**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

**The Soviet Jewish Oral History Project of the Women's Auxiliary**

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**ELEONORA KHAZAN**

**Computer Programmer**

BIRTH: April 28, 1959, Kiev

SPOUSE: Stan Khazan

1953, Romny, Ukraine

Married, 1979

CHILDREN: Julia, 1982, Kiev

PARENTS: Rita Kogan, December 25, 1937

Zakhar Kogan, May 28, 1935

SIBLINGS:

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

**NAME: ELEONORA KHAZAN**

**DATE: August 30, 1990**

**INTERVIEWERS:**  Saralyn Levine and Margot Hirsch

(Where were you born? and the date?)

I was born in Kiev, April 28, 1959. I was the only child.

(Let's go to your earliest memories. You were alone in the house with your parents. Were your parents working? Who took care of you?)

Both of my parents worked, and I was in Kindergar­ten. From the age of one year, I went to Kindergarten. I had my grandmother who lived with us, but she was working also. So nobody could care for me, only the government!

(Was this like a day care center? How young did they take children to care for?)

Yes, they took care of the children all day. When I was a child, they took the children from six months old. Now, it is from one year old. My daughter went from the age of one year and was happy in the Kindergarten. You have heard how they live in Russia? Maybe five percent of the mothers sit with their children all the others are working. It is very hard to live with only one salary. So most mothers work.

(So, when you were little, your grandmother lived with you but she worked too, and you only saw her in the evening, at night?)

She was my mother's mother.

(Did she talk about her life and the life before her. Do you have any sense of your grandparents' lives and maybe even your great-grandparents?)

My grandmother had a really hard life so she didn't like to talk a lot about her life, but I heard some --. She talked sometimes about her life, about her parents. She loved her parents and she showed me a picture of her par­ents, it was a very, very old picture. And she could keep them during the Second World War. So I did know something about my great-grandpar­ents but it is not a lot!

(Where did they live?)

They lived in Kiev. At least for two generations they lived there, I don't know about before that. It is strange but they were like farmers! My great-grandfather, the father of my grandmother, worked for the owner of a forest. He managed the forest, tending it, protecting it, selling the wood and like that. The forest was near to Kiev, and he lived near Kiev, and maybe during the winter, two times a week he came to be with his family. In the summertime, the family came to his home in the forest. That was nice. Yes, this was before the 1917 Revolution.

My grandmother had only one child, my mother. But she had a lot of sisters! And one brother. (Was it a policy after the Revolution to have small families?) No, no. I think people did it out of their own feelings. It was a very hard life, especially for Jewish people. So that is when I think there began to be not more than two children in a Jewish family.

(As you were growing up, what do you remember about what a normal day was like, who your friends were, about early school?)

A normal day was to wake up and go to the school and about three o'clock I would come home. I attended not only the regular school but also music school. So, sometimes, when I was a little girl - like in second or third grade - my grandmother (my other grandmother, from my father's side) took me to the music school. I had piano lessons, but music school in Russia is different than an American music educa­tion. It is not only piano lessons, but music history and hearing, and chorus, singing together, it is everything! (How do you know it is different here? Stan) I checked here, here they give lessons. I was interested in this for Julia so I asked a lot of questions!

(In music school, there must have been a lot of Jewish students because it is a sort of Jewish thing to do.)

Right. In all Jewish families it is like a neces­sity for them to keep their children busy! Usually with music, it is a violin or a piano. It is a cultural thing, right. I am very obliged to my parents that they did this for me. Yes. Some days I wanted to give it up, but I didn't.

I went to regular school every day and to music school about three times a week, then I did homework.

(Did you have any special jobs around the house, that were your jobs?)

When I was a small girl, of course not. But after I was eleven or twelve, when my parents - my mother asked me, but I wasn't willing to do that. I should have! Something like cleaning, things like that.

(What was your home like, was it an apartment? how many rooms did it have?)

We had a two-room apartment, very similar to Stan's apartment. Two rooms for four people, three generations! When I was born, my parents and my grandmother lived in a one room apartment - eight meters by eight meters. I learned to walk on the bed because we didn't have enough space for me to walk because of all the furniture! This story about my walking on the bed is like family history!

But when I was about two years my grandmother got this two-room apartment. They were so happy! They were happy not only for the larger apartment but because the air was really good. It was really good air there and there were a lot of Jews. Yes. A lot of Jews meant that in our house, our apartment house, we had like five Jewish families. It means a lot to us.

(Were you close to them? Did you celebrate holidays together? Did you celebrate any holidays?)

We celebrated Pesach always. (Did you have a Seder?) Yes, the little man down in the front of our apart­ment, we were very close to him. He would invite us. But what celebration? It meant just to have dinner, it is not going to synagogue to special service - no! We had special foods like *hamantaschen*, not for Pesach, but we cele­brated Purim too! But it wasn't much. I remember. We ate matzohs for the week, but we ate bread too, not only matzoh. We had no special prayers at the dinner, it was not that kind of Seder. We called all our very close relatives and congrat­ulated them, and they congratulated us, but it was only a dinner. We knew it was a holiday, but we did not have all the religious service for dinner.

We always had fish - gefilte fish - on all the Jewish holidays. My grandmother usually made this; sometimes my mother, but usually my grandmother.

(What kind of work did your grandmother do?)

You mean her occupation? She was like an accoun­tant. My mother is an engineer, and my father too. My father is a mechanical engineer; and my mother was in construction estimator engineer.

(Which brings us up to you - no, let's first talk about high school and - . You knew you were Jewish your whole life because you had your special friends; and your holi­days.)

I couldn't say to you that I learned this at any one time --. Not just because I had Jewish friends. Actually, I always had one Jewish friend; and a few Gentile friends. I think that I knew that I was a Jew since I was four or five years old. From children, in our yard, the children from our house, when we played together.

(What did they say? what did they do?)

