

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Esfir Brodskaya**  
**August 11, 2014**  
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## PREFACE

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## **ESFIR BRODSKAYA**

### **August 11, 2014**

Gail Schwartz: The following is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer collection interview with **Esfir Brodskaya**. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in Rockville, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Esfir Brodskaya: Esfir Brodskaya.

Q: Is that the name you were born with?

A: Yes. Nothing changed.

Q: Nothing changed. Where we were you born?

A: I was born in Ukraine in a small town **Stara Constantina**, communist area, September 20<sup>th</sup> 1938.

Q: That was your birth date and then you said when you were one month old, you moved.

A: In a month, the parents took me to the place where my husband lived, my father lived and so my father lived. It was in **Ulitch Simyonovka, Chenidov** [ph] area.

Q: Let's talk about your parents. What were their names?

A: My father, **Yitzhak** Brodsky and my mother Eda **Fletermann**. She did not change her name.

Q: She did not. Was their family from the same place, from the same area, their families, your grandparents?

A: My mother's grandparents.

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Q: Or your mother's parents?

A: My mother's parents lived in Stara Constantina and lived many, many years. It was Pale of Settlement and my father's parents lived in Simyonovka and lived for many, many generations and it was the same Pale of Settlement.

Q: Did you have a lot of aunts and uncles and cousins?

A: Yes, my father. My mother, she had her six children. Her parents had seven children. My mother was fourth. My father had four, my father's parents had four children. One was killed in 1918 and so they had three children and so I had enough.

Q: You had aunts and uncles and cousins. What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was a teacher.

Q: What did he teach?

A: He taught I think biology.

Q: In a high school or in a college?

A: We did not have high school. We had schools from one up to ten. So my mother, before the war she taught, she was a teacher. She enrolled in university in Moscow but like he said, she did not finish yet because the war started but she taught German language in the same school.

Q: Do you know when your parents were born?

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A: Of course I know. My father was born June 1<sup>st</sup>, June 3, 19 zero one. My mother was born February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No.

Q: No. You were an only child. An only child. Were you parents very religious?

A: No, no.

Q: You didn't go to synagogue or –

A: No.

Q: They didn't that you know of.

A: I don't know. I don't remember. During the war, after the war they never did.

Q: What language did they speak at home?

A: Russian.

Q: They spoke Russian, not Yiddish.

A: No, they knew Yiddish and they were afraid to speak Yiddish. I know exactly because they always spoke Russian.

Q: You weren't born until 1938 but do you remember anything that your parents told you about life before you were born, being Jewish, how difficult it was.

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A: No, no. They were, they lived in peace with other people.

Q: They did.

A: No, no they were. My father, the people liked him. He was – not so many people had got education. He was attacked in the revolution or –

Q: They had friends who were not Jewish? Your parents had friends who were not Jewish?

A: Yes, yes because I know he sent letters some, after the war. Because after the war there were no Jewish people.

Q: You're born in 1938 and what is the first memory you have. I know you were a child.

A: I remember, I remember the place where we lived was a house, not big but we lived with two families for one, a big house. And I remember that I had some toys. I remember many things before, during the war and I don't remember anything after I was 12 or ten. You know some period from fight after the – I don't remember.

Q: We'll talk about that later. Let's talk let's start with your early –

A: I remember that my grandmother came to us and gave me strawberries. That I can --

Q: Do you remember any German soldiers or anything like that?

A: No I didn't. I never saw. Anything.

Q: Never saw. What other memories to you have of a very early time?

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A: Before the war. That's, no.

Q: Ok so then the next change was when for you?

A: Next change. When we moved I remember because we moved as my cousin, she is living in Israel. She was older than me 14. She was 14 years older. And she told me that 500 kilometers, it's about 300 miles, we moved. We had horse and my father did not move with us because the chief of his school told that the men have to stay to fight. And so he stayed and he said nobody was in the school. Only I came alone and he was asked so he moved later. So he moved. My mother, me and together and the family of our neighbors at the -- for one horse.

