

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

**DR. PAULINA SHMILKINA GINSBURG**

**Pediatrician**  
**Medical Institute of Kiev, M.D., 1938**

**BIRTH:** October 13, 1913, Zvinigorotka, Ukraine

**SPOUSE:** Naum Ginsburg, Cardiologist,  
Married December 2, 1934

**CHILDREN:** Isaac, March 2, 1936  
Boris, 1947, resides in Tel Aviv

**PARENTS:** Chaim Shmilkin, born in Boguslav, in 1877, deceased 1953  
Esther Friedman Shmilkin, born in Bogopol, 1890,  
deceased 1984

**SIBLINGS:**

**MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:**

**PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:**  
Sima Shmilkin, no other information

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):  
Ezra Habonim Synagogue

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of  
Chicago

NAME: **PAULINA SHMILKINA GINSBURG**

DATE: December 27, 1990

INTERVIEWER: E. Snyderman, interviewer

TRANSLATOR: Isaac Ginsburg, her son

(Begin with your earliest memories growing up in Zvinigorotka, which was about 100 miles from Kiev. What do you remember?) I don't remember anything about Zvinigorotka because when I was four years old we moved to Boguslav. Before the revolution my father was an owner of a big store. We had a house. But after the Revolution, the government took the store from us, and the house, too. After that we rented a little apartment. When I was six years old, I started the gymnasium. Then the gymnasium became a school, and I went to school.

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(Who lived in your house with you?) My grandmother, my father's mother. Her name was Sima. And father and mother. (Do you have any brothers and sisters?) I have a younger sister. Her name is Sima. My grandmother died, and then my little sister was born.

(For some reason, your family moved to Zvinigorotka...) [ISAAC: From Zvinigorotka to Boguslav.] (But they must have gone from Zvinigorotka to Boguslav...) [ISAAC: No, in the other direction.]

I was born in Zvinigorotka and moved to Boguslav. (But your father was born in Boguslav.) Yes. (So he had to leave Boguslav...) My father always lived in Boguslav, but he came to visit. For four years we went from Zvinigorotka to Boguslav. It's not far. I lived with my mother for about four years, and then we went to Boguslav.

(What kind of store was it?) It sold flour. (Was it a mill, too?) No, just a store. (But you did a big business in getting the flour from the mill. It came from the mill to your father's store, and then it was sold.) Yes. (So after the government took away this store, what did your father do for a living?) After they took

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everything away, in general, *kol'khozy* hadn't been organized yet - I don't remember. He worked with some kind of private commercial dealings - I don't even know how to describe it exactly. He traveled a lot, to Moscow. He sold things, like flour. He bought it in one place and sold it in another, like a salesman, because he had contacts with p... or other things.

(By this time he's employed by the government?) No. (He's working for himself?) Yes. (Who owns the flour that he's selling?) He just bought it from some peasants and transported it to Moscow, to Kiev, and other big cities, and sold it there.

(Paulina, do you have any memories of what life was like in the early years after the Revolution. You would have been very young, but do you remember any effects the Revolution had on your life?) There were *pogroms*. We lived in Boguslav. This was in 1919. I was five-and-a-half. [The family is arguing about whether or not *pogroms* also occurred before the Revolution, but Paulina is arguing that she doesn't remember, so she doesn't want to comment on that.] We suffered, of course, and mainly Jews. So the

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Russian population hid us. One man, his name was Krashchinkov, who rented the first floor of the house to my father, he saved us many times. He would hide us in the basement. And when it became really dangerous, papa ran with us and hid in little villages.

(Did you see anybody after a *pogrom* that was injured?) Well, I was five-and-a-half. On the square you could see people who were hanged. (What kind of people were they?) Jewish. (Because they were shop owners...) No, because they were Jewish people. [ISAAC: At this time on the Ukraine there are several groups, like gangsters, Mosno, Zelyonij, Pekljura, anarchist-nationalists.]

They tore up apartments, stole things and killed people. They burned the houses. (So you didn't actually see the violence, but you remember seeing people hanged?) Yes, on the square. (Did that make you nervous; did you have nightmares?) I was very afraid. I couldn't sleep. My parents took me away so I wouldn't have to see it.

(Do you remember any political conversations in your home when you were growing up?) Yes, I remember later how

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the Soviets took everything away, and papa became, basically, nobody. He went to work at the *kol'khoz* [collective farm] in Boguslav. I finished school, so I could study. I was supposed to become something in the family. Because papa didn't have any kind of specialty so he went to work at the *kol'khoz*. [ISAAC: These were organized in the thirties for people who had nothing. They made everyone collective farmers.]

