

LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT
The Soviet Jewish Oral History Project of the Women's Auxiliary
of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

GRETA BERSUTSKY ETINGEN

Drafting Designer
Mechanical Institute of Kishinev, 1986

BIRTH: April 20, 1962, Kishinev

SPOUSE: Alex Etingen, Mechanical Engineer, Leningrad

CHILDREN: Bela, 1986

PARENTS: Izrail Bersutsky, Kotujany, Moldavia, 1929
Frida, deceased September 7, 1989, U.S.

SIBLINGS:

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:
Leah Bershotsky, 1903-1972, Kishinev

David Bersutsky, 1903-1985, Kishinev

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of
Chicago

INTERVIEW WITH GRETA BERZUTSKY ETINGEN

INTERVIEWER: Elaine Snyderman

(You were born and grew up in Kishinev? What was your education like? What do you remember about the very start? Was someone teaching you at home or did you start in a Nursery School?)

My mother spent a lot of time with me and she gave me everything that I know. I think everything I know is my mother because she gave me much.

I was seven years old when I started school. I went to musical school, a special school for music. I studied the piano. I have a piano in Russia, but not here. It is not possible to have it here. I studied piano for seven

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years. In Russia, I had two schools, music school and public school. It is required to go to public school and I graduated from my school in 1979. After that I entered a Mechanical Institute in Kishinev. I graduated from that Institute in 1986. It took six years because after I graduated from school, I tried to leave Russia, and the Russian government would not give me the permission, that was in 1980. So I did not get accepted here until 1981.

(What do you remember about growing up in Kishinev as a Jewish girl?)

When I was a child I had no problems because I stayed home with my mother. After - when I became a school girl I remember I had problems from Fifth Grade. I was about ten years old. In Russia, they used middle names and my father's name was Izrail. It was the time of a war in Israel, and the Russians they hated Israel and when Russian school girls and boys heard the name Izrail, they laughed and it was very - I felt very uncomfortable.

The teachers laughed also. She laughed and she tried to get everybody to speak my middle name, because it embar-

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rassed me. There were only two or three other Jewish children in the class. They were teased this way too, so we stuck together.

(When you tried to go to the Mechanical Institute in Kishinev did you find that there was a limit on the number of Jews there?) Yes, sure. And only this Institute would take Jews as students because in Kishinev they also had a University and seven institutes and this was the only one that would accept us. There were about eight thousand students in the Institute. I don't know exactly how many students were Jews, but I think about five hundred.

(Did you feel that you were treated fairly there, as a student? Did you feel that your work was judged just like everybody else's?)

Oh, in Russia, everybody from the Jewish people, they know that they can't do the same as other people. They gave different tests, they gave much harder homework, more problems, and harder problems to solve. But it was not all bad, I think, because we can do this work.

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(You graduated in 1986, and then what did you do next?)

Then I went to work. I took a job. I worked in a mechanical plant, I worked like a drafting designer. This is what I would like to do here, too. I have some problems with computers, of course, in Russia, they never used computers, then. Right now? I don't know. That is my problem. I would like to take a class in this in June. I think I will go the Moraine Valley Community College to study this.

(In your home, in your childhood, did you get to see your grandparents? Did you get a sense of the Jewish holidays? Were there any Jewish celebrations at home?)

My mother celebrated every Jewish holiday. She did everything so well. We celebrated, what is going on right now, 'Shavuot' and Purim and it was in February. I have never seen a synagogue, my mother did all the things at home. For Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur it was most important day. We stayed at home and didn't eat. It was hard, we had to stay home from work or school. When we fasted, we stayed home.

(Where did you meet Alex, your husband?)

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I met Alex in Kishinev. He came there after his degree to work in Kishinev. He came to the Engineering Institute. His family is from Leningrad. His friends worked in Kishinev and his friend is my friend's brother. They introduced us. We were married in 1986. The same year I graduated.

(Had you both studied English, before you came here?)
Yes. But we both speak it very bad.

(What was your home like in Kishinev? Your father had a really nice job before 1980. So, did you remain in the same house after 1980, or did you have to move?) No! We had a very bad apartment, all the time. It was only one room. The kitchen was without windows, it had a small light, like a closet. The bathroom was very bad, we had no bath, only a shower. My father, my mother and myself, we all lived in the same room.

After Alex and I got married, we had a smaller room for the two of us. Bela was born in 1987, and we were in this small apartment.

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When our daughter, Bela, was nine months old, we took our papers to go to Ovir (pronounced Aveer), in Russia. It is an organization where Jewish people took their papers and tried to ask the government through this organization for permission to leave. In 1988 we received the permission to leave.

(What did you do with the piano?) I sold the piano. We sold everything we had, or else gave it to other people. We took an airplane from Moscow to Vienna. We stayed in Vienna about two weeks, it was very nice. But my mother was very sick already. After that we went to Rome, in Italy. We were there about one month. From Rome we came here.

Our sponsor in America was Michael Schwartz. (Did they help you get the work?) No. I stayed with Bela during the day and some evenings I work at MacDonal'd's. It is close.

(What does Alex do?) He works as a machinist, he is an operator of a CNC machine. He works at HAR Aerospace. I

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think they work for the military with some sort of an aircraft plant. He is happy with his work. He would like to be doing the same work as he did in Russia. There he was a manufacturing engineer. It is work with tool and die and parts of machinery. There was more planning and design there.

(If you get the computer training, then you would be designing also. What kind of a company would you like to work for?)

I don't know right now. Right now, I don't know much about what company I can help. I need the details.

(Do you think there is some kind of Jewish agency that could help you find the right kind of company?) Yes. They tried but right now they can't. (Do they say that they might be more helpful after you finish the computer training?) Maybe. But I tried by myself to get a job.

(What would you like to have for your life here? What would you like for Bela's life to be?) I would like to have my daughter in the field of Jewish communications. I think that maybe she can be more able to communicate with

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Jewish people, in Jewish schools. We would probably move from this area. (When do you think you might move?) I don't know. We might like to move to Skokie.

(What kind of help are you getting now from Jewish organizations?) We have had much help from Jewish organizations. Right now, they are trying to find jobs for us, for me and for Alex. Bela does not go to Nursery School yet.

[Interrupted by Bela.]

(Greta, what are some of the things you miss about Russia?)

I miss my friends very much.