

LENA GORYUNOV
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Lena was born in Kiev in 1954 Her father was a mechanic. Lena remembers that postwar Russia was very difficult and there was much antisemitism. During WWII the family was relocated from Kiev to Armenia. Her grandfather was very religious and went to synagogue. The family celebrated Jewish holidays only at home in private. She never even told her son, Eugene, that he was Jewish until they came to America.

Lena passed the exams for university but because she was Jewish she wasn't admitted and had to go to the Agriculture Institute. Lena describes the educational system in detail and stated there was a lot of bribery unfairness. She mentioned that her husband's institute had called him to warn him that he would be thrown out if found out he had been to synagogue.

Lena and her husband, Sergei, met after graduation and were lucky to get their own apartment away from living with parents. She describes how the living accommodations worked. After Eugene was born Lena stayed home for 3 1/2 years. She had wanted to emigrate but they were refused permission. After they applied to leave Sergei, a computer programmer, was dismissed from his job and couldn't find another decent one. He finally found a job with low pay. They waited 10 years to emigrate. Being a refusenik was a terrible time when they had trouble finding enough food and enough clothing. Lena said she spent half her life on lines for food or other necessities and often there were empty shelves in food stores.

Lena stated they were not told much about Chernobyl. When she finally realized the dangerous effects for her young son, she sent him to Moscow for 6 months. The government had not told them anything about this tragedy; they found out from the Voice of America radio.

Lena and her family left December 1988 through Austria and Italy and finally arrived in US in 1989. Sergei quickly found a job though a friend. Lena's in laws initially came with them and her parents followed later. Lena is glad her parents sent her to English school at an early ages she was prepared for the move.