

KECK-185
ALEXANDER ALLAND
BIRTH DATE: 1902
INTERVIEW DATE: JUNE 3, 1986
RUNNING TIME: 1:25:00
INTERVIEWER: EDWARD APPLEBOME
RECORDING ENGINEER: NANCY DALLETT
INTERVIEW LOCATION: NORTH SALEM, NY
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 1/1995
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

RUSSIA, 1923
AGE 20
PASSAGE ON "THE CANADA"

APPLEBOME: This is Edward Applebome and I'm speaking with
Mr. Alexander Alland on Tuesday, June 3, 1986. We are
beginning this interview at 10:30 in the morning. We are
about to interview Mr. Alland about his immigration experience
from Russia in 1923. This is interview number 185. Mr. Alland,
can you tell me where and when you were born?

ALLAND: I was born in the south of Russia in a city called
Sevastopol.

APPLEBOME: You'll have to spell that for us.

ALLAND: S-E-V-A-S-T-O-P-O-L. Sevastopol.

APPLEBOME: And what year were you born?

ALLAND: I was born in 1902.

APPLEBOME: And what do you remember about growing up? Can you tell us what your family did?

ALLAND: What I remember growing up, you see, you stopped me. I have something prepared for you and I think you should allow me to introduce you to what I've written here and then you can ask me additional questions. Because I'm an author and I can organize my thoughts and I can organize all the answers, but I have to have time in which to prepare. Will you allow me to read you a little bit?

APPLEBOME: Okay.

ALLAND: You'll see. After all, you can always delete. I was

born in Sevastopol, a city in southern Russia, and it was there that as a boy of twelve I first became interested in photography. Then I don't know if you're interested in that, let me see. As in most important cities in Russia there lived in Sevastopol with their families people of many nationalities. They were artisans and tradesmen, gardeners and fishermen, dock laborers and industrial workers, governesses and engineers. There were soldiers and salesmen, itinerant actors, musicians, artists. All paid heavy taxes to the Czar's treasury. But only a few were made to feel they belonged there. To be considered a Russian one had to prove his descent from the ancient Muscovites and belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. All others, a majority with no country but Russia to claim as their own, were looked down upon. They were mainly Russian Tartars, Russian Finns, Russian Poles, Russian Germans, Russian Ukrainians, Georgians, Latvians, Jews, Armenians, Greeks. Minority groups entitled to just enough civil rights to get by. Shortly after my graduation from the commerce school, too young to be drawn into the fight, I was forced to part from my family. In the turbulent period of this civil war my family had already lost two people dear to me. So when my father in the summer of 1920 succeeded in obtaining my passage

to safely cross the Black Sea, I had no choice but to go.

APPLEBOME: Could you tell me what your father did for a living in Russia?

ALLAND: Yes, my father was, my father had a smelting plant. He was an engineer and he had an iron splint, you know. I have to find my biography. I don't know what I did. You couldn't find it. I thought I brought it downstairs yesterday, because in my biography is all the answers put in very nicely and it would take much less time.

APPLEBOME: I'm sure when you speak to us it will be very nicely.

ALLAND: So I went from Sevastopol to Constantinople, now Istanbul. I first applied my hobby to earning a living. In those days the city was filled with men of the White Armies who set the carefree pattern of life. Money was spent freely. I was kept busy in my studio where I had found employment. Now, do you want to know more about--

APPLEBOME: This was working as a photographer?

ALLAND: Yeah.

APPLEBOME: When had you first learned about photography?

ALLAND: Okay, I'll tell you. Without my biography. At the age of twelve I became interested in photography and I made my own camera. It was during the war, First World War. And I had no money and cameras were not obtainable easily so I made my own out of cardboard. And I used a magnifying glass for a lens. And for a range finder I used an old range finder that came from my father's old rifle.

APPLEBOME: How had you seen cameras that you even knew how to do that? Had you seen cameras that you even knew how to put one together? Were there people in your neighborhood that had a camera?

ALLAND: Oh, yes. After all, I was in school. I could read and Sevastopol was not a provincial city.

APPLEBOME: As a Jewish person you were still allowed to go school?

Did you go to a public school?

ALLAND: This is a good question. We did have restriction for Jews to go into a regular gymnasium. So the number of Jewish merchants got together, contributed money, and established a commerce school, it was called. Which had the very same program as any other gymnasium. And I entered that school and I graduated from it. I was there for eight years.

APPLEBOME: What were you studying?

ALLAND: Everything. Just the regular courses that you study in any public school plus high school. You see when you graduate from gymnasium in Europe you get your public school plus two, three years of high school encompasses in this study.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember when you first became interested in photography?

ALLAND: At the age of twelve.