Q: When was this, what year?

A: It was I think 41. And according to this, I think it was August or maybe end of July. My mother told it was a month. Then the war started.

Q: You remember that? You were so little.

A: I remember when my mother took me on the, in her hands, because it was very loud. In fact people --

Q: You were three years old.

A: And some people fall down and I remember a lot of sounds and I remember it. Because maybe it was very shocked you know.

Q: Where did you go from there?

A: And then we moved to **Kursk**, according to this, as I understand. We came to Kursk and from Kursk we got this, all these papers, because before we did not have anything. We just, and

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nobody knew from what place we moved and in Kursk we got papers that we have to move to small village.

Q: How long did you stay in Kursk?

A: I think ten days.

Q: Just a few days.

A: Yes, maybe two weeks.

Q: You were with your mother?

A: Then we moved, my mother, my father, me and my grandmother, my father's mother.

Q: There were four of you?

A: Four, according to this paper.

Q: Your grandmother's name?

A: My grand, **Fruma**. Fruma.

Q: You moved from Kursk?

A: To small village, **Dergachi**, terrible name. Dergachi, terrible name. It was close to **Saratov**.

Q: How long, did you stay there for a time?

A: Yes, we stayed there all the, after the time that we left for **Irkutsk**.

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Q: How long were you there?

A: Well, let me see.

Q: Was it years or was it –

A: More than a year. November, from November 28, 1941, my mother started working in the school. So we left, we left, we left in 1943.

Q: You were there for almost two years?

A: Yes, in the end of 1943.

Q: Do you have any memories of that time? Those two years.

A: No, no memories. My mother told me that I came to the small restaurant where the military people ate and they asked me what do you want? She said I want you only with sugar.

Q: That's what you said.

A: And I remember only one thing. We did not have what to eat and I remember my grandmother took flour with water, a little salt and I like it very much. Even now I remember. Now I can't even imagine how could I eat it. But we didn't have what to eat. So we almost died there. And while, with my mother, when my father went to army. My mother wrote all her relatives. She did not know if they are alive or not and only her sister, she lived with her husband in Irkutsk. He was a military man. She sent us paper, allow, allow.

Q: To leave, to go to Irkutsk.

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A: Yes, because Irkutsk was closed for refugees. It was military.

Q: Do you know your mother's sister's name?

A: Yes, Luba. Luba.

Q: And it was her husband who sent the papers?

A: Yes, he sent them.

Q: Do you have any other memories you wanted to talk about before Irkutsk that we didn't talk about cause you were a very young child?

A: I can tell you what my –

Q: Any other stories that your mother told you about that time before Irkutsk?

A: My mother told me that she got a wage. It cost one, one bread so she told me that she did not have what to eat and before we left, she got paid, she had papers and my cousin that she, I told you, she is living in Israel. She came to us because she said she was 18 years old and she had to go to the plant, plant without ceiling, without -- so and every day the German planes flew and her father was killed. He came to the job and he never returned home back. And she said I don't want to live and she –

Q: Her father was killed?

A: Her father. My, my father's brother, older brother. And she came to us and my mother had tickets and, for three, and she said I don't know what to do. And my mother, she worked in special place, when she helped in the military base. Write some papers and she made her –

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Q: False papers?

A: Papers yes that she's 16 years old. And when we went to the train, to the train to go to Irkutsk, when the controllers came, they saw, nobody could see me. I was small and she was instead of me. That was terrible. I don't know how they did it. It was not one week. It was long time. We were about one month we moved.

Q: You get to Irkutsk. And you stayed there.

A: Yes.

Q: What memories, what do you remember about that time in your life?

A: I remember that I was sick all the time. And that I got TB because it was cold at a different climate and I was in special place because --

Q: In a hospital?

A: No. It was special house for children without contact with parents. So two years I was there. And then so I don't remember. I remember that I, when my mother came I saw her through the window, so I don't, I lived like I was, I did not have parents. They lived in terrible conditions. Because they did not have even a room to live. They came to my aunt. They had only one room and we came. Me, my grandmother, my mother.

