guns there where they could shoot and everybody wouldn't dare to escape from the concentration camp.

EM: Could you tell me, were there only Jews in this camp or were there non-Jews also?

AK: They were all mix of people, all big international over there. There were Jews, Poles, there were Russians also and the Russians also were Russian workers with us, who were captured from the Russian Soviet Army. There were plenty, plenty over there, you know, so there was a big, in other words international place, this concentration camp. And Ukrainians were...

EM: Were...

AK: Present there too, plenty Ukrainians.

EM: Were the Jews separated from the non-Jews or did you all live together in the same barracks?

AK: Well we lived all together in the same barracks. There was not separation any more. Just men and women were separated like I mentioned before, but the nationality didn't matter for the Germans. They were all together were forced the same way to do

slavery work. You know, as hard as possible, and to be nourished so bad as possible and to be exhausted so much as possible of the physical energy, this what the purpose of the administration of the concentration camp, to exhaust the prisoners.

EM: Do you remember how large that camp was, approximately how many people there were in this camp?

AK: Well, I have to look in my book again, which I bought after the war which I have it describes the quantity of the inmates. You know is now for me hard to tell. No, I believe maybe approximately I don't want to lie to tell you a wrong number, but about maybe five thousand maybe.

EM: Maybe five thousand.

AK: Five thousand people.

EM: Were you able to see your mother while you were there?

AK: No, in that period of time-

Tape one, side two:

EM: ...interviewing Mr. Alex Krasheninnikow. This is tape one, side two, continuing. Did you know if your mother was in the same camp? You said you couldn't see her, but did you know that she was still in the camp?

AK: Yes we knew that she is there, you know, but we didn't know whether she survived or whether she is dead already nobody would give us a message about it. Because we could see in the men's section of the concentration camp we could see the men dying every day, every day, and not only dying, you know. Well they were shot. If somebody could not do a hard physical work, pick up a heavy stones, you know, because his energy was expired we know that the S.S., these henchmen cops of the concentration camp took him behind the bungalow and we could just hear loud shooting, puff, and this was the sign that the man was shot. Yeah. Mmm hmm.

EM: Do you know how the corpses were disposed of? Was there a crematorium or were the people buried? Do you have any recollection of that?

AK: There was a crematorium, yes where the people were burned but they were also buried both they did. One part they burned in the crematorium and the other part they just burned like dogs, you know, like animals outside of the concentration camp because we could see the corpses loaded on the wagons in the trucks. I mean were loaded on trucks and they were just taken outside of the camps and there was...

EM: Were any people taken out of the camps into different camps? Like were there any transports from this camp into another camp?

AK: This I cannot tell you only I know they had new types trucks of prisoners were coming almost everyday, more and more to the camp from different regions of the occupied territories, from all Europe, you know. There were all Czechs coming there, from Czechoslovakia and also Bulgarians from Bulgaria even there are not so many in quantity like Russians or Ukrainians you would say. Also not so many in number like Jews, you know, but there were plenty, plenty of different nationalities because the newcomers were delivered by, with the truck guarded by the S.S. henchmen every, almost every day, every day from the all Europe which was occupied by the Nazi German empire, yeah.

EM: O.K. So you worked there from November, 1943 to when?

AK: From November, 1943 until January, 1945, when finally Schwiebus was, this was the end of January, 1945, but finally Schwiebus was liberated by the Soviet Red Army, you know. Then we were free again.

EM: How, could you describe the liberation? I mean did the Germans escape? Did they open the gates? How was it?

AK: The liberation as far as I remember took the following way, you know. In the same day before already when the Red Army was coming almost near to the Brätz concentration camp and to Schwiebus what they did there were many weaklings taken out from the camp and behind the bungalows and were all shot, which never happened there

before. Now, people were shot, as I told you before who were exhausted of energy, but not in the same quantity as in the last day, you know they did, you know. And finally after that, you know, they all became mild to everybody because they felt that their power, they won't last too long, because the Soviet Red Army is coming closer, nearer and nearer to this camp, and they may be responsible. And they started to be kind all of a sudden to the people who remained alive to treat like equal to an equal, you know? And finally...

EM: For how long? How long did this last?