APPLEBOME: When you built the camera?

ALLAND: Yes.

APPLEBOME: You must have seen pictures before that, that had taken your interest.

ALLAND: Well, of course I went to museums and I read books. I come from a cultured and educated environment. I did not come from some parents who weren't educated. My father was an educated man , he was an engineer.

APPLEBOME: What kind of home did you live in?

ALLAND: Well, it was, my father was well-to-do. It was a two-story house with many rooms. We were five children in the family. Of course we had a maid and a cook and a janitor.

APPLEBOME: Did you have and grandparents living with you?

ALLAND: No, my grandparents lived in another city, also in Crimea. But they lived in another city 100 miles away. You have to understand that many immigrants left Russia because

of discrimination, persecution, pogroms, etc. Sevastopol was out of bounds to Jewish people. It was a military fortress and it is today. And the only Jews that were allowed to live in Sevastopol, they were descendants of the defenders of Sevastopol during the Crimean War in 1852. And my grandfather was a soldier in that army and he must have been a very good soldier because at the end of the War he received a medal and that distinction gave my family right to live any place in Russia. But they not have to live in special places.

APPLEBOME: So would you say your family didn't encounter discrimination?

ALLAND: No. At least I don't remember any acts of discrimination because it was very small population and my father was one of the officials in the Synagogue. He was a "gabe." I don't know exactly what it means. I know he was not _____, I think it's one of the officials. And he also represented Jewish community to the officials if there were any questions or problems. I remember he used to put the uniform on

with the three-cornered hat and walked to the meeting with the officials. So it was quite a distinguished family I suppose.

APPLEBOME: So when he decided that you needed to leave Russia your father decided that for you.

ALLAND: I left Russia because of the civil war. I was 16 years old and they began already, the army began already to mobilize boys of 16. They began to catch boys in the street and put them into the army because Sevastopol was not in the hands of the Red Army. Sevastopol was in the hands of the White Army. And at that time, in 1920, the White Armies began to lose on all fronts. And all they had left was the south of Russia and Sevastopol of course was one of the cities. So they felt desperate and they began to catch boys in the street. So in order to save my life my father obtained, we had a Zionist Organization, Zionist office, and he obtained a certificate which certified that I was born in Palestine. At that time Palestine was under protection of English and so that certificate allowed me to obtain an exit passport. So my father obtained the exit passport from some corrupt Russian official, army official. And he put me on the

Turkish fishing boat and that boat brought me to Constantinople, which is right across the Black Sea. I had a very easy way of escaping. Many people had to walk all through Siberia, China, Manchuria. But I had it very simple. I just left my home and in 15 minutes I was on the boat and two days later I was in Constantinople.

APPLEBOME: Were you traveling by yourself?

ALLAND: Yes, I went entirely by myself. I made some friends on the boat and we decided to share expenses and live together. And for a few years I lived together with my friends in Constantinople.

APPLEBOME: How did you feel about having to leave Russia?

ALLAND: Well, you have to understand I left my family. And at that time my family dwindled because we were five children and my older brother left, he went north, and he got separated from us. He went to University. And my mother went also north before the Red Army took Sevastopol over. She had a sister in Yekitserinslov, which is in the Ukraine,

and she went to visit her. Meanwhile Red Army pushed ahead and they isolated her. And she found her way back on the train but she caught cold on the way and she died before she reached her home. So I do remember how happy I was but I remember I was a Scout Master, Jewish troop, we had a Jewish troop, and I was a Scout Master, and the whole troop came to bid me goodbye. So it wasn't, I wasn't too, departure was not too pitiful.

APPLEBOME: Were you thinking that you'd ever be able to come back?

ALLAND: No. I never thought so because my grandfather hoped that I will reach Palestine and he wrote me a letter, which I have here. You may be interested in that letter. He wrote, "We are sending you with God's blessing. Hoping that we will meet in Palestine." But when I came to Constantinople, very soon there occurred in Palestine a first attack by Arabs on the Jewish settlement. And it happened the first time. And because of that the English will not permit Jews going to Israel. Arabs demanded that the immigration stopped. And to placate Arabs they would not give visas to Jewish people. You must probably know the Exodus, story of the Exodus and all that. So in that period Jews were not allowed to go to Palestine and I

got caught in that vortex, in that business. So i spent
three years in Constantinople.

APPLEBOME: So if you had the opportunity you would have just gone
straight on to Palestine?

ALLAND: Yes. Yes. My plan was to go to Palestine. And two of
my brothers with their families went to Palestine before
me. So I had relatives there already. But I didn't go. I
remained in Constantinople for three years. I don't know
what you'd like to know.

APPLEBOME: If you could tell me what it was like living in
Constantinople? You're doing so well when you just speak
yourself. Let's see if we can stay with that.

