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Julia Umantsev Interview on June 15, 1991

- Born January 27, 1929 in Moscow; parents: Israel (Eugene) Zissman (accountant before the war; born in Gomel in 1898; died 1982) and Maria Samarovitska Zissman (a bookkeeper; born in Poland in 1905; died 1958); no siblings; professional title: physician; husband: Rudolph Umantsev (married July 10, 1949); one child, Alex (born 1952 in Moscow); grew up in a typical living situation in Moscow, in a three-room shared apartment (lived with the Strausov family, a well-connected Russian Orthodox family with three children).
- The Russian Orthodox archbishop would talk with Julia's father; much in common because all religion were suppressed under Communism; discuss history, the Torah, and Hebrew; celebrated Orthodox holidays at the apartment; at Easter, the archbishop would celebrate in her apartment, while her family went to her grandparents to observe Pesach (all Jewish holidays celebrated at her grandparents, who kept kosher); always had matzoh because grandfather connected to the synagogue (matzoh so rare many Jews never had).
- In her childhood, she began to see being Jewish in Russian as "bad"; her uncle, Moses Levitan, was arrested by the Lenin regime, so that the government could confiscate his successful businesses during the New Economic Program; sentenced to Siberia and died; relatives lost their homes, lived in basements.
- Julia was twelve when war broke out in 1941; horrible bombing raids; she and many other families would go into the Moscow Metro, with blankets, mattresses, and supplies, and take refuge in the tunnels.
- When war broke out, Julia sent to be a nurse's aid; worked all day long; although many fled Moscow, her family had not yet left because her mother was an important bookkeeper (father had not worked since the late 1920s); however, the Russian Orthodox family, the Strausovs, insisted that Julia's family flee; that said that the Nazis were killing Jews in all the occupied territories, even Ukraine; the Strausovs helped Julia's family get out on a train, but traveling was very slow because they did not have the proper papers.
- In Tashkent, mother worked as a laundress at a slaughterhouse, from 7:00AM until 7:00PM; pay was poor and never had enough food; there was a law in Tashkent at the time requiring families take in evacuees; lived on the estate of a well-educated, wealthy Muslim Uzbeki family, who really liked Julia's family; the husband had four wives, and Julia was friends with one of the children and went to same school; Julia had to wear a chadra (traditional Islamic dress) and wore forty-two braids—had to blend in or risk being killed; Julia's mother did some bookkeeping for the man and Julia worked in the garden, in exchange for rice.
- Returned to Moscow in 1942; did not really feel anti-semitism until after the war; wanted to attend medical school, but very hard to be admitted as a Jew; she ended up going, after being tutored by her future husband, Rudolph, who she met in 1947 and married in 1949 (originally wanted to marry another boy, who was not Jewish and her

mother would not permit it); difficult in medical school because Jews were not permitted to take any class—had to apply and might be rejected by the professor for being Jewish.

- Alex, her son, was born while she was still in medical school; her husband took care of the baby while he was writing his dissertation; her mother also helped some, but her mother worked full-time as a physician.
- One of her relatives (or possibly a family friend) named Pavel Somorovitsky, who Julia described as a “great Communist,” was arrested (by the militia and KGB) and shot in 1937; no one ever knew why; Pavel’s wife, Sonya, was then exiled with their infant son to Karaganda, in the Eastern Soviet Union.
- Family and acquaintances also included: Moses Levitov and his wife, Liza, and their son, Izrail, and that family was connected to Sakharov; Natasha Levitan, who was married to Ilya Rubin.
- When she finished medical school, sent to work in a crime-ridden region of Moscow, Marina Roshcha, for five years; tended to the children of the local prostitutes, who Julia described as excellent mothers.
- Her husband had become a Communist in 1942, when Jews were allowed to join, but she never did, although she said there was a moment where she wanted to, so that she could get a better job; but no one would take her application by that point, because she was Jewish.
- After working in Marina Roshcha, she was able to get a job where her mother was the head of gynecology and worked at that clinic for about thirty-five years, which she enjoyed and worked about six-and-a-half hours a day, five days a week, including making house calls on families of high-ranking party members.
- Had access to lots of books from *samizdat*; could access Voice of America and Voice of Israel on the radio; and many of her family were emigrating to Israel (Julia wanted to emigrate, but Rudolph did not want to); decided to emigrate during *glasnost*, around 1986, following the Chernobyl disaster; Julia treated children who had been exposed; what does she miss most about life in Russia: “Nothing.”