So he went to work as a collective farmer, and he got a piece of paper for this, and that's why I could study. So I came from the village to Kiev, and I continued to study. Before I went to medical school, I needed a paper that I work somewhere because I was from that kind of family - not farmers or workers. So when I was fourteen years old, I went to work in a factory for about one year. Then I could go to medical school with this piece of paper.

(What kind of factory?) Knitwear. A weaving machine.  
(What did you do?) I took the spools and needles and spun threads. In 1927 I arrived in Kiev. I finished school and went right to Kiev, worked, and went to medical school. I lived with my aunt and uncle, father's brother. After that

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I lived one year in the dormitory of the medical school. After that, my father left his work at the *kol'khoz* and came to Kiev, and I lived with my father and he worked at a big factory. This factory made some things for the military, for ships.

(While you were growing up, what language was spoken?)  
Russian. My mother spoke good Yiddish. I spoke Russian. My grandmother and grandfather were very religious.  
[ISAAC: My grandfather was very religious, and he did services in the home. I remember, it was in the 1940s.]

(In the home, did you have the holiday celebrations secretly?)

When it was still allowed, in the 1920s, we went to my grandmother's, my mother's parents, at Zvinigorotka to celebrate all the holidays. (So you had matzos for Pesach?) Yes. And the four questions of my grandfather, I did in Yiddish, on Passover. (Were you able to get matzos? When did it become impossible to get it?) In Kiev there wasn't any. That means in 1927 there wasn't any. In Boguslav, it was illegal. We baked it ourselves. My mother baked it at home illegally. Even in recent years it's

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illegal in Khar'kov, the same thing. There they receive matzos from Riga or Moscow. Nobody could go to the store and buy it.

(So, you were able to start medical school. In those days, the Soviets didn't have a policy, stated or unstated, against Jewish students?) No. It was normal. (So when you went to medical school, you were treated like the other students?) Yes. (What percentage of your class was Jewish?) Some. About 20%. (Was that about the population of Jews in the area?) I don't remember, it didn't matter to me. At the institute there were a lot in our group.

(So teachers treated you alike, and you felt that you had the same opportunities?) Yes. I graduated with honors.

(What made you decide to do pediatrics?) I like children. It was easier to get into the pediatrics department than in some of the other departments. The competition was about eight students to one spot. There was a bit better chance, it was a surer thing, so I applied there. I studied in the medical school. In the medical school there



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were two specialties - pediatrics and gynecology. So I chose pediatrics.

(Were your friends in medical school mostly Russian, Jewish, or a mix?) Some of each, but mostly Jewish people. (When did you meet Naum?) I was already in my first year of institute. It was in 1929. I was in the last level of the medical school, when my parents moved to a new apartment. [ISAAC: My father's relatives were her parents' neighbors. So they met first.] (So it was just a coincidence?) [ISAAC: Yes. My father said that she made a ring, encircled him.] (How long until you decided to get married?) About two years.

(At this point, how did you feel about socialism? Did you see good in it for the people, or did your family still feel it was a bad thing?) I didn't think anything about it. We simply didn't know anything different. My father spoke very negatively about it. He called the government *burvasy* - people who have no shoes. A bad government.

[ISAAC: They didn't have enough money. They lived in a one-room apartment. The apartments around have many

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rooms, but about four families live in the apartment. So one room for one family. The room has dimensions like this [points].]

(Who was in the family at this point?) Father, mother, me and my sister in one room.

(What was the wedding like?) There wasn't any kind of wedding. We went to ZAGS and signed the papers, and in the evening we went to the movies. Then he went home to his place, and I went home to mine. We didn't have an apartment. Then, some time passed. We got married December 2, 1934. After some time, my aunt, who lived in the same apartment said that this wasn't right that the husband and wife don't live together. And she said they could live with her in her room.

(Did you finish school about the same time?) [ISAAC: My father finished in 1936, and my mother finished in 1938.]

(When you finished, 1938, it's very close to the war. What happened between the time you finished and the war began?) At that time my husband worked, so he went to a

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little town called Stary Oskol, and after I graduated, I went with my son to where my husband was. (So Isaac was born while you were a student?) Yes. (Who takes care of the baby while you're in school?) My mother and father.

(Did you have the baby in the hospital?) In the hospital. (Did you have good care?) We had everything the same as everybody else. My husband's uncle worked in this hospital and my husband was an "A" student and came any time. [NAUM: We gave birth together.]