ALLAND: You have to remember, I was 17 years old. I left when I
was 16, almost 17, and I was there until I was 20. You
a are a boy of 17, between 17 and 20, and at that
period, you know, you're interested in girls primarily. You're
interested in good times. I wrote poetry, I was a
Russian poet. I had two books published of poetry in Russian.

I belonged to the Russian literary, Theatrical Literary Group. We had about 200 members, and one of our members was a wife of American Admiral who commanded American fleet in Mediterranean Sea. And when it became dangerous to stay in Constantinople, you see there was also civil war, Kemal Pahal was the leader of the civil war in Turkey in the Asiatic part. Turkey divided into European and Asiatic part. And Constantinople is right on the brink, in the Bosphorus, which separates Asiatic from European part. So it became dangerous to stay in Constantinople because the revolutionary armies were coming very close to the city. So she obtained for us, the wife Admiral Bristol, his name was, the wife of Admiral Bristol, she obtained for us one visa for the whole Russian club to go to America, which was quite an achievement because there was already quota established in 1923, in the beginning of 1923 it was established, quota in America. Prior to that time anybody could come. And so I came on that visa. I came to America and I escaped the second civil war which I'm sure was much more brutal.

APPLEBOME: What had you heard about America?

ALLAND: Who didn't hear of America? When I was a boy every week I bought books by American detective, Nat Pinkerton. There were three, Nat Pinkerton, Nick Carter and somebody else in Russian translation. I bought every week and we heard these stories. Besides, before I left, my father gave me the address of my cousin, first cousin, living in New York City. She left before the Revolution. And he said, "Well, that address may be of need to you." And that's why I really came to America, one of the reasons. I don't know whether she still alive or not, but she was married to a man, ladies garment manufacturer on Seventh Avenue in New York City. But you say what I heard of America. Do you know of any Jew in the world that didn't hear of America, didn't have a relative in America or didn't want to go to America? Because we knew it was a free country and Jews were treated equally with other people, which wasn't exactly so. I did find discrimination when I came to America, and there was a quota in colleges for Jewish students when I came to America. There were examples of anti-semitism. As there were examples of anti-everybody else.

APPLEBOME: We'll get to that as we go on.

ALLAND: Alright.

APPLEBOME: There were 200 of you that were going to come in on a single visa?

ALLAND: Yeah, about 200 members. And we all came on a single visa.

APPLEBOME: And what was the trip over like?

ALLAND: The trip was very pleasurable. It wa 14 days. I met a girl, I met an Italian, daughter of an Italian Consul in Russia, who was killed during the Revolution, and we became sweethearts and I had a very good time.

APPLEBOME: What was the name of the boat?

ALLAND: Canada. It had a French tri-color flag.

APPLEBOME: You didn't travel steerage?

ALLAND: Oh yes, oh yes. This is an interesting story. I, of

course, I had very little money. I had to sell all my photographic equipment to buy a passage in steerage. I had three dollars left to my great surprise. And I went in steerage. I boarded the ship, a boat, I went downstairs because steerage was all the way down in the boat. I went down and I was horrified because it was one tremendous room. Beds standing side by side, separated maybe by six or eight inches. And I wasn't just accustomed to that. I was brought up in a well-to-do family with _____ and _____, you know. So I wasn't accustomed to that. And I put my baggage, so there was no passageway that was left and to think that I had to sleep with all these hundreds of people in the same room was horrifying experience. I went upstairs on the deck to say my last goodbye to the city before we left and I met a young lady whom I knew in Constantinople. We were friends. And she was traveling to America with two brothers. And they had a cabin, tourist cabin. She asked me how I was traveling, I told her I'm in steerage. So she said would I mind if they invite me to come and travel with them in the cabin. What happened was that her cabin had four beds and she traveled with two brothers, so they were afraid that they

would get the fourth passenger who would be complete
stranger to them. So she invited me to travel with them
on their own expense. I moved in, of course, very gladly
(he laughs) and I tried to go to the, how do you call
the official on the boat who sells tickets and
everything?

APPLEBOME: Purser.

ALLAND: Purser. I tried to see the purser but he was awfully
busy before leaving the port so I couldn't, I went for him
for hours and I couldn't, so I moved my things myself and I
came to America in tourist class.

APPLEBOME: You were very lucky.

ALLAND: I was extremely lucky.

APPLEBOME: What were, the other 200 people from the group--

ALLAND: No, I traveled alone. No, we all went, as a matter of
fact in my biography, you know I don't know exactly how deeply

you're going into the subject. But I will be very glad to let you see my biography. It's not published, but it's already finished, 200 pages. And I describe my passage. I describe everything. The food we have and all that.

