

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

**VLADIMIR REZNIKOV**

**Student**  
**University of Illinois at Circle Campus**

BIRTH: May 16, 1970, Moscow

SPOUSE:

CHILDREN:

PARENTS: Gennady Reznikov, April 16, 1937, Moscow

Sulamith Shternberg Reznikov, August 11, 1937, Moscow

SIBLINGS: Sergey, 1965, Moscow

Michael, 1979, Moscow

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Wolf (Vladimir) Shternberg, 1903-1964, Dunaevtsa

Malkah Rubinstein Shternberg, 1906-1984, Dunaevtsa

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Lev Reznikov, 1904-1979, Ukraine

Sofia Libinson Reznikov, 1907- , Moscow

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

NAME: **VLADIMIR REZNIKOV**

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INTERVIEWER: E. Snyderman

(Vladimir, you're twenty years old. You were born in 1970 in Moscow. Can you tell me what you're earliest memories are growing up?) My very first memory, I remember how I was trying to climb the stairs or a chair, but that's not very clear memories. My more later memories were of some events when I hit my head or when I fell out of the train onto the tracks.

(How did that happen?) My father went from the train to buy something in the station and my mother didn't want me to go after him, but I ran out and there was some distance between the train and the platform and I fell between the platform and the train, and as far as I remember I lost consciousness and I was operated on, and I still have some of the scars. (How old were you then?) I was four years old.

(There was another child in the family? You're the second child?) Yes. My brother's name is Sergey and today

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he is twenty-five. (So he was about nine at the time.) He was there with my mother and he probably wasn't as daring as I was. (You were the troublemaker then?) I didn't think of myself then that I was, but probably yes. (So your earliest memory is being disobedient?) I think all of us were.

(So you recovered from this... Then what do you recall? Did you grow up in the same household?) Yes, I grew up in the same household and the first years of my life I went to the schools and communicated, socialized with almost the same people all the time that were in my house-yard or in the school in this area. (What part of Moscow was it that you grew up in?) It was southwest part of Moscow where now are the streets Profsojuznaja and we lived on the street Butlerova, which is a small street between Profsojuznaja and Volgina Street. (Was there anything special about the area that would be interesting historically?) I can't think of anything because probably Moscow as far as I know is not strictly divided into areas like western cities are, so I'm not sure the area does give any color to the people or to anything in this area.

(Were there other Jews in the area?) I was aware of some Jews who were in my classes, that live in this area, but it didn't make a big difference for me until probably I was already in my late teens, I think. (Just before you left the country....) Before I graduated from high school.

(You grew up in a household where there was some political interest and some activity. When did you first become aware of this political activity?) First I remember when I was

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probably, I don't even remember, maybe when I was nine or when I was eight, somewhere in between six and ten, I believe, that my parents were discussing the question of leaving Russia for America or for Israel. But it probably didn't have any political context. But politically speaking I think I became aware much later when.... First I think I was more interested in Jewishness and I was beginning to become acquainted with Jewish traditions rather than with political ideas.

(How did that happen, that you were aware of Jewish traditions? Did your grandparents live with you?) No, my grandparents didn't live with us. But one of our grandparents would visit very often because she was retired and she would help my mother with the household business. (Which grandparents was this?) That was my mother's mother. And she would come. But regarding the question of political ideas, I think first I began speaking politically when our house was visited by some foreigners, like Western people, who would come to visit [us] as refuseniks.

(Do you know how your family made its first contact with these foreign visitors?) I believe that we were put into refusal in 1979 when I was nine, and our first visitors were in 1983, so I think it occurred besides my parents awareness of that... I think that American institutions or organizations who had these lists of refuseniks and people who need help, and they finally got our name on these lists and we were probably called by phone or by whatever means, and my parents, I believe, met with them and that was our first acquaintance.

(How did you become aware of your Jewishness? Was this

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a positive thing or was it negative?) I think it was... I knew that it all was positive. Another thing was that I had some experiences which were not positive, but it never occurred to me that I was ashamed or that I ever regretted that I was a Jew. (How do you explain this, because many of the Soviet Jewish immigrants we meet say initially they were very unhappy at discovering that they were Jewish, that they were called bad names. Why is it different for you?) I think because of my parents, who, from the beginning, from the start when I began to deal with the fact that I was Jewish, they would explain or they would give me some things to read about Jews. So I read books like by Howard Fast, about [...], I don't know the name of the book. *My Glorious Brothers*, or something. (It was historical fiction based on....) based on the Macabee stories. And I read other books. I began reading the Bible, and I read the Israeli Russian-language journals like Israel Today. And it was very exciting for me, and it was even more exciting because it was forbidden to have these things, so...