(How long did you remain in the hospital after you gave birth?) For us it's seven days. (When you graduated, you and Naum were separated?) [ISAAC: No, because my father was chief of the hospital in this place, they gave directions for my mother to go to the same place.

(Was that a nice time in your life, when you were both working there?) We were young, so everything was good. Things didn't seem so hard. [ISAAC: But this wasn't a good time for the country, because in 1937 one of the biggest processes to kill people began.]

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Then everything got bad. There weren't really any Jews left. We left and lived with my father in Kiev.

(What kind of purges were these? There was unrest...)  
[ISAAC: I want to go back two years because my mother said that because my father was a good student that he can continue his education. But at that time, when the government continues faster the pushing of Jews, he can't get his Ph.D., and they have to go to work in another city.]

(So things have changed about the attitude of educating the Jews equally to the others.) [ISAAC: Yes. She went to the station called Old Oskol the year 1936. My mother at that time continued her studies, so they lived apart. I lived with my mother, and he lived alone for two years. From 1938 to 1940 we lived together there and in 1940 he came back to Kiev and went to work on his Ph.D. He worked with a famous medical professor in Kiev, Gubergritz.]

At that time we didn't have an apartment. We lived with my parents.

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(Were you able to join the Komsomol?) No, never. (So the two of you weren't politically oriented at all?) No.

(1941 and Naum enlisted. What did you do?) When the war began, Naum was in Kiev. I was working. On July 5, 1941, Naum took us, my son and I, and my parents and sister, and we all got on a cattle train. The train is heading East - we didn't know where. Naum stayed and went into the army. (Where did you end up?) We would get out and hide, and get back on, all along the railroad. Then we ended up in Stalingrad, which is now Volgograd. All the people on this train went to the sports stadium. We were there no less than two days. My father, mother, son, sister. (Was she married by then?) Yes, and she was pregnant at that time. Her husband went into the army, too. (Did they serve together?) Yes. (But he wasn't a medical person...) He was a student in teachers' college, but he hadn't graduated yet. So he went with Naum and worked as an assistant to him. He was in the Komsomol.

(Now Naum had to join something because his superior wanted him to.) That was later.

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(When you went to Stalingrad, who would you say was in charge of the family? Who was making the decisions?) I did! [laughs] (The reason I ask is because your father was with you..) My father was horribly depressed at that time. After two days we came by ship to Astrakhan. It was on the Volga river by the Caspian Sea. We traveled very slowly, about one day. Then we arrived in Astrakhan, and I set off to work. We got an apartment. Then some time passed, and my husband found us via Moscow, through some letters to my uncle. [ISAAC: My father sent us a special document that helps support us for living. For persons who are in the war, they give special document for supporting.]

Money for food. Money. That's it. And we lived in Astrakhan, before the German army came to Stalingrad in 1942. Then Astrakhan was bombed horribly. Then we took a ship and went East to Uralsk, and then to Guryev, also on the Caspian Sea. We were there three weeks. Then we went to Bashkiryeve, near Ufa, because at that time, my mother's sisters lived there. (What republic is this?) Russia. But it's an autonomous region - the Bashkirian Autonomous Republic. We were in a little village called Rayevka, near

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Ufa. We lived here about one year. (With your aunts?)

Yes.

(And they were good to you?) We had very little room. We were on a *kol'khoz*. My aunt worked as an accountant/bookkeeper so we can live. Then I wanted to work and couldn't because they didn't have a medical office, but I did some work and was paid in food. Then we moved to Buguruslan, where I found work at the clinic there.

(How did you feel then?) Badly, I worried a lot. My son was sick. He had bronchitis. The work there was hard - there was a lot of horrible work. My sister already had her baby, and we lived together. There wasn't enough money, enough food.

(How did you keep your spirits up?) In addition to what I said before, at that time I began to feel anti-semitism. I couldn't imagine the end of the war.

(How long did you remain there?) Until the end of the war - until 1945. In 1945, my husband came, and we went to Kiev. (There was one time during the war that you saw your

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husband.) In 1944. I was sick. He had a vacation of ten days. (You developed a stomach ulcer, and you were going to have to have surgery.) Yes. I had an operation in Germany.