APPLEBOME: Oh, so you can tell me a little bit of that now. It's nice to hear it in your own voice.

ALLAND: Yes, I will. What was I saying.

APPLEBOME: We were talking about the trip over, you're in the cabin now.

ALLAND: Oh yes. I said we all went our different ways. Some of the men, some of the boys who were my friends, they were, they tried to persuade me not to go to America because they say America is full of gangsters. At that time gangsters were notorious all over the world. And that it was dangerous to live in America. And I asked them where would they go. So that some of them were going to Germany, some went to France, some went to Yugoslavia, most of them to Czechoslovakia. It was a free country at the time. And you know, I

write in my biography all my friends who went to Germany and Czechoslovakia perished in the hands of the Nazis, and I survived by coming to America. Ten years ago I invited my sister, she lives in Moscow in Russia, to come and visit us. When she came she told me that had I remained in Russia I would not have survived. So I survived thanks to America, thanks to my coming to America. You see I describe the food, I describe everything in my biography.

APPLEBOME: Okay, well you can quickly tell me again what the boat trip was like, what the food was.

ALLAND: Excuse me, I don't know if I mentioned to you, but I'm an author of seven books. And two of my books were chosen one of the 50 best books of the year. So I'm a much better writer than orator.

APPLEBOME: You're a very good talker. The talking is fine also.

ALLAND: Excuse me. What was the question?

APPLEBOME: The question was to describe the boat trip coming over,

what the food was like, how you were feeling.

ALLAND: I was 20. I was interested in my girl. I loved to kiss
her. I loved to embrace her. What can I tell you? I
was happy, I was a happy boy. I write poetry to her, I was
a poet. I told you I had two books published in Russian
Language. Two books of poetry. The food was rotten.
The meat--

APPLEBOME: We're just going to have to pause now for a second,
let's pause for one minute, Okay? This is the end of side one
of tape one of the interview with Mr. Alexander Alland.
This is interview number 185.

END OF SIDE ONE OF TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO OF TAPE ONE

APPLEBOME: This is side two of tape one of the interview with Mr.
Alexander Alland. This is interview number 185.

ALLAND: You're much more efficient than television. I'll be on

and WNBC television on 4th of July. They photographed me interviewed, you know, but you're much more efficient. I like your equipment better. (They laugh)

APPLEBOME: Okay, you were going to tell me about the boat--

ALLAND: Would you like to know the name of my girlfriend of 65 years ago?

APPLEBOME: If your wife doesn't mind it's okay with us.

ALLAND: Her name was Lola Amorgio. She was the daughter of an Italian Consul and she befriended me. She had, well, you don't want to know the story about her.

APPLEBOME: It's okay, tell us the story.

ALLAND: She wanted me to go to Rochester with her because she had an uncle who had a restaurant and she thought that he'll give me a job. But I thanked her very much, but I was much more ambitious than work for a restaurant.

APPLEBOME: We had been talking about the boat trip over. I don't know if there's anything else you want to tell me about that.

ALLAND: Our meat was, they had to preserve, it was a 20 day passage and so it was full of salt peter, you know. to keep it fresh. Rotten, which I couldn't eat. Fortunately, once a very pretty young woman came to my photography studio and asked me to take a portrait of her in her new hat. She had a very elaborate hat with flowers and all. It turned out that she was a street walker. She was a prostitute. So she paid me very well and she told me that she was going to America on the same boat with me. She was going first class. So everyday in the evening she would lower down on a string a package of first class food to me.

APPLEBOME: That's fantastic.

ALLAND: So I didn't, I didn't fare so badly. (He laughs)

APPLEBOME: Did you see how the people were doing in steerage?

ALLAND: Well of course I watched people. I was a photographer

APPLEBOME: Okay, but you really speak so nicely when you just talk from the heart.

ALLAND: I'll speak to anyway, but this is better. (He reads) I came to New York in the summer of 1923 on the Forth of July. When our ship came to rest opposite the lower tip of Manhattan Island I was filled with happiness and anticipation mingled with fear. There arising before me, silhouetted against the simmering, hot, red glow of lights were ramparts of steel and concrete. I could perceive no passage that led beyond. I expected no friends to greet me. Here I was an immigrant boy, face to face with the great, prosperous, and powerful America. A little problem come to its shores. But what a problem America was to me. A problem as great as life itself. I don't want to be presumptuous, but I see you have many, many interviews already. I don't know whether you have a single interview yet with a writer. Did you? Because I can give you a literary interpretation of the whole thing which I think will be more powerful and more all inclusive than just ordinary people can give you.

APPLEBOME: Well, there's something very touching about an ordinary person telling their life.