They would say an offensive word for me so I couldn't not know. Actually, we were not very close friends, but we had friendly relations. Sometimes you know when children argue, then this word would come out.

(Did you tell your parents about this? did you discuss it?)

I felt bad about this name calling. But, actually, my parents said - what can you do? say something offensive to them? So I said something offensive to them!

(So then you went from the primary school to something like our high school? Were you with more people then? because when we go to high school it covers a larger area, is it the same there?)

No. Because the high school and the elementary school are in the same building. It is just the same school, with the same people, with the same teachers, from First Grade up to Tenth. You are with the same teachers and all the same pupils for the whole time. Elementary School is just for ten years. The only new people were students who had moved from another area into our area.

(At what age did you finish Tenth Grade?)

Seventeen? Yes, seventeen. Then I entered college, not the university. We have two different types of colleg­es. Just like the Institute of Engineers is not a universi­ty program. I was in the Institute, it was a technical school. That was my decision. Actually, I wanted to enter another school, but I knew that I couldn't co that! (Why?) Because I am a Jew. I knew that I couldn't.

I wanted to be a teacher and I wanted to enter a teach­er's college, but I didn't even make an application. I just knew from other people that it was very hard to enter this Insti­tute, espe­cially for Jews. My college, which I en­tered, had a better reputation for accepting Jews because it wasn't a very prestigious college!

My college was a Construction College. I didn't want to be a Construction Engineer, but I was lucky because in this college they just opened a new course, a Computer Science course. And I really wanted to be a programmer, so I was really lucky because not all people knew about this new course so they didn't have a big competition - we had only three people apply for each place. This is not a BIG competi­tion, that is why not three or five percent, but maybe ten percent of the people in this course were Jews.

Then, after a few years, it was very hard to enter this college for Jews, because more people knew about this and it became a more prestigious school because computer program­ming is really a prestigious education in Russia. (Were you learning on Russian made computers?) Yes. They were com­parable to what I have seen here, sophisticated. But I think that, the programmers there say that the technology, the hardware, is from the West and that it is copied. They copy the Western technology and just make it in the Soviet Union. The programming is in English. The programming languages like here, COBOL, SYLVAN, everything is the same - it is in English!

(Did they have enough equipment that everyone had their own computer?)

No. We had it in a lab, and we had only a few hours a week to do something with computers. We had a schedule for the people in our group to use the equipment. There were three of us in our group, so we each got to use the lab equipment for about two or three hours a week. It was funny, it is hard to study computers if you only have two hours a week, right? Then when I worked, we had maybe two or three hours a day to work with computers. We did not have a computer terminal on our desk, like here. We had the same sort of schedule and we had two or three hours a day, only to work and then you should know it.

(How long was the class program for learning computer program­ming?)

Around six years, five and a half years. For two years we studied, like, technical subjects, common technical subjects. Then we studied the computer sciences. It was very thorough.

(You've seen Julie in school here now, how do you compare the educational system?)

We think that the Russian education system is better, at least for younger children. College education is proba­bly better here. But elementary education was much better there. (Why? because they teach more subjects, or they teach it more thor­oughly?) They teach more subjects in Russia, and it is much more intensive. (And they are more serious, there is not so much time to play?) Right, right.

(You were living at home when you went to this college, yes? Did you have holidays? Did you have vacations and things like that?)

Yes. It is the same as the schools here. Winter vacation and then summer vacation for two or three months.

(Did you go away with your family, on vacations?)

Yes. The point is that after my first year in college, my father was very sick and couldn't leave the city. So I had vacation with my girlfriend and her mother. We went to Crimea, to a resort. The second year's vacation I spent with an admirer!

(So you married very young!?)

Yes, I was just twenty.

(Where did you and Stan meet?)

We met in Kiev in a friend's house. It was kind of quiet, not a holiday or anything, just a get-together. I think you already talked about us with Stan?

(Yes, but now I want your side. How did you feel about him, when you first met him?)

I don't know, I did not imagine that he was going to be my husband! It was Okay. (Did he pursue you?) Maybe the second time we met, not the first time. (How long did you know each other before you got married?) We knew each other for about one year. But it wasn't like a full year, we didn't get to meet very often. You know he did not live in Kiev, and with my job very often I was working at another city. He was in Kiev and we might meet very often and then he went back to his city and we didn't meet for a long time. (Did your write back and forth?) Write? No. Just by phone. I don't like to write letter - but I like to receive them! This is why I have to write them.

(When you decided to get married? Was it important that you met each other's families before you got married?) Yes. It is a typical Jewish family tradition. It is impor­tant not only to meet him but also to meet his family. And the same with me. His parents did not only want to see me, they also wanted to meet my parents. What kind of family one comes from, right?

(We talked before about the importance of marrying someone Jewish. Did you know this from your childhood, or how did this evolve with you?)

I think that for me it was more important that a man was either a good guy or a not so good guy. And I really didn't think it should always be for sure a Jew. But then I was so young, and now I understand that it is really impor­tant! But when I was like seventeen or eighteen years old, what was important was whether he was a good guy or not. But I know exactly that my parents would not accept a non-Jewish man. I know this exactly!

We were married in 1979. (Where did you live when you got married?) At that time my grandmother got an apartment (my mother's mother), she had been living with us altogether and she got a one-room apartment. Then we just exchanged. We went to live in the one-room apartment she had, and she came back to live with my mother and father!

So when she was about fifty or sixty years old she got a new apartment, one-room; it is like a studio apartment here.

(Is it easy to just switch apartments?)

No, it is not easy; but for families it is not hard. But we should have a reason to do this. But we didn't do this legally. She moved into the new apartment and then she moved back and we moved in. But we didn't do this paper­work. No.

(When you're assigned these apartments, who do you pay the rent to?) The government. (Is there an agency that collects all this?)

It is like the currency exchange is here. We just go to this place, like a currency exchange - like you send a money order!

(I wondered, did you work before you were married?)