AK: For about a couple, maybe a couple hours, four to six hours, you know? And finally what they did, they all escaped from the camp. And then we finally understood that we are free. And after that well the prisoners themselves opened the gate of the concentration camp so, outside so the new army is coming. The Red Army is coming closer and then finally they ran inside to the camp and greeted each other, embraced each other and said, "You are free!" Now to each other with the food products especially little children like myself that they should survive with the bread and butter, whatever they had. They didn't have too much either, you know, so much as in a time of peace, you know, when the whole food industry is functioning normally.

EM: Yes.

AK: But the soldiers would share with us everything they had, the last piece of bread, rye bread, white bread, maybe the butter, maybe the pork meat, something like that, you know. And that's...

EM: So your father and mother, did they survive?

AK: They survived, yeah. And my mother--the women were allowed to come to the men's section and men to the women's section. And she came and we were very glad to see that she survived, yes.

EM: Do you have any idea of how many Jews there were in the, in for instance in your barracks? Did you know who was Jewish and who was non-Jewish?

AK: Well, so far we knew each other, you know, because once in a while we were allowed to talk, you know. And we realized each other, you know, by the manners of talking, you know, who was Jew and non-Jew. But the quantity, again, I have to look in a book because this book is in my home library for a long time but I didn't look for a while in that, you know. If you are interested to give you this answer I will tell you exact number how many Jews...

EM: Yeah. No, I just wondered if you had any idea of what the...

AK: No, probably maybe two thousand, I would say, approximately, not exactly, but approximately. Two thousand Jews were there with us together, you know. But Polish Jews, mostly Polish Jews...

EM: Mostly Polish.

AK: Who were, they were there from Poland, you know, because that was close to the Polish border, you know, the Polish Jews. And they spoke also Russian, like us because they were formerly from that territory which was under Czarist Russia before the

First World War. You know, so there were two languages popular in that time, the Polish and Russian...

EM: Yeah, right.

AK: You know, so that's why even the little children like myself, you know, at the age of eight, nine years old, there were boys and girls who speak three languages already--Yiddish, Russian, and Polish. Yeah, we were free to do this.

EM: But you didn't know any Yiddish, did you?

AK: I knew, yes.

EM: You didn't...

AK: I knew already, yes.

EM: What--but where did you learn that Yiddish? From your...

AK: I forgot a little bit now, you know, but from my parents.

EM: No, no, but where did you learn...

AK: From my parents a little bit.

EM: When? As a child or...

AK: As a child, yes.

EM: As a child...

AK: Yes.

EM: Then you were learning it.

AK: Yes, yeah.

EM: So because you said that, you know, you didn't have any Jewish upbringing. So I just wondered how come you knew...

AK: Yeah, but with the language I had the Jewish upbringing, in the language. Just in the language.

EM: In the lang-...

AK: Not in religion. Not in religion, but in the language, yes, I had, yeah.

EM: Now, you mentioned something about hearing that the people who hid you were, were they put to death or how were they punished? That you heard that they were punished.

AK: Yeah, hard to tell again because as I said, they all escaped, you know, a couple hours before the Red Army came they all, the cops of the concentration camp, this was...

EM: No, I mean the people that were hiding you, the Baranowskis.

AK: Oh, oh, the Baranowski family, yeah.

EM: And you know what happened to them.

AK: Somebody, they gave us a message that they were shot by the Germans.

EM: That they were...

AK: Yeah, they were immediately shot, taken outside from their homes and shot. Yeah that's, that was non-official message given to us, you know, but somebody who came from the Jewish families with us from Darnitsa they gave us such an unofficial message.

So we don't know for sure whether this was true or not, you know, but an unofficial message was given to us.

EM: So what did you do after the Soviet Army liberated you?

AK: We went back to Kiev, yeah.

EM: You went back to Kiev.

AK: Yeah, and then the regime was...

EM: But that was in, what, in January of 1945?

AK: Yes, yes. We went back to Kiev even before the end of the war. You know, we could go back to Kiev, you know. But I must tell you the truth that the economical conditions was very hard over there and also the political regime under Joseph Stalin was horrible, as you know. From the history you know...

EM: Yeah.

