**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**ALEX UMANTSEV**

**PhD., Institute of Metal Physics, 1985**

**Thesis: Dendritic Solidification**

**Physical Technical Institute of Moscow**

**Currently: Physicist/Research Associate in Material Science,**

**Northwestern University**

BIRTH: July 10, 1952, Moscow

SPOUSE: Lilia Shafran Umantsev, Moscow

Married 1987, Moscow

CHILDREN: Boris, September 28, 1988, Moscow

PARENTS: Rudolf Umantsev, February 5, 1924, Irkutsk, Siberia

Electrical Engineer

Julia Zissman, January 27, 1929, Moscow

Pediatrician

SIBLINGS:

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Izrail Zissman, Siberia

Marya Samarovitska, Siberia

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Boris Umantsev, Uman, Ukraine

Fayina Lustig, 1898-1976, Siberia, Gynecologist

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

NAME: **ALEX UMANTSEV**

DATE: Dec. 12, 1990

INTERVIEWER: E. Snyderman

(Alex, you've been telling me about your roots, and it seems that your father was born in Irkutsk, Siberia, where there was a large Jewish population, and your mother was born in Moscow. You were going to tell me a bit about why your father happened to be in Irkutsk. Something happened under the czar where the family wound up there.)

Actually I do not know much about my grandfather's family, but I recall the story about my grandmother's fami­ly. Her grandfather was a tailor in the Ukraine, and he wasn't a revolutionary person, but I was told the story that some students used to gather in his house and read books and discuss things and talk about politics, maybe, and because of this he was resettled from the Ukraine to Siberia by the czar regime. He was resettled and from that time on, they lived in Siberia in a small settlement near the river Piliv­da, as I remember. And there were many Jews who had been resettled from the Ukraine to Siberia and started the Rus­sian Jewish population in Siberia. And now in America from time to time I meet people from Siberia.

(Do you think you get a different type of person from Siberia than you do from other parts of Russia?) A little bit, but not strongly. (How are they different?) You see, of course the environment impacts on the person, and maybe they are more closed persons. They do not talk much. But I do not see a very strong difference. They are pretty close to us who lived in Moscow and so on, of course in the cen­tral part of Russia, I think.

(Now I'm going to ask you what your earliest memories are growing up in Moscow. Tell me who lived in your house, what your neighborhood was like, what do you remember of school.) This is a tough question because I don't know how to answer. If you are interested in my Jewish remembrance, for instance, I don't know... (That's a good start...) This is something exact, something that I can talk about a little bit. This is something absolutely different in Russia than in America. In America as I can see now, as I can realize, kids recognize themselves as Jews from the very beginning, let's say from the date of birth, from very young. But in Russia, the story was absolutely different. And as I re­call, I didn't recognize myself as a Jew until I was fif­teen, fourteen years old. You see, there are often, I heard this word to my address ‑ Jew ‑ and my impressions were not very good, but I can say that I simply didn't understand what it is. I didn't understand why kids called me a Jew and why it was bad. And in Russian there are several words, several terms to call a Jew, and they are not like a nick­name. They are almost like a bad word. And I didn't understand those until I was fourteen. And by that time, step by step, I got friends and many of my friends were Jews too, and from that moment on, I started to under­stand some­thing ‑ that I belonged to the Jewish nationality, that I belonged to a very, very old people, to the part of the world community with a very old and rich history. At that time, probably, when I was a teen, I was interested, as I remember, very much in history, in all things that were available in Russia. Not many of them were at that time.

And then step by step ‑ I do not remember the first time when I appeared in the Moscow Synagogue ‑ by the way, a very inter­esting place. It's a very old synagogue ‑ maybe two hundred years, maybe a little less, I don't know ‑ very old, very beautiful, with all details, as I realize now ‑ special details that helped to serve the religion in this, let's say, difficult environment. For many years, Russia was trying to kill all religions, and especially first of all Jewish religion. I don't know how many synagogues were in Russia until the last year. And then we started to visit the synagogue during big holidays like Passover, like Rosh Hashona, like Simchat Torah. (How old were you?) I was sixteen, maybe seventeen. You see, when you get this piece of information, and somehow I realized that this is my part. This is something that I can say that I like, that I felt good with and so on, that I understood. We used to meet friends near the synagogue and so on. And from that time period, of course things were different. This part of my life ‑ When I realized I was a Jew ‑ became absolutely different. I was proud, and I am proud of this.

(I'm wondering what made your family take you to the synagogue then and not before. What changed? What kind of changes were going on around you that permitted that?) That's a good question. You see, I can't say that it was my family that brought me to the synagogue. Probably it was my friends, and probably it was myself. I'm not sure that I really can explain all details even for myself right now. In Russia, it was a custom to think ‑ it was part of the education of kids that there isn't anything like a religion. It shouldn't be. The greatest idea is everything that deals with the Communist idea ‑ all people should be Communists, and they should be the same and the most impor­tant thing is to belong to the working class... and reli­gious affili­ation...

