

Transcript:

Alexander Savranskiy (with interpreter)

A28

43m

Interviewer: We're going to talk a little bit about pre-war life and talk about your time in the ghetto, and then we're going to talk a little bit about liberation. Feel comfortable at any time to stop. Do you want me to wait, take the time that you need.

Alexander Savranskiy: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay. Why don't you start by telling me a little bit about pre-war life, a little bit about your family?

Translator: He was born in Ukraine. It is a county, Tomashpol. A small city, Tomashpol. He was in the eastern part of Romania, very close. It's almost on the border with Romania.

Interviewer: Your parents?

Translator: His father was working as a carpenter on a sugar factory. His mother was a teacher in a day care.

Interviewer: Brothers and sisters?

Alexander Savranskiy: No.

Interviewer: You were an only child?

Translator: His father died when he was four years old, and they did not have any medication to lower his fever. In the hospital, they were covering him up in linen just to bring the temperature...the fever down. He was never sick, and his immune system didn't make it. His fever was over 105. They didn't have any medication.

Interviewer: What about your mother?

Alexander Savranskiy: He was living with his mother and grandmother. His mother moved to Odessa. It's a bigger city just to be able to make some money to survive and pay the bills. So, the grandmother was raising him. When she was coming of age...the grandmother was raising him and this is how he grew up.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Alexander Savranskiy: 1930.

Interviewer: Tell me about your first memories of antisemitism.

Translator: In the city where we work, it was a Jewish town and he never faced any antisemitism because it was all Jews living in a small city. When he was growing up and getting older, he understood what was going on. In his town were two Jewish schools, one Russian and one Ukrainian. In 1939, this was during Stalin time, all the schools, Jewish schools closed. That happened not only in his city. That happened all over Russia. He was kind of questioning the year [unintelligible 0:05:31.9]. He says he is not sure about when the school closed down but he has a picture of 1938 when...it was the first year when he went to the school, Ukrainian school. In the schools, what he grew up and he went, at the beginning was only...everything, all the school subjects were in Yiddish, and

they had a hard time transferring to a different school because of his communication. The children were put a grade lower because for the adjustment period. The Jewish teachers have problems also because they lose their jobs since they were not qualified to work in Russian...

Interviewer: What did your mother explain to you about what was going on when the antisemitism began, when Jewish teachers, when all of these things started happening, you were 9 or 10 years old?

Translator: Nobody explained anything. They felt it on their own, by their own experiences. We heard— I can say we because I face the same problems growing up. It's kind of like--

Interviewer: Why aren't you on our list? Are you a survivor?

Translator: No, no. I was born way, way after the war, but as growing up in Russia you always face that because...and I don't even know, and I'm talking from my own experience when people call you a dirty Jew, it's like very insulting, and I always...this is my own experience. When people call you a Jew, you wonder as a child, how do they know you're a Jew. You don't look different from them. You don't look different from Russians or the rest of the people. But, this is what he is trying to explain.

There was a lot of groups, terrorists, who were killing the Jews in 1920s. And first time, in the cemetery... He says the first time he remembers he went to a cemetery and he looked on a grave and there was a sign, "God Will Punish."

Interviewer: God will punish.

Alexander Savranskiy: He said the name was signed in Russian, in Yiddish, and underneath, "The God will punish the people for the death of our people, and... the dead will punish the life? And the dead people will punish the people who were killing the life... I don't even know how to translate.

Interviewer: It's a reference that God will punish—

Translator: For the broken cemeteries, headstones.

Interviewer: So God will punish the people that did that and the people that died will punish them. Okay. How old were you when you entered the ghetto?

Translator: Eleven.

Interviewer: And with your grandmother?

Translator: Yes, with the grandmother.

Interviewer: Grandmother and mother?

Translator: No, mother wasn't there.

In one month after the war started, their town was occupied. June 22nd when the war started.

Alexander Savranskiy: And the German army come to Tomashpol 22, July.

Interviewer: 22 July. One month. Tell me about occupation. Tell me about what you remembered during the occupation.

Translator: It's human nature to remember positive things in life and he tries to forget what happened a lot of time during the night, he remembers a lot of things but he can remember almost every day during that time. After a couple of days after the Romanian and German soldiers came in, they organized volunteer army from the local people. This is the first time he faced the antisemitism. We lived in our own homes, but when the local policemen and the Russian and German, and start taking the young people combined hundred people and they were told they are going to work, and in the hundred people they took were two of his first cousin. They were older, 15, 16 years old.

Interviewer: They were taken to camps.