AK: Of the period of the [unclear], you know. And that's when my parents decided to make a plan how to escape to the West after that, yes. Yeah.

EM: So how long did you stay in Kiev?

AK: We stayed in Kiev until 1950.

EM: 1950.

AK: I think '50, yes, five years after the war. And then finally we took, my parents with me together took a risk. I was a big boy already. I was 16 almost, 15, not exactly 16 years of age. Yeah, so [tape off then on]

EM: So, in Kiev did you go to school then for a while?

AK: I went to school for a while because my, actually my education in my childhood was missing a lot because I was in concentration camp. So I had to start actually my education in the age of, for instance I was 11 years old when the war was over in 1945. From the very beginning, from the same grade where the children start from the 7 year of age, you know, because I missed a lot by being, you know, under the German imprisonment of the concentration camp.

EM: And your father, did he go back to his old job? Or what kind of...

AK: Yes, so they gave him again back to his own job, yes, yeah.

EM: And you could go back to your old apartment? Or did you get a new place to...

AK: We got a new place, but also in a communal, collective apartment, you know. We didn't have our own, private apartment, you know. We had to go live in another one which was a couple families. We shared the same, a common kitchen, the common toilet, the common bathroom, yeah.

EM: Could you tell me, what was the attitude of the people in Kiev once you came back? Did they say, were they antisemitic? Or didn't you feel that?

AK: First, yes, we didn't feel any antisemitism, because everybody knew what happened in Babi Yar, what happened to the six millions of Jews, you know, in the whole occupied Europe in that time.. So in the beginning they were so, I would not say

sympathetic, you know, they didn't show demonstrate any compassion, you know. But they were just like I would say indifferent, you know. They didn't demonstrate any antisemitism in the beginning at all, you know, only in the year of 1948. Then it has been started. And I just received, you know, to be honest with you, they have now a Soviet magazine from Moscow, the *Sovetish Heimland* where is being published the biggest crimes which were committed, you know, to the Jewish intelligentsia beginning of 1948 by Joseph Stalin and Laurentii Beria, his right hand Chairman of the KGB, yeah. And since that time, you know, the antisemitism started to grow stronger, yeah. And then, it added, again when we were already here in the United States, what I read in the same magazine in 19- [noise]

EM: Excuse me. [tape off then on] Did life in Kiev in 1945, from 1945 to 1950 differ a lot from life before?

AK: It differed only in one way, that it was very much more scarcity of the food products, of other consumer goods and people have to stay in long lines whenever something was delivered, even a little quantity of food products or consumer goods so it was crisis, economical crisis worse than before the war, of course, because the whole industry was destroyed by Nazi Germans, you know? Industry in food industry and technological industry so there was a terrible scarcity. And that's why many people decided to leave for any place the Soviet Union because the life was horrible, very hard.

EM: Yeah. Did your parents have any other family that survived there, do you know? Did you have any aunts or uncles?

AK: Yes, my father's mother, my grandmother, was living in Moscow, and his two sisters, my aunts. They were in Moscow. You know, that's why they were safe completely from the Holocaust because Moscow as you know was never occupied by the Nazi German Army.

EM: Yes.

AK: You know, and in the time when Joseph Stalin died and we were here already in America my father has established relations with them, found them, through the American Red Cross.

EM: So when did you leave Kiev?

AK: We left in 19-, I'll say in July, 1950, yeah.

EM: 1950. Where did you go from Kiev?

AK: We went to the border of eastern Germany and western Germany and we escaped through the border illegally. Somebody helped us to escape through the border illegally to the Federal Republic of Germany, yeah.

EM: So you went to Germany.

AK: Yes.

EM: Where did you live in Germany and how long?

AK: In Munich. We lived in the southern part of Germany, in Munich. And we lived about let's say we came there in July, 1950, the end of July. We lived there until, so

about December, 1950, you know. And we immediately applied for a visa to go to United States. That's why only a couple of months, yeah, a couple of months.

EM: How, did your father know anybody in the United States to help him with the visa? Or was it difficult for him to get the visa to come to the United States?