Q: Your father?

A: No father was in the army and my cousin and then their brother came because he was wounded and he came too at the same place. So I don't know how they lived.

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Q: Did you know when you were very young that you were Jewish or did you just think you were Russian?

A: No, I always knew it.

Q: That you were Jewish?

A: Yes. I always was, I always knew when I, especially when I came to school. I always knew that I am not the same as others. I was only one.

Q: How did you know that?

A: Neighbors told me. But in the schools there were no anti-Semitism at that time. I knew, but nothing changed. No, I just meet this. A lot of Jewish people lived in Irkutsk especially before the war. All intelligent people were Jewish. Doctors and accountants or –

Q: Let's talk a little bit about life in Irkutsk. You said you were in that children's home in Irkutsk.

A: Children's home for sick, for –

Q: For sick children.

A: Yes.

Q: The whole time you were in Irkutsk, were you in that children's home?

A: For two years.

Q: Two years. So you didn't go to school?

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A: No before the school. It was before the school. I went to school when I was eight years old.

Q: You started school when you were eight.

A: Yes. Eight years old.

Q: What did you do in the children's home? Played or --

A: I think we played. We played.

Q: Were you very sad or was it a happy --

A: I was happy because I had a lot of food. They, it was war but in this place we ate a lot of, my mother told me, you are lucky because you could die if you did not go there.

Q: Did your parents have enough food while they were in Irkutsk?

A: I think yes, because my uncle came from the army. He was wounded and he, when he got food special for wounded.

Q: Did you feel Russian at all or just Jewish?

A: No, I never felt myself Russ -- you know even I wanted to be the same, but my name, my father's name.

Q: Brodsky

A: Yitzhak. Yitzhak. He is, what do you want? So and my name and my mother's name it's all, all are Jewish. I always knew that I am Jewish. When I was about maybe 12 years old, my friend,

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the old friend took me to one place and I heard that people told look at her she is Jewish. But she doesn't look like Jewish. How can I forget it?

Q: You're in that children's home. When did you leave the children's home?

A: My parents had a small room, half of this and I came home.

Q: What year was that? Do you know?

A: 1945.

Q: 1945 so is the war over.

A: When war over, my parents got a room and my father returned from army 1945. Because he was in the war with Japan on the east. And it was, he was lucky because if he was in the war in the west, he could be die there. He went to army voluntarily because he was more than 40 years old, you know. But he said if I don't go to army, the people will kill me because he was one man in the village and he could not do the same. He was the big – so anyway he was Jewish and it wasn't that \_\_\_\_ in Irkutsk.

Q: It's the end of the war. Did you know what that meant as a young child? You were only seven years old then. Did that have any meaning the end of the war?

A: I remember my – I was in the kindergarten. My mother came to see me and she said, let's go the war is over. And we went to the square and there were a lot of people. I remember that my mother bought, not bought, sewed for me new clothes. It was May. It was rather cold, that I remember. And every people were smiled and --

Q: You remember it was like a celebration?

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A: Yes.

Q: So then you went back with your mother and what happened then? The war is over –

A: And my father came, he went to Ukraine to find a job. And he was, as I know, my father was at home one year. He tried to find a job in Ukraine. In one year, he returned. My mother didn't allow me to go to school. She thought maybe we go – It was one year.

Q: You're still in your Irkutsk.

A: Yes, and he returned in year. He said, he did not find, nobody wants Jewish. Jews. He said. And so I went to school and we started our life in Irkutsk, and I lived up to that 2004. All my life. My parents died and they were there, in Jewish cemetery in Irkutsk.

Q: Now you're seven years, let's go back a little bit. You're seven years old. The war is over. Your father is looking for a job in Ukraine and you start school.

A: No, my mother didn't –

Q: Oh, that's right. You said your mother thought you wouldn't be staying. But then eventually you did start school.

A: At eight.

Q: At eight. What kind of school did you go to?