(Anything that was organized religion was outlawed.) Right. And it was some­thing wrong and didn't prohibit it. I recall the story when one man got time only for teaching Hebrew. I'm not sure if I explained the story exactly. He was a teacher. He had a group of people who studied the Hebrew alphabet, words, trying to understand the Torah ‑ not Torah but Bible written in Hebrew ‑ and he got the time only for teaching, not for religion, not for some kind of wrong things from the point of view of government, but only for teaching Hebrew. Just teaching the language. (For beginners...) Right, at the beginning level. I'm absolutely sure that people who gathered and tried to study Hebrew ‑ they didn't have any kind of advanced level, of course. For instance, in Russia I didn't know the Hebrew alphabet at all ‑ only some letters. Again, he got time only for teaching.

(You mean he got sent to prison?) Yes! (Where was he sent to prison?) In Moscow or in Leningrad. I do not remember the story exactly because it was... (How old a man was he?) He was young ‑ probably he was forty years old. (And what year was that about?) In the 1970s. (How long was he in prison?) These details I do not know because he wasn't a friend of mine. (He was the friend of a friend?) No, just someone that I heard a story about.

(So the authorities were pretty strict at that point, but that was before you had the opportunity to go to syna­gogue, because it wasn't so dangerous then. You were born in 1952 ‑ you were sixteen or seventeen, so it would have been in the late Sixties, around '69.) It was approximately at this period of time. (He was sent to prison about the same time you were going to synagogue?) At the same time, we started to visit synagogue.

(Would you say this was an act of foolhardiness on your part? Were you taking a big risk doing this, or was it reasonably safe to do this?) By the way, not always. I know stories about guys whom I knew who were expelled from the institute because of visiting synagogue. These stories I know for sure. And the story that happened with me...

Once during the holiday ‑ it was the beginning of the fall ‑ maybe it was Rosh Hashona or Yom Kippur ‑ I do not remember exactly ‑ we were at the synagogue. The regular story, we were singing and talking with friends, and then one guy appeared who was taking pictures of us ‑ with the camera and flash and all that stuff ‑ and he took some pictures and after that, I realized that some of the pic­tures appeared at the institute where I studied, for in­stance. I don't remember if my picture was over there, but it was a very funny story, and we, being students, were telling this story to each other ‑ which photographs ap­peared and who was questioned about this thing of visiting the synagogue.

(Where did the photographs appear ‑ in a publica­tion?) The pictures appeared at first in the Party Committee of the institute. Each governmental insti­tute in Russia ‑ probably I have to add that all enterprises and institutes ‑ they are all in a sense of governmental origin. They are governed by the government. And they do have special party committee. I am sure that this is some­thing boring to listen about this, because it is very stupid how it could be, that every­thing could be governed from a certain place, but in Russia these are the things that are customary. And the first pictures appeared in this Party Committee, and then they were distributed to the departments people belonged to, and so on. I remember another story when people were expelled.

(Let me ask you, where did you go to school? You went to school in Irkutsk as a small child, and then when you finished our equivalent of high school you would have been sixteen or seventeen?) Seventeen. (Did you know early on what you wanted to do? Did you know what your career would be?) Of course, I didn't know for sure. But to some ex­tent, my attitude to the future has been formed during the last couple of years after high school. And I understood that things of great interest to me are physics and math, and I wanted to follow this track, this way. I passed exams ‑ I was very lucky ‑ I passed exams and entered a very good institution in Russia. I'd like to add that science and everything dealing with this in Russia ‑ this is an abso­lutely different story than very many tough and stupid things that can happen in Russia ‑ still, they had good institution and a not very bad system of education, and if you would be lucky, you could get not bad education in Russia. But of course, Jews had restric­tions; they had very strong barriers, and everybody knew that. To some extent it wasn't a secret that Jews were treated absolutely different at the institute during the examinations. Being a Jew, you had simply different marks. If you got the same marks as a Russian or a guy of different nationality, minority, could get in this place. And Jews, they were not minorities like minorities in America, absolutely. They were treated dif­ferently.

(They were discriminated against.) [laughing] Yes! It's a bit funny to recall and to talk about it, but when you live under this system, when this is not the story that you are talking about but when it's your life ‑ you see! When you are thinking about this... I don't want to say all day long, but very often... this is something...

(So you felt some anxiety about your future because your interest was in physics and mathematics and you know that you're probably a pretty good student, right?) Right! I tried to be. I studied with interest. (So when you fin­ished, what were your grades?) Yeah. Actually, I got my first degree in Physics. My grades were, in Russia, the system of education is a little bit different. I do not remember exactly all my grades. In general, they were not bad. (So this is when you're already at the institute?) Yes. (What's the name of the institute?) It was the Physi­cal Technical Institute of Moscow. (Were you worried about getting into this institute?) Yes, I was, sure. (So your grades had to have been pretty good at your regular school prior to that, right?) Yes. Oh, you're talking about my grades from high school? (Yes.) Oh, my high school diploma was very good. Probably if I had any Cs it was a mark about my behavior. In Russia, teachers estimate not only your knowledge, but your behavior. (And your telling me you misbehaved in class?) Yeah. Probably, it could be. I'm also sure that teachers do not like me very much very often. I'm talking about the teacher in History. We had very tough discussions. It's very interesting. We didn't know the truth at that time, not many materials and books and studies had been published at that time. We didn't know the truth. But we felt, being even kids and having sources sometimes from the radio... By the way, I recall many stories we had by the radio from America. (Voice of America?) Right. And sometimes kids could find something in all the books and stories of their grandparents, and so on, but we felt that the type of history that teachers at the school tried to bring to the class was wrong. It wasn't the truth. (So you actually challenged the teacher?) Yeah. But I got a very bad story after this. Yes! I could be called so, yeah. (You weren't afraid?) I don't know. Yes, I was, I was. (So why did you do it?) Because we felt and knew that she was not right. That it wasn't true. At that time we thought that probably something could be changed. Later on, when we became older, we understood that probably to change things isn't in our power, you see. And probably at that time we became much more pragmatic.