(So these forbidden things were being brought to you by these foreign visitors? Did they mail things to you?) No, I think usually they would come to us through other people who got them from somewhere, but I think that initially they were brought by some visitors from abroad. (So how old were you when you started reading these things?) I was ten. I remember exactly because that was the summer of 1980 when I was in the house of some people who had all this literature and I began reading it and I was very interested in all this stuff, and it was probably my beginnings of my self-enlightening education and interest.

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(Were your parents still working at this time, or were they allowed to keep their jobs once they became refuseniks?) Once they became refuseniks they changed their jobs. And actually, after this my mother gave birth to my younger brother who is now almost twelve, Michael. After that, he was born in February 1979, and we got refused in October 1979, and after that she wouldn't work. (She chose not to work?) She chose not to work, and probably wouldn't be able to if she did want to, so she knew that it was a dead end and she didn't work. (What work had she been doing?) She was in engineering construction, so she would make drafts and all that.

(And your father?) Before refusal, he decided to go by the path of not dissident, but, say, someone who thinks otherwise. He was an engineer in engineering chemistry, and I believe in 1977, two years before we applied for a visa to leave Russia, he had to quit his job because of the secrecy matters, which was the first job. And later he changed his job to a less profitable, but still he could support us partially.

(So how did your family survive during this period when you were only supported partially by your father?) I suppose that a big chunk of it was aid from the foreign visitors, from Europe, from the States, and rarely, from Israel. And there were people who were helping us from the refuseniks community because they would get the same material aid from the West, so that's probably how we survived, because like once in awhile we'd get some presents which would support our life. (What kind of presents were they?) It could be clothing, like coats, like if we would get a coat that cost three months' salary or

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more. (In dollars what would that be equivalent to? A month's salary for your father at that time?) That's a hard thing to say because Russian rubles are quite different from dollars. Especially when it comes to paying the rent, say, if you should pay the rent in hundreds of dollars, there you should pay tens of dollars. Our apartment cost was about thirty rubles, whereas in the States the same apartment would cost like \$600 a month. That was the main difference, probably, between the cost. Food would cost less than in the States as well, like maybe half as much, in the terms of one ruble to one dollar. But so my father's salary was like just enough to pay for the food and pay for the rent, nothing else. That wouldn't be enough for anything else.

(Did you feel deprived? Did you feel that you were missing things that you needed in your life at that time?) I knew that I was deprived, but thanks to my great parents who would raise me in a way that I would be happy with whatever I had, so I knew that I don't have those things, but I never felt it. I always was satisfied with what I had. (So you weren't hungry, and you had a roof over your head?) Yes. (And you were warm enough in the winter?) Yes, definitely. Thank God.

(Your sense of Judaism came from some religious observances, traditional observances. What kind of holidays do you remember being celebrated?) I believe that none of them were celebrated up until probably 1983 when I had bar mitzvah and my father would become acquainted with some religious leaders of the Jewish community in Moscow, and after that we celebrated some of the holidays, like Pesach, Purim. They were not like

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strictly observed by the rules of Jewish tradition, but we knew that they were holidays and we would have dinner or we would have some friends, or, say, American guests, or European guests who led the Seder or the Purim dinner or whatever.

(So you actually had a Bar Mitzvah? I think you're the first young man I've met who had one in Russia.) I don't think that it was a really strict Bar Mitzvah in the religious terms. I didn't go to the synagogue. I knew that I had twins in London and in Pennsylvania and in a couple more places around the world, who prayed in my name, but I didn't go to the synagogue and I didn't have any religious ceremony. (So you did not, for example, read from the Torah?) No, I did not. (Did you ever see a Torah while you were there?) Yes, I definitely saw. When I was thirteen, I believe, I saw one from a long distance, or I saw one in Russian translation which I read. I think, by the age of thirteen I read the Torah in Russian translation which was not quite Torah but the Christian Bible in Russian translation, but whatever. It was still a Torah. But later on I saw a Torah and I even read some of it, not before an altar, but just for myself. (Have you had an opportunity to study Hebrew?) That's a good question, because when I was fourteen I was very interested in Hebrew, and I found people in Moscow who were studying Hebrew, and who were teaching Hebrew, and I tried to attend a couple courses. And after that some way, I don't remember how, my connection with them was lost, and the only thing that I had in my hands was this self-taught book of Hebrew which I started, actually. I started by myself. And later on my parents, my father in particular, and my brother, were interested in Hebrew, and we got a teacher. But that was already later on, and by that



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time I already knew Hebrew enough not to have to attend these courses. In this particular case I think my story is quite different from what usually you would have in Russia with Hebrew and a Jewish education.