AK: It was not difficult, because there were a lot of Jewish organizations here, you know, who were sen-, Jewish, and also these Jewish organizations were united with the so-called United National Refugees Organization, which was functioning at that time in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. And they helped us to come to get a visa and to come to United States, yeah.

EM: When you were in Munich, did you stay in a DP camp or wh-...

AK: No, no, we didn't stay. In 1950, you know, almost, these camps started to be...

EM: Dissolved.

AK: Laid off already, you know. But the UNRRA, which was called then, a little...

EM: IR-...

AK: Maybe IRO, you know, change it, by the name of IRO, you know, they helped us to get a visa to the United States.

EM: The UNRRA, right?

AK: UNRRA, yeah, United National Refugees Relief Association [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration], yeah.

EM: All right. So where did you come to the United States?

AK: In December of 1950 we arrived here to...

EM: In 1950.

AK: Straight to the city of Philadelphia we arrived.

EM: Oh, and so you parents and you, right?

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: And then did your father get a job here and you went to school or...

AK: My father just got a job, not any more as a teacher, as a, like he was before. He got a job in the University of Pennsylvania in the scientific laboratory to do research work. That's what kind of job he got when he arrived here, yeah.

EM: And you...

AK: And I went to school, yeah, to American High School yes.

EM: All right. Well, is there anything else that you would like to add or something that you think would help us to understand the situation a little better?

AK: Yes, as I mentioned before, the only thing I can add again, that I decided to, as soon as Joseph Stalin died, you know, I decided to establish there cultural relations within my native country the Soviet Union, between the city of Kiev. Because these Committees for Cultural Relations With the Compatriots Abroad only started to be functioning after Joseph Stalin's death. Before that such committees never existed, neither

in Kiev nor in Moscow, nor anywhere. But then, they started immediately, you know, under the rule of Khrushchev, you know, for the, first Malenkov was ruling the country, then Khrushchev, you know, they started to establish these committees in order to keep relations with their compatriots abroad. I wrote to them, you know, I found out from a newspaper an address and they start to send me regular literature straight to the city of Philadelphia, you know, so because I always believed no matter what, you know, you have to be a patriot of your native country where you are born, you know. You didn't have to be an enemy. You may be disagreeing with the Communist regime especially with when Stalin was ruling the country, you know, it was horrible of course. You know, this terror, the liquidation of many innocent people--Jews and non-Jews--also altogether. You know, declaring them as enemies of the people for no reason at all. But nevertheless I believe it, you know, the regime doesn't matter, and the political or social system doesn't matter. This is your native country. You have to be a good friend of it and establish cultural relations. I read literature, especially when they would send this literature free of charge, you know? So...

EM: Yeah.

AK: And so I got back in touch with them. That's the only thing I may add, you know, and I am doing this until today, the same thing. I have cultural relations with Kiev. Not any more with Moscow, because a problem is, you know, when Gorbachev came to the government, as the head of the government...

EM: Yes.

AK: They're asking me to pay for the newspaper already because it started already to be like in, a little bit Capitalism really. Yeah, so I decided, you know, my goodness, I said, "For twenty years they have sent me for free and I don't want me to pay." I resisted to pay so they discontinued to send. But from Kiev, they send me still the Ukrainian newspaper. There's a whole news from Ukrainia. It's published bilingual, in the Ukrainian language and in English, you know. And from Minsk, you know, the Belorussian newspaper I also have cultural relations with the capital of Belorussia in Minsk, the *Rezhima*. *Golos Rezhima* means Voice of the Native Country [Voice of the Regime] also. They call the newspaper in Belorussian language. And Belorussian language is very close to Ukrainian. In Russia you don't have to study it to be able to understand, so I am reading with great pleasure, yeah, and it's all I may add, you know, yeah, to that.

EM: Could you tell me, did you ever think of going to Israel for a, when you were in Germany for instance? What was...

AK: Well I was thinking...

EM: What was your attitude towards Zionist or Israel?

AK: Well my attitude, as I told you, I was not brought [up] in a Zionist spirit, you know, so...

EM: Yeah.

