**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**IRINA UMAN**

**Electrical Engineer**

BIRTH: July 11, 1957, Kiev

SPOUSE: Alexander Uman, 1948, Kiev

Married in 1978

CHILDREN: Vladimir, 1981, Kiev

Igor, 1988, Kiev

PARENTS: Gregory Chervonsky, 1932-

Alexandra Turovskaya Chernovsky, 1932 -

SIBLINGS: one sister, unnamed

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

NAME: **IRINA UMAN**

DATE: November 8, 1990

INTERVIEWER: E. Snyderman

(When were you born? Tell me about your grandparents.)

I was born in Kiev on July 11, 1957. I remember my grand­mother and grandfather. They lived in Kiev, too. They were born in a little Jewish town near Kiev. They cam to Kiev after 1917, after the revolution. My grandfather worked in a factory and my grandmother didn't work. We lived together. I was living my whole youth with my grand­parents. I was sixteen when my grandfa­ther died and seven­teen when my grandmother died. They spoke Yiddish. My parents knew Yiddish. They can't speak very well, but they can understand. I know just simple words. I was with my grandmother. She took care of me. My grandmother was a very good cook. She baked delicious cakes. She cooked Jewish things-- strudel. My mother learned from her and I learned then, too. We only celebrat­ed Passover. I remember when my grandfather went to syna­gogue on Yom Kippur. He went to synagogue on other Jewish holidays, too. He was tradi­tional. I have been with my husband in Moscow's syna­gogue when I was much older.

My father was a mechanical engineer; my mother too. Now my mother's retired. She's still in Kiev. My father also. We celebrated all birthdays of the family. It was a party with our relatives and friends.

(grandparents)

My grandfather told me about their life before the revolu­tion. He was born in a big family. About-- I don't remember exactly-- he had five sisters and two brothers. He was the old­est. When his father died, he took care of the family. He was very big and he looked older than he was. They wrote in his document that he was not sixteen, but twenty-one, and he wrote this in this document so he could get work. There were laws against children working. His younger sister was really young.

The town was called Dimev, near Zhitomir. It was a Jewish set­tlement. My relatives all came to Kiev. I have many cousins. Some have come to America. I think it's maybe a second cousin living in Los Angeles. But we weren't so close in Kiev.

(about your neighborhood growing up)

We lived in a Jewish area. Many Jewish families lived in this area. We had many Jewish neighbors. I don't have problem with anti-semitism when I was really young. Mostly I played with Jewish children because we had a courtyard behind the buildings and there were many children of Jewish families. We played "*lapta"* in Russian. We moved when I was seven years old. We received a better apartment. That wasn't a Jewish neighborhood, but a new development. I changed schools. At the beginning, I didn't have a problem with the mixed neighborhood. I took math, Russian, Ukraini­an, history, geography, biology. I liked school. I was a good student. I graduated well.

After school I had sport club. I played with my new friends. (Was the history they taught really the way things were?) When I was really young I didn't understand, but in high school I understood that what they said wasn't true. In the higher grades. I had many friends. I was a good student. Sometimes I had problems, I still have many Jewish students in my class, about ten Jews. The whole class had thirty students. Usually we were treated the same. But I had a problem with one teacher. Chemistry. She didn't like me. I think it's because I'm Jewish. I had lower grades than I deserved. This happened to all the other Jewish students.

(What were your dreams?) I wanted to be a teacher. But it was impossible. I can't study at the teachers' college. Almost no Jews could become teachers. So I forgot about it and went to Moscow and took a course in college in Communications. They teach engineering for communica­tion: for the mail, automation for the mail service, sort­ers, etc. I was there five years. But I lived in Kiev and took corre­spondence courses and twice a year I have exams in Moscow. After school I was working. I got a job as an electri­cal drafter, designer, then engineer in the same company. I became an electrical engineer after the five years.

(How did you meet Alexander?) I was nineteen. We worked in the same organization. We knew each other three years before we decided to get married. Our families didn't know each other. They met when we decided to get married. We had a party in a restaurant with family and friends, about 100 people.

My mother's parents were dead. But my grandmother on my father's side is alive. She didn't live with me, but we were very close. I was very close with her when I was older. She's a beautiful person, a very smart and strong woman. She is eighty-three, she's my best friend. She lived with her younger son and his family. I remember that she had a big fami­ly. She had three sisters and a broth­er. The brother was killed in the second World War. My grandfa­ther was killed in the war, too. My grandmother was with two small children. She never remarried. She lived in Sverdlovsk and L'vov until just before the second World War.

(at work)

It was a very big engineering company. Many Jewish people worked there. My boss was Jewish and my friends-- I had many, many friends. I liked working there. I worked fifteen years in the same place. I had a break when I was pregnant. I had two years off then. When we got married we lived in our own place. It was bad, a small room, but our own. (Alex: our own 10 square meters).

When we had the baby we still lived there. We shared the kitchen. Two other families cooked with me. We had many, many problems. We have two other families, so three women. I was in good relations with them but they didn't like each other. It was difficult. They weren't Jewish. They were Ukrainians. We heard when they spoke with other people about the Jews. We stayed there four years. Then we got a new apartment [laughter]. We waited seven years. we applied just after we got married. We were very lucky. Some people wait twenty years. We moved in 1986 to the new apartment in the new area. It was a good apartment. It was far from our old place. It was very mixed. I didn't know Jewish people there. We still worked. You know, I had a very comfortable feeling in my job and when I came home, I was with my family. I heard what people say about Jews, but it wasn't to me. We lived far from relatives but we met each other once a week. My friends come to my apartment, usually, and we went to them.

(being Jewish)

I only felt bad about it one time when I couldn't go to college. I tried three times in two years. It was not a good time.

(leaving Russia)

We decided to leave Russian when we got married. In 1979. We married in 1978. So we applied. Then it was 1979 and emigra­tion was closed. We didn't lose our jobs or anything. I wasn't a boss, I was just a drafter. I had some uncomfortable disputes with my boss, but that was it. He asked me why I want to leave the country.

(Alexander and the KGB)

I had a terrible feeling. We didn't tell our parents or friends about this. We spoke about it only with each other. It was a terrible time. It was in 1984.

(being in Vienna and Rome with the children)

We didn't have a big problem with our children. Igor was nine months, but he was a good baby. Vladimir was about eight years old. We didn't have much of a problem, but it was hard.

(Chernobyl)

I was scared about my son and scared about all my family. My sister was in her ninth month of pregnancy. I worried a lot. She also left Kiev. They gave us vacations for one month-- the usual length.

(Why Chicago?)

My cousin lives here. She came to America eleven years ago. So we decided... They sponsored us.

(What do you like here, and miss from there?) In Russia I miss my parents, my sister, my friends. It's different here, but it's interesting. I have a problem only with my English.

(about the future)

I hope that my parents and sister come to me. I so miss them. It's better here for the children. I think my sons will have a real life. I don't know what they should be. Whatever they want.