(So you had the advantage of knowing other people who had the same need to pursue the Jewish studies, the Hebraic Studies, to learn the traditions, and that was a support group, you might say. You all supported each other somehow.) Definitely. I think that being in refusal all these years was meant very much to have good friends, to have people who think alike and who have the same hopes and the same faith, who will help each other. (Of those people, what percentage of them has been able to emigrate to Israel and the United States?) I think by now if not 100%, maybe 95% of them have emigrated to either of these two countries. But back then it was not the case, and people whom I knew began emigrating in 1986-87, and by 1990 almost all of them have left Russia.

(How did being Jewish affect your thinking?) I think that first, it gave me a sense of responsibility, that I couldn't do something that probably other people could do, like steal, or do something that is clearly not advised or forbidden by the Torah, if I knew that. Because in Russia children don't have such a law as the Christian law because they have State law, but they would steal or something if they want to. And I remember sometimes that sometimes Jewish religion would prohibit it and I would stop doing it. (So you were tempted sometimes...) Yes. (For example...) Yeah, I remember how I would walk with my friends from grade school, and they would come into the store and would want to steal

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some buns or something, just to do it, because it was very easy to steal anything from the store. And I wouldn't do that. I couldn't stop them all, by any means, but I remember how I thought of this. Here you have something where you should be different from these people, and have this moral idea behind that. Even though later I didn't think that I'm different in this sense that they can do it and I can't. (Were these all non-Jewish friends who would do this, or were there some Jewish friends as well?) I didn't think of their Jewishness in particular at that time. I just knew that I'm Jewish. I think they were not Jewish.

(Were you aware of your parents worries?) Sometimes yes. Sometimes maybe not fully aware, because I believe they always had some worries and not all of them they wanted to reveal to us, or even if they did, not all of them did I understand well. So I'm not sure I can answer this question, because I don't know all their worries. (Were you worried about anything?) I don't know, actually, because I didn't worry exactly. I knew that I did worry, but I don't remember how I worried. I remember that after I knew that our family wanted to leave, I knew that I wanted to leave, too, and I was looking to it every day, like checking my mailbox where the announcement for our permission to leave should have appeared. But I don't remember my exact worries, at least before I was like sixteen or seventeen I didn't worry much. Actually, I think I was pretty happy, because we had some purpose in life. We had some faith. We had people with whom we could share all that. So probably it was full of ideas and purpose and sense life.

(Did your family worry about being watched by the secret

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police?) I think they were aware of it, but my father would often say that we didn't do anything against the law, so even though they felt they were being watched or being heard, I don't think my father was worried about what he was saying because we didn't go against the law even if we would express some unusual or nonconformist ideas. It was not against the law, and we didn't do anything against the system, besides probably being out of it, being exceptions to it.

(He told me that when he was growing up, his older brother was brought in for questioning after demonstrations, but were there any incidents among your family or friends? Were they questioned or detained or followed?) I know that when I was in high school, there were people who were questioned about this and that. Our high school was a very good one. It was a math school where many Jewish people went. And that's why, probably, the principal of this school was very afraid that the authorities didn't like this school because of its Jewish population. They wanted to finish it by all means if they could. And the principal, who wanted to prevent the school from actual disaster, tried to eliminate all people or ideas which were non-conformist. So she expelled a couple of people because of their Zionist or religious activity. And she would ask other people if they know anybody who does that, but I think it was done with the great idea of preserving school from destruction from above.

(You're saying that it was like a hotbed of dissidence.) Yeah, there was dissidence there. And the principal was trying to prevent this dissidence from going off the limits of the school building. Because in this case the school would

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be eliminated as a fact, and that's why she didn't want it, because it was a very good school. But many Jews went there and they liked it and that would be a disaster if officials would find some reason to dissolve it. (So was she effective in what she tried to do?) She was effective, yes. She expelled a couple of my friends. And she even wanted to expel me, but I stopped very quickly, and because I just know that it's better not to talk about Jewishness and not to have any propaganda or information about being Jewish in the religious or social matters. The school existed for study, not propaganda. So I stopped. But there was a time when they wanted to expel me for participating in like, Purim celebration, etc.