Translator: This is when panic starts. My cousins, they didn't look like Jewish. They were told they were not Jews. They were Ukrainians because they just [unintelligible 0:14:09.2] the Jews, and they let couple more people go.

Interviewer: Where were they taken?

Translator: They were shooting them. They were taken to the cemetery and shooting them.

Interviewer: Oh, they were murdered.

Translator: They were put in one mass grave. They heard the shots...but they were able to hear the shots way before that. One 17-year-old girl, when they were shooting she fell down. One of the local policemen was in the same school with her...he pulled her out and let her go. When she came back to the city, to the town, she told the people what happened. Before they started the war, we had no information about where the Germans were doing with the Jews. We didn't have any radio stations. The old people who were... and we were always told what the Germans and Austrians thought of other people. During the revolution, when the German, during the World War I [unintelligible 0:16:21.1], when the Germans came and occupied, they were told that Germans were nice people and they will not shoot. They will not kill people.

Interviewer: I want to go now to the ghetto. Tell me about your first day in the ghetto.

Translator: The first thing what they did...they moved them to a couple of...two streets in the same place, wired fence, and they were trying to shoot everyone who would leave the area.

Interviewer: Tell me what you remember most about the ghetto.

Translator: Hunger, cold, and death of the very close... People were dying from starvation and people were dying from disease and cold.

Interviewer: How was your grandmother?

Translator: My Babushka... She died in 1942.

Interviewer: In the ghetto?

Translator: He lived with cousins and relatives in another house. We slept on the floor and 8 to 10 people per room. When people died, we had more room then. First who die are young children. We needed sugar, we needed nutrition. We were eating potato peels and beet peelings. We were exchanging clothes for food.

Interviewer: Who were you exchanging clothes for food with?

Translator: They were going to a market and local people were bringing potatoes and green beans, and they were exchanging with them. Needles, sewing needles, were very -For one needle, just sewing needle, they were able to exchange for 10 pounds of potatoes. The adults were able to go to—

Interpreter: I don't really know how to explain where they were breaking stones.

Male: Quarry?

Interviewer: Like a rock quarry.

Translator: Yes. Plant, like a farm work, and they were able to eat there.

Interviewer: Were you working?

Translator: Only the children were able to work in the fall...farm for apples and trees. Wintertime, there was a lot of snow. It was a very cold winter, and there was a lot snow.

Interviewer: Did your mother know where your were?

Translator: No. She had no information about him.

Interviewer: Your grandmother died in the ghetto.

Translator: In 1942, she died.

Interviewer: You were in the ghetto from when?

Translator: For three years he was in the ghetto. The German soldiers came in, in their town, first and left last because they were so close to the border. This is why he

was in the ghetto for such a long time. The place where we used to live during the war was given to Romania. The place was called Transnistria. During...most of the time in the ghetto, the Romanian policemen were in charge, and they were reporting to the German soldiers. They have two German soldiers who were in charge. And the place where he... There was a lot of killing and a lot of rape. But in comparison what the place is where it was just Germans, all of the Jews went to concentration and majority of them died; the places who are in charged, Romanian were in charge, majority of people survive. They were always scared and this is what terrified most during that time.

Interviewer: Were you a religious man...religious boy?

Translator: Yeah. I believe in God. I believe in Jewish religion. He is trying to explain only because of Jewish religion...

[INTERRUPTION 0:24:42.1 to 0:24:58.7]

Translator: When they were growing up, they didn't have rabbis. We were not taught Judaism. But I was turning 13, I was [unintelligible 0:25:26.4]. They need 10 people to have a [unintelligible 0:25:33.6], so he was one of the people after he turned 13, a part of the group to be in the [unintelligible 0:25:39.3]. Before he was too young but he knows what they were involved in prayers. They were praying in Hebrew and he never knew Hebrew. We knew we were Jews, but we were not religious.

Interviewer: Did your faith ever helped you in the ghetto?

Translator: We never had...people were guiding us during religious... During Passover we were making matzah.

Interviewer: Tell me about liberation.

Translator: We heard the shooting and--

Interviewer: Who is shooting?

Translator: We heard the shooting.

Interviewer: Oh, you heard the shooting.

Translator: I would like to go back and explain something. They were paying money, and gold, and jewelry and everything, all the valuables they have to exchange for their lives so they will not be sent out...so they would not be sent away to the concentration camp. They were sent to concentration so they were trying...they're buying their lives for exchange for gold and money.

Interviewer: You were trading things to keep you from being sent to a camp?