ALLAND: Well, yes, maybe so. (He continues to read) Pacing up and down late into the night in the crowded steerage, I tried to visualize what might await me on the 'morrow. Further than that I dared not think. I felt confident with the confidence of youth. I was healthy and eager. I knew a trade. But then doubts would come to torment me. Would I pass inspection? How would I make myself understood? Understand orders/ How would I make a start with but small change in my pocket? It was nearly morning before I fell asleep. What happened on that morning left me marveling for days afterwards. Within a few hours, having passed all inspections at Ellis Island, wearing a large identification card pinned on my chest, I was riding the subway. I was one of a group of young men being escorted to a comfortable home maintained by a Jewish agency to assist newcomers who had no relatives here. The agency was HIAS. In the evening of the same day, I leaned against a store window on Times Square. Fascinated, I watched the throngs of smiling people, the endless streams of cars, the splashing waves of multi-colored lights from the signs of theaters and

shops. No one asked me any questions. I was not called upon to identify myself, to show my passport. For the first time in years I felt secure. Already I was one of the millions. I was an American. That's all on the very same day.

APPLEBOME: Let's back up a little bit and tell me what went on that day.

ALLAND: Sure.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty.

ALLAND: No. Why don't I remember. There is absolutely nothing, you know. I came to this country in 1923. That's already 63 years. I traveled, my job took me all over America. In the last 15 years my wife and I went to Europe 12 times by boat both ways. So we always passed the Statue of Liberty. And every time that we passed the Statue of Liberty something very special happened to us. There is nothing in the whole world, we were in many, 15 countries, that is as attractive, as moving, emotionally, as the sight

of the Statue of Liberty. And I asked myself many times the question. "How come I don't remember the meeting of the Statue of Liberty?" I don't. I don't know. Maybe I was too excited, because coming to America for the first time for an immigrant, it's exciting, it's terrible emotional upheaval in every person. I don't know, I don't know why I don't remember. I remember Ellis Island.

APPLEBOME: Tell me what you remember about Ellis Island then.

ALLAND: Well, I remember that launches would come to the boat, take 20, 30 people at a time and bring them to Ellis Island.

APPLEBOME: The people who were in first class, had they gotten off the boat already?

ALLAND: Not already, yes. they were the first to come out on the Fourth of July. They didn't wait 'til the next day. I was very envious, I saw them coming down the steps, including my friend the prostitute. She was led out immediately without any inspection. And who knows if she was inspected, maybe she would have been sent back if she

had some venereal disease or something. But she went easily, right out, and I had to wait.

APPLEBOME: The boat was docked at a slip along the Harbor?

ALLAND: We stopped right in view of Ellis Island. In view of Manhattan Island, but not at the pier. Because we weren't allowed, we weren't processed yet.

APPLEBOME: The people who had gotten off the boat, there was ferry of some kind that carried them?

ALLAND: Including me?

APPLEBOME: No, the people in first class.

ALLAND: Before me?

APPLEBOME: Yes.

ALLAND: I suppose so, there were ferry boats, sue, took them out. But the first class got out and I was really angry and I

wrote a poem. It's in my biography, maybe I remember.
I'll tell you translation, short poem. The next day was
very hot, the day we came was very hot, it was Fourth of
July. The sun is yellow like banana, smiling slyly
through the mist. You just wait until tomorrow-- When I find
my biography I'll read to you my poem. I don't remember it.

APPLEBOME: You had written it in Russian?

ALLAND: I wrote it in Russian, in my biography I translated it.

APPLEBOME: Were there festivities in the Harbor for July 4th, what
was going on?

ALLAND: I don't know. I suppose, it was a very busy port, New
york City, on the Fourth of July. Maybe just the opposite.

APPLEBOME: Were there fireworks going off?

ALLAND: No, it was in the daytime. I don't remember
fireworks, no. Because I was in the boat all night. I don't
think they had fireworks. After all, we weren't in the

immediate vicinity of Battery Park. We were about a mile away opposite the Statue of Liberty, not Statue of Liberty, the Ellis Island.

APPLEBOME: And what happened when they finally took you on to Ellis Island?

ALLAND: Well, that was since my cousin didn't meet me , I had no relatives, so I was approached by a young man who spoke Russian and he spoke every language, I learned later. He asked me if I was Jewish. I said yes. He asked me if anybody was coming for me because I must have presented a very sad sight to come to America and not have anybody meeting you. I said yes. He said, "Well, you come with me. I represent Jewish Immigration Office," or whatever organization, HIAS means Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. And he took us all after he rounded the group of young men, I suppose about 20. We followed him. We had big signs on our chests and he took us to HIAS which was in downtown New York.