(So she was aware of meetings where you would have songs or parties?) Yes, definitely. (Was there any printed matter?) No. No printed matter. (But the group was not secretive about it. They wanted a public...) Actually, it wasn't a group. It was just people who were Jews who sometimes would gather and sing songs, etc., and tell stories. And that was a little bit dangerous, probably, for the existence of the school itself, and that's why our principal wanted to prevent it from closing.

(You were saying that this was a pretty good school and you didn't want to lose your place in it, and you wanted it to remain open, and the emphasis was on mathematics?) The emphasis of the study was on math, but all teachers, almost all teachers and subjects were taught very well, and their standards of education were very high. To get into this school, one had to pass three or four rounds of exams. (At what age did you take those exams?) When I was fifteen. So

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I was there at fifteen, sixteen and seventeen. Three years.

(It was a competitive school. How did you do there?) I think I was doing well. I would not get worse grades than I got in other schools, and they were better sometimes. But it amounted to hard work, so I worked there as a student, and I studied hard. And I liked it very much. (Did you actually complete the course of study there, or did you leave before that?) Oh, I completed the course of study. And even after that I went to one of the higher schools in Moscow.

(Which school did you go to?) I went to the Institute of Railway Engineering, and my course of study was applied math and software engineering. (Do you think you would have been allowed to pursue the level of studies you wished there had you stayed?) I hope yes. I think so. Because even at that time there were some hints for the bettering or improving of the situation with respect to the anti-Jewish discrimination. (Who do you credit for that change?) I think I would credit the worsening of the Soviet economy, which was pushing the government for negotiations with the West, and the West pushing for the improving of human rights in the Soviet Union, and later the flexibility of the Communist leaders, who came to know that they need to improve something inside, like on the social level, and the economic level.

(So that was *perestroika*, the restructuring, and *glasnost* - how would you describe *glasnost*?) I would describe it as everyone can try to say and not be afraid of saying that, and probably publishing it. Because in Russia even now I'm not sure exists the freedom of publishing whatever one wants. And

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the means of, say, publishing, mass production, and copying of the material is very limited. You couldn't find these photocopying machines like here, like xerox machines. And now I've heard that you can find it. But to make a copy it costs a lot and you're not able to make millions of copies--not easily and freely. That's just an example.

(But you were getting publications, prior to *glasnost*, you were seeing these forbidden publications?) Yes. (Was the Bible a forbidden publication or was it allowed to be read?) That's hard to say. I think it was allowed to be published, but as a member of Communist community, like if I'm in the Young Communist League or if I'm a so-called pioneer --it's like boy scouts or girl scouts in Russia-- if I'm in this League, I'm not supposed to read anything that's connected to religion whatsoever. So if I'm reading this, I can have problems in ideological things, with the leaders of this league or the leaders of the community to which I supposedly belong. So actually, there was probably no prohibition for religious literature like the Bible, but there was very strong pressure not to pursue and self-education or whatever education connected with any ideology besides the main Communist one.

(What books do you recall reading that were forbidden?) I think that all books which could; Howard Fast, I'm not sure-- there was not list of forbidden books, or whatever. Forbiddance is something for which you can suffer some losses, such as loss of freedom or loss of work, and probably Howard Fast could amount to these kinds of books because first, it was about Jewishness, so you can say if it's about Jewish

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people in particular, if there's something which is nationalist, and that which is nationalist is conservative, and if it's conservative then it's capitalist, etc. You can make a chain of words such as capitalist or nationalist and conservative and Zionist, and that would lead to anti-Soviet.

(How about some titles - even Soviet authors who were forbidden to you that you might have read when you were of school-age? Whom might you have read at that point?) Actually I didn't read many books which were forbidden because... I knew, I was aware of the existence of these books, but I tried to spend my reading time reading classical literature, which was not forbidden usually, as dissident literature. I read Solzhenitsyn, but I read One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich, but it wasn't forbidden because it was published in Russia. By that time I already lost my basic interest in Jewish - not Jewish, but any dissident - literature, because I was a little bit already educated enough not to read about, say, anti-Soviet things. I knew that it is bad there, so I didn't want to disappoint myself. Then, on second thought, maybe I was trying to read good quality literature, but not just interesting literature. (So who were the writers you were reading then?) Many writers, I don't remember. (You said the classics...) I'm talking about Russian classics, or even American classics. I read almost all of Jack London, almost all of Jules Verne, and I was reading Mark Twain and Galsworthy. I read Salinger. I was reading Russian classics, from Chekhov to Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, all the big names. Bulgakov and many names that maybe are not as well known. I read Graham Greene from this century, as I remember.