Translator: Yes. If it would be interesting to you, I would like to explain something else. He couldn't do that but his first cousin was building buckets. From the rooftops, they were building buckets, aluminum buckets, and they were able to sell in exchange for food. The women were able to sew and sell. The most important thing was the food. To keep us warm, we were burning wood, and the policemen would not allow them to break down the old houses and use the wood. And once a week we were able to get out of the ghetto and exchange. Only one person per family was able to get out of the ghetto to exchange.

Interviewer: Tell me about liberation.

Translator: In 1944, the Russians were coming and through the city was moving --They were moving through Russia, through their town going to Romania and there were people who left, didn't believe that the Russians were coming and March 19, 1944 three tanks moved in. And in the tanks were sitting boys, 17, 18 years old,

and he said that they did not think that the Russians would be able to win. They didn't believe, and when the Russians were coming they started believing [unintelligible 31:13] freedom. And the freedom was... No food and no help. And the houses were occupied, owned by the Jews and occupied during the war, the Ukrainian started moving out. And one of the Russians in charge, he made a list of all the people who survived. And they were cooking food and feeding the people. That's all he remembered about the [unintelligible 0:32:09.9]. The Russian soldiers were very surprised because in comparison of the city where he was from to the places where the Germans were in charge [unintelligible 0:32:32.7], but they were also very hateful and called us Jews, dirty Jews.

Interviewer: Even though they liberated you.

Translator: Correct. During the war, the antisemitism in Russia was very strong.

Interviewer: Where did you go after liberation?

Translator: He stayed in the same place until 1948.

Interviewer: No. Where did he go?Where did he live?

Translator: [He stayed in the same house.]The house survived. The furniture and everything stayed in the same place.

Interviewer: You were by yourself?

Translator: His uncle was on a tank and he got hurt and burned on the tank, and he got...and he moved in with them. When his uncle came back, he started looking for work. One sister died. And his mother emigrated to the Stalingrad area. They had a list of people where as they were moving out and he came and picked up

his mother. At the end of 1944, his mother came back to the same place. His mother sacrificed her life and raised him. She never remarried. She was worried about him.

Interviewer: How did she sacrifice her life?

Translator: She never remarried. She dedicated her life to him, and she was worried about his life because she felt guilty leaving him behind.

Interviewer: When did you come to America?

Alexander Savranskiy: In 1995. September.

Interviewer: 1995. Why Tennessee?

Translator: His daughter, she came here two years before with the husband. She had two children.

Interviewer: Your wife?

Translator: No. His daughter—

Interviewer: Right. Where is your wife?

Translator: She lives here.

Interviewer: Oh, she lives here.

Translator: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh. When you look back at your time in the ghetto, what do you think about when you think about it?

Translator: He said that only...you can see the sadness in the person's eyes, in Jewish eyes, the sadness. I try not to remember this and only when I cannot sleep during the night, I remember that. Until this day, I never complained about being hot, but I always complained about being cold because there years of being cold in trying to warm each other up. When I try to eat, I always take a slice of bread as much as I can eat because I don't... And he still cannot understand how people survived it. The most important answer to your question. Three years to be stressed out and this has made impression on my life. I am very nervous and very...He is comparing himself to the people who came from Vietnam that made the impact on my life. He does not mind dealing with his nerves and the stress. Psychologist said it was just a little crazy.

Male: Post traumatic stress disorder.

Translator: That's exactly what he is trying to explain. Being Jewish maybe has something to do with it. This is the result of all the previous time with the... He is trying to explain to us the history of Jewish people.

Alexander Savranskiy: The Jewish people go from [[span (sp) 0:39:53.0]]. In Russia, "pogrom," this word, "pogrom." [[unintelligible 40:05]]

Translator: When Ukraine combined with Russia, 200, 000 Jews were killed.

Alexander Savranskiy: I know this history. I know. This is in my heart.

Interviewer: Well, I want to thank you.

Alexander Savranskiy: I must be now in Jerusalem. I must. Next year. I very hope.

Interviewer: I want to say thank you so much. Thank you. I want you to know I know how hard this was for you, and this is an honor. This is an honor for us.

Translator: Because of your visit, I remember all the past, and at night, I remember that.

Interviewer: I want you to know Sharon...you know Sharon here?

Alexander Savranskiy: Uh-hmm.

Interviewer: She is willing to talk to anyone of you if you'd like to talk some more. I am always available to you if you'd like to call and offer some more.

Alexander Savranskiy: Sharon, a very good helper.

Interviewer: She is here for you if you want to talk to her.

Alexander Savranskiy: I tell Sharon God sent you for me.

Interviewer: I'm going to let you speak to Rob. He is our photographer--