(When you say "we", you're talking about other people in your class?) Right, about my friends, yes. (How many of you were doing this?) Like, five people. I'm not going to say that all of us were doing things, but we were friends and we were exchanging opinions and stories and were dis­cussing all things. We were of the same point of view about things that happened. By the way, I'm talking about the last two years of high school. At that time, we had a very good, very close group of five, six Jewish guys (all boys?) yes. Yes. You see, all of them were boys. (These boys went to the synagogue together?) Yes. We used to go to the synagogue together. Of course the stories and our histories are different, but at least three guys, three people are now in America. Two in America and one in Canada. And probably that was the begin­ning of my Jewish recognition, if I'm explaining it correctly.

(Let me backtrack a little. I see the influence of this peer group. But you say that your grandmother, Faina, lived with you.) Yes. (And she knew some Yiddish. She was a gynecologist.) Yes. (Was she practicing medicine when you were a child?) Yeah, but again, I'm sorry, but probably I will repeat this sentence very often, that in Russia, the way it goes is different from American. Again, practicing of medicine in Russia is different. She didn't have a private practice as physicians do in America. But she belonged to the very big clinic, again of a governmental department. Every­thing in Russia belonged, (and this is a problem right now ‑ to destroy this system and to get more freedom), even a couple of years ago ‑ even four, five years ago it belonged to the government. Anyway, at the clinic she had a very big prac­tice. She was famous. She worked for fifty years. So, yes, I remember. (So you're saying she worked almost until she died?) Yes, exactly. She retired a year before her death.

(She would have a recollection of Jewish practices and knowing Yiddish and so forth. Did anything appear in the household because of this background, even foods. Do you remember any foods that were Jewish that you could look at now and say...) Yeah, I can. My grandmother and my mother ‑ they saved many Jewish recipes. And I recall special names, like: knadel, like kugola, like .... (There was challah in the house, that special twisted bread?) I will try to answer. You see, it was very strange, but at that time and probably until recently, you could buy challah at the special bread store. Again, in Russia, this system is absolutely different, I mean stores and markets ‑ they are different. There are special stores for bread. At this store you could buy real challah. At first, a long time ago, it was called challah, exactly. Then, of course, it lost this name and was called bread ‑ 25 kopeks. Now that I can compare with real Jewish challah, it looked exactly like... it really was a Jewish challah. (But there was no Shabbat service?) Of course not. It wasn't kosher. (It didn't just appear on Friday nights?) No, it didn't ap­pear. This bread wasn't connected with the Shabbat. Not at all. I remember not far from the very beginning, because matzoh was in our house from being a kid, and my mother and my grandmother ‑ my mother's mother ‑ she used to bring, and used to cook things from matzoh. Matzoh ‑ this is the name, the word I'll remember forever. And last years in Russia, I was responsible to bring and to buy matzoh and to bring it home. What's the way to get matzoh in Moscow? Probably the same stories in big Russian cities. Maybe the story is different in small villages, in small Jewish settle­ments and so on, but in Moscow you could buy matzoh in the synagogue. There is only one synagogue in Moscow. Like 200,000 Jews in Moscow, not less, maybe 100,000, but of this order ‑ 100,000 Jews in one city and one synagogue. [laughs] They prepared matzoh only for the Passover. (How many years was this going on?) Forever.

(I've heard different stories about the unavailability of matzoh in different cities. Like in Odessa they couldn't get matzoh. But you're saying that in Moscow all along, it was possible.) Yes, it was possible, but it wasn't a very simple way, because very many Jews wanted to buy, and only one place, only one small window through which you could get this matzoh, and it wasn't very simple. And I believe it was the story that in some big cities you couldn't get matzoh at all. Anyway, it wasn't something simple, some­thing regular.