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(And this was reading that was assigned in school, or...)  
No. I'm talking about reading that I was doing for myself. If I had time. (Was Shakespeare part of the curriculum?) No, it was not, but I read, not all of Shakespeare, but his basic plays. *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear*. And it was by myself. I would prefer to read this stuff but not dissident literature which was not very good literature as literature, but was very pungent by that time, you know what I mean?

(With the advent of the greater flexibility, the term you used, in government, did you see some change, did you see people responding to this? What kind of response did you see to the government change in terms of the people around you, even in school - the teachers.) I think from the teachers' point of view, there was a big change when it came to the teachers of ideological subjects as history or political science. We didn't have the term sociology, but there were some courses which had some sociology, probably, in them. And these teachers would be very confused. They didn't know what to teach, how to teach - history, say - and Marxism. They didn't know what to do. That was very funny to see because sometimes we would have some materials in our textbooks canceled as wrong or old-fashioned.

(Give me an example of a teacher floundering with some material?) Okay. We had that in 1936 the Communist Party adopted a new constitution. I don't know if you have this, under Stalin's purges. But in 1936 Stalin adopted a new constitution and in our constitution of developed socialism in which it was taken that the Soviet country and the Soviet economy came to the point where they have already achieved the



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Communist basics from which we can build Communism and all this. I don't know the decent word in English which would describe it. All this rubbish. And usually we would learn that in these years from, say, 1932 to 1936, there was a great achievement in all levels of industry and agriculture, etc., etc., and after that they finished with this constitution and everybody in the Soviet Union was utterly happy and utterly satisfied, and everybody was ready and all this rubbish. But when it came to *perestroika* in 1986, we already knew that there was beginning to be published the materials about the purges which began, I believe, in the 1930s for whatever history, and we knew about the Thirties.

And we knew about famine which was in 1932 when millions of people died. And we knew about the concentration camps and about the cost which was paid for industrializing the country. Because the whole country was industrialized in ten years, which was by all standards, Soviet and non-Soviet, a miracle. The production grew like 500% in ten years, or something. But we knew that all that was achieved by killing slave laborers who worked in all this construction. And the constitution which proclaimed the freedom, liberty and quality of rights, you know, good words that were in the constitution. And the chapter of this history book was about the achievement and all the good words about the constitution. And so we would just skip this chapter because the teacher didn't know what he's supposed to talk about. And to learn what's written in the book was a waste of time.

(So the teacher simply skipped a chapter that he'd done the previous year.) Even more, in regard to the final exams,

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all questions regarding the Soviet period of history, that is, from 1917 when the Bolshevik revolution was until, say, 1970 or even 1980, was just skipped. And we would answer only about the Tsarist Russia or everything that was before the Bolshevik revolution. I mean, we were lucky, because we had to write questions with less material to study.

(Were you aware of people being released from prisons or being brought back from exile?) There definitely was, because I was very well acquainted with the son of Joseph Begun. My parents were very good friends with the Slepaks, who were in exile, and other people, so we had some contact with people who were in exile and in prisons, and we knew about the release of most of these people.

(What about Chernobyl? When did you first learn about it?) I think about when it was published, or when I heard the rumor that Swedish radio station was panicking that the Chernobyl cloud is over it. I think we learned about Chernobyl about three or four days after it exploded. It exploded on the 29th of April. On the 30th they didn't say anything, probably because of May Day, which is a national holiday in Russia, so they didn't want to spoil the holiday for the Russian people, or they just wanted to deceive and not to show it. I don't know. There wasn't a very big understanding of what had happened. We found out what happened much later. The first day when it was reported there was like a ten or fifteen-line column in the back of the newspaper that said that one of the reactors in Chernobyl blew up. And there wasn't a big fuss about it. So we supposed that it could be a big disaster, but it wasn't presented in a way that one would

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think that it's really big disaster, a big tragedy. And [blurb] would only know about the consequences.