A: Usual, public school. Russian public school. Russian public.

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Q: Were there other Jewish children in your class?

A: No. Oh, another woman. We were two girls. Her name was Bender. Bender, a Jewish name.

Q: A last name, that's a family name.

A: Last name, family name.

Q: You go to school. What else did you do? Anything special? Did you –

A: In a year I went to musical school. My mother sent me, without piano but with my mother had some friends with piano. And so I was busy. I went to two schools, musical school and –

Q: You went to a public school and music –

A: Public, music school.

Q: And you had friends who were not Jewish.

A: Sure, one Jewish.

Q: But no anti-Semitism?

A: No, no. Our teacher in the first grade my teacher was German. I think she was very intellectual but she was only there. Her husband died. I don't know where but she was very good teacher. You know, I remember **Elizaveta Carlovna**, so Eliz and her father's name Carlov.

Q: What else did you do as a child? Did you play sports?

A: Sports, I started later.

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Q: What kind of sports?

A: I was gymnast.

Q: Gymnast. And did you like to read books, were you a big reader?

A: Yes, my mother. That time my mother she did not have any papers that she was a teacher so she went to the university in Irkutsk and she graduated as a teacher of Russian language. And later she got another education and she could teach Russian, English and German.

Q: She knew English?

A: She knew English, like I knew without speaking. Everybody knew English. We could write it

Q: You could read and write.

A: I could read and write and could translate but I couldn't speak because –

Q: Nobody to speak to.

A: No, if some people came to us, specially Japanese, we could speak English because or Chinese, that's easier because it's not their native language.

Q: When you were living in Irkutsk, did you travel at all, or you just stayed in Irkutsk? Did you do any travel?

A: When I was 12, 13 years old we went to Ukraine the first time.

Q: To visit?

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A: To visit my aunt, my aunt **Evenitsa**. If you – we went to, in the street and behind me one woman when you walk and she said look at this Jew. Look she doesn't jump. She doesn't speak loud as you are. You know. And I said my mother, I never, will never come to Ukraine again, never will to live. It was anti-Semitism. It was 1954, 55 or something.

Q: You went to elementary school in Irkutsk. And then you went to high school?

A: The middle school. They had the same building. I graduated from school. I enrolled at university and after I did from university I went –

Q: What did you study in the university?

A: I studied physics, physics and then I could not, the first – of course, they did not want me to go to work somewhere. I went to middle Asia where my cousin lived. Middle Asia in Uzbekistan.

Q: Uzbekistan?

A: Yes, and I one year worked there.

Q: Where did you work in Uzbekistan?

A: I worked in **Ferla** [ph], a small city, town **Fergana** [ph]. Uzbekian. Town one year.

Q: As a scientist?

A: As a scientist yes. There was small laboratory and they took me in because they did not know many things. I was physics, they were chemic, chemistry. They were chemical, chemical and I worked one year and then I returned. I had paper that I worked one year and I found a job in very

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low position at the Institute of Organic Chemistry. At that time as you remember the academic, academy of sciences was organized by Khrushchev. He did a great job. And I found very low position. They did not want to take me at all and from this low position I moved, I got higher position but it was terrible for them to see me in this.

Q: Because you were a woman or cause you were Jewish?

A: Because I am Jewish and I was not a communist party member. I was Jewish. It's another story. And I left because I, two times I went to court to prove that I am eligible for the job. After second time I understood that, too much.

Q: So you went back to Irkutsk.

A: No. I came here. I left. It was –

Q: So that's when you decided.

A: It was impossible because I, you know in isolation. I had my room in the institute. Nobody couldn't speak to me. Nobody could not smile or tell hello. Life was – it's the same because our new director, he was academician. It does not matter but he was not, he did not like. I was the last Jewish.

Q: I'm a little confused. This is in Uzbekistan or Irkutsk.

A: No it's Irkutsk. You understand –

Q: Uzbekistan was one year.

A: Only one year.

