

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

MILA "M"

Architect
Moscow Institute of Architecture

BIRTH: 1954, Obuchava

SPOUSE: Victor "M", 1952, Moscow
Married in 1984

CHILDREN: Larry, 1976, Moscow

PARENTS: Arseny K., 1927, Obuchava
Nellie N., 1929, Obuchava

SIBLINGS:

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of
Chicago

NAME: **MILA "M."**

DATE: March 20, 1990

INTERVIEWER: Elaine Snyderman

I was born in 1952, in Obuchava, in the vicinity of Moscow. It is a little town about twenty-five miles from Moscow. I graduated from the Moscow Institute of Architecture in 1981 with a Masters Degree. I worked at the State Company for Housing, also worked in the Society of Moscow Architects, this is like your A.I.A. here (The American Institute of Architects). I organized a congress of architecture, we helped deal with some problems in the Soviet Union.

My father, Arseny, was born in Obuchava in 1927, the same place I was born. My mother, Nellie, was born in 1929. I

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have a brother who is five years younger than I. He is still in Russia. Victor and I were married in 1981.

My life in Russia was much different than my husband's. As I remember, from my very early childhood, the Soviet government, not like the religious tradition because it was not positive. My father was born into a quite rich family before the Revolution and in the place where I was born there was a kind of textile factory. It did not belong to my father's grandfather. He worked closely with the owner and he had a good house and was the manager. They were very proud, and he was very strong and relatively wealthy. When the Revolution came my grandfather was very smart, he gave up everything to survive. He gave the factory to the new government and they became very, very poor. My grandmother had five children. They survived but they were very hungry, my grandmother told me. And, my mother told me that this happened when she was very young. And my grandmother committed suicide after that. This was about the time of the Stalin purges of the 1930's.

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This happened in the Ukraine and her uncle took care of my mother after her parents died. That is why they felt what they felt and they dropped everything.

My father, when he was fourteen years old he went to the army by himself. He was one of the ones sent to make the trenches for the defense of Moscow. They would not allow the Fascist army to enter Moscow. But even young people, eighteen years old, and younger, were sent there. There was no purpose because there was no way to defend what they had. And it was true because they were sent a few miles to the West from Moscow. So there was a risk of being taken prisoner by the Germans. So he and another little boy decided to get rid of this stupid situation and they walked, just walked, about one hundred twenty miles. And they came back, somebody informed the local government about this and they were considered deserters. He was between fourteen and fifteen when this happened. So my grandmother was required to go to the place and somebody dragged her, someone threatened her and told her they were going to kill him, the young boy. So, in a couple of years he was able to go by himself to the war and he went into Leningrad (the siege of Leningrad?) and he went to sea

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with the military - with the navy. He was in the Navy for nine years.

He continued his training but he was wounded from his war service, he had a contusion and other injuries, so he needed to come back home, and he did. He wanted to be an artist but there was no one to give him studies. In spite of his desire to be an architect (?) he wanted. But he continued to draw and he had some talent. He taught me to draw.

All my childhood we had, I remember how he drew!

What he was doing for work, was a joke. He worked in a textile factory, (?) he did some very useful stuff, he made some inventions for this factory. They appreciated him as much as they could. He was in charge and then when I was little he was very poor. We lived in a very poor apartment. My parents try to live, not even near here. My father was very sincere with me, even when I was very young. He explained to me everything about Soviet power, etc.

My mother worked at the same factory and worked with a group of sixteen other artists. She was the designer of

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carpets, ornamental carpets. She did just the design. My parents met at the factory and then they got married.

I went to public school in Obuchava and I sort of trained to be an artist very early. Then I decided to go to architectural school and my parents also supported me in this. I went to architectural school and it was a great time. I was very happy in this school.

I got married very young, and I was stupid. So after five years we were divorced. I met the man who is my husband now after I went to the Institute in Moscow, after my graduation. Then I was looking for a new, and more interesting, job. I worked at my studies, but it came quickly to me. I had some knowledge of architecture from earlier. I had very good communications with people and good language so I helped organize people and ideas. I have very strange feeling, as long as I worked at the Institute of Soviet Architecture in Moscow, I understood how simple ? the top people, educated, they have money in comparison to other people. and the Society of Architects in Moscow was invited to go abroad, to make some tours, to make contact with

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other people at other countries. So I noticed how people worked together and how the ways they used together.

