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## Holocaust survivors, vols connect & share

By JOYCE SHELBY  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

It's been 63 years since Zaster Gennadiy was separated from his mother and sister as they were leaving Kharkov, Ukraine.

But his memory of the event is vivid. Some things you never forget, he said.

"My mother and my sister and I were on a train, trying to escape the war," said Gennadiy, who was 8 at the time. Now 71, he lives in Sheepshead Bay.

"The train was bombed. My mother and sister thought I was dead. I thought they were dead. So, I went back to my hometown," he recalled.

More than three years would pass before the family was reunited. Initially, Gennadiy wandered, living on the streets. Later, he was taken to an orphanage.

He recalls numerous Nazi soldiers - some kind, many not. There were two drunken ones who ordered him to continuously strike a grenade, which injured his leg when it exploded. A kind soldier took him to a hospital.

On another occasion, a soldier gave him bread.

"But the soldier thought I was a spy," he said. "He took me to the home of a Ukrainian woman. When the Germans found out I had no information, they put me in a basement, but the Ukrainian woman later let me escape."

As Gennadiy talked, Mitchell Krasnerman, a senior from Baruch College, listened, periodically shaking his head.



Theodorakis for NEWS

**Zaster Gennadiy looks through some old memorabilia.**



"I'm trying to imagine what my 8-year-old brother would do in these situations," said Krasnerman, 20, who lives in Manhattan Beach. "He'd be dead."

Since October, Krasnerman has been visiting with Gennadiy through a volunteer program called Connect 2. It is sponsored by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island and the Shorefront Jewish Community Council with funds from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Connect 2 sends volunteers of all ages to the homes of Holocaust survivors, many of whom have no family. The volunteers run errands, read mail - and, most important, provide companionship.

Sheva Frank, who coordinates the program, said about 80 volunteers regularly visit more than 100 survivors.

"We put a lot of energy into making correct matches," Frank said. "We want the volunteers to feel they have something in common with the people they visit. We really want these relationships to work."

Because Krasnerman speaks some Russian, he was matched with Gennadiy, a former captain in the Soviet army who became a mountain climbing instructor.

The father of two, Gennadiy came to Brooklyn 10 years ago and worked as a handyman until 2001, when heart surgery forced him into retirement.

"I don't like to bother people," Gennadiy said, but he admitted Krasnerman is a good companion.

"I've learned a lot from him," said Krasnerman. Gennadiy smiled and added, "And I must still teach him a few things."

Connect 2 welcomes volunteers. Call Sheva Frank at (718) 449-5000, ext. 216.

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