(You did have that meeting that was a surprise, where you didn't expect to meet at the train station. Can you describe from your point of view what happened?) [laughs] I was very sick, and my sister, who at that time lived in another city with her husband, decided to send me to Moscow for medical consultations. So I had to go to the town where they lived - Sorochinsk, not far from our place. And that night, along the way, we had to stop in Kuibyshev. We were standing in the train station. I couldn't even buy a ticket. I sat there for twenty-four hours and waited. There were so many officers at the station, I said it would be very nice to find my husband there. There was an old lady who said to me, that in reality it can't happen. I went to get a drink of water, and suddenly someone came and put his arms around me from the back.

(How did you know it was him?) [laughs] [SK: There's Rus. & Eng. here and I can't understand either one!] It was horrible! And I couldn't believe it had happened.



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Then we set off for my sister's. We were in Buguruslan and Naum came to Buguruslan, and he doesn't have enough days off, so he took Isaac and my mother, and we all went to Sorochinsk and met at the station. (So Naum wasn't alone. He had the rest of the family.) Yes. That night, when my father stayed at this station in Kuibyshev, Naum went through Kuibyshev on the train to Buguruslan, and then he came and saw that I had gone to Sorochinsk, he went back to find me. [ISAAC: I was already in school. I was very surprised.] [spelling of Kuibyshev]

(So you were together for just a few days.) A few. And then we went to Moscow. I stayed there for consultations in the hospital. My husband went back to the army, and I went back. (When they treated you in Moscow, they did not do any surgery?) The doctors in Moscow gave another diagnosis, but it was a mistake, considering what we know now. So they didn't do the surgery or anything. But it was ulcers.

(So from that point on you just waited until the war was over?) Yes. (At the end of the war, did you want to go back to the same city, or did you have to go back?)

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[ISAAC: We wanted to go. My father wanted to continue his education. But he didn't receive permission to go from the army at that time.]

(When you returned to Kiev, was your father better?)  
He didn't work by this time. But I worked. My sister worked. We all lived together.

(What year was it you went to Germany?) In 1946.  
(About your father...) [ISAAC: He wasn't exactly depressed. He was a man who didn't say many words. He was very sick with high blood pressure. After the Revolution, the whole time, he cannot feel like a free person. Life for him was very hard.] (He's about 68 years old.) Yes. The blood pressure was very high. There was not enough medication.

(So, Paulina, you went back to work at a hospital in Kiev. What was the name of the hospital?) The Kiev Regional Children's Polyclinic and Hospital. (So you were there about a year before you went to Germany?) Yes.

(What were conditions like there? Were there children who had been harmed during the war? Malnutrition?) Of course

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there were children there who were just exhausted, who had various children's illnesses. But sometimes there were children who came from other cities to Kiev, who hadn't had enough to eat, so they were malnourished. But of course there were regular illnesses. In Astrakhan there was a high children's death rate from the measles, because they couldn't acclimatize.

(How did you find out you'd be going to Germany?)

[ISAAC: My father received permission, most people did, that the family can go live together.] (He went first?) He was in this place already working as the chief of this hospital. And then we came. (How was it in Germany?)

[ISAAC: For us it was a much better and easier life, because there was food, and a nice place to stay.]

An apartment, a house! [ISAAC: Even after the war we didn't have such a nice apartment as we had in Germany. A famous doctor had lived there, who during Hitler's time killed himself. His wife lived on the first floor, and we lived on the second floor. Her children live in Argentina.] (These were Jewish?) [No, German. She wasn't

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Jewish, but she was anti-fascist.] She was a beautiful frau, lady.

(That's when you had your surgery, when you came there?) [ISAAC: After some time, she had her surgery. But before the surgery, Boris was born. In 1947. After, my mother had her surgery.]

SECOND INTERVIEW WITH DR. PAULINA GINSBURG

January 8, 1991

Interviewers: E. Snyderman and Margot Hirsch, interviewers (Also present are her husband, Dr. Naum Ginsburg and son Isaac Ginsburg, who translates.)

(When we left off last time we were at the point where you had just joined your husband in Weimar. What were your impressions of Weimar and what was your life like there?)

We were happy because we were together after a long time and the war was over. Things were easier. Here there was enough food and conditions for life were much better.

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There were no problems such as we had in Russia during and after the war.

(Was it that life was freer too?)

I felt free. We lived in a private house and I felt my husband's support. Before I was the support. I felt very free. (Isaac: I think at that time they were not thinking of political freedom. Because they had other feelings. Many times they had been separated so now they were together and didn't think about the interior behavior of people. That wasn't important at that time.)

(Would you describe this as a second honeymoon?)

(Laughing) Yes!