(Let's jump to.. now you're a student at the insti­tute. Are you involved in political activities at the institute?) No. (Now you're careful.) Right, exactly. (In your class­es, is it generally known by your instructors that you're Jewish?) Probably not. At the first insti­tute... Let me tell the story to the very end. The first degree I got from the Physical Institute and the Master's degree I got from a different institute. It was in Moscow, too. It was called the Insti­tute of Transportation. By the way, the title doesn't mean anything. It could be a very interesting department, very interesting people, and so on, at any institute. Later on I'll try to tell the story of this institute, too. At first, when I started at the Physi­cal Institute, instructors were really nice people, and they were not worried about these things. This is not... This is from 1969 to 1973, early '70s. At first what we were wor­ried about was physics, math and absolutely regular things that are almost the same as in America. And you could understand that there are some restrictions, some things that you couldn't get, only dealing again with the special, how to explain, with the authorities of the institute. Of course, it's an institute and there are authorities. And authorities, you see, you had to deal with them. And this process is with some kind of separation. The life for Jews, it's like a way with barriers. If you got through the barrier, then things are quiet and more or less good. You can live, you can do probably what you are thinking about, but to get through this barrier ‑ and this barrier is dif­ferent for you and for different people. And if you got through this barrier, for several years you could be safe, you could think, you could do something.

(But you didn't tell me what the barrier was with you.) Right, the barrier was the entering exams. To enter the institute, you see, at this moment, you've been treated differently. To apply to the institute, you had to fill out the application, and in the application, it should be writ­ten your nationality. I don't know if you're familiar with this process, but in Russia, you live forever, you live your whole life with your nationality, because your nationality is written down in your passport.

(What is the official name of this passport? Is this the internal passport?) Yes. Exactly. An internal pass­port. Passport of a citizen of the Union of Soviet Social­ist Republics. And your na­tionality isn't your religious affil­iation. This is something absolute­ly different. And I'm not sure that people in America really understand all these details exactly, but you are a Jew, and you've been treated differently independent of your religious attitude, of your opinion about religion. Maybe you do not like to think about religious history and so on, but you are a Jew from the very beginning.

(And it's different because... let's see if I'm right about this, because I've been hearing something about it and I want to understand. The other people who have this stamped on their passport ‑ it is a nationality ‑ like Russian...) Uzbek...(Ukrainian. But the Jews didn't come from one section of the country. They didn't have a part of the country, right. So I understand already this is a different kind of meaning even though it's in the same place on the passport. Is that right? It's in the same place as if you were Russian, but it isn't your birthplace at all. It's not the nation you come from....) Exactly. Right. This is the nation... (You're part of a national minority, but your minority, the Jewish national minority, does not have a place in this country.) Right, absolutely. We're trying to estimate this situation, and probably Jews were the only minority in Russia that didn't have the place. But again I'm not saying the truth exactly, because there is a special Jewish autonomous region in Russia, but this region is in the Far East ‑ probably you do not even know this place. It is quite close to Japan ‑ the so called Biro­bizhan region. But Jews never recognized this place as their region, as something that they belonged to. They came to Russia from an absolutely different place. They lived in different cities and different places, and they were settled over there by the order of Stalin and it was some­thing. Anyway, Jews didn't have... (But that only came later, Birobi­zhan.) Sure, it came in the late '30s. (And then later on it even became a place for exiles, didn't it? And impris­onment for Jews?) Yeah, it could be. I do not know. It could be, but I'm not sure. (But it wasn't generally known.)

(So there you were with your passport trying to get into the institute. That was the first barrier.) Yes. Let's say it was the first barrier on the life way of me and of all my friends. (Was this a shock for you?) No. We were prepared. You see, when you graduate from high school, you're already a big guy, and you had to be prepared for real life. And this is exactly, probably, the science that your parents teach you in. This is the story, all these things, this is the way it goes in Russia. Parents of a Jewish boy or girl ‑ they try to prepare the kid for the real life. They tell different stories... (In your house, who talked to you about this?) My mother and my dad, too. We talked and we discussed all these stories and situations candidly, and talked about everything.

(I didn't ask you what your father and mother did. I know what your grandmother did...) My father's occupation was as an electrical engineer. (That was his work.) Yes, yes. (Mother?) She was a pediatrician. (And she worked like your grandmother at a clinic?) At the same clinic. My grandmother helped my mother to find a job.

(So your parents were able to talk with you and prepare you. Did your plans for school change by the fact that you knew you were going to have some difficulties. For example, you had a doctor in your family, and it was hard to get into medical school. Did you have any thoughts yourself of becoming a doctor?) No. I didn't. (Did you go after what you really wanted to go after?) I tried. Sure, I tried. I realized that I could get problems and that probably I wouldn't be able to get everything that I would like to get, but I knew that I had to try at least. I was lucky. (They accepted you without a lot of problems?) Yes, I passed exams very good. And I remember at this institute only two Jewish guys and in our department we had 70, maybe 100 students, and among them I remember only two Jews.

(How big was the student population at the institute?) It was a very big institute, like 7‑8 big departments. In Russia, to get the degree you have to study sometimes five years, maybe six years. Eight departments, maybe a hundred students in each. It's a big institute, and very much work has been done at this institute. It was a good school.

(So you thought you had a good education, but you also knew that you were very much in the minority, and knew only two other Jews in your department...) Yeah, but I was not friends with the other Jewish guys. (So your friends were not Jewish, they were Russian?) No, no. My friends were from high school. And these are my real friends up to this day, to this moment. (But they weren't with you at this institute?) No, they were not. They tried to enter differ­ent institutes when they could. None of them studied with me. At the institute I didn't have friends, I had only people with whom I studied, you see? Colleagues. That's it.