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Q: And then you went back to Irkutsk and what you were talking about was all in Irkutsk, yeah.  
Ok. So you stayed, what year did you leave Irkutsk to come here? What year did you leave Irkutsk finally?

A: 2004.

Q: 2004. Were you married by then or?

A: I, no at that time I was widow.

Q: You had gotten married?

A: I was married.

Q: Who was your husband?

A: My husband was Jewish man. His grandparents were born in Irkutsk, grandparents. And his father went to synagogue. His father and he knew all Jewish people in Irkutsk. And his name, last name was **Furman**.

Q: And your husband's first name?

A: Michael.

Q: Michael Furman. Did you have any children?

A: Yes, I have two sons. They were born in Irkutsk. And they are here now. They, everyone is here, both the families.

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Q: You worked up until the time you left Irkutsk?

A: Yes, I left at the end of November. I stopped working.

Q: Where were you working in Irkutsk?

A: I worked at the same institute of chemistry. I was a leading scientist and –

Q: Was your husband a scientist? What did he do?

A: No. He was an engineer.

Q: An engineer.

A: As are most of the Jewish community.

Q: Was he religious? Did you go to synagogue with him?

A: No, no he was not. He died when he was 51. At that time you know when perestroika and did not have, how a special man. One by one, one by one died because they didn't know how to live in new conditions. How to work, how to get wages. It was terrible time. Many husbands of my friends died at the same time and the same age.

Q: Because why?

A: Because of Soviet Union was broken and no –

Q: Not good medical.

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A: Medical always was not good. No, he died because he was afraid of new life. I think. It's my opinion.

Q: What year was that, that he died?

A: He died in 1989. In 1993 my youngest son left for Israel.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: Two ways. To go to Israel or to go to army. That's not a \_\_\_\_ decision.

Q: He went by himself to Israel?

A: He went. He was not even, he was 19 years old. And he went to Israel without language and without relatives. One kibbutz where nobody spoke Russian. In three year, older son with his family moved to the same place. To Israel.

Q: Also moved? And he was married by then?

A: Yes, he was married. He had a one year old daughter. She was one then. His second daughter was born in Israel and my younger grandson was born here. So I have three which are very--

Q: You stayed and worked after you husband passed away.

A: After my sons left.

Q: Your sons left and then you decided to make a change?

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A: You know, I could stay but I knew that in a couple months, they will, decided that I don't correspond to my position. I knew it exactly because it's not court. I cannot go to court in this case and I decided that it's time for me to be winner. To live as a winner, not as they, they give it.

Q: Was it difficult to leave? Was it hard to get permission to leave?

A: No, very, very simple. My son here sent me paper. My oldest, both sons were here. My older son sent a paper and I got this paper signed papers. They said to me, went to Moscow and they said oh, you're ok. Five minutes interview only because everything was clear. You know I didn't change. I didn't change and I was not a communist party and my children are in the United States. It was the simplest decision in my life.

Q: Did you bring anything special with you?

A: Yeah. Boxes with – I could not take many things. I was alone and nobody could help me and I was afraid that somebody kill me in Irkutsk. I did not –

Q: So you left everything in Irkutsk. And then you came to the United States, to Baltimore.

A: To Baltimore county. In Owings Mills.

Q: In Owings Mills. Did you know any, I know you said you could read and write English. Could you speak it at that time?

A: I could understand a little. How are you? Where do you live? How old are you? Very simple. I could write and read this thing. Because I wrote, I translated my articles from Russian to English.

Q: You had written many scientific articles?

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A: I wrote if I wanted to sell article in the international journal I had to write.

Q: Your specialty was what, your science specialty was –

A: You know –

Q: Did you have a special?

A: Yes. Special. It means PhD or something?

Q: What you did your research in?

A: Ah, research. Yes, I investigated the structure of chemical compounds. Electronic structures, base structures. It was like physical chemistry because I was physical, I graduated as a physics. Physicist. I am sorry.

Q: Did you work when you came to Baltimore? Did you get a physics job?