----- with membership in Communist Party and we were directed to that department that direct the job like we do because it was a kind of theoretical field in architecture. Architectural ideas and theories, and new ideas sort of like a "think tank", but they were directed and even the best people were Soviets (?) and I found it very frustrating.

It was no big deal to cancel from your idea they could cancel it all at once in front of a lot of people. The party people could cancel such projects publicly or privately but just knocked out by someone who could get more out of something else. I was a person who was very committed to the society but it seems to me that the air was full of black lies, everything. I could not respect these people.

As to my childhood, my mother was a Jew, my father was Russian, and my father's family was Christian so they followed Christian traditions, they celebrate some Russian Christian holidays but that was it. My mother was brought up

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she sometimes didn't even mention

I did not have the word, Jewish, on my records, only the records of my father, so this did not affect me as a child. I know that for some people it was a real problem. My husband was lucky that it was not a real problem. Some times I think some people exaggerate to get more sympathy - prosecution, or persecution, something like that. Russians, here, they have a tendency to exaggerate, 'they were persecuted, they were almost killed, etc.,' sometimes this is not true, sometimes it is not comfortable to be a Jew. I feel that I am Russian, I'm sorry about that, I felt very comfortable as a Russian. When I felt uncomfortable with the people who lied and did not appreciate the work of others, I was not troubled, I was disgusted. It was not from the point of being Jewish, but just as a Russian.

Of course, I often thought of leaving Russia, of going to America, it was always a kind of dream when I was young. I used to draw pictures of America when I was a child - I even dreamed about it. Probably from reading different things about it, from magazines, or just from my imagination. But,

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for as long as I lived I was interested in America. You know, it is a shame to feel that you are not free.

//??? You have to stand in long lines for food and for other stupid things. A lot of time was just wasted.

When I was working, I was working eight hours a day and I had my son at home. My son was alone at home after school. When he came back, sometimes he would spend time with his friends and more simply he was home. He was in day care until, well when he was born we lived in student housing and they had a kindergarten for the infants, there were about twenty babies to one nurse, sometimes even more. There was a second person who sort of assisted the teacher. They really didn't worry too much about changing every child's diaper and things like that. I didn't worry too much about this, because I was very busy and studying a lot, and this was just the natural way to do things. He was fine, he turned out well.

(What did you get there? did you get it from your father? your mother?) It is a carpet (?) I got it from everybody, from all Russians. ??

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After my work day or classes, then I would go to the store usually every other day to buy food. Sometimes I would go to the store at lunchtime to get milk and take it home and then sometimes go to another store before you go back to work. They are trying to adjust this. Sometimes there is a little deceit in leaving the office to do this.

Sometimes I would leave work - well we both had an opportunity to go to the cooperative at night after work, that's why I sometimes spend many hours working late. Then Victor would go and sometimes my mother would get the food. Sometimes, it was a sort of trick to arrange this shopping between my free time, Victor's free time and my mother's free time, it was tricky to do. We managed, it was really tough. Women have much more to do over there, than men. Here there is no trouble getting food, just too many choices.

So, my childhood dreams of America were sort of filed away because I was so busy with husband, study and family. It was not until there was a shift in politics that these dreams again became important to me. I saw people making progress not because of ability but because they schemed and worked to achieve this in devious ways. I felt this was very unjust.

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But this is the way to make your career now. I was ready to share my ideas and I like to be surrounded by smart people. I did very well there, probably I could do a kind of career but I felt I had to sell my soul to sell my programs, which I felt were very good.

The ideas for Symposia, I developed at the Architectural Society, then I would invite experts in the specific areas to come and make presentations. I just organized between different people and I was a coordinator. I felt that my ideas, my creativity, just all went into one big place and it was a real ideological problem in Russia. Things could always be cancelled by someone farther up the political chain, no matter how good an idea was, if they disliked it - they did not have to give a reason. This I found very frustrating. I felt it was a stupid system.

I was the one in the house who first said "Let's fly.", but we had talked often in the house. But, though my husband was concerned about his parents who would be staying, I convinced him it was time to go. My parents actually were ready to leave with us.