(So you went through those four years at the Physical Technical Institute with relatively few problems then?) Yeah, with relatively few problems, yes. (And when you finished, did you immediately go to work or did you start school for further education?) Then I changed the institu­tion and started my education at an absolutely different place in Moscow in the center. (That was in 1973?) Yeah, I think so. Probably '73, maybe '74. (What degree did you want now, a Master's degree?) A Master's, yes, in Applied Math.

(How was it there for you?) Absolutely different. At this institute we had a very big Jewish population of stu­dents. (How do you explain that?) I can explain. There many of them tried to enter different institutes, like Moscow State University. To be exact, it the Mathematical and Mechanical Department of Moscow State University, a very good and famous university with a very good system of educa­tion, and a very tough anti‑Semitic system. It's very well known to everybody. They simply didn't try to hide this, that they were anti‑­Semites, and they tried not to accept Jews, and so on. But still, many of the people whom I knew tried to enter this institute, and so on. They couldn't. They didn't pass the exams. A stupid story. And then Jews always tried to try to find a different way, a different place to get education, for something different. But to reach the goal, you see, if you'd like... I'm talking about students whom I knew, people with whom I studied. If they couldn't enter this institute, but they knew exactly what they wanted, they knew what type of education they wanted to get, they tried to find different places. For instance, this place was very good from this point of view because they had a very good math department. Because the same story happened with professors in Russia as with students. Students were treated differently, but of course teachers too. Some of them couldn't get jobs at different insti­tutes. They couldn't find a job where they were looking for, and they tried to find different places. And they found, say, like *ubezhishche* [refuge, asylum - sk]. They tried to find a place under a roof where they could live, work, do what they wanted to do. And that was a very good department with good teachers. There were very good stu­dents. The position of the department, of the institute, depends not only on professors, but on students too. And I realized this thing now in America better probably than in Russia. And students were at the level of education, of exams that was very good. Probably half the students were Jews, maybe more.

(And how big was this class?) Not as big, maybe 70. (And the school itself was very big?) It was a very big institute. In Russia the system of education is different from American, and most of Russian places to get education are not universi­ties, but they are institutes ‑ special institutes with special orientation, like engineering. For instance, this word "transportation" said nothing for me right now. I don't know anything about transportation. An interesting story ‑ my diploma, thesis... I'm talking about graduating thesis to get the degree. Later on I got Ph.D., but this is a different story ‑ I'm not talking about this. At the institute, my thesis was purely mathematical. You have some kind of problem, and so on. Before the last exam before I was ready to defend my thesis, my dad gave me some advice. It is something irrelevant. You are talking about math at the Institute of Transportation. Probably you need something from this... Why not draw a big train on a big sheet of paper, like an interesting picture for everybody. The picture of the train could be the only thing about transportation that I know! You see, you could study any­thing...

(Did you really draw a picture?) No, no, it was a joke. (So without any problems you went through this insti­tute. ­You defended your thesis and that was fine. Now it's about 1977?) I got my degree in 1976. This institute really had many problems. This is the institute that ex­pelled some of the students because of attending synagogue, and we had a very big story, maybe another day I'll try to show you. Once, I don't know how to explain all the de­tails ‑ they are absolutely unnatural for Americans ‑ but it was a process when ‑ do you know this word Komsomol? ‑ (Sure.) Good. When the Komsomol organiza­tion of the insti­tute... (And you were a member?) Yes, yes. They were blam­ing us students ‑ most of our students were Jews ‑ and they were blaming us because of our way to behave ourselves, to get education, that we do not take part in the special Komsomol life, that we are not doing everything that they require, that we're supposed to do, etc. Now, things in the system of Russian education is absolutely different, and they realize that it was stupidity then ‑ now I'm not sure that the Komsomol really exists. I'm sure yes, but I think it really disintegrated.

(Still Dec. 12, 1990, talking about Komsomol leadership at the Institute of Transportation.) I'm not sure that I'll be able to tell many stories about the Komsomol. I would like to do this. But maybe to explain some things, this organization, the Komsomol, it was a special organization to govern the youth of the country. Because, you see, now I'm trying to talk from the point of view of the party chief, that young people, young students, youngsters, they do not know exactly the way, what to do, where to go, and so on. We have to govern them. We have to keep everything in our way, not to lose all [...]. You see, this is exactly the organization ‑ the Komsomol. In our generation, everybody was members of this organization, the Komsomol, crossing the level of fifteen years old, you had to enter this organiza­tion, otherwise you would be blamed. For instance, it's another difficulty to enter the institute if you are not a Komsomol member.