No. I just studied at the college. I was still a student when we were married. Stan was working. (so, you moved to Kiev at that time?) Yes.

(So you were very fortunate, as a young married couple to get this apartment?)

Yes, we were envied by all our friends, to be able to live separately. They had to move in with their parents.

(What is the general feeling about having to live with one's parents after you are married?)

This makes a lot of bad feelings. Nobody is happy to live with their parents, of our friends, because it is a different generation, you know. At ten o'clock, for exam­ple, parents want to sleep, children want to watch televi­sion, or to have their friends, to study, so it increases the tension. And if you have children, the grandparents always have different ideas about how to raise children. It is not good.

(How long were you married, when Julia arrived?)

Two and a half years, about. Almost three years. When I had graduated college.

(Were you working at all when you were a student?)

No, I was a full time student. I finished school three years after we were married. Julia was born just after I graduated.

(Now, let's talk about your work for a while. After you graduated college, do they help you find a job or are you on your own?)

Actually, they have and should have more programs to help you find a job. It is different from the American system. How to explain that? (They have a special list of companies who needed the students, -Stan) especially from this college program, because we were very few. And the college will send you to these companies and you have to work for them for three years. And they don't have a choice. The graduate should go direct to that company and work there for three years! I feel this is a bad system. Some companies are very good but - (sometimes you are not happy-Stan) especially if the company is in another area, and you have to move to another city and you have no place to live, no friends, nobody, in another Republic, for exam­ple.

So, it is a big problem and now a lot of students don't want to go to the companies where they were assigned and there has been some trouble. (Where was the place they sent you?) In Kiev. Because I was married and they have a law that for married students, if schools work in this city, they could not send me to another city. (Good!)

(Now you are finished your education and beginning to work. During this time, do you remember feeling any kind of politi­cal pressures on you?)

We always felt political pressures, because all our lives we studied political subjects. So, we should talk only this way, like it says in the textbook. It is a kind of pressure, I couldn't explain what I was feeling. I could not ask questions, couldn't say my opinion, I just could say what I had read in the book! This is a kind of pressure. And I didn't want to study this subject at all! It wasn't interest­ing to me. Maybe, if I compare the hours, in col­lege, that I spent studying the political subjects and the hours I spent studying the computer, I think maybe the political subjects took up more of my student time!

(What about History? We're led to believe here that Russian History is taught, not quite accurately.)

Right. Especially after the Revolution, the Communists Period. I knew from my childhood that it wasn't true what I studied in school. (How did you know that?) From my par­ents, from my father. He was very interested -he is now very interested in History. He wanted to be an historian but he tried to enter the university, the college, for History course, but he could not enter. He knew a lot about History.

(What kind of work did your father do?)

He was a mechanical engineer.

(Was he old enough at the time to have been in World War II, or not?)

No, he was a child. My mother's father was killed during this war. And she doesn't even remember him well, because she was only three years old. And she didn't have much time to get to know him because even before the war, he was a profes­sional pilot. So she doesn't remember much.

My father's father participated in this war. And he finished his service. He had a bad leg from the war, he was wounded. Actually he died because of this wound, every year he was supposed to go to the hospital for some medical course. One year when he went to the hospital, he got an infection, (gangrene?) Yes. He died when I was maybe seven or eight years old. (1965, or 1966)

(Was your father's mother in Kiev with you?)

Yes, she was in Kiev. I don't know what kind of work she did, actual­ly, she didn't work for a long time after the war. She took care of my father and her youngest son. She worked like a tailor some years later. But that was was not a full-time job.

(Did they get a pension? Did the government pay her when your grandfather died?)

No, because it wasn't war time and even my other grand­mother, my mother's mother didn't get any pension. Nothing, nothing. She had really a hard time because she had to work in two jobs, because she raised my mother without any help at all. She worked really hard.

(Did your other grandmother come to your house to celebrate holidays with you?)

Yes, she did, and sometimes we went to her house. She lived in a common apartment. She had two rooms. And this apartment had maybe seven or eight rooms so she shared this apartment with other families. Common kitchen, common bathroom; so it was really hard to celebrate some holidays because she was the only Jew in the apartment. And some­times she had trouble with her neighbor. (Because she was a Jew?) Not just that but it is hard to share a kitchen and prepare for a holiday with strange people! Of course, sometimes they had problems! After all, they were not family or relatives!

(Well, now I think we are up to your working - you have gone to this place where they told you that you had to work?)

Yes, but I was lucky because I had practice after every year at our college, before summer vacation, we had one month's practice, like training. So we couldn't choose a company, of course, but one year I got this training in this company. And I thought it was a really good place to work, because there were a lot of Jews!

(What kind of a place was it? I know you did computer programming.)

It was like a consulting company, it worked for cli­ents, and the clients were construction companies. And this is why I got training in this company, because I was in a Construc­tion Institute! So they prepared specialist comput­er program­mers to work in the construction field!

(What did they construct?)

Everything - commercial buildings; housing. (Did they get government - everything was government projects, wasn't it? At this point was Gorbachev in power?)

No. Not yet. I graduated college in 1981 and after training, I asked my training boss in the company to ask my boss in the Institute to give me a job in this company! So, nobody wanted to work in this company - I don't know why. So, it was perfect for me!!

(How big of a place was it? How many people worked at the company?)

Around three hundred people in our company. Our de­part­ment consisted of maybe fifty people. And our group was around fifteen to eighteen people. And about 70% of the people there were Jews. They were also my age. Now it isn't!

(Did you bring some of them home and have a social life with some of them?)

We had a very good team. Not just good workers but friendly. But now a few of them live in Israel, and a few of them live in America, and some of them moved to another company. Now there are only a few Jews left in our depart­ment.

(What were working conditions like? What time did you get there? What were the hours?)