APPLEBOME: What was the atmosphere like on Ellis Island? What were some of the activities going on?

ALLAND: Very sad. Everybody was frightened to death. You know, you didn't know whether you pass or not. They gave us a very rigid examination starting with the eyes, looking for trachoma, you know. And then all kinds of examinations. They tested our arms, they tested fingers to see if we could work. They didn't want invalids. And the doctors examined internally. And I don't think it was a very thorough examination. It was mostly outside. We didn't have to get undressed, for instance. Women had to get undressed. I was told by the girl later. Women had to get undressed, the girls. I don't know why. But men were not asked to get undressed.

APPLEBOME: Did you see people who were being rejected?

ALLAND: Yes. I have to tell you now, I didn't see it with my own eyes. But the Museum of Immigration on Ellis Island is going to have the largest collection of photographs of immigrants, which is my private collection. I making now 80 pictures, 11x14, which will be exhibited under glass in the Museum of Immigration on Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty Museum. So that picture shows the people who are being taken into the

detention rooms, they look very unhappy. I don't know whether you, you deal with pictures too?

APPLEBOME: A little. So you passed with flying colors. You passed the exam without a problem?

ALLAND: Oh yes, I had no problem. And I expected my rich cousin, maybe I'll see her in another room.

APPLEBOME: Had you written to her? How was she to know that you were coming?

ALLAND: Yes, I wrote to her. And she answered. "Sura," Sura is the diminutive of Alexander in Russia, so she called me Sura, I'm Alexander, but in diminutive it's either Sura or Sasha, and I was called Sura. She wrote me a letter, "Sura," she didn't say Sura she said Surka which is more, a warmer way, I forgot the English word, but something you say--

APPLEBOME: More affectionate.

ALLAND: More affectionate, that's right. "Of course you come, you'll be our guest. You're my only cousin that I ever see, that I ever see. My blood is in you blood. My home is your home." That's the kind of affectionate letter she sent me and she did not come to meet me. And she didn't send anybody to meet me. And I sent her a letter, not only I sent her a letter, but I only had a couple of dollars left so I spent almost all my money to send her a telegram from the boat the day before we arrived in New York. So she received my telegram and she didn't come to meet me. I could have been sent back because of that.

APPLEBOME: Because what is the story about not having enough money?

ALLAND: I borrowed \$25 from my cabin mate, he gave me \$25, I showed, and on the way out when we were outside of the gate I gave it back to him. What should be next.

APPLEBOME: Let's talk about what happened now when you finally got to New York. You said you ended the first day standing in Times Square. How did it compare with what you had expected?

ALLAND: I just read to you. Here is a small problem came to its shore, but what a problem it was to me. You see, before I saw Times Square I saw the ramparts of New York City. Because our boat was staying for 24 hours almost, you know, overnight. And the ramparts were in front of me. So that was the really most important impression. Because I asked myself a question, I remember. How is it possible, so much weight, that the little bit of land can support that tremendous weight that I saw in front of me. With all the skyscrapers and all that. Because you come face to face when you come to America you should have come to small little place, some country area, whatever. But no, boat stopped right in front of the most impressive sight in the United States, the downtown New York. What can be more impressive? And I don't think I was frightened. I was 20. and my rich cousin was going to meet me. I visited her later. I could have been very comfortable. I didn't have comfortable travel. I was employed--you'll want to know this later.

APPLEBOME: Where did you find to live?

ALLAND: When I was taken to HIAS, on Sunday, many people were taken to HIAS and their relatives came from far away, from

Chicago, from Philadelphia, you know, to meet their kin.

So I was sitting in a large room, a large reception room in HIAS and fortunately I met a family whom I knew in Sevastopol in my hometown. As a matter of fact I think they were somehow related to me, far, far apart, but somehow related. Because in Russia there were not so many Jews and more Jews were interrelated one way or the other. So they recognized me and they asked where I'm going to be, you know. I told them I'm completely alone, nobody came to meet me. So they said, "We have an extra room. You can board with us." And they took me to the Bronx. They lived in the Bronx. And they took me in, very easy. And something else. They were waiting for me to be released, the next day they had to come back for me, and they introduced me to another person who came, I don't remember with them or to meet his own family. But he said to me, "If you want you can work for me." So I was employed as soon as I came.

APPLEBOME: What kind of firm did the man have?

ALLAND: He was a plumber contractor. Not fixing the plumbing and things, but when you build a building he would fix the plumbing for the whole building, he was a contractor. So

next day I was taken to that family, they gave me a room and I boarded with them and they had a few sons. One went with me to the plumbing contractor, which was also in the Bronx. Introduced me how to get there and I had employment from the next day. I would take a bus, no, streetcar, to get to the job. He made me in charge of the parts, little parts, you know, many parts in plumbing inventory. I became inventory clerk because he had several jobs and his drive had a list of things that had to bring to various jobs, and he would give me a list and I would give him the parts.