(So you were literally forced to become members. Did you have to pay dues?) Yeah, we had to, but sometimes dues were absolutely nominal, like 2, 3, 5 kopeks. But later on when people get salary, then it could be some­thing substan­tial, a part of your salary. But this organization, this is really something special, to deal with the young generation of the country ‑ not to allow this stream to enter different sources, not to go a different direction, you see? (To control the direction...) Exactly, yes. And from this organization, this was the way... Really it was the source of very bad things, when young people, young men and women, trying to get good positions in the Communist party leader­ship, they were prepared to do everything, to do whatever you want. They could say anything to their friends, and so on. Anyway, this is the problem. The worst remembrance that I brought from Russia, the Komsomol organization. It's something very frustrating for me and for my friends, too.

(During this period, did you have access to any of the *samizdat* publications, any of the forbidden or underground publications? Were you reading any of those things?) What do you mean "access"? The idea of *samizdat*, and the idea of underground publication, it means that this is the source without access. Somebody tries to publish, to issue, and then it spreads automatically, from hand to hand. It spreads without any control. And if you're lucky, of course, and we had, we tried to find something. By the way, it was another very interesting source of information, of knowledge about everything.

(When did you first have opportunity to read something like that?) I don't remember. Probably I picked up some­thing from my parents. Sometimes they used to bring some­thing at home, too. I'm not sure that at that time that they liked to show everything to me, because, you see, when you're a parent, you think that your kid is young and might not understand exactly everything. Probably they were scared. (You may have found something.) Yes, I saw... ­(Do you remember what it was?) The first thing, I probably don't remember what it was, but I can recall stories, books and information that I got through this source. I read some stories by Solzhenitsyn, but not the most interesting. The most interesting for me were stories about Jewish history, about holidays, and I recall the book by two Churchills, a book about the six‑day war. Do you know this book? It's probably *The Six Day War*. Churchill's son was in Britain at that moment, and his grandson was in Israel as a journalist, and they wrote this book and I got 80% of information about this event through this book. At that time we could find poems of Russian poets like Akhmatova. Even Akhmatova, she was Russian, and Mandel­shtam, of course I read Mandelshtam first in *samizdat*, and later, what else? It was a Jewish journal about everything. (About the emigration movements?) Oh yes. Something about emigration, too. What else? Step by step, about everything. (There was a book in 1972 ‑ *Jews In The U.S.S.R.*, devoted to the history and culture and personal problems of Jews. We have this here on this time line...) Yes, it was. (So you were pretty cur­rent. You could keep up with what was going on pretty much at the time it was happening...) we tried, I'm not sure that we were, but we tried.

(For example, were you aware when Solzhenitsyn was arrested and sent to prison ‑ did you know anything about that?) Yes. We knew because some materials had been pub­lished in newspa­pers and we could read them, and again, even at the moment of publication that it wasn't exactly the truth. It was some­thing that had been prepared by the government, and so on. You see, in Russia at that time it was like a game between population and government. Govern­ment tried to show the performance, and public, population, people, I don't know the best way to say, people tried to show that they do really believe in this performance, you see. But actually nobody really believed it except some small group of people.

(What about Sakharov. He was later of course...) Yeah, a little bit. (How about Sharansky?) Yeah, in Russia, of course we knew. And of course I learned more when I tried to emigrate, when I happened to be involved in this process of emigration, of course I learned more. But this is a strange way to get information in Russia. Always you try to pick up different sources, friends, radio, *samizdat*. Actu­ally, friends... (So you kept each other informed?) Right.

(So you were definitely aware that certain things were going on and yet while you were at the institute you had to be careful because of the Komsomol and this and that. So now you've finished at the Institute of Transportation. And you want to go on now for a Ph.D. Did you work for awhile or go to school?) Again, as I told you, life of a Jew in Russia, it's like a long way with barriers. First barrier, say you enter the institute and you got an education, you were lucky, but then there is the next very strong, very heavy barrier to get a job that you would like to have. This is the strongest barrier. For instance, again, the system in Russia to get a job is absolutely different from American. In America it's a system of free choice. There are many companies, and many students on the market. You have to write down your resume and send it to everybody, and to look, and I don't know... But in Russia, there's a special system of distribution of positions, and each insti­tute has a list of positions, of working places, that you could apply for, and they bring this list, and sometimes you have the choice to find or to choose something from this list. Sometimes you do not have, it depends. Mostly, you have the chance to find something from this list. And when I got my Master's, I was a really good student, I had rather high grades, probably I was like, maybe, seventh, eighth, maybe ninth from 100 students. It's a not bad result.