(Were you working at this time?) The first time when I came I studied biochemistry and I began working in the laboratory of the hospital as a biochemical doctor. They didn't need a pediatrician at that time. After a period of time I began working again and continued for a year and a half.

I trained in a hospital training laboratory in Yenna, very close to Weimar, about 25 kilometers. Then I worked

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in a clinic for children. Professor Ibrain, a very famous professor practiced in this clinic. He talked with me and asked me some questions and I knew the answer so he knew I understood. I had studied some German so I knew enough to communicate.

(Who was taking care of Isaac?)

He was in fifth grade in Weimar. (Isaac: When I came home my mother was at home.) He attended a Russian school and studied in Russian.

(Did you learn German?)

[Isaac: Everyone else around me was German, except for a few Russian children, so I learned German. In Yenna where we lived there were maybe three Russian children.]

[Isaac: In Weimar there were many Russian soldiers and officers. The chief of the army and his officers stayed there. In Yenna the Soviet division was located. This was at one end of the city and we lived near father's hospital at the other, separate from the others. There were many Russian children and in Yenna there was a school from first to fourth grade. In Weimar from fifth to tenth grade, so I

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began to study in Yenna when I was in fourth grade. When I finished fourth grade I started fifth in Weimar.

(Paulina, your son was in school and you could pursue your personal career but were you worried about your parents in Russia now?) My parents and my sister stayed in Kiev. Economics changed and things were very bad at that time. So I sent packages from Germany and my husband sent money, a special kind... After the war the anti-semitism in the Soviet Union became very bad. It began in 1946 and by 1948 it was a very dangerous time for Jewish people. In 1948 it was the time of "Cosmopolitanism."

(In Germany you did not feel anti-semitism?)

From the German people who communicated with me, I didn't. Their behavior was good. We lived in the house of a professor who had been a known anti-fascist and his wife was a lady, very friendly.

(Did you live in the whole house?) The house was three levels. The wife of the professor lived on the first level. We lived on the second level and on the third level

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lived two women, one German, one Russian who worked at the hospital.

(How did your living arrangements compare to what you had in Russia?)

(Laughter) Even now, in the Soviet Union, I don't think anyone lives as Russians did after the war! [In Germany] we had five rooms, a big hall, a bedroom, the children's room, a living room, a cabinet for my husband, a big kitchen, bathroom, a special room for a refrigerator. The furniture was there.

I kept it very well. I was afraid to damage this furniture. At that time the Germans didn't have enough fuel and when it was cold we invited the frau in our apartment. In Russia we had one room and in this room was everything and the whole family all lived in it. We had no refrigerator. We cannot compare. Everyday I cooked. Even now, people who live by Soviet standards that are Okay, don't live as well as we did then.

(When did you arrive in Germany?) Approximately May, 1946 and we remained until approximately summer of 1948.



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(And your son Boris was born there in 1947?) Yes, August 11, in the hospital in Yenna. (How was that, compared to Isaac's birth in Russia?)

In Germany where Boris was born we had a separate room and he was with me. In Kiev there was one big room where many women gave birth together at the same time. The children were kept in another room, sometimes two in one bed, in Russia.

(So you felt the conditions were more advanced for the care of the mother and the child in Germany?) Yes, but at the time in the Soviet military hospital there were no gynecologists. So that the care was better [in that respect] in Russia.

(How did you feel when it was time to return?)

We wanted to go back to Russia because my parents and sister were there. I had had surgery and I thought I could get better care [recovering] from my mother and sister.

(Isaac: But I think it was important for them to go back to Russia and be with the family and my father wanted to be with his teacher in Kiev).

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(When did you have the surgery?)

Approximately, May 1948. This was the reason why my husband got permission to return. He took care of the military chief who didn't want to let him go back to the Soviet Union because he took care of the generals. The chief of the army came to see me in the hospital and I asked him for permission to go, so he said we could leave.

(You might have remained in Germany until the army left, because the generals liked Naum's care so much?)  
Yes.

(What were your living arrangements when you returned?)

[Isaac: They returned to the same apartment, which had six rooms, to the same room. After they returned from the army, my father was given a second room.]

In these two rooms lived our family, mother's parents, and my sister and her husband who received a third room. They had a boy who was born during the war, in 1942 and a girl born right at that time.

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(Now you're all crowded together after being used to privacy. How did the family interact at that time?) It was not easy to live together, except with our family. It was the other families that were difficult. There was one kitchen for everybody to use. Another room was completely destroyed during the war.

(Did you have facilities outside?)