A: No, no I did not speak English no. And in a month, my grandson was born and I you know I felt that I am very old woman when I left Irkutsk. And I came here, I told you, I cannot live alone. No I do not know how to live alone. They told me that you will live alone.

Q: Did you live with your son?

A: No, I lived with my older son. When he left Baltimore county for here place because his daughter went to school. She was only one white girl in the class and boys and girls did not like her. So they decided to find good school. And they found good school. Then they got this apartment across the street. And I lived with them and then my son told me that his wife's

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mother will come and they cannot approve two, two grandmothers and she has to find a place to live.

Q: So you moved into this apartment? Are you an American citizen?

A: Yes.

Q: You are. What was that like the day that you became an American citizen? Do you remember?

A: Yes. Sure.

Q: Can you describe it?

A: Well it was, I went to Baltimore you know three or four time because it was, remember it was year 2011 when it was a lot of snow. The first time I passed interview but my fingerprints, finger were not good. The second time I came they said we understand that you are not invade or something. No you are normal but your fingerprints are not good the second time and so I passed interview again.

Q: What was the matter with your fingerprints?

A: Because it was winter and it was very dry and if they did it not automatically. It was ok. Because when I came it was, then I can say it was the same. I said the same problem but they did it –

Q: Differently?

A: Yes they did it old way. But then this time they did it automatically. I said it is not ok. It's not enough. I need. So the second time. The third time I came, everything was ok but they did not

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have to be citizen because it was snow, a lot of snow and the fourth time at last everything was ok. Four times. So I remember.

Q: Do you feel American or do you feel Russian or do you feel Jewish? What do you feel?

A: I feel Jewish. It's ok. I don't feel Russian and I have never been Russian in Russia. In my birth certificate, nationality, Jewish. So you know it. So I have never been Russian so I try to be American, but I'm not American. You know it's different culture. It's absolutely different culture. So I tried. I had a friend. I don't speak Russian for a couple of years. I tried not to speak Russian at all, to understand English. So I, now I can speak simple English but at least I can speak and people can understand me. That's the most. I can call and sometimes.

Q: What do you do now? Do you do anything scientific, any – nothing.

A: No when I left Irkutsk, I said to myself never. That's all. They called me. They wrote my – for work. My coworkers they asked me question. I said no. I forget. No, never, never, never.

Q: Can I ask you some questions about some of your feelings? What do you think about Germany? Do you have any thoughts about Germany?

A: You know when in 1980 I was in Germany, eastern Germany for three months in business there. And I decided I will never live in Germany.

Q: Because?

A: Because some memories, I don't know what. If I watch some movies, I couldn't do it. So I cried and I decided you see and I stop it. No, and you know they –

Q: Because of what they did during the war?

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A: They have a lot of laws again anti-Semitism that I've heard it.

Q: You still felt it?

A: In that –

Q: In Germany.

A: Yes in the institute when I worked. I felt it. You know some people never talk to me. Some people never invited me to – so you know this. So.

Q: Do you get reparations from Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: I got. It's not enough.

Q: Did you lose many extended relatives?

A: Yes.

Q: Because of the war?

A: Yes. My, Stara Constantina it was that time it was on the border with Poland and in a day or a week, so already the German army was -- And my, grandfather, grandmother, one sister with two children and another sister with three children were killed there, from my mother's side.

Q: By the Germans?

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A: Yes. They were. One sister, her husband was a Ukrainian and he went to army and he said to her go to my mother because she didn't have time to leave and she went to her. His mother and his brother told Germans that she was killed and three children, three boys. And all, and my old man from this man, mother's family were killed as they went to army and I found some letters my aunt wrote. We went to find the brothers of her husband, three brothers, young. Nobody knows. They were not married. Many, many, many. And my grandfather, my father, on my father's side, died when we were in Dergachi and my aunt and uncle. I told you he died in Saratov. We don't know in what way. And many, many other relatives. And –

Q: When you said the relatives that were in the army got killed, was that in battle?

A: Yeah.

Q: While they were fighting?

A: They were.

Q: Have you been to Israel?