AK: But I still believe it, you know, that Israel is also a Jewish native country, a native country of all Jews, and I have, was very enthusiastic of visiting very often Israel, you know, as a native country of all Jews who received this native country after two thousand years of being spread all over the world, being pogromed, you know, suffering from pogroms, from other persecutions and discrimination. You know, so I was very enthusiastic to go, but unfortunately until this time, well like I never went to my native country Soviet Union, to the Kiev, only I have cultural relations. The same thing, I never went to Israel now. But I still believe, I'm not too old and I will always have a chance to do that, sooner or later, yeah, yeah.

EM: Could you tell me, what kind of work are you doing?

AK: I am an interpreter, a linguist. Russian-English, English-Russian interpreter in City Hall and in other lawyer offices where depositions are being held. I am working for Berlitz School.

EM: Oh.

AK: Berlitz School is my, where my employer is. The Berlitz School...

EM: So you...

AK: Of Foreign Languages, yeah.

EM: So are you teaching Russian?

AK: No, just interpreting...

EM: No, you're not. Just interpreting.

AK: In the courts. Just interpreting, for English to Russian, from Russian to English. That's all, yeah, I'm a very little man in this case, comparatively, yeah, to other people.

EM: And are your parents still alive?

AK: My father died two years ago, being almost 92 years old already. And...

EM: And your mother?

AK: Still alive, yes.

EM: Is your mother...

AK: 81.

EM: 81.

AK: Yeah.

EM: So, and do you have any other family in this country?

AK: In this country I have just my father's second cousin, and also her niece here, you know. But I don't know what, I have no relations for many years with her, with my niece. I don't know what happened to her because she has had a hard life. She was married, you know and she, then she got divorced. She got a son.

EM: Well did...

AK: Yeah?

EM: Well did she come here before the war or after the war?

AK: Before the war.

EM: Before the war.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Could you tell me if you remember any incidents where people in the camp helped you?

AK: Well, there was no such way, no such chance to help each other because everybody was imprisoned, you know, equally. You know, so nobody had right to help, you know, there. You know, if somebody...

EM: I mean some, like for instance was...

AK: Was is exhausted of their energy, or their physical energy was just shot in the neck. That's all. You know, what kind of help other prisoners could do? You know, they just were sad looking with sad eyes what's going on, and they were all slaves deprived of all human rights. They could not fight with the German S.S. men and cops which were appointed, yeah.

EM: No, I mean in did anybody give you some extra food since you were a young boy? You know, you were still a child.

AK: Yeah, this...

EM: So what I...

AK: Mr. and Mrs. Baranovski who were hiding us in Darnitsa...

EM: Yeah, but...

AK: So they gave me extra food.

EM: I meant but I mean in the camp. Did you have...

AK: No, just the Red Army soldiers when they liberated us. They gave us extra food, especially first for the women and for the children, so we were...

EM: How many children were there? Were there more children?

AK: Oh, I would say quite, the number reaching quite to 100 I would say, yeah. Quite to 100 children, yeah, for all...

EM: All boys? Or girls or...

AK: The boys were with the fathers, the girls with the mothers, like I said. The women and men were separated you know in different sections of the camp, yeah.

EM: So there were children.

AK: Yeah.

EM: O.K. All right, well is there anything else that you think would be of interest?

AK: Not so much, you know...

EM: Whatever, well we've...

AK: Everything you're asking me, I have added that I have cultural relations now with my native country the Soviet Union.

EM: Yeah.

AK: So they send me their literature, the newspapers and other pamphlets.

EM: Yes.

AK: You know, for which I have one now about Babi Yar, more or less the truth because as I said the numbers were varying, you know. Under the Khrushchev they send me a publish, they said there were 70,000 Jews who remained and were killed in Babi Yar. You know, and now they're saying under Gorbachev only 30,000. And our 100,000 altogether were Soviet war prisoners, you know, Russians and Ukrainians, all those who were arrested during the two years of Nazi German occupation, you know? And they were shot also in Babi Yar, were delivered there and shot and mixed, their corpses, the dead bodies with the Jewish dead bodies, with the Jewish corpses together, yeah. That's all. I can add, you know, so the numbers was varying, you know. So, probably the Soviet press was not telling exactly the truth about the numbers of the Jews how many they were killed. Once, as I said, they were saying 30,000. You know, under the Khrushchev, they, you know, and now they're saying under Gor-, and under Brezhnev the same thing, now they're saying only 33,000. So I don't, you don't know which one you have to believe, you know? Yeah.