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ADDENDUM-MILA A.:

(Follow-up interview at the home of Victor and Mila A., Elaine Snyderman, interviewer.)

To discuss our expectations and what we actually met here it is not a simple question, life is very complicated. I met things here that I could not expect. Some people call it "cultural shock" or just a new style of life. I would say we made a great step, a very strong step, and it demands from us to review everything that we had before, that we learned before, that we met before, so we have probably had to revise some of the ideas that we had before about America.

It doesn't mean that it is worse than we expected, I would say it is even better than we expected in some respects because we were lucky, we found jobs and this is not easy for most people who come here and we are trying to do everything to help ourself in a professional way. That is what I think is most important.

(Last time I asked you things, but I did not pick up on all the things to get fuller explanations. You told us about how the Revolution changed your father's life - How?)

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Actually, it was my grandfather's life that was changed, not my father's. My great-grandfather's family. They had obtained property in the vicinity of Moscow, a sort of textile factory and they had a little store that just served the surrounding community.

I think they had very good masters, very good owners, and they gave people work and they paid for this. They were respectable people.

But when the chaos happened and the terrible things began everything was changed. I knew, I heard it from my father, that my great-grandfather was very smart man and he predicted for himself that this terror would be for a very long time. That is why he did not reject giving everything he had and he did give away everything that he had - his house, his property, his money and his belongings. It was not a huge amount because he was not a millionaire but they were quite comfortable. The family was big, they had five children and my grandmother told me that after a the terrible years of the Revolution in Russia people were absolutely hungry. My grandmother then sold some of her jewelry to buy food for the family. They were terrible years, just worrying about food for your children.

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So, my father had a very poor childhood. I was told this by him. This was my father's mother. When he was sixteen he left his home and went to World War II, because he knew that in one year they would ask him to go to the army anyway. So he left his home and he went to Leningrad and he took an apartment after World War II and he spent nine years there after the war.

They were terrible years, he told me. Because it was under Stalin and everything was very strictly regimented.

During his years in the Navy my father had a few very dangerous situations with the authorities because he was close to being arrested. He was very young, he didn't always cover up his feelings, he was very open.

He and his friends went to prepare defense, in the vicinity of Moscow, from the West Side of Moscow, where Hitler's Army was approaching. And they had to prepare defence, lines, trenches, etc., it was very terrible because they were close to being captured by Hitler's army and there was no way to survive, even. Many orders that were provided

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at that time were very stupid because they were incompetent people giving the orders. This is why thousands of people were murdered. They wouldn't send tanks.

Everything was complex and different orders were crossing, and they sent just boys to do this work, they were not trained. That is why they tried to avoid the situation.

Actually, only a couple of days after he and his friend left that terrible place, people who had been working with them were captured and shipped away to prison. Actually, my father was only fourteen when he was sent on this defense detail.

My grandmother had to go to the place where they were arrested. They arrested and threatened them with being murdered if they told anyone about where they had been. They were told this defense was very secret and very important.

(You mentioned something about something very bad that happened in your mother's family, and then your grandmother committed suicide, what was that?) My grandfather was arrested and probably murdered. This was in the middle of the

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30s. The first arrests under Stalin began in 1932-33 but the big terror began in 1937. My grandfather was a kind of political person but not on the high level, not a big politician or in the Communist Party. He was like an activist and there were a lot of people like that, especially after the Revolution and I really don't know whether he had Communist ideas or not but some of them were just deceived and were just followers of these ideas and they were young and idealistic and tried to follow the ideas of Marx, Lenin, and everybody was going to save the country and make it better.

This grandfather was sort of work activist and he used to work in some of the main cities in the South of Russia, doing propaganda of some sort. He was a paid organizer of the Communist Party and I really don't know what happened. Whether he changed his point of view or what. It is really a sort of dark spot in our family history and I do not know many of the details.

My mother would never discuss any of this with us. She was only a little more than six years old when this happened. Her mother, my grandmother, was very young, she was in her twenties and her life was such a struggle that she could not

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put up with it and that is why she committed suicide. My mother was an only child and she was sent to her uncle's home in Karkov, a Ukrainian city. It is very difficult living with someone else's family. She was sent several times from family to family. She was treated very kindly but still felt an outsider. She never talked much about this, she is a very discreet person. She did not tell us much about this.