[Isaac: We went to a bathhouse once a week. In the kitchen there was cold running water. I think that the most important thing is that two of the neighbor families had had a deal with the Germans. After the war they remained in the same apartment and they were very anti-semitic people. In the Soviet Union at that time anybody could write to the KGB and say that other people were bad and the KGB could look at what is happening. So it was terrible.]

(Did you have problems with the KGB? What were they?)

[Isaac: My father did.]

The first was I was afraid that because the kitchen was open to everybody that someone could poison the meat. That was a terrible time. My mother and I were afraid that

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when we went into the kitchen this one woman would begin to hit us. Her name was Eugenia Maslinikoya.

[Isaac: Because she wrote many letters to the KGB, the judge knew her and was afraid of how to deal with her. But because my father worked in the hospital at this time, they didn't do anything. They kept the papers on file but didn't do anything.]

This continued the whole time and that's why we left this apartment. We lived like this until 1953.

(Was only the woman harassing you or did her husband also?) Just the wife.

(Were you practicing medicine at the time?)

Yes, my mother took care of the whole family then, the cooking, the cleaning. My sister and I both worked. She was a doctor of chemistry and worked at a clinic. We were working and stayed out of the kitchen!

(Where did you go in 1953? That was after Stalin's death, the year after the "Doctor's Plot" trial.)

Anti-semitic tension was very strong, and if something was wrong or somebody thought something was wrong, they

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could do anything to Jewish doctors. So the tension was very strong but I didn't have any problems.

(Were you practicing pediatrics at the time?)

[Isaac: Yes, she was. In Russia there are special offices and hospitals, that are separate. In this medical office people come and say that they don't feel very well and want to stay at home. The doctor can take care of them and give them a special permit to stay home. But when their health is too bad, they can be sent with a special prescription to the hospital.]

(But your mother is taking care of children.)

[Isaac: Yes, but for children it's the same thing.]

[Naum: I remember what happened at that time with my chief.] (We got that in the interview.)

(After Stalin's death did things change for you?)

It became easier to "breathe."

[Isaac: My mother was not a supervisor but a regular doctor so she did not feel as pressed from the government because she took care of sick children and communicated with the parents, so it's not like my father who was chief of staff. Second, they lived separately because my father

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went to Dnepropetrovsk in 1951. We moved there in 1953.  
In 1954 we moved together to Kharkov.]

(How long did you stay in Kharkov?)

[Isaac: Until 1989.] (How were your living conditions?)

[Isaac: Our living conditions were much better. In Dnepropetrovsk and in Kharkov we had two rooms in a separate apartment.]

We had a refrigerator now. No neighbor!

[Isaac: After that grandmother came to live with us. She took care of the family until the last two years of her life.]

(Are you practicing medicine in Kharkov?)

Yes.

(What about the anti-semitism there?)

There I didn't feel anti-semitism toward me personally.

(You recognized anti-semitism in the streets; do you mean you saw slogans...?) [Isaac: No, not slogans. In newspapers, never in the Soviet Union, not ever, but there are right words in newspapers. But ... she didn't feel, except when I want to come to the institute. When Jewish

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students come, they feel it and their parents feel it too, how it's bad.] (This is about 1954?) [I came to institute in 1953.]

(Do you feel you were able to accomplish what you wanted to in your place of work?) [Isaac: Maybe, she didn't think about this. She can't work in special hospital like she wants. All time she works in the office, polyclinic. If you feel bad, you can come to this office and say you feel bad. She'll give some prescriptions, and then they go home. If they feel good after that time, they go to work. So she cannot look at these people a long time.] (She isn't treating them.) Right. Better for doctors when they work in big hospitals. They take care... (Was this because of anti-semitism?) Yes, because of anti-semitism.

(When did you see any signs of the movement for Jews to leave the Soviet Union. Did you see anything happening at that time? Did you see any underground books or papers? Were you aware of any political activities going on around you that were against the government?)

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Everyone was afraid for many years, and they didn't talk about political things, because anybody could be a KGB agent. So in this time I didn't know anyone like that. But later, in 1973 I worked with a doctor whose niece emigrated to Israel, but that was in 1974. (Did she have any problems after her niece emigrated?) She had various unpleasantries. This doctor, her name was Brunina. Before this happened, she shared an apartment with another family, and the husband in that family was a military officer. And maybe he, maybe somebody else, told the KGB, that she was listening to the Israel radio, so she had a problem with the KGB at that time. And during the Six Days' War the Russian doctors said in their office that if they cared they would go to Egypt and beat Israel.