EM: Were they mostly people from Kiev and the neighborhood of Kiev...

AK: Yeah.

EM: That were sent to Babi Yar.

AK: Yeah.

EM: You don't know if any other people, any other transports came to Babi Yar?

AK: As I told you the...

EM: Just from the...

AK: Ukrainians and the Russians who were politically arrested...

EM: Yeah.

AK: You know? Before they shot them they delivered them with the trucks to Babi Yar and then they shot them, you know. And so, so far as I know from the press, from the Soviet press today they said they were shooting of machine guns was not stopping, you know, the whole [coughing] excuse me, two years of occupation, you know.

EM: Of the whole...

AK: Somebody...

EM: Not just in nine-...

AK: All over again, you know.

EM: Not just in 1941.

AK: Yeah.

EM: There were shootings...

AK: In 1941 first the Jews fell, were the victims and then everybody else became a victim too and they were shooting machine guns continued over and over again, you know, over there.

EM: Tell me something.

AK: Yeah.

EM: When the Germans came to Kiev, did they look especially for Jews? Did they give any special arm bands to the Jews? Did they look for Jews especially? Or...

AK: Yes. I will tell you. Yes, that is a good question, you know. Before this announcement was given in September 28, 1941, that all Jews have to leave their apartments at 7:00 in the morning, next day it means on September 29 with all their important belongings, and go to Babi Yar, you know, before that announcement, you know, the first days the German Army entered to Kiev, some Jews who were walking with other people, you know, on the street to meet the German Army, you know, they were just looking sometimes asking people for ID card any man or woman whose face looked a little bit Semitic. You know, and sometimes they and look, asking for ID cards. They, you know, was looking on the people's eyes and noses and said, "Ah! Jew, or Jews with the face to the wall," you know. And they collected them, you know, and probably also they put them on the truck and delivered them to Babi Yar and killed them. You know, but they could not kill everybody like that, you know. And so finally they found this place Babi Yar which was very convenient, a big ravine, a gigantic ravine, you know, with the cliffs...

EM: A big ravine by...

AK: Around the, a ravine, yeah. And they had to give this announcement that everybody has to go there with their belongings, you know which were very important. But they didn't say any food, you know, just belongings, important valuable things, you know?

EM: Yeah.

AK: So everybody believed already ahead of time, could assume what will happen, that they didn't tell you to take food with you, food products, that probably they will liquidate you physically, yeah.

EM: Do you know if the Jews knew what was happening in Poland at that time, just before the Germans marched in? Did the Jews know what was happening in Poland?

AK: Well, I will tell you something, since the Molotov and Ribbenthrop Pact was signed on August 25th, 1939, you know, between the Soviet Union and Germany for ten years, as you know.

EM: Yeah, I know.

AK: That was assigned for ten years. You know, whenever somebody in the Soviet press wanted to write about this big Holocaust which took already the whole occupied Europe, what the Nazi Germans provided it was prohibited to write in that time because we are allies of Germans. Let them do whatever they want in their occupied territory. So long as they didn't touch us, we don't care and we have to be quiet, because we don't want to annoy them. They are our allies now. We signed a peace pact for ten years. And this peace pact didn't last even for two years, you know, and they invaded, you know. But in that time the Soviet press had to be silent because even anybody wanted, a journalist, to bring any article about it, the horrible things in Czechoslovakia in other places, you know, even in France in 1940 when they occupied France, you know, to write about this horrible Holocaust. They said, "Don't you dare touch the Germans, we, let her

fight, you know, they are our allies. Let them do whatever they want. So long as they don't cling to us we have to be quiet..." But they were clinging to us too, finally. Ha ha, yeah, they were bitterly mistaken, yes. So...

EM: All right, well thank you very much.

AK: You're welcome, Mrs. Millman.

EM: Thank you, Millman, yeah.

AK: Yeah, Millman, yes.

EM: I do have, O.K., I would like you to fill something what, this card out, O.K.?

AK: Yeah, O.K. This? Yeah.

EM: And-