APPLEBOME: Where in the Bronx were you living?

ALLAND: How old are you?

APPLEBOME: I'm 34.

ALLAND: Do you remember where you lived 34 years ago?

APPLEBOME: Yes I do. I've been told.

ALLAND: Don't forget it is more than 60 years we're talking now. But I know exactly where I lived and I'll tell you the

name.

APPLEBOME: I knew you would.

ALLAND: Because the street was named after a famous American poet. Longfellow Avenue.

APPLEBOME: You lived on the same block as my father. My father lived on Longfellow Avenue. But we can get to that at the end of the interview, we'll see.

ALLAND: Later I moved to 163rd Street, late on. But that was Longfellow Avenue. And I couldn't forget it, it's a poet, how can you forget Longfellow?

APPLEBOME: How were you able to return to photography?

ALLAND: Good question. Of course I was not on the low strata of humanity. So to be a plumber, yeah, later I became a plumber's assistant, I forgot. I was interested in something better. I went to high school, evening school. I was there for four months and I learned to express myself with little English. I

received a letter, I got in touch somehow, I had a family also from Sevastopol living in Rhode Island whose son was a foreman in a textile mill. You know how all the textile mills are in Rhode Island. And he said to me, "Why don't you come over. Why should you be in New York City without English?" I spoke French because in Europe I lived three years in Constantinople and everybody who is anybody speaks French because you don't speak Turkish or Greek, you learn French. So I spoke French. And the textile town where my friend lived was all populated by French Canadians, in textile mills they worked. So when I came there I felt very comfortable because I could express myself and I spoke French with other people. But I lived there for about six months and I went to school. I learned English and the first I learned English I moved to New York City. Because I came to, I didn't come to Pawtucket. I came to New York, you know. Because America is New York. So I came to New York and I became one of the Russian colony, it was a big Russian colony. The fact that I wrote poetry brought me in contact with the top notch Russian people. I don't want to throw names at you, but I became part of Russian colony, literary Russian colony. I wrote for two newspapers and as a matter of fact I was befriended by Davidovitch Bullock. David Bullock was the

father of futurist movement in Russia. Futurist movement in arts. And he befriended me and we became good friends and I got jobs. I worked in various factories. I was a factory worker and I wrote poetry, of course, in my free time. And I settled in New York City.

APPLEBOME: And you were able to take up photography again?

ALLAND: Oh, about that. Yes.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side two of tape one of the interview with Mr. Alexander Alland. This is interview number 185.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

APPLEBOME: This is side one of tape two of the interview with Mr. Alexander Alland. This is tape number 185. You were going to tell us about how you returned to your career as a photographer.

ALLAND: Yes. I had all kinds of jobs in various factories but I wanted to continue as a photographer because it was more lucrative. And I found a job in some studio. The photographer was Russian so I could, he employed me basically because I could communicate with him. And then I had all kinds of experiences as a photographer. My goodness, my work is going to Smithsonian Institution. I became one of the leading American photographers and my books are all illustrated with my photography. So I don't know, I cannot go into detail.

APPLEBOME: Can you tell us about taking pictures of immigrants? I like it in your own words.

ALLAND: Several years will be skipped here. I became a photographer, I became a lecturer in photography. I was invited to be a member of various organizations and through my connections and through my work once I was invited to illustrate a book, my first book, called Portrait of New York. And that book, I was commissioned by Macmillan publishers to illustrate. I did not write the text. The text was written by Felix Reisenberg, an author. So I illustrated the book and it was acclaimed very, very highly. It was called the best book ever

done on New York City. That book brought me in contact with, oh, when I did that book, when I finished it, I became dissatisfied because I was primarily interested in people, in various kinds of people. And that book, Portrait of New York, dealt primarily with views, with buildings with views, with landscapes, with the landmarks of New York City. And I decided that when I have time, some time, I'll do a book of people of New York. And I began to, no, because of that book I was put in touch with a famous sculptor, he's dead now, Joe Davidson. He had a son who was interested in photography and Joe Davidson knew of my work at that time I was a supervisor on a WPA art project. I was supervisor of the Mural Project for the WPA. So he made me an offer that I should take his son as an apprentice and teach him photography. So I said it will be inappropriate from my house and all that. Why don't we organize some sort of syndicate and go out of the country to travel, take pictures, and meanwhile he will learn photography. So we did that. Joe Davidson contributed money and I organized a syndicate called Exploration Photo Syndicate. When you were here Smithsonian was taking pictures to Washington for the archives which I took on my trip, on that Exploration Photo Syndicate. And we made an itinerary to go to West India Islands since