We worked from eight to five. Sometimes I had second shift which was from one or two o'clock - after lunch -to nine or ten at night. Actually, they had one shift, but sometimes they had problems with the computers, because we had too many people and not enough computers! So when we have scheduled to work after five, we just needed to go the second shift. I worked at this company until we left Rus­sia.

(Now let's talk about - and I really want to get into your thoughts and feelings in this area - your decision to leave the Soviet Union. What was happening politically at the time? Just tell us about everything from the first moment you thought this might be a good idea for you. How did all this start?)

About the decision? (Yes) We wanted to leave when we first got married. Even before we got married, my family had made this decision - in 1978 or 1977, 1977. And then when we got married the special invitations came from Isra­el, and we needed to have this invitation not only for my family but now also for Stan's family. So just, while we needed this invitation, actually we got this invitation, but before we had time to leave Russia because in 1979 they closed the emigra­tion so we couldn't leave.

(Who sent you the affidavit?)

Everybody, not relatives, you know - but acquaintan­ces, friends of acquaintances, friends of relatives - we asked every­body! (You had to do this all personally? there isn't an agency that you could contact in Israel?) Oh no, that is illegal! You know, somebody would leave Russia and we would give them our data, you know, and we know, - my grandmother said, maybe more than ten invitations! My parents didn't get anything, just -- which was really awful, you know. Because we had asked a lot of people and she knew that these people did send us invitations and only my grandmother received this invitation - not my parents!

I don't know why this was, but we know exactly that the government doesn't want to give out the invitations. Be­cause the same people sent in, on the same day, the invita­tion for grand­mother, and for my parents.

(And they were people that she knew as friends from before?) Right. And my grandmother received all the invi­ta­tions but not my parents.

(So this was the end of the seventies, and you had the piece of paper but they closed the doors?) (Did you keep those papers?)

Right! And it helped us to go this time to America. We didn't need to wait for new invitation. We just used our older invita­tions and in 1988 we left.

(They closed it in 1979, under Brezhnev, did you know why they closed it?)

Because of Afghanistan. Actually we didn't know. At the time they didn't say that. But people talked about that with friends and relatives, and everybody knew that it was because of Afghanistan. (They told us that because we were married, and that they would get some American technol­ogy. So, they traded us! - Stan) Yes! But my uncle told me that they had economical sanctions, America, and Brezhnev closed the door. It was like, "You don't want to give us that? We won't permit Jews to leave our country!"

(So, you wanted to leave for several years but you just couldn't?)

Well, we didn't apply again until we knew the doors were open again, and we really didn't believe that it would open again!

(When did Gorbachev come in?)

He came in 1984 or 1985. (Did you notice changes at that time? In your daily life, in your television?)

I didn't feel any changes, I didn't believe there would be any changes. I got more cynical. Let's say things became more interesting for us. We got more books to read, more news in the newspapers, many books we could not read before.

(What kind of books?)

Oh, we had a lot of writers who government censor didn't permit us to read. So, under Gorbachev's political changes, it was permitted to read these books. There were a lot of things. You know Pasternak's ***Doctor Zhivago***? legal­ly we couldn't read it.

(Could you get a copy of it from underground? before it was legal?)

***Doctor Zhivago***? Not the whole book, we got some­thing of it. Even from Israel we had some copies, ***Exodus*** by Leon Uris, we read that, we had only two days for this book! (You had to pass it around?) Right! So we read very hard - by day and by night!

Another book, it wasn't like ***Exodus***, it was more about Jewish history. It was a very interesting book. We also had it only two days and we didn't get a chance to finish it.

(Was there a whole network of stuff like this going on before Gorbachev? A sort of underground?)

Oh yes. It depends on the neighborhood and the people with whom you work and communicate. Well, I communi­cated with more Jewish people, more young people, and they were more educated than a lot of others, and they talked a lot about political stuff and about reading, music, and every­thing else, and we exchanged the books and everything! If I got some new book, an interesting book, I tried to give it to them to read and the same the other way around.

(During this time was there any kind of religious service you could go to? Was there a synagogue in Kiev?)

Yes, there was a large synagogue in Kiev but we didn't go to it. I don't know anybody who went to the synagogue. It wasn't closed but I think people were just afraid. My grandmother? no. Her sisters lived close to the synagogue, and - by the way, they were our source of matzoh! I know that some of my co-workers when we were in Moscow, they went to the Moscow synagogue, but no one I knew went to the Kiev syna­gogue. I think they were afraid to go. In Moscow, it was easy because nobody knew you. Somebody could hear you in the synagogue - it is not against the law to go but you can have trouble because someone could inform - not even KGB, but they can harass you. I know some people this happened to.

(What happened to them?)

I met them here in America, they are from Leningrad. They got troubles, they were thrown out of the Institute, out of college. (Because they were in a religious group?) Not a religious group - they just went to synagogue! When you are a student it is very easy to be expelled for any reason. They say, just behave and be a student, work hard, this is not good for the communist student. No more excus­es. You can think anything but your behavior has to be what is good for a Soviet student!

(Besides the books, when Gorbachev was elected your newspapers changed. Did anything surprise you?)

No. At first. But we knew that they could write this in the newspaper. We knew what they wrote, that was not surprise to us. (You always had a network of information?) Yes. But it wasn't official. It all depends on the people with whom you communicate.

(Can we talk a few minutes about Chernobyl? When did it happen? When was the explosion?) It was in April 26, 1986; Julia was four years old, yes. (Did you know what happened when it happened? Let's start with that.)

It happened on Friday night, but we didn't know any­thing until Monday. When we got to work, some people knew about this and they told us. (But I didn't believe it. I felt that if it really happened, somebody should inform us. -Stan) There was nothing in the papers or on televi­sion. Then was the First of May, a work holiday and it was a little panic before the holiday. A lot of people whose work was related to nuclear physics, they under­stood how it was dangerous. For example, I couldn't understand because it was not my field. I could just get panicked like every­one else but not in the way a professional in this field could be. People who lived in the city were told to leave by acquain­tances and to drink with a lot of milk with io­dine. And so on. There was a little panic.