(So these were Russian doctors who expressed such dislike for the victory of the Israelis.) Yes. And this lady, for that she was in the KGB about twelve hours. She was in this building. (They were questioning her?) After a long time the KGB yelled at her and told her that she was s....., and if she continued, she would be put in jail. After that, she was let go, and that was the end of it.



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(Did that discourage you from discussing politics at home, or did you privately talk about some of these things?) [Isaac: No, I listened to the radio and we talked about it. I didn't like the Soviet government.]

(Did you allow him to talk about politics at home, or did you try to keep him quiet?) [Isaac: My father didn't like it, but she let me say what I wanted. But they said that I must be very careful and not talk in other places about it.]

(At that point you're [Isaac] in your early twenties when you're talking about politics?) Yes.

(At this time are you thinking about possibly leaving the USSR?) [Isaac: They began to think about it when I was kicked out of college, in 1976. This is a time when people began to go from the Soviet Union.] (What happened in 1976 that made you start talking about leaving Russia?) [Paulina says in Russian that, yes, it was when he got kicked out of the school.]

[Isaac: My father was very disappointed. He didn't think that could happen. Some other professor in my

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college was... Before he cannot think that it can happen because he was in a strong position. When it happened and I cannot find a job, he went to the Party Committee and told them. But after some time he understood that they didn't really help. He began to think about leaving. But he can't because he was a long time in the army and at that time it's not enough time to go.]

(Because he knew--) He did not know. He was a doctor! And I cannot leave because I was in military college, so I have a special document that I know something.

(Was this a bad time for your family, the 1970s, or were you just getting along, doing Okay?) [Isaac: For my family it was a shock that I left school. But after some time I began to work. After that, everyone calmed down.] (So it's not getting better for your family, it's getting worse. You're still working...)

[Isaac: No, my mother at that time was retired, but she worked part time, as a consultant. Part-time she came to the medical office and helped.] (So the work was not even as high a level as it had been?) [Yes.]

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(What happened that made you decide to go? Your granddaughter, Anna?) [Isaac: Yes.] (And how old is Anna?) [Now she is thirty.] (What kind of work is she doing?) She's a computer programmer. (And she said, "Let's get out of here?") Yes. (What made her say it?) The children, and Boris. I don't talk much about it because I was afraid my father was ill. And he was very bad at that time because it's a heart condition, and I was afraid to move him. But Anna and Boris, they talked about this. And Isaac. [And then Anna wrote to a friend in Israel without telling my mother, to send the invitation. Then we received the invitation and were ready to go.] (What year was that?) 1988. (It took that long...) Yes.

(How did you feel when you got the visa?)

[Isaac: Visa or invitation?] (How long between the invitation and the visa?) Oh, it's about two months. (Were you happy or did you have some mixed emotions about this?) [I had mixed emotions.] My husband didn't feel too well. One son didn't receive an invitation. (Isaac: My brother was the only one in the family who didn't receive an invitation. Everybody received one, even the parents of

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my son-in-law. Only Boris didn't receive one. Then, only after many times his friend, who was in the United States, brought an invitation from the United States. But it was in September, so he was late and he cannot come here. He had to go to Israel.)

(So for whatever reasons....) I think it's special.... [Because my brother didn't receive it they are destroyed because we are one family. But we think that we can be after some time together. But my mother was very strong.]

(Were you the tough one in the family?) I don't know! We made decisions. (What did you say, what did you do to support everyone?) [Isaac: It's not easy to explain, but I think that my mother all the time told something good to my father. But my father didn't tell anybody he didn't feel good, but my daughter saw it and so she cried, and when he saw that, he understood that he must be strong, and so he became strong and his behavior was very strong and he didn't want to destroy our plans. I think he gained courage.] (He became braver for the sake of Anna..) Yes.

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(I'm going to ask your mother some questions about what she thought and felt, looking back, before she left. I'll tell you what the questions are... Easy questions, if she can answer them... Looking back on life in Russia, what was the worst time for you?) The war. (What was the best time?) Well, my youth, when I studied, when I graduated from institute and had children.

(What were you able to take with you personally that was precious and important to you from your past in Russia? I know Naum took his wonderful medals and I saw some of the pictures in your family album. That obviously was one of the precious things...) My children! [laughs] My grandchildren. The pictures.

(Sometimes in a family there's a menorah...) [Isaac: She had a ring from her grandfather. It's not very expensive/valuable.] I had to leave it there. [Isaac: At Customs, the officer didn't permit it.] (Do you think he kept it for himself?) No, no. She gave it to Boris and to her sister.