She did receive an education eventually. She came to Moscow to another uncle who took care of her and she graduated from a certain college in Moscow. In order to have her own life, to be independent, to find a job, she had to leave Moscow after her graduation because it was very difficult to keep living in Moscow.

They assigned the graduates from Moscow to smaller cities. The same thing happened with Victor's parents.

It is really different to live in a province. Of course, people would like to stay because of the level of living in Moscow.

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She was doing a kind of artist's job in textiles. She designed things.

My father had to leave the army because of injuries and contusions received, so he went to visit his parents and they went on vacation together and that is when he met my mother, and decided to stay with her.

My father was very artistic and worked in the textile factory. Since his childhood he tried, he dreamt about being an artist, a painter. All my childhood I was provided with pictures. He made copies of the greatest artists. He like the Dutch artists, like classical, and he only liked Russian artists who were classical in form. He was very traditional and classical in his tastes. It was very tough living with him in my youth because of the difference in our tastes. Of course, I respected his taste. He regretted that he could not further his education in this way. He had no opportunity to get any artistic education as we have done.

My mother had formal training in textile design. My father graduated from college also, after a few attempts that failed when a scholarship was impossible for him to attain for

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an art education. So he began to work in a mechanical field. He was very talented and everything that he gets in his hands works well.

He did some great stuff for that factory where he worked. People there respected him very much. He is one of the persons whose name is pronounced with respect. He was technically very skilled and he was also an inventor. He invented a few machines that actually helped to work in the factory surroundings, because some of the studies say that in the textile factories there are some chemical and other specific dangers for the workers. To help people he invented a special ventilation system.

He tried to invent a machine that would go on the Moon. He was not mad but just very talented in his inventions and his imagination. Probably it was his creative outlet.

Perhaps the correct translation of the title for the group we formed would be the Institute for Soviet Architects.

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(What caused you to be disenchanted with your work?) I think it was just a slow process to get disillusioned. This is sort of actually what gets everybody who ---

(So, you got your permission to leave and then they tried to persuade Victor to stay?) Well, it just happened like a funny story for us. Like they say, I was nervous. So in March we got the permission, and on June 28, they call me. Pretty fast, we started what we had to do before we made this great step in our life. We had nothing valuable to sell, to save, nothing we could take with us. We sold some of our art books and mostly presented them to our friends. When it came to buying our tickets we did not have enough money. Our parents helped a little, some little we tried to save, I sold my very good coat. It was a good Canadian leather and very difficult to get it in Russia.

We collected a lot. Our furniture was left there but without this and that. Pretty fast we became ready to go and I found some friends, some connections, to get tickets because there were long lines even at that time, two years ago. We decided to go in September, eventually. Some friends saw us off, but not many. Now it is already two years ago.

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I miss my parents, my best friends, a little spirit - it was very strong in Russia between friends. In the surrounding you create, even in your life, you know. This is what I don't have here. Girlfriends who are architects, it was something special for me our conversations and evenings together. Of course I miss my youth and my student times but that is just part of going away.

It is an easy question to answer, about my job and what I am doing here because everything I am doing here - it is just too much, too much good and too much bitterness. Despite a very good situation in how I found the job and I actually have been there more than a year. All my American experience provides real difficulty, problems with the language, to accept life. And it is my own ambitions that seem to cause problems because I have ambitions to be treated like a professional, because I had this treatment in Russia. To be accepted, to be respected, and I know my capabilities just get wasted here. I know my skills can be expanded, and this I do step by step, every day, but it is a real struggle.

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When I first came here we decided Victor would apply for architectural job and I would just do charts, etc., because it is much easier, it does not take as much time as architecture. This is a real elite position here and we don't have time for this. So I do this job and it is Okay, but it is just my way how I feel, my way how I walk, my way how I talk, and the way I need to be treated and accepted.

