



## FROM THE LIFE OF DR. ALEXEI HEISTVER

*In front of me are some newspaper articles with various headlines, which all describe some part of the life story of Dr. Alexei Heistver. The more I know of his life, the more I become aware of the fact that I will never be able to grasp the depth and agony of the things that happened to the Holocaust victims.*

*“The last witnesses warn!” - is the headline of one article in the newspaper, Blitz on November 9, 2008. Another headline says: „Born in the KZ - concentration camp - Alexei Heistver survived the medical experiments of the Nazis.“*

*Some of you may know Alexei personally or have even read the article about him, „One Day Could Be the Last!“ which was published by the Evangelical Sisters of Mary. I am very grateful that Alexei has allowed me to share some parts of his life story in our Ner Yaakov newsletter as well. I hope that we all may learn from it.*

*You may remember that I went in the summer of 2010 with several Holocaust survivors to Finland. Leaders of different Holocaust-associations, themselves survivors, had gathered there for a conference. There I met Alexei, today the leader of the organization for survivors in Germany. When he spoke, I felt his dedication and his heart for the well-being of poor and sick survivors. I was fascinated by this man, and it does not happen often that someone can bring me to laugh so wholeheartedly with such a wonderful sense of humor. This was Alexei, a Holocaust survivor who had suffered indescribably and still is full of kindness and without any bitterness, who cares for others and even makes others laugh and happy! For me, hard to understand and at the same time, a great example.*

*It was wonderful to meet him again, on my last trip to Germany.*

*Alexei was born in 1941, in Kaunas, Lithuania. He does not know his exact date of birth - only the year because his mother was shot dead in the ghetto. His aunt was deported to the KZ Stutthof. Only years later he found out the name of his father, Chaim Alexandrovitch. His traces lead to the concentration-camp Dachau. „Has probably survived“ was what Alexei was told about him. This meant with almost certainty that his father was led on the “death-march.” Through further investigations he found out that his father wanted to immigrate in the early 1950’s to the USA, but then all traces of him were lost again.*

*What are his „childhood memories“? He remembers a German doctor of medicine with a white jacket and a case of very clean and sparkling instruments...sparkling instruments which he used to perform medical experiments on little children, children like Alexei. Until today we can see the scars on his arm, scars which speak of this indescribable, inhumane deed. But the wounds of his soul are invisible to us. Three years he was unable to speak because his uvula had been removed. While in Finland, Alexei told me how an older boy advised him how to behave during the experiments: „Just hold very still...!“ was his advice. The camp in Kaunas was famous for its experiments on children. Out of 2000 children, only 120 survived. Only in 1944 was he liberated by the Red Army and placed in an orphanage for Jewish children. Only one photo is left from this time. A Jewish military journalist adopted him in 1946.*

*As a journalist his father always had to move where the Army sent him: Moscow, Irkutsk, and Odessa!*

*Later Alexei studied Russian literature, history and German in the northern Caucasus. He married, had two wonderful sons and worked at the Academy of Science in Kishinev/Moldavia. His two sons went to college and Alexei and his family finally had a good life. But then something terrible happened. In the late 1980’s beginning of 1990’s Moldavia fought for independence. Again he had to watch how nationalists marched in the streets. On banners he saw the writing: „Russians to Moscow, Jews into the river.“ Anti-Semitism had reached him again. The oldest son was poisoned and was not treated properly in the hospital. He died at the young age of only 29 years. He was not a Moldavian. And the younger son, 24 years old, was killed on the street. What remained is deep pain and mourning – which we cannot even remotely imagine. „I could not bear to see how my wife was constantly at the graveyard!“ he shared, and so his friends helped him and his wife to come to Germany, where they have been living since 1999.*

*Today Alexei is the president of the organization for Russian Holocaust survivors and he is fighting constantly for their rights. It is unbelievable how much opposition he encounters through German laws and bureaucracy. Can we really say that the Holocaust is over – as long as the survivors are still suffering?*