(And you were competing with a specialized group...) Right. (So did they give you where you wanted to go?) No. At first I wanted to get the position at the institute that wasn't on this list. (Did you wish to teach?) No. (What did you wish to do?) I wished to make some kind of re­search. (What kind of research was it?) You see, at that time I didn't know very much, I didn't know exactly what I was wishing to do. I knew that I wanted to deal with some kind of physics and math problems, but I wasn't exact in my wishes yet. And then I found something from this list. It was a scientific research institute in this department ‑ the Department of Transportation. In Russia it's a big depart­ment. It's called the Ministry of Transportation, of Rail­ways. And they have a big research institute. And I found one position on the list for this institute, and I applied to the guy, to the man who came from this institute to find somebody. And he said that okay, I'm very good. He would like to hire me, to see me at the institute, and so on. Then I was at the institute looking at the working place, at what they were doing. We almost came to an agreement. But then in a week I gave him a call and suddenly he said, "Oh you see, I don't know what happened, but our position is closed. Now I can't hire you. I'm so sorry..." And the real story was next. You see, I have a Russian last name. And he didn't recognize me as a Jew. He simply didn't know that I was a Jew until he got my documents. And from the documents, he mentioned that now in the department ‑ not the benefits or payroll department, it's the personnel depart­ment ‑ he said that he was in Personnel and he could­n't offer me this position. Exactly the story was that he got my documents and realized that I was a Jew! But to tell you the truth, at that moment I wasn't frustrated at all because I expected something like this. Then, looking for a job, I got a position at a small branch of this institute ‑ some­thing irrelevant, in a different place and so on. Again, at that moment my mother helped me. It's a usual way in Russia when parents, through their friends and relatives, try to help their kids, their sons and daughters, to get a job. I got something, but it wasn't the best place. I tried to do something that I thought probably could be valuable, some­thing interesting, but anyway... (This wasn't really chal­lenging?) Right. (So how long did you stay at this insti­tute?) Probably for three years. (Until 1979 then.) No. From 1976 ‑ yes, until the end of 1979.

(Then what happened?) Then again, then I was lucky and a friend of my parents' helped me to enter an absolutely different institute. It was an institute of metallurgical department. It was the Institute of Metal Physics. And the total name of the institute was the Institute of Ferrous Metallurgy. (This is where you did your doctoral thesis?) Right, exactly. (What was your subject? By this time you had a better idea of what...) Right. The first idea I got from my supervisor, from my advisor. I started to work in the area of solidification, in the area of metallurgy of physical metallurgy and material science exactly.

(That was the area that your thesis was in?) Yes, exactly. (What was the title of your work?) There is a special term: dendritic solidification. Dendrite is a tree in Greek. (How long did that take?) I took, let's say, almost five years to get the degree. (So in 1983 already.) I started in 1980 and in 1985 I got the degree. But at first I was doing the work. Then I was writing the thesis and I was working.

(Was it during this period or after you finished your thesis that you met Lilia?) After. I met Lilia when I was a Doctor, after that. I met her in 1986. (So it was the following year.) Yeah, that year. (So after you got your thesis done, there should have been fewer barriers now.) Right.

But again, let's try to talk about barriers. I could get through this barrier. I could get the work that I was thinking about, that was good for me because of friends and so on, because of chance. It was chance that at that moment they could accept a Jew to this institute. Anyway, it was an interesting place. But from the early '50s, maybe from the '60s, very many Jews worked for this institute, and they had a very interesting company. This is a famous place. Here in America at Northwestern, very many people are well­known from... (This is the school you went to that you re­mained at working or this is a whole different place?) The same place. It's the Department of Metal Physics at the Institute of Ferrous Metallurgy. It's difficult to explain the structure of this institute. It's a big institute of ferrous metallur­gy, and there are different departments. And one of the departments was the physical department. Okay. And it was a vocational institute, not exactly a teaching institute, an institute for students. They didn't have an undergraduate program, only small, not very big, but good graduate program.

(So you stayed on to be a professor there?) No. I got the Ph.D. and I started to work for this institute doing re­search. And to get a professorship at this institute didn't mean anything because they didn't have an undergraduate program. It wasn't an institute for teach­ing. It was an institute for research. (So how long did you stay at this place?) I entered the institute in 1980 and stayed until I emigrated from the Russia ‑ for eight or nine years. (So when you met Lilia you were now a researcher with your doctorate at this institute.) Right. (At this point in your life you were able to go skiing.) [laughs] Yes. It wasn't my first ski trip. Working at this institute, I started to ski and liked downhill skiing. No, it wasn't my first trip.

(You probably had some sense that you were going to get married, but you didn't know to whom, right?) Yeah. (Was it important to you to marry somebody Jewish?) Yes, it was. By all means, of course. (Do you remember how you met? Were you with Jewish friends when you met?) By chance, I was. We met each other. It was far from Moscow in a small, northern town in the mountains. It was a company from Moscow, almost all of us were Muscovites. And I was with my friend, an interesting man, with whom I worked at the insti­tute and with whom I published a paper. And he emigrated a year before me. And now he is in Maryland and we came to see his friend. It happened to be that Lilia was in this room. She came to see her friend. It was the same company. I think it was a regular story.

The only unusual thing that I see was that we met each other far from Moscow, but we lived in Moscow in the same region, not very close, but in the same region. We didn't meet each other in Moscow. For instance, we used the same metro station in Russia to get to work. We used the same metro station, but never met. But we met each other 1,500 miles away from Moscow.

(When you met, did you know at that point that you were thinking of emigrating?) [end of tape]

Second Interview: **ALEX UMANTSEV**

DATE: January 15, 1991

INTERVIEWER: E. Snyderman

We're very close to the deadline. Just five‑six hours before the Middle East deadline. (At midnight tonight...) 11:00 p.m. Chicago time. (And it's 5:10 p.m. now. Presum­ably Bush has the authorization to go to war against Iraq.) Everybody's worried strongly about the situation. But let's try to talk about our things.