When I started in this office, (Oh my God, that was so bitter!) I did the most stupid thing in my life that I could ever imagine. Nobody trusted me. What was my experience in Russia, what did it actually mean? Nobody could believe the kind of education I had in Russia, so, without the language it troubled me so much because the first weeks just were close to the death of me from the tension, from trying to understand what people are saying! Particularly in the English languages, you know, slang, your daily kind of language, it is difficult, it is not at all like public radio, every day. People talk quickly, they didn't pay attention to whether I knew the language or not. Some kind people tried to do it nicely but not-kind people took no time. But this is my problem, I know that, I don't blame them. I am blaming myself because I thought I could have prepared better. You know I

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took German in Russia and that is why I took some private classes before immigration and I did it very fast and very quick, I picked up everything quickly. So I decided that after a few months experience in my office I would put into this all the time and energy I had, all the money, and I would keep talking to get an education. I went and took the most expensive and probably the better school in the United States, maybe in Chicago, I don't know, the Berlitz School, a private school of learning languages. It helped me lot particularly in conversation, and even in really reading also. It helped me in getting a vocabulary and in understanding what others say. It depends sometimes on pronunciation. And right now, the tension is gone and, step by step, I was doing my work the best I can do.

We are now doing office designs, like banks, hospitals, etc. Right now we are working on one for Weiss Hospital in Chicago, a renovation. Space planning. And the big job that I took part in was the new building for Sears. They are going to move.

I am very proud of myself because I tried to do a very good job. It is very complicated to communicate in a new

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language without being able to express myself as I could in Russian. So, I am doing Okay, I am doing Okay, and I always believed in my star and when we came here we met a very nice man, he is an architect, and he is president in the "all for one, one for all" (?) architectural firm in Chicago. My previous connection in Moscow, he told us, when we met together with Victor, "Guys, you are beginning a new life in a professional field in Chicago and you will go very slow. It will be very difficult for you and it will seem impossibly slow at first."

And this is true, because my previous experience helped me so much and I feel comfortable working here. I do the things that some others cannot do: creatively, it is like Europe and the School of Architects - it is different. I think we were taught to be more creative than here. They are very pragmatic, they know some catalogues and the things that they were taught but very often they are not able to handle the pencil, the brush, to do the actual art work. They are very often just not sharp. And it is very encouraging to me.

(And now, your son is in a completely different environment?) Yes, we sent him to the Jewish Day School and I am

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sorry but we are actually disappointed in their level of education. We thought he would get a more serious education there, more control, more discipline. Maybe a different school might have it. I think the Jewish schools are better than any others here. He is in Seventh Grade and we do not know what our plans will be for him. Right now we are getting a scholarship for him so that we can afford the Day School and if we change I think he would have to go to a public school and I definitely do not think that would be better. It is a dilemma, it is a very serious question because he is doing all right there but he is a very uneducated type of person. He did not have the proper type of schooling in Russia that would help him here, he did not have any early Jewish education. He tries to adjust in his own way.

In Russia, they teach probably the same subjects in Seventh Grade as they do here but much differently, much more seriously and in greater depth. They study Literature but they are able to compose, they are doing composition, here it is a kind of play, they don't try. They don't even have it to do. And children, especially in Russia - maybe we talk too much about our way but it is a better school in Moscow; a

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better Architectural School in Russia. Maybe we will understand the new approach, but to us it seems that the Russian education is more controlled and disciplined.

Of course we would like to send him to a private high school but it is too expensive.

He hasn't brought home the school discussions about Jewish culture and *kashruth*, because he knows that I am so busy that I am so involved with work. We are not really involved with these observances from our childhood and for us it meant something weird, a different way of living. We think about this, we think about the spiritual and the customs and the way to a Russian.

Of course, he has asked me not to buy ham and something like this, and I do it. I do it without any difficulty, it is fine with me.

(What do you hope for Larry in the future?) I like that he was able to get a good education, because I think this is very important. I think human beings who understand this world, who have more knowledge, extend this world with

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intelligence. I think it is very important that we keep him reading and I hope he never knows the problems like we had in Russia, the difficulties, and to bring him up in the expectation of doing good for people; to have good taste in everything, to have good taste in creating his surroundings, creating his life, to like and to be close to his roots.

To create a new life with good friends. Because he left very good close friends in Russia. They were special children, some of them. One of them was the grandchild of a very famous composer, and they were so smart, so good. They arranged everything very interestingly in their own life, their children's life. I think he misses them very much and he tries to keep this to himself, inside himself.