(Did you leave the city?)

Not before this holiday. Not before the whole govern­ment decided that to prevent this panic... You know that on the First of May we always have this big demonstra­tion.

Some people thought that because of this big tragedy at Chernobyl they would cancel this demonstration because all people understood -- everybody said that we should close the door and close the window, not do anything outside. Because outside was very dangerous air - especially for children. And our government decided to hold this demonstration to show people that nothing happened and we had to go to a bicycle championship, right? They didn't cancel this bicy­cle competi­tion. And I think nobody from the parents wanted their children to participate in this demonstra­tion but school teachers they pushed children to participate in this demon­stration.

And it worked, by the way, it worked. Because people do believe what the government says. You know, if the government says we should do this, then maybe it is not so dangerous. It was terrible.

(When did they put it in the paper?)

On the Fifth of May. We had four days of holiday, unfor­tunately. Usually we have two days holiday but it was the weekend, so it was a four day holiday. It was really good weather and people had picnics outside in the forest - it was really dangerous! And then, only on the fifth of May we came to work, and when we came to work my co-workers were really panicky on our job, because some friends of our co-workers were - their occupation was nuclear physics and they explained everything and they told that some people drove their children to other cities to stay with their grandpar­ents or somebody else. I got really panicked. I just called (not to Stan he did not have a work phone), I just called to my mother and said I am going to the train station to buy some tickets.

I didn't even say anything to my boss. I didn't even think of it. I didn't think about my job! Nobody was at work. I didn't know even where we should go! and to whom? Because I was still at work, and Stan was still at work, and my parents were still at work! So I thought when I was on my to the train station, where should we stay and with whom? And then at the station was a really huge line, really huge! Because I just went from work. So maybe I stayed five hours at the station to get the tickets, I forgot exactly how long, but it was really not a long line compared with other days. But after this day, there were no tickets at any place, nothing, and the lines were really long.

On that day in the evening they began to talk to us on radio and on the television. Not to worry. We are working on this problem. We will take care of it. Just when I stayed in the line everybody talked about Chernobyl. But the only ones who got to leave the city were the children of officials, they left before the fifth of May! They sent their children away the 25th of April.

(How did you know which direction to go in?)

Just from people! When I stayed in the line waiting, every­body talked, everybody said what he or she knew. I told them what I knew, what my experience was. And we just had to analyze the information the best you could. But, we had only one place to go, to Stan's parents, to Lvov. It wasn't a good place to go, but it was better than Kiev.

(Did all of you go?)

No. My parents did not go, just I and my grand­mother and Julia. I left my grandmother with Julia and went back to work. Kiev was like a dead city - no children at all! I never thought that it was such an awful feeling when you don't see any children.

The second day after Chernobyl, some relatives in America called (not us) their relatives, our friends' rela­tives called them and asked, "Are you still alive?. Go away from Kiev!!" and they told us real information. Yes. This was the second day after Chernobyl, and they said don't drink the water, just use mineral water. Then my parents' friends sent us a big letter with a lot of instructions of what we should do. They knew that our govern­ment would not tell us what we should really do. So they sent us the instructions: don't drink water from the faucet; and so on.

(Eventually did you get the real information, or do you think you never really got the entire picture?)

No. Never. (In every plant and every institute they had devices to measure the radia­tion, Geiger counters, and civil defense and the men who were responsible in the time of nuclear war. But they didn't give us any information about the radiation level. - Stan) Even in the children's Kinder­garten they didn't give out complete information. They told us about some books we could research in the library. Of course, the people in Kiev were very angry, and the smarter, more intelligent people, were the angriest. I'm sure that a lot of people who don't know anything at all about nuclear radiation were not as concerned. You know, you cannot feel anything and if your government says it is all okay, don't panic, don't believe what other people tell you, (The people didn't see any changes - Stan)

Yes, nuclear radiation you can't see, you can't touch it. But really educated people, of course, they knew about it. But what could we do? We could only go to the Library and take some book about Physics about Nuclear Energy, just read it and analyze the situation ourselves. (Also, unless you went to a relative, you couldn't just pick up and leave, you couldn't just go to another town to live, could you?) Of course, of course. It was really, and the govern­ment didn't permit the bosses, the presidents of the com­panies, to give the mothers a day off or some vacation. We can't take our vacation when we want to take them. We have a schedule from the first day of the year. And you can't call up and say that you are sick. You have to show a paper from your doctor that I am sick. So before that, I should go to the doctor, and the doctor will say "No, you are not sick."

So, it was really - people were very angry. Especially since the government, to prevent panic, said don't permit the women to leave the city with children. And everybody knew that their children had already left Kiev. It was really terrible, you know, they were so angry, and in this moment I said, if we could leave the country, nobody would stay here. Not because they were afraid of the radiation but because people understood that nobody cared about them, and they were prevented from taking care of theirselves and their children. Even if they don't care about me, or my children, don't prevent me from caring for myself and my family! Right?

(At this point, did you resolve to leave? I know that you wanted to leave for years but this was an added motiva­tion?)

Of course it was an added motivation.

(When you used your papers to apply again to leave, how did it affect your life in Russia?)

It was under Gorbachev's polical policy and now it is much better. I don't think it is better because people have changed but because the government changed. The govern­ment now says, it okay if they leave the country, guys. they leave the country but they are not our enemies. The atti­tude had changed a lot from fifteen years before. Not because people felt different but because the governement's official attitude was different on how to behave with people who wanted to leave.

(So did you have to go to a special agency with your invita­tions?)

It is not an agency, it is like a department of the KGB who are responsible for giving permission to leave the country. (When did you go to them?) We tried first at the end of 1987 and we didn't have Julie on our old invitation because she hadn't been born then. So, they wouldn't accept this invitation and they said that we should get a new invitation. But we knew from other people that we could go to Moscow, to the Holland embassy, and they have the right to make the correction on our invitation. The government people didn't tell us this, but we knew from other people who had the experience. This is why I said we had informa­tion just from the communication of our friends and rela­tives and co-workers.