(When you understood, was it months later?) I don't remember. It was later. Even the central authorities began reporting on it more and more, and afterwards we would have the different stories in newspapers and journals about people. It came later on, after Western pressure. Not the same day. (Did you notice any kind of an emotional reaction once people understood?) I think not in Moscow. Usually it would be many, many jokes about it, about two-headed people or something like that. (People chose to laugh about it rather than cry.) Yes. Moscow is far, and you never perceive it as a real thing, and that's why there were many jokes. People would say there's a gay radio active and gays radio passive or something. (Say that again...) It was one of the jokes of that period that there are two gay men who go in the streets of Kiev, which is not far from Chernobyl. One is gay is radio-active, and the other radio-passive. There are active gays and passive gays. So that was one of the jokes. There were many of them.

(When did you first learn that you'd received the permission to leave?) I believe it was the same day that we got it. The person from the emigration office, which is OVIR in Russian, called my mother and said that we should collect all documents together to get the visa and that was permission. That was on October 6, 1988. (How long did it take before you actually left?) From October 6 until January 22. Like three months. (Was there anything special you felt you must take with you?) Maybe only people. There were people I left behind. (Who remained behind?) My friends. I had a very

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good girlfriend. There were people.

(Do they have a chance of getting here?) Oh, definitely, they do have a chance. (They are on the list?) No, they have not yet applied, but they are going to. And there are many of them. Not all of them are going to leave. I found out that one of my friends is going to come here as a tourist, so we're going to try to keep him here. But it's not easy. And that's only one. And I have very many friends. I was in many schools, and in all schools I was kind of a popular person. So I have many friends, very good ones, whom I probably miss more than anything else which I left there. I'm not very patriotic. I don't have any nostalgia over the country itself. (You don't miss the country itself?) Almost not at all. I miss that I can't walk the streets that I do like in Moscow or whatever, but for me it's not as important as my friends.

(What have you gained by coming here?) Hopes for the future, I think. And I think that probably there are some ideas or a new perception of life purpose or some idea of freedom in choosing something and doing it, even though I'm not sure that I'm doing the right thing, but still, I have this freedom. And something that I see that I can achieve by going to it, like some purposefulness. And freedom of movements - I can go wherever I want, I can do whatever I want.

(Do you think you have a better chance here of fulfilling your career and intellectual aspirations than you did in Russia?) I'm not sure about intellectual aspirations. I'm just not sure exactly what you mean. But about the career,

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definitely. Because in Russia there was always a dead end, some point where you're not going to go anywhere, and even we have a friend who visited us this Thanksgiving. He left Russia in 1972 and he went there for the first time this year, so it's 18 years after he left. He saw his old friends, and saw that they were in the same place doing the same thing and getting the same money and having almost the same situation [as before]. The only change was that they had children which were taller than him already.

(What do you want to do? What do you feel is available to you that might not have been in Russia?) First, I thought of doing some computer and mathematical work. Now I'm thinking of doing more like Business or International Relations work. That's absolutely different from what I could do in Russia. (So if you could see yourself ten years from now, what would you like to be doing?) It's hard to say. I don't know. Working. I'm not sure that I know. But definitely I want to advance in what I'm doing all the time, but not till like I'm thirty and then fifty-five or until I'm sixty doing the same old things.

(What would you say is the most important thing about your story thus far? I know that your life is really just starting to open up from the adult perspective, even though you are mature and have thought about a lot of things and have read a great deal for someone your age compared to your peers in this country-- What do you think is the most important thing about your story thus far?) Hmm. That's a very broad question. But I can say that important is the support of other people like my parents in all stages of my life, wherever

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I was I had parents who would help me in educating or enlightening me, or just in their presence, so I can say that was very helpful for me. What else can I say? Another thing that I probably should say, too, is that we shouldn't judge anything too harshly, like Russia or the situation here, by the same standards. Like my story is maybe absolutely different from another story, and we shouldn't say everything that was in Russia was bad everything here is good, or anything like that. We can't judge because there were good things there which are bad here and vice versa.

(What about being Jewish? Is that going to be an important part of your life now that you don't have to fight to be Jewish?) I think, I hope it will. But, I was in Israel, and I'm trying now to go there and be active in different Jewish activities like I was participating in fund-raising, going to different universities and giving speeches there. I went to Northwestern and the University of Chicago, and I went to other places just to collect money for Russian Jews. I hope I will have some connection with the Jewish community, because for me it's first not religion or race or... it's just something that can support you, from the inside and hopefully from the outside. So the same idea of supporting, because people should support them because alone it is very hard to do anything.