A: Yes, many times. My children both lived six years. So I was almost there --

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel?

A: I like Israel but you know it's not a place for me to live. I don't know. It's easy to live there. It's easier to live because a lot of Russians they speak, they communicate but I did not, maybe because I came for three months, two, three months, I did not feel myself comfortable. Maybe because my children did not feel comfortable. I don't know. My younger son got education, he graduate from Haifa University.

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Q: Are your sons scientists also?

A: No. My older son, they both programmers. My younger son graduated from university as a historian or archaeologist, but my oldest son told him don't do it. You cannot get any money.

Q: Job.

A: Job and you must learn programming. You must learn that and he came here and he graduated a second degree as computer scientist. My older granddaughter is studying computer science too.

Q: How many grandchildren do you have?

A: I have three.

Q: Three grandchildren. And do you talk, have you talked about your childhood with your grandchildren?

A: Some, very, very.

Q: They're still young.

A: You know I don't know if they need it. They understand, not they need. If they can understand. They don't understand even about my life in Irkutsk. It's absolutely different life. But –

Q: When your children were young did you talk to your sons about your childhood?

A: No, no.

Q: For the same reason?

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A: Yes. I did not want, first of all they don't understand. It's very difficult to explain. They live in normal conditions. I could not explain them. Sometimes when we were in the camp, I told them look the toilet is the same as we have in the building that I lived. We had five small houses. One small house to say, small like for one, one –

Q: A central place you mean?

A: Two, three toilets in one –

Q: Bath house.

A: No, no. In –

Q: On the floor or –

A: Outside, outside. Can you imagine minus 40 and you have to go in, outside. We did not have water and we had to walk.

Q: Indoor plumbing.

A: No, no plumbing. It was, not for men, for women. It doesn't matter.

Q: Do you think the world has learned any lessons from the war? And the Holocaust and what happened to the Jews?

A: I think no. People do the same now. The same every day. I watched Israel. And history is going to barbarians. They will take next power.

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Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum? In Washington?

A: No.

Q: Because you do not want to go there? Too painful?

A: It's too painful. I was in Israel.

Q: Yad Vashem.

A: Yes, yes it was too much. My granddaughter was.

Q: She went?

A: She went.

Q: Who are your friends now? Are most of them Russians, are they survivors or who are your friends?

A: I don't have many. But in Irkutsk I had Russian friends.

Q: Here now, in this for instance in this building are there many survivors?

A: Not so many, not so many.

Q: Do you take any classes or do you go to any lectures?

A: I take English classes. Sure.

Q: At the Jewish Community Center?

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A: I have wonderful teacher you know, absolutely. When I came here I had to go to classes to learn English for citizenship. And then I always told I want real teacher of English teach me, not volunteers who doesn't know how to teach. I can speak but I don't know how to learn to knew. Now I have a real, she was a teacher of English and about eight years she is a volunteer to teach.

Q: At the JCC?

A: At JCC.

Q: So you are able to go to lectures and do you go to speeches, to learn things?

A: Sure. If I go to concert I have here.

Q: You can walk.

A: To JCC?

Q: To JCC.

A: Yeah. And this place is special because I can walk to JCC. I do sport classes there.

Q: What kind of sports? Swimming?

A: Swimming, step and --

Q: Exercise?

A: Exercise. Not special.

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Q: And you're close to your son across the street, which is nice.

A: My family is living very, very – ten minutes walking. So I don't need car.

Q: Do you have any desire to go back to visit in Russia?

A: Russia, no. I found a woman I pay her. She looks after my graves, my parents.

Q: Of your family?

A: I pay her.

Q: Well

A: Nobody is living.

Q: Nobody is there. Is there anything you wanted to add, anything that you remember that you haven't covered, anything you wanted to talk about today that we haven't talked about, your experience? Are you angry that you had to go through difficulties when Jews in America did not have to go through?

A: No.

Q: I mean here you had such difficulties, you had such losses, family and Jews here in the United States did not have. Does that make you angry?

