

SHAMAIL DANILOV
RG-50.405.0012. (rec. 1991 Chicago)

Shamail. Danilov was born in Baku in 1953. His wife, Yelena, whom he married in 1981, was also born in Baku in 1953. He was the youngest of five children born to a shoemaker and his wife. They lived in a very small apartment, and life was difficult. There were 2 synagogues in Baku. Shamail was a member of the TAT group of Jews, (TAT means Mountain Jew.) Their language was more like Farsi than Yiddish. Baku was a very international city, but there were ancient problems between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis that grew worse over time. Shamail's family did celebrate Jewish holidays, and he had a bar mitzvah in his home. In 1969 the first families began leaving for Israel, but his family didn't think about it then. He wanted to go to Moscow and study mathematics, but he didn't get the opportunities

Shamail got his MS from the Azerbaijan Oil and Chemistry Institute in 1975. After graduation he was sent to Siberia for 3 years to work in oil transport. He worked in a very isolated area in the taiga with 150 engineers. It could only be reached by helicopter. He describes that life there was ok, but in 1978 he moved back to Baku. He found his work there not that fulfilling and applied to emigrate. It took 2 years to get permission and he worked very little during that time. He stated that their decision to leave Russia was based more on economics than politics.

Shamail discusses details of his life including his marriage ceremony, what his siblings did, and the different foods of the area. His 2 children were born in Baku. He describes the trip to the US. You could take very little with you, and you needed to pay HIAS back for the airline tickets. Now living in Chicago, he says the family needs to learn English and get familiar with American life, but that the move has exceeded his expectations. His mother, sister and husband are probably going to go to Israel where his mother's oldest grandchild now lives. He decided to go to the US rather than Israel because he knew more about it and felt it was more democratic.