(Was there any reason for that? How come Holland was allowed to make these changes?)

Because there are no Israeli embas­sies in Russia be­cause there are no real diplomatic relations. So Holland has an embassy in both places and Israel has allowed them to do this. So we went to Moscow and we corrected our invita­tions. Then we went back with the corrected papers and it was just before New Year and it was a really big holiday in Soviet Union.

Back at the KGB department, the woman there said, "You know guys, in just a half-hour I will finish my work, and you will not have time to fill out all your applications. Why don't you just come back after the New Year holiday? Your application is all right, everything looks fine, you should have not more trouble at all. Just come back in January, after the holiday." "Okay," we said, "we'll be back in January," and she congratulated us..

But when we went back in January, she said it is all finished. It is too late, it is a new policy. Of course, she knew this when we were in two days before the New Year. She knew it. And we said, you told us to come back after the holiday, why didn't you tell us then that there would be a problem in the future? She could not have cared less - it was not her problem.

So, my father said - it is like a Russian expression - "We're left again!". And then, acci­dently, again in Febru­ary we heard from our network of information that it was working again. Just from my father's co-worker. So we went back to this department and again applied for leaving - and it worked! So we just took our papers and ran down there. (This was in April)

Actually, we had to wait for six months, to get the permission and then maybe two or three months to get a visa. So it was nine months in all. At work, they had some formal meetings with us, we should say to them why we wanted to leave. What makes us unhappy in this country? and things like that. But it was just a formal­ity, it wasn't like fifteen year ago when they said - you are animals, our enemies. Back then it was really hard. Some people who didn't leave said that it wasn't because they were afraid but it was really hard for older people.

They set a meeting with the whole company. Can you imagine? You have to stand in front of the whole company and you have to say why you want to leave your country and everybody is staring at you. They had maybe five or ten people who should stand up and say their opinion about you. Especially like communist leaders, or professional union leader and some people who are interested in getting recog­nition, they should make a speech about you. It was really a terrible procedure, especially for old people and some people, I know, they had something like a heart attack. Not because they really cared what people thought about them but the feeling of standing alone before everyone, a lot of tension and stress. Why do you need to say to these people what you really think?

But when we left, we just had to talk to our communist leader in our own company. (What did he say?) Why do you want to leave? I should know, he said - (I asked something like, why do I have to tell you this?-Stan) but he wasn't really offensive, he would be asked about this by his supe­rior because, he said, I am responsible for you. I said that I had a lot of relatives in Israel and I want to live with them - I love them very much! I am sure that he real­ized that I lied, but he accepted this so he would have an answer when he was asked.

(Do you still have relatives living in Kiev?)

In Kiev? Yes. But not in Israel! I don't know any­body in Israel.

(The reason I am asking is because when we write up your story, if there is any reason you feel you do not want your real name used, they can do that, you know. If there is a problem, if you think - - )

No, they have a different last name. We write letters and we call sometimes. They do want to leave. My father's youngest brother, he applied a few months ago, so maybe he will go to Israel. And my mother's cousin - she is like a sister, but you say here "cousin", (my grandmother and her mother were sisters.) they are going to Israel too. We have a lot, a lot of relatives but they are not very close.

My cousin, my mother -- It is always confusing to me when you say cousin - how do you know if it is a sister, or a brother, a male or a female? You just say cousin but you don't know if it is a woman or a man! I find it confusing! My mother has two cousins, one is "he", one is "she". She is in Kiev but her other cousin, he just came to American two months ago. So we just had him here. It has been difficult, we told them all about our experiences.

(So you finally then got your visas and your permits, how did you feel?)

Good!! We really felt good. We were really busy. It was a hard time for us, with the apartment, with packing, with tickets. (Were you limited in how much you carry out?) Yes, of course. Very limited. And after us, it was really restricted even more.

(What was the problem with the apartment?)

With the apartment it was only a money problem. We should have a paper from some agency, not from like a jani­tor here, but a state agency. We should get a list signed by some agency that is responsible for our apartment because it is really not our apartment, it is a govern­ment apart­ment. So we should give our apartment back to the govern­ment. So, they should sign a paper that this apartment is in good condition. No damage, no this or that.

It is a problem, because they do come and inspect, and depending on their mood, we could spend one thousand rubles in repairs, or five hundred dollars or two thousand, so it depends on their mood. (Is this a bribe?) Of course, of course. It is better to give them one hundred rubles than one thousand to the government, because we know that our apartment was so beautiful. We had done a lot of repairs the year before. And the man who got this apartment after us was really happy - he said, maybe ten times - thank you for us for keeping this apartment in such good shape.

After Julia came, we lived with our parents for about two years and then my father got a new apartment. So we had the two room apartment from my father and the one room apartment from my grandmother and we changed it for a three room apartment. It is popular way to do things in Russia. So my grandmother had a separate room, and we had two rooms. We decided to do that because Julia was so ill and she wasn't a healthy child; she got sick and got sick. Very often when I went to work I had to ask my grand­mother to go to our apart­ment to stay with her. It wasn't convenient for her, you know, to be without clothes for one week, for example. She packed and she packed. So, actually she lived with us in our two-room apartment that is why we decided to change the two apartments for the bigger one.

(So, what happened to your grandmother? Did she come with you?)

No. She died. One year before we applied.

(Now, you are packing your belongings, so I'd like to know what your feelings were then?)

(We were trying to pack as quickly as possible - Stan) We thought that an any time something could happen and possibly we could not leave. You know, we call Russia the Country of Miracles. Because, every day you can have some­thing happen and we can't believe one hundred percent for sure that we have something. We know that today we can go to bed and tomorrow we watch TV and everything changes! And then you can throw away your paper, your visa, your tickets and anything else! (So we tried to get our tickets, it was a big problem - Stan) Yes, we had a big problem with tick­ets!