(What is your philosophy of life? You've had such upheaval in your life, so many changes... Talking to your

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son, both of you had to be very good parents, because he's a together person, a decent, fine person. What is this philosophy you have?) We raised our children to be honest, decent, hard-working, have a good attitude towards people, friendship and support in the family.

(What are your hopes now for your children? Isaac is here and looking for work. Boris is in Israel. What did he do in Russia and what does he do in Israel?) [Isaac: Boris is a mathematician. He has a Ph.D. in mathematics. In the Soviet Union he was a professor in a college. In Israel now he works like the people who rent apartments.] (Like a rental agent?) Right. (So he is not able to use his training and skills...) The language problem. He must learn Hebrew. Anna bought the tickets for my parents and they applied for the passports to go to Israel.

(When would you go?) As soon as they receive the travel passports. I think it may be the end of the month, because we applied in December. In the Office of Immigration and Naturalization, they said 30-60 days.

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(What surprises did you have when you came here?)

Freedom. You don't have to be afraid to say what you think. People's friendliness, nice friendly people who are helpful and kindhearted. [Isaac: At the community center there are volunteers who want to help.] (Are they talking about the Gross family?) Yes. And some other people we communicate with. So very friendly people. You cannot find the same in the Soviet Union. This is very surprising.

(But there are disappointments, too. Were you disappointed about certain things?) That Boris is in Israel. (What are the prospects of your all living together? Is there a possibility?)

[Isaac: We know that after five years living... people can go if they want from Israel. So if he wants after five years, he can come to the United States, because Israel is a free country too. I don't know if he wants to ... His children are very happy and they write such interesting letters about how they are happy that it is surprising for us.]

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We've never been separated from our grandsons, so we feel upset. We're upset that Isaac and his wife haven't found work yet. (You've been here how long exactly?) We came in 1989, September 28. One year and four months.

(What do you miss from Russia?) The people. My parents' graves. One sister. (Where is she?) She lives in Cherkassu, it's not far from Kharkov. Her son lives in Kharkov. (Is there a chance that they will come here?) They didn't think about it because her son's wife is a young lady but she is very sick. She cannot move. It's a very hard arthritis. She cannot move all parts of her legs and arms. Many medicines she took, and nothing helped her. And she is forty. And friends.

(Why did you come to Chicago?) [Isaac: Because my very good friend who is my school friend came here twelve years ago, and he is our sponsor. His name is Boris Silverstein.]

(We've covered a lot of ground. I'd like to ask if there was something you'd like to talk about that I didn't



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ask about. This is an opportunity to say those things.) I think I told about everything.

(Margot just reminded me there was a question I was saving about your experience after Chernobyl, whether you thought that any of the children were affected by the radiation. How did the whole nuclear accident affect you and what you observed?) In general, the radiation was in Kiev. Some relatives are in Kiev so when it happened my niece with her child came to Kharkov and lived maybe one month there. They have some tests done. All members of the family had some tests, but they didn't feel anything. But some doctors who came to Chernobyl at that time and who worked with me had some problems with their blood. There were changes in the blood. (Anemia?) Anemia. (So you yourself were not looking at children?) [Isaac: She didn't work.]

(Were people angry with the government about how they handled it?) [Isaac: Of course all people were angry.] (Did they talk about it publicly?) At that time all people could talk publicly about the government. Because at first the government didn't inform people. Many days later they

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gave information. Then there are other reasons why they built in that place where there is very good agriculture. Why the quality is so bad? Not only there, but people understand that something happened.

(Paulina, do you think the environment is permanently polluted there?) [Isaac: I think the cover of the reactor is not so strong. Some parts were destroyed. But pollution in the Soviet Union is so big that maybe it's not the worst thing. For many people in the Soviet Union there are the Ural Mountains. And there are many plants that made such strong pollution. In the 1950s they had the same thing like Chernobyl, but nobody knew about it.] (Another nuclear disaster?) [Yes, and many other disasters. What is surprising for us when we came to the United States, I don't believe in all information that I can read in Soviet newspapers. But when they tell about pollution in the U.S., I thought it possible because there are too many cars. But when I came to the U.S., I was surprised at how clean the air is. You can't compare this to any air in Soviet cities. In Soviet cities it's much worse.]

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(So you feel the concern about the environment is better here?) Yes. I know that Chicago is not the best place for this, but it's much better than any place in the Soviet Union.