A: No. No. I cannot change, I could not change. I got what I wanted. I got, in Russia I got everything. I got good education. I had good job. My children got education, my older son got education. It's ok. We had many problems with our religious, but it passed. It passed. I cannot, could not change. And I did not know before. I went to Germany in 1980. I did not know that

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people can live better than we lived. You know I did not know. I worked. I never read this papers, I never watched TV because I was busy, busy, busy. And then when I came to Germany, I went to the store and saw so many sausages. Even I bought one, two pounds for a month, for family. Can you imagine? I thought I will die. No, but I did not die. From that time and I talked with German people and they told, we don't like Russian government but we like Russian people here they told me. I wasn't Russian. The time I knew that I am not Russian.

Q: Do your sons feel very Jewish, your sons?

A: You know my younger son his wife is Jewish in Jewish too. And they don't go to synagogue but they live among, they live among Jewish relatives and in Jewish area and but they are not religious.

Q: Not religious, but they are Jewish, that's what I meant.

A: My older son is married to Russian woman, a Russian woman and it was very difficult for me from the beginning, not because she is a Russian. Because she has not, she is only one and she has mother who is Russian you know orthodox. But now they don't speak about religion. I don't think it's good but I cannot change.

Q: Your grandchildren, do you think they feel that they're Jewish? How old are your grandchildren?

A: My older granddaughter is 19. She has only Jewish friends. Only Jewish friends. My younger granddaughter is, she is 12. She has Japanese, Chinese, I mean I don't know but she is closer to me because I teach her not she has teacher. But I help her to play piano. And I see her every day. I always tell her something. I can tell her.

Q: Your third grandchild?

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A: My grandchild, he is nine.

Q: You kept up your music? You mentioned the piano you've kept up. You said when you were a child you went to music school.

A: I played now.

Q: Have you ever performed? Have you ever been in a concert?

A: Oh no, oh no I have never been in this. I graduated from school. Then I went to college, then I left because it was -- I had to choose to go to university or to --

Q: Conservatory?

A: Yeah and my teacher, I had wonderful teacher and she said you have small hands. You cannot be a performer and I had high ambitions you know. Only the best. My mother always told me you must be the best because you are Jewish.

Q: Is there anything you wanted to say before we end the interview? Is there anything else that you wanted to say that you haven't talked about?

A: I want to say that now, I was born again in the United States. When I came here I was, I felt so old and I thought at least I will die not alone so now I feel comfortable. I look at the old women and I see that I am young.

Q: You were how old when you came to the United States?

A: 66.

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Q: 66.

A: In Russia you are retired at age 55. But I worked, I could work in science the kind of work

Q: You can work longer?

A: Mm hm.

Q: Do you correspond with anybody, do you write letters or email?

A: I have Skype sometimes. I speak some –

Q: To people in Russia.

A: Sometimes I call my friends, call them.

Q: You do still have connections.

A: Not so many as I thought that I have so many friends. I lived all my life there.

Hey, you know Russians I called about this event. They said Putin is right. Different, different level of knowledge, but all of them told the same.

Q: That what?

A: That Putin is right.

Q: In what sense, what do you mean?

A: It means that he annexed Crimea, that he went to Ukraine. It's, he is right. We are living well.

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Q: That he was right in going into Crimea? I don't understand

A: Do you know that Putin, that president of the, he annexed.

Q: So that was correct?

A: Yes, they said that is correct. He did right thing.

Q: He did the right thing.

A: So Irkutsk is too far from Moscow, five, six hours by plane between this place and Irkutsk 13 hours, 13. Can you imagine?

Q: Did you become religious when you got here or you never have? It did not affect your religious feelings.

A: I tried when my youngest son left Irkutsk. I tried to go to synagogue we had.

Q: Did your boys or grandchildren ever have, or your sons have bar mitzvahs?

A: No.

Q: Neither son.

A: No.

Q: Thank you very much for doing this interview. Appreciate. I just want to close by saying that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Esfir Brodskaya.

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(end)