I think that maybe we review the tape and what is written and maybe you will have questions, that maybe something is not clear for you and we can talk more. It is very difficult for me to explain briefly what I felt when I started working, and if it important for this conversation, maybe we should do more of this.

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I told you this was the last step, why I am here doing this, because in comparison with other Russians I have good position, a good life, a good salary and I have people who are envious of me. The society of Moscow and what I did. I have feelings and I am really not completely satisfied with what I have said. Maybe next time when you will come, maybe I can even write for myself what I want to explain to you because right now I am trying to use and to find those meanings.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT FROM MILA A.:

(We are talking about the possessions that were sold to be able to come on this trip. Mila, how did you feel about selling all those things?) I never tried to collect things, and I guess I just felt so much freedom facing the new future in America. I was prepared for this emotionally, physically and I felt free and it didn't bother me that I didn't have valuable things to bring with me.

(Now, you are here and from what I have learned, you have acquired more things here than you had there. [Yeah, right!] These things include - what?) Okay, it is really funny to say that the things that you can see around us right now, we didn't

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have them in Russia. I mean, the stereo system, some appliances in my kitchen, but it doesn't mean so much for us.

Of course, you know we can go and buy stereo systems, new TV and new coat and stuff like this, but the most important thing is the way I feel in myself. I feel free, I feel interest in my life, in my future. Even if I meet difficulties, even if I meet them again, I keep the curiosity and interest in life and it helps me. It helps me because it seems to me that since I am here, I have a new life. My previous life just happened, it is over, I feel enthusiastic about it. In spite of many, many difficulties, psychological difficulties, language difficulties and things like that. I see it as a new beginning.

(Now, you said that you just saw friends, after two years, who have just come from the Soviet Union, and there was such a big difference between you. What were the differences? How do you explain them? Who changed?)

I changed and this let me have a look, a new look at people and their values and their lives. The thing is, if people have a problem, like buying shoes, or a piece of meat for their children, they have problems behind - a root problem.

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Because, it seems to me, I have a root problem. Tomorrow I might be fired.

I work at the Epstein International Engineering and Architectural Company. I work for the Interior Department and, it seems to me that we are facing the real problem. The problem is to buy shoes and soap, that gets strange. And people are involved in this. It means they like to think (? the man is ?), not stupid, but beyond human imagination, I mean civilization.

(In other words, let me see if I understand, your friends were saying, "We couldn't get soap or shoes", you are saying "I'm worried about my job." She doesn't have to worry about her job, she will have a job. Okay. So you feel - again, correct me - what she was worried about was little stuff.)

This little stuff is very important for her, but not for me. That is why our values and some meaning doesn't cross each other. They are, like, on different surfaces. For her it is very difficult to understand our problems because we have this stuff, that stuff, you know, in comparison with what they have in Russia. (This is a Jewish friend?) She is half-

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Jewish. (Is she here on a visit?) Yes. (Does she want to come here?) Maybe, but she hasn't decided yet. Because, for me, I would say, it was plain in Russia - emigrate or not emigrate. I felt that, and we did.

She came here to look around to see if it was better or not better, and she can see a lot of very strange things are happening, in comparison with Russia. Things that she knows, like she knows Kiev, she always compares her life with the life of her relatives life here. She has relatives in Washington. How they save money - how they spend money - how they live, and she tries to find mistakes, where they are at fault. She criticizes everything because, she is misunderstanding why they do this, or not that. Like all Russians, they just trying to force, to push, you know, it is not true; it is not right; you have to do it this way. It is a particularly Russian attitude. [The Russian way is the right way, to direct somebody, and to explain to somebody else, that this is good, this is Okay with you.- Victor]

(I would like to go back because there were some questions I didn't ask you before. Did you ever go to a Jewish wedding, a Jewish funeral, a Jewish circumcision, in the Soviet Union?)

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No, never. I didn't know even one experience like this. (Have you been to anything like that since you have been here in the United States?) Our son's circumcision; and we have been one time in our friend's family.

(What was it like to be at your son's circumcision?) Ha! Okay, I think it is absolutely a different point, starting point, for our son. He wanted to do it by himself, after he came back from summer camp. He probably wanted to be the same as the other boys. I think this is the more important part of it. He asked us and we decided to do it, no problem. (Were you upset while it was being done?) No. Absolutely! (And a *mohel* did it? Where was this done?) It was done in the hospital but we asked the synagogue to help us, the Free Synagogue on California, so we went through the synagogue thing and prepared for this. They helped us to make the arrangements. And they provided everything, the *mohel* and all, and they paid for it.

Perhaps we didn't put a great meaning on this. The case that I saw in our friend's family is different because this is their life, the boy was born and they should do this to be involved in the spirit of something, you know. (Which came

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first, that *brit* or Larry's?) Our son's came first. (What were your feelings about the second one?) I felt a little sorry for this little child and his mother. Solemn, because many friends and grown up people get together and celebrate this event. It was something for them and I felt that it meant something. (Did any of that relate to the feelings you had, or was it strange?) Not strange, because I am a person who can accept strange things. I would say it was a new experience, and that's it.

(I asked your husband this too and it is a very hard question to ask, I have trouble phrasing it. Now that you are part of this Jewish community, you recognize something from your past, something that you share with these people, whether it is some rituals or some way of looking at life, or something. What is this identification with the Jewish community that you have?)

It is really a tough question. I would like to discover it and find out (?). We came into the Jewish community, I don't know, maybe I would have had another experience in another community. We came here people were very kind to us, including our neighbors and people around us. They keep

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trying to help, to give advice, but they did not push. That is what I like very much. I don't feel that I am really involved in serious religious procedures and rituals. Maybe it is too late for this, for me, I don't know. But, it is really interesting to see that part of the contemporary life that includes even the part of strange community. Like the Jewish Orthodox, for example, in the contemporary life you can see a lot of people who have a right to be what they want to be and to live like they want to live and nobody cares. It is phenomenal! I think it is great, because people have rights to be what they want to be. It was, I would say, the strongest feeling that I felt about the Jewish community here. It can exist and I can see it!

(It was alien for you, but it affected you emotionally? Maybe you would feel this way if you saw American Indians?)

Exactly right. It was like a fact of the new style in the contemporary life as different from our old style. It was the freedom of choice - they want to live like this, so they live this way. I don't feel that I would follow their examples, probably not. In fact, we met a few quite young religious Jewish families here. They invited us for their Friday night, and we spent a few times in their houses and

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apartments here. It was fun and - we recognized some of the Jewish foods, we had eaten them in Russia. Foods like stuffed fish, and it was great! very tasty, and very delicious. It was like a tradition that people expected. It was ground up fish, like gefilte fish.

In Russia, ethnic food, was like a lot of Asian food, the middle-Asian food. Not much Jewish ethnic food. Matzo was very hard to get, but most good synagogues let people buy it. (How old were you the first time you tasted matzo?) Maybe fifteen; it was in the family of my uncle. But it was not something special. People mentioned it, you know.

(One of the things I didn't realize was that Larry's natural father was Jewish.) Hmmm - half-Jewish. This was not something I considered when I married him, it was just a coincidence. He was an architect, we were students when we met and married each other, when I entered the architectural school. (Did it matter to you that Victor was Jewish, or half-Jewish, when you met him?) For him, I think it was important that I was Jewish or not. For me, all my life I spent in a circle of Jewish people, Jewish friends in Architectural School. It was just natural to be among Jews. Nobody

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paid attention that it said Russian on my passport. I would say that Russians always accepted me like a Jew, Jewish always accepted me like a Russian. Ha!

(So you lived to both worlds. Comfortably?) Comfortably? You know my point of view about Russia and the regimentation. It is terrible. (Do you think that is a Jewish thing? To be against regimentation? To be against the idea of government handing down rules about how people should think?) No, I would say that this applies to all people in Russia. I don't see that it applies more to Jews. I think that all the people I knew felt this way. It is not just a Jewish perception.

(To wind this up, I wondered if there were any questions that I didn't ask that you would like to talk about, any summary you would like to make at this point? Anything you feel we should have talked about?)

I think if everything works for you and is clear for you. If you don't think something is clear, just feel free and call me and we can do this again. I really enjoyed this. I'm sorry that we delayed this.