(We stopped last time where you had told me that you and Lilia met hundreds of miles away from home. Both of you were on ski vacations with friends. You met and... How long were you on that vacation?)

Probably, it was not more than two weeks ‑ probably ten days. I don't know what could be important for us here. Maybe the only thing that marrying a Jewish woman was really important for me and I realized later to meet a Jewish man was important for my wife, too. (When you saw each other, did you recognize...) Not immediately. (Both Jewish and non‑Jewish friends...) Right, mixed company.

(When you saw her did you recognize that this was a Jewish person?)

I didn't recognize immediately, but Lilia said that she did. Somehow, probably, women are more experienced in all these things like that. I'm not sure. But later on, talk­ing step by step--- By the way, again, that's interesting. At that time it was a crisis. It was some kind of crisis in the Middle East, too. It was a difficult time for Israel. I don't remember exactly. It was in 1984, I believe. (About the time of the Yom Kippur war?) That was in 1973. (The Lebanese invasion...) That's right, sure. Exactly. I remember watching TV and exchanging opinions about the situation in the Middle East, and so on. I can't say it was a very romantic story, just a regular way.

We left each other five‑six days after meeting, because my vacation was over, and Lilia stayed at that place a couple days more. Later on I came to the railway station to meet Lilia, my future wife. When she returned to Moscow, I met her when she arrived. (So right away there was a very powerful interest in each other.) Probably. Yes, probably from the very beginning. Could be. Then, step by step...

(So how long did you know each other before you got mar­ried?)

I used to say I dated my wife for a year, and then married. Not a very long time. (But then again you weren't a youngster...) Sure, we were not. We were both after our thirties. We had some living experience. We knew much about life, and so on.

(Do you remember anything about your wedding?) Yeah, I do. To tell you the truth, I do not like this procedure, how it looks like in Russia. Except formal things that you have to sign special papers and they have to seal your passport. To get married, you have to get a special seal in your passport. [laughs]

(That could be frightening, couldn't it?)

Could be, yes. I told you before that the passport plays a very important role in Russia. What else? Usually there is a special person who is responsible for this proce­dure, and she has to pronounce a special speech, congratu­lat­ing the new couple.

(Is this usually a woman?) Yes, probably. Usually it's a woman, and she has a special dress, like a ribbon with Russian emblem on it, with flag, with some kind of stupid thing. (So she's designated as an official.) Exact­ly. (So you remember you didn't like the seal, the woman's official emblem. Anything else?) Yeah, of course. When she was pronouncing this speech, Lilia knew that I didn't like this and I think she expected something from me. I couldn't stay, just couldn't wait for the end of her speech. And when she finally ended up, I started to applaud, which was absolutely inappropriate, absolutely unnatural. When it's a speech, you see, you're supposed to applaud after a speech, and I started to applaud because it was a reaction.

(Do you remember anything she said in that speech?)

"Congratulations. It's the beginning... starting a new family.... your family is the smallest part of the soci­ety..." and all stupid things. It's trivial. Actually we can get this type of speech. We can ask Russian authorities to send to America the usual type of speech that this sort of woman pronounces. Let's mark that it's official stupidi­ty! [laughs]

(It takes the place of a religious ceremony.) Right, yes. It came to substitute. And this religious ceremony, beautiful maybe and sometimes interesting, at least that is a ceremony that makes sense. Because, you see, the Russian thing that weddings commit in the blue, in heaven. (Rus­sians have a saying that... marriages are made in heaven?) Yes. No. I mean in paradise. (That's the same thing ‑ heaven, paradise.) I'm sorry. Occasionally I thought I started talking about hell. (No, that's the opposite.)

Sure, yeah, yeah.. But this is a civil ceremony. Russian officials are trying to substitute... and this is a sort of idea... It's interesting that we're talking about special things to specifically place in concern with this event and this, and somehow we touch a great idea, the special idea of life in Russia, that when Communist ideology came, it had to substitute the place that religion had in human life by something, by their own ideas. And when it was close to the human life, it had very rude forms substi­tuting something, say a religious idea with a Communist idea, with the idea that you belong to the State, that your life belongs to the State, you have to do this, that, and so on. And this is everywhere through your life.

Always you get the idea starting from kindergarten, and of course school and university, everywhere, special idea. You are trained in this way. You are prepared by somebody else, and you have to prepare yourself by yourself in this direction. That's why it's impossible... Of course this is difficult for everybody, not only for Jews. But why it's more difficult for Jews, because this idea expels and elimi­nates Jews, and they are filling the pool, absolutely. Then this is much worse for Jews, too, but for people in general this is not good, this stuff. Now people realize all things and they simply threw out almost the entire idea, immediate­ly, in one year. Everybody knew that this is something extra in your life, something very dangerous and unneces­sary. They threw it out very easily. At first people started this process of the renovation of history.

(You're going all the way back to the revolution ‑ 1917...) Sure, right. (In 1917 they threw out religion...) Exactly. This is the moment I'm talