

EXODUS Project

Interview of Lena Vaysbukh-1

February 29, 2016

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Lena Vaysbukh, First Interview.ext

Date: 02-29-2016

Linnie Morves: I'm Linnie - I'm Linnie Morves and I am interviewing Lena Vaysbukh. Did I say that right? Did I pronounce your name right?

Lena Vaysbukh: Yeah.

Linnie Morves: And, eh - hello at Plow Towers...

Lena Vaysbukh: Oh...

Linnie Morves: In her lovely home, and it is February 29th 2016. Lena...when and where were you born?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: I born in Kiev, Ukraine in a - uh...six - wh - June 1931 year.

Linnie Morves: Okay, can you tell me about your family and growing up in - in Kiev?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[asking question in native language]*

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language to Speaker1] [speaking native language]*
Uh, Mom and Papa *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: ____ translate it.

Lena Vaysbukh: ____

Speaker1: Translating to interviewee. Uh, my parents, both of them...Mom and Dad they were Dentists and before second World War started our life was very good.

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm. Thank you, so...what - where were you, uh...before the war started?

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Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Uh, yep...yeah.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[answering question in native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* Uh, we lived in Kiev...uh, June 19th 1944 she had birthday, she turned 10 years old, but 3 days later June 22nd the War started...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Okay, the war started.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Lena? So the war started when you were a - a little girl...

Speaker1: *[translating to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Uh, yeah.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: 10 years.

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm. So the - so...wh - wh - can you remember what that was like?

Lena Vaysbukh: I all remember right now because in 22 June begin, uh.... *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Aircrafts...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: We had big arch in our...

[Multiple speakers talking and words lost]

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: And we were told to hide under this arch, and she was only 10 years old. She was seeing bombs flying around...

Linnie Morves: Ooh...ooh. Di - do you - how did you feel when the war broke out? What was that like for you?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: You know, uh-huh.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

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Speaker1: She was scared, scared.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Alright, yeah, and so how did the war affect your life in the beginning?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Your life was changed completely, and now **she wants to eat something please**

Lena Vaysbukh: *[coughing]*

Linnie Morves: Okay.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* So, uh...her parents before war, they were, uh, labeled as Dentists in the mm - water, uh...Water Weight Division State Organization. So they were able to move from Kiev using the boat...they decide to move to another Ukrainian city **near Petrovsk** where her mother had relatives because everyone was sure that the war will take just couple weeks. So they decide to wait in - **near Petrovsk** for a while. It was small boat....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[coughing and speaking native language]*

Speaker1: And, uh...as you know Kiev is staying on the **River Dnieper** so they were using the small boat with 4 families on this boat. It was July 9th, 2 weeks, and several days after....

[Phone ringing and words lost]

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: State government didn't allow people to leave city without any proper documents.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: When we came to **near Petrovsk**...

Lena Vaysbukh: Uh-huh, *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: At that moment when they arrived to **near Petrovsk** they captain of this boat announced that no one is allowed to leave the boat because bombing started at **near Petrovsk** also.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

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Speaker1: So all people who were, uh, we can call them refugees already, all people were arrived, uh, by boats to **near Petrovsk**. They were transferred to the train...and all those family found them self in those trains, not in their wagons for people, but wagons for, uh, animals, for, um - uh...for - and other commodities. They had only one small suitcase with them because were thinking of spending just couple weeks at **near Petrovsk**.

Linnie Morves: Oh...you had one small suitcase...

Speaker1: But...

Linnie Morves: Oh...so you...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: You - you can ask more or next question.

Linnie Morves: How long were y - how long were you there...with the...?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Like the, uh...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[translating to interviewee in native language]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: How long you, uh - uh....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So this train took them to Stalingrad.

Linnie Morves: Ah...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So they **stamp** several month in Stalingrad.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: September 12th...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking to interviewee in native language]* September 12th the radio announced that Kiev already is taken by Nazi's. So all their hopes to come back soon...were...

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Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: It was the end of their hope.

Linnie Morves: Right, Lena...?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Let me ask you, so you were in Stalingrad?

Lena Vaysbukh: Stalingrad...

Linnie Morves: In Stalingrad...

Lena Vaysbukh: Stalingrad *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]* Stalingrad *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* So after government realized that Kiev was taken and the Nazis are moving to over Stalingrad, those refugees are originally from Ukraine, they were taken to the further places to the city of **Kuybyshev** They were moving them by...*[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: **Volga River** because Stalingrad is staying of **Volga River**

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So first time...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: It was **Dnieper**...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: **Dnieper River** and now...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: It was **Volga River**...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm, what memories do you have of that time that stand out for you?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

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Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interview]* Everything, everything.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm...

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* So she remembers a lot of small...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Details which is hard to describe right now. She does remember this big ship and they were transferred to the 4th Class, so it were not separate beds, it were bent beds with several layers...

Lena Vaysbukh: A lot, a lot people...

Speaker1: Yeah....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: There **is stuff there** and she remember even some small details like one man was pouring water down...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: To the lower bed....

Linnie Morves: Hum, mm-hm.

Speaker1: And made the...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Made a joke for....

[Multiple speakers talking and words lost]

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]* Madam *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: "Madam are you still sleepy?" It just childish memories about what and what and....

Lena Vaysbukh: What, yeah, I remember *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: When we arrived to **Kuybyshev** by boat we were transferred to train again and those train later was taken to the city of **Chkalov**.

Lena Vaysbukh: Chkalov...Chkalov.

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Linnie Morves: How did you feel about being Jewish? Did you know you were Jewish? What about being Jewish?

Lena Vaysbukh: A lot Jewish, a lot Jewish in *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: It were a lot of Jews around...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: All Jews, we are very different people from different level of society. People with education, people without education...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]* My Mama *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* So when they arrived to city of **Chkalov** her mother came to Minister of Health and she said that she is Dentist, professional Dentist with a second education as surgeon, so she was sent to small city *[speaking native language to interviewee]*...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: **Nagorsk** it was in Chkalov area, and she was sent to hospital as surgeon and they were given small flat **and then they...**

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm.

Lena Vyasbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: She even has documents from **Irat Krovos** which proves the address where they lived before the war started, the address in this city **Nagorsk** where they lived. So she has documents form a **Red Cross**.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Winter was very good...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: She couldn't go to school because she didn't have...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Any clothes for winter time.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So they were given big flat **ferros**, but they were not living on their family on this flat. It were several families from different...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

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Speaker1: Soviet cities. They lived in this city **Nagorsk** for 4 years until their father was back from the front area, and it was the year of 1945.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm, what was it like for you during the war in that apartment? What was that like for you?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: I wanted it...

Linnie Morves: Oh, is it...

Speaker1: I was hungry all the time...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: She said for instance, where - during the lunch when her mother at hospital, was giving like food, can food; her mother would just drink the juice and all boiled fruits. She would put some away and take it back home.

Linnie Morves: Awe...mm.

Lena Vaysbukh: My momma *[speaking native language]* Momma *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: My mother was working as surgeon in this hospital for 4 years...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: It was big hospital with a lot of...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Doctors.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So her mother....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Walk a lot because it - even it was big hospital. It were only 2 surgeons in there; she and another doctor, and so they were busy all the time. Also, her mother was famous donor, blood donor in this area because she had first group of the blood, which was working for a lot of different types of blood.

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Linnie Morves: Mm-hm, mm-mm.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Her father also was working in the - during the....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: During the battles in - near the **Moskva**. He was in humongous hospital which was receiving wounded people from the battles, and trying to...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm...

Speaker1: What is the word, I can't say it...

Linnie Morves: Save their lives or...

Speaker1: No, no to transfer to them to another small hospitals...

Linnie Morves: Right.

Speaker1: With certain problems.

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: He also had a lot of...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: Medals and ____

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Her cousin also wrote the book about war and her parents with a lot of pictures, but she didn't - doesn't tell about...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: And *[speaking native language to interviewee]* her father saw through the whole war he moved from Kiev to...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: **Berwyn** and he signed on ____ with his name...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* He written on the rules of **Eichstätt**...

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Lena Vaysbukh: Eichstätt

Linnie Morves: Oh, when the war was over, ah...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: What did you do during the war?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: What did you do as a little girl in...?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: During the day, what did you do?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Uh...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So he....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: He was di-....

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Discharged immediately after war is over because he was asked by big state officials to stay in Germany longer for signing some documents...

Linnie Morves: Yes, yes.

Speaker1: With Germany, for instance like...

Linnie Morves: _____

Speaker1: Certain things, it was about dentistry...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: He was specialized in dentistry...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: In 1945 we came back to Kiev.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Our flat was saved...

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Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: What do I want to say in conclusion?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So she wants to say about her mother that when she left Kiev in 1941 she had only one small suitcase...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: She had 2 daughters, but she survived...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: And this is picture of her mother...

[Showing picture to Interviewer]

Speaker1: Her and her mother....

Linnie Morves: Uh-huh, awe beautiful.

Speaker1: Now she wants to say some words from the famous Russian Poet, Sergei Yesenin...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: You know I don't, I'm not so brave to translate poet...

Linnie Morves: **It's okay.**

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: "It's not so hard to die, it's hard to survive."

Linnie Morves: Ah...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: So, **that was amazing, oh**, whoa.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Lena?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: You have more questions?

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Linnie Morves: Lena, can I ask you a few more questions or are you ready to stop for now?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee in native language]*

Linnie Morves: Thank you.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* She is not sure which picture would you like to take...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: And I said that I suggest her to choose...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[showing picture]* This before...

Linnie Morves: Mm...

Lena Vaysbukh: My husband died, he _____, he _____. I have 2 surgery in place of my knees. Like now I go with walker because I...

Linnie Morves: Lena what was...?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Right, yeah. So you said that it was a challenge to survive. After the war what was that like for you and your family after the war was over?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking to interviewee in native language]* So after second World War **they graded** actually I didn't translate a question about during the war because she was going to school except first year when she didn't have clothes, now our question after the war, her parents came back to Kiev and after war, very short time government allowed people to have private businesses. So they opened their medical dentist office and they led - had very, very normal life. She also joined medical university. She graduated in 1954...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

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Speaker1: With the best scores which students can have.

Linnie Morves: Wow....oh.

Speaker1: Yeah.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking to interviewee in native language]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Speaker1: Okay, during the Soviet time students who graduated universities were sell by government to certain places for work. People were out looking for the - all places to work. So she was sold to Kazakhstan which is far away from Kiev. By that time she was married. It was first marriage, she had son, and her husband who also graduated the same university, he was sent to the area which was very close to Kiev, but the director of program, he was _____ and he did everything that this family would not move to the place which was close to Kiev. He did everything that this family was settled to...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Kazakhstan.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Can you tell us in English?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

Linnie Morves: Can you translate that?

Speaker1: So she said that, so they lived for some time, they live in Kazakhstan and after several they returned back to their motherland, Kiev, but she has also conclusion that during her life she survived evacuation...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: During the Second World War, radiation during Chernobyl time and immigration when they moved to United States.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Wow, do you want to talk about that?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Do you wan-...?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking in native language]*

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Speaker1: Chernobyl was of course tragedy. Of course it was human factoring. It was nothing to do with equipment, and machinery, and even now there are very high level of radiation in this area.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Oh...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm, mm-hm.

Speaker1: She was working in the area which was very close to Chernobyl so it was very high radiation in this area.

Linnie Morves: Mm, mm; wow, wow. How did you meet your husband?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking to interviewee in native language]* Her husband, her first husband passed away in 1952, and in the last letter he wrote her, "I don't want you to live alone and to be only with our son. Find someone." She had a little friend's in Kiev and her friends wanted her to meet someone. So one day they introduced her to the person who later become to be...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Her husband.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language and walking away from the table]*

[Holds picture to the camera]

Speaker1: She had, this is picture make, was making later, but she still take (00:32:37) beret.

Linnie Morves: Mm, so pretty.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: ___I wanted to marry him...

Linnie Morves: Yeah.

Speaker1: He was handsome, smart; he had very nice position...

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Linnie Morves: Mm-hm, yeah. Did you experience antisemitism besides what you told me before?

Speaker1: *[translating question to interviewee in native language]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: *[speaks to interviewee in native language]* She said that first of all...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Her husband was supposed to see the...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: She doesn't want to go, **just wait now.**

Linnie Morves: Okay, **don't say anything.** She doesn't want to talk about that?

Speaker1: Mm-hm.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Linnie Morves: Can you translate any of that?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: No?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Not right now.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Do you have more questions?

Linnie Morves: **I'm going to try.**

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: When she take exams for to join university, she had the best sores, but she was not taken to the...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So her mother use all connections she **had with the cities...**

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Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: So they use all bureaucracy tricks to take **you back to university**.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: You couldn't get into the university because you were Jewish?

Speaker1: Uh-huh.

Linnie Morves: Is that...?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Yeah.

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

[Phone rings]

Lena Vaysbukh: Excuse *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: _____

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]* Jefferson Town College *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: *[speaking native language to interviewee]* So when they moved to United States *[speaking native language to interviewee]* Jefferson...

Lena Vaysbukh: Jefferson College at *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: Ah, so they, first of all they came to Louisville, Kentucky and she join - her husband start to receive government...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: SSI probably...

Linnie Morves: Mm-hm.

Speaker1: And she joined university, Jefferson City University studying Theatre and Language, and *[speaking native language to interviewee]*

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Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: It were a lot of professors who came...

Linnie Morves: Ah...

Speaker1: From Russia...

Lena Vaysbukh: And, uh...

Linnie Morves: Ha...

Speaker1: And she told him in a sense that her English was much better...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: That time than she had...

Linnie Morves: Oh.

Speaker1: ____

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Speaker1: About 4 years she was...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: What year was that, do you remember?

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

Linnie Morves: Mm...

Speaker1: And also she was in volunteer schools...

Lena Vaysbukh: *[speaking native language]*

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