they were the nearest to us. Besides West India was interesting because they are divided, they were owned by us, Great Britain, France, and Holland, Netherlands. So it was of great interest to me. So we organized the Syndicate, and his son and I, we went to the Virgin Islands. We spent six months there and we couldn't go any further. We had to come back because the War broke out and all the other Islands became military zones. We were going to go to Barbados, Martinique, Curaco, and all the islands in West Indies. So when I came back from the Virgin Islands I became engaged to my project of photographing people. And as I began to photograph people Louis Adamic, I don't know if you know the man, the famous author on the subject of ethnic groups, he's an author of many, many books which are known in the series Nation of Nations. So I began to do pictures what he did in writing. And when I amassed enough pictures I offer John Day Company to do a book. This was my first book. Portrait of New York I only did the photography. I didn't do the text. Here I did text and photography. And Pearl Buck's husband, Richard Walsh was the owner of the John Day Publishing Company. So they made an appointment for me, they looked at my pictures, and she fell in love with my work. She wrote an introduction. There is an 11

page introduction here by Pearl Buck, which characterizes me very well. But I have to open the book and you get annoyed every time I go back to the book. She calls the introduction, "Land of the Noble Free." And it's a long story and in the end she says. I'm sorry, taking your time, but she speaks of me, she says, "The man who took these pictures was born in Russia, but he's an American, and he is showing you America through his camera. He has understood that to find America you have to look into many faces of many colors and kinds. This man has found an even greater variety in our country than most of them ever knew existed. Assyrian and Welsh as well as English and German, and Scandinavian, Italian and French, but try the test of Americanism. Speak the word freedom to anyone of them and the same look comes into their eyes." This book was chosen as one of the 50 best books of the year, which is quite a distinction because we published a billion books every year, and I had two books selected as one of the 50 best books of the year.

APPLEBOME: Did you ever go back to Ellis Island? Have you ever been back there?

ALLAND: Yes. This group that is helping Ellis Island to establish a Museum, Metaform, they're helping, they were here several times, and they selected many, many pictures.

They said that I;m the only one who has a collection of pictures of immigrants at Ellis Island. If it weren't for my collection it wouldn't exist. There was an inspector, one of the head inspectors at Ellis Island at the turn of the century by the name of Sherman. He was an amateur photographer. So he photographed immigrants as they were coming in, making their portraits. When I, a few years ago, when I began to publish pictures of immigrants, I remember that when I came through Ellis Island in the corridor through which I had to pass, on both walls opposite each other there were portraits of immigrants under glass, big prints, which impressed me very much. And I remembered for 50 years. So I asked permission from the Commissioner of Immigration to allow me to go there and re-photograph.

He allowed me to go providing that I do not remove the pictures. They were embedded in the wall under the glass. I went there. I spent all day and I made copies. There were 36 portraits. Magnificent. I have them downstairs. I can show you. I told that to the people, the research people for

Metaform. They said, "May we see the?" So I showed them. And I told them the story. So they told me this story. That if it wasn't for my re-photographing, these would be lost forever. Because the pictures were removed, you see, Ellis Island was renovated many times and they removed the pictures. Ellis Island, like many other islands and parks, are in the charge of the Park Department of the Department of the Interior in Washington. So they went to look through the Park Department, Department of Interior. Everything completely perished. Not a single picture was preserved. You would think they went to the Library of Congress or to Smithsonian Institution. Somehow they got lost.

APPLEBOME: Where had the pictures been?

ALLAND: In the hall entering the big, were you ever in Ellis Island?

APPLEBOME: Yes.

ALLAND: The very big hall, where there is an examination hall, there were cages, I don't know if they're still there, but I have pictures of that, that I can show you. So they were embedded in

the wall and they're not there anymore. So because of my foresight, of my interest, we have now found portraits and I have the set of negatives which they're buying from me for the Museum. So that was the only time when I went back.

APPLEBOME: Was it the way you had remembered it, when you went in and took these pictures? Was Ellis Island the way you had remembered it the first day you came through?

ALLAND: Well, I didn't go all over, you see when you first come to Ellis Island as an immigrant you go through various rooms, various stages. First they register you, they photograph you, they examine you, you know, you go through manu echelons of inspectors and all that. I have photographs if you're not acquainted with the whole procedure, I could show you. Aren't you hungry? She's hungry. Make some kind of lunch, I'm hungry too-- (Discussion follows about what kind of lunch they'll have)

APPLEBOME: Thank you very much. You speak as well as write and it was a very good interview. Thank you very much. This is the end of side one of tape two of the interview with

Mr. Alexander Alland. This is the end of interview number
185.