We couldn't get tickets! (You don't know this problem! -Stan) (You mean airline tickets) Yes. From Moscow to Vienna. You could not get them. Again, you know, we should have to bribe somebody. That is how we got them. We start­ed to work with this problem before we got the Visa. But for some people it takes like half a year.

It was funny, because when we flew from Moscow to Vienna, we had a lot of free places on the airplane. Always. Not only on our airplane, but everyone says that. They say "no tickets", No. Everything is No. And then they have a lot of empty seats. So there was the two of us and Julia and my parents.

(How did you feel when you left?)

I felt bad, bad. Because it is hard to leave, because our relatives were in the airport to say goodbye. They went with us from Kiev to Moscow. So we had a bad feeling, only because of our relatives, not because we loved the country so much. It was hard to say good-bye. I can't say that I hate Russia, or that I hate Russians, No. We love the country, we just don't like the system.

We had a really bad experience before we left with Customs, checking our baggage. It was really awful, really awful. Julia was sick and she had a temperature, a fever, and they didn't permit us to have any medicine. And I could say nothing to them because I didn't have any papers that said they couldn't do that to me, you know? I couldn't prove anything!

(In Vienna, we didn't know any German, and we should go to drugstore and ask for drugs. And we didn't know what to say, what to ask for. I had a German vocabulary with me but I showed it to the pharmacist and that did some good. -Stan) We didn't know how to say it was for a child, or anything.

(In Vienna, were you on your own, or were you met by someone from one of the agencies?)

We were met by HIAS. They met us and gave us an apart­ment and that was it. We lived there for twelve days. (And that's where you changed your mind, to come to America and not go to Israel?) Oh no, we always knew we meant to come here. (We had all the trouble with our customs in Moscow; and then when we got to Vienna, their customs officer told us "Wel­come." -Stan)

When I left Russia, I had a really bad feeling about the country we were leaving, because what kind of a country is it when they would not let me take any medications for my child. And when I say that maybe - to the man that wouldn't permit it - I said, maybe if this were your child, maybe you would behave in a different way. And he said to me, "My child doesn't go to Israel!" I said, "Unfortu­nately for you, and for him." I was really angry, you know.

(Well, we now have you out of Russia and Vienna, and getting ready to come here. So that is probably where we should begin. I want you to know that it is very natural that you would feel badly leaving your family, and I want you to know that it is totally understandable that you lived all your life as a Russian and, probably, in the back of your head, cul­turally, with what you like to read and music you like, you will probably always be Russian. That is natural, so don't feel that you have to love everything here.) (So, you were in Vienna for two or three weeks, something like that --)

It was a wonderful time, wonderful time! It is a won- derful city, a very old city, beautiful architecture, opera. We know how Russians buy the tickets in the top of the theater? Not too nice of seats, but it was good. It was beautiful, the Vienna Opera is famous. By the way, the town where Stanley lived before Kiev, in Lvov, they have a an­cient theater and the Lvov Opera is highly ranked. There is the LaScala at Milan, then the Vienna Opera, then the Opera at Lvov!

It was a wonderful time, especially because Vienna is just a wonderful city. You know, Austria is a wonderful country. But especially comparing with the Soviet Union, you know? Like yesterday we were in the Soviet Union; today we are - ! wonder­ful. It was great just looking in the store windows. Julia was in shock! She was six years old. We were prepared for this because we had read a lot of letters from people who left before us. So we had read about their feelings so we were ready but I couldn't say that we were in shock, but for Julia! ! - you know. We told her not to ask us to buy anything, because we didn't have any money, so please just don't ask. We told her that after we got to America and had a job, then we would buy things for her. But before America, please do not ask us! So, she just stood near the store windows with an open mouth and big eyes. It was wonderful.

After twelve days, we went to Rome. That is the usual procedure. We stayed in Italy for two months. Waiting for the American visa. We had the Soviet Visa to come to this country, but not the American visa letting us enter. (Are you still under HIAS protection in Rome?) Yes, but not like in Vienna. They didn't give us an apartment. They gave us money to rent an apartment but we had to go look for the apartment ourselves. So, it was a bit of a problem, it wasn't as nice as Vienna! (You know, this is something we never had to do in Russia, so we had no experience in how to rent an apart­ment. And we didn't know Italian at all! - Stan) We just found out how to say a few words in Italian "Do you have an apartment for rent?". Something like that! It was the first experience in a capitalist country for us!

The weather was warm, it was beautiful. It was not a very good feeling about living there, but we were just worried about our future. (How did you like the different foods that you ran into on your travels?) Well, we didn't have any extra money so we really tried to budget. It isn't like here where you just go to a restaurant and try differ­ent things, we were really short of money. We didn't even try pizza in Italy, only here! Of course, we didn't have a lot of money.

(So then you finally got the Visa from the American govern­ment to come. Did you fly from Rome?)

Yes. All five of us. We flew from Rome to New York and then New York to Chicago. (Did you stay in New York at all?) We should have done this on the same day but there was a delay.

(Why did you pick Chicago?)

Why? Because my parent's friends lived in Chicago and they were our sponsors. We couldn't go to any city, except New York, unless we had a sponsor in that city. (You could have gone to New York?) Yes, New York is like a free port of entry, you do not need a sponsor there.

(Did your sponsors meet you at the airport?)

Yes. They had been my father's classmates in Russia. They had been here for about ten years from 1977 or 1978, they just left Russia before we decided to leave. Before 1979. Stan did not know them because it was before our marriage. (Did they find a place for you here?) Yes, they found a place for us for a few weeks and then we just rented an apartment in an area where we wanted to stay.

(Did you get jobs right away?)

No! It took a half of a year to get the jobs. We had the Jewish community support for three months, right? Then we asked them for a loan because we still didn't have a job. And maybe in five months, I got a job and then a month later Stan got a job. I worked in a small company, (I didn't like this job) in two months I changed to a good company! Now I am really happy! I work for Information Resources, Incor­porated. It is located downtown in Chicago. It is a mar­ket­ing associa­tion, it is very interesting, I really like it.

(What do you like about America and Chicago? And then I am going to ask what you do not like about it.)

First we liked the people. People ask us what was the first thing that surprised us about Chicago. And it was the people, smiling! (Russian propaganda told us that Americans are all --- Stan) We didn't believe in all the Russian propaganda! But, you know, but somedays we had - we really believed that people were enemies to each other. This is the Soviet propaganda. You thought?? Come on! But it is really surprising, you know, you walk on the street and people just smile. They don't know you, but they smile. And sometimes they say "Hello". And people are not angry because they don't have to stand in the line for food, because they should do something that they don't want to.

It's not only that they don't like to stand in line. People in Russia are really angry, because of the hard life. But, I love people, Americans. I know that sometimes some­one may smile at me and maybe he or she doesn't like me, but I don't really care!

It is just very comfortable here, we feel free, and we have choices, you know. What we want to do, we can do. And we know that everything depends on us. That is a really good feeling, you know. We have more control over our future, we have more motivation.

We were young when we were in Russia, right? but we didn't have any future. We didn't feel any motivation to live, to grow, to have some drive to do more. We always knew that we had some limits, not only because we were Jewish, some limits were because we were Jews, but there was much more than that. Everybody felt the limitations.

If you don't have somebody who can help you, somebody in government or somebody like that, maybe somebody you can bribe, there is no way! Even if you are more smart than anybody else, the stupid people will not like you and you will never get a raise because you are more smart than your boss, for example.

(At work, even though they do not make it harder now for you to leave, did you find that the people who were not Jewish were jealous?)

Some of them, yes. But you know, the situa­tion in Russia, now is that everybody wants to leave. It depends, if the person is a good person, he or she can just say "Good luck for you. If I were a Jew, I would leave, I would do the same." But some, you know, they were not good to you and they can be really jealous, and they won't talk with you anymore. (The reason I was asking was that I heard that there was a lot of Anti-semitism because of this.) Yes, and they said, "Why is it only the Jews who can leave?" It is not only one person but many.

(What is it you don't like here?)

(Too many commercials! - Stan) Right, the commer­cials. (You don't have a lot of advertis­ing, do you?) Especially on TV, maybe there is just not anything to sell. It is really a difficult question to answer. I don't like that I can't speak English, good.

(Can we talk for just a minute, about your dreams and your hopes? You are here now and you're going to stay here. It takes a while to really feel at home in a new place. Please talk about what you hope your future will be here for you.)

We are the same people like Americans, so we have the same dreams. What is the main American dream? To have a house, to have a good car, what is the third? There are three things but I can't remember the third. So those are our dreams too.

Our first dream, of course, is Julia. She was our first reason to leave Russia. We want to see her well educated and to get a good education and to see her happy. We don't forget about ourselves, we want to have a house, and we want to have a good bank account, and to have money to travel a lot. We would like to see Europe. (To go back to Vienna with some money in your pockets?) Vienna, yes, and other countries and cities. We haven't seen so many places that we need to go back again to the few we have seen!

We have decided, ourselves, that we would like to make our first trip to Israel.

(Is there something I haven't asked you that you think I should have? Is there something you want to say?)

No, I think we covered very much. I just want to say thank you for all American Jews. We know that we are here because of you and we understand that we should do the same for others. That is why the Jews are still alive, right?

(We are just lucky because our grandparents left earli­er, or the got on a boat earlier, and that is why we can help now)

I can tell an interesting story about my family. About the things you talk about. (Please.) My father's grandfa­ther, before the Revolution, came to American - in something like 1917 -it was between the Revolution and 1920. He came with his family but not his wife and children, with his two brothers. The brother's family stayed here and my grandfa­ther decided to go back. He just came to find out what America was. Then he decided to go back and get his family and bring them to America. But when he went back, he came by boat and there was a crash. It was a very famous event. It was not a boat, it was a ship, and only five people from this ship survived. And my great-grandfather survived. And it was on his papers that he wanted to go to America. But then he got back home to Russia, and he didn't want to go again! Not by ship.

That is why we were not here! I always said that I should have been born in America! And I didn't know how to find my relatives, I knew only their last names. They would be very old people, but I think they are dead now. We don't know if they stayed in New York; and, of course, we don't know the names of their children. Just - it was a very common name. It would be difficult but I think it would be really interesting to find out if any of them are around. My father knows the year they were here.

(There is a list in the Library of Congress, in Wash­ington, of everybody who came, day by day.)

Even if it was in 1919, 1920?

(Yes, and in Utah, the Mormon Church, it is a Christian Church, and they kept excellent records. It can be done but it is not easy. It would take a lot of time and energy.)

(The same with my brother too. He did that.-Stan)

(Were you ever drafted, Stan, like Afghanistan? Or how do they draft into the Army?)

I was drafted at the time of the Institute. I had a military course. In college, yes. I had military officer's position. In this case, I wasn't drafted but every two years I should go to military camp and have some training. Just like your reserve years. This training was to last until I was thirty-six and forty, nobody is sure yet. (He partici­pated in this camp training maybe three or four times during our marriage.- Elen) (If you were still in Russia, you would still be going?) Yes.

(The other question is a little more difficult. I was thinking about the fact that your mother and you were the only child in your families. I know, and by the way, I understand, I feel that a woman should have the amount of children she wants, and that is it. And I know that in Russia, abortion is a very accepted thing. Now, did your mother really just had one child or do you think that she used abortion - as I know many Russian and American people do.-H)

I don't think I know exactly that she had an abortion. I know that she really only wanted one child.

(One more question, Elen, what is your birthdate? There is nothing in the forms I have.) April 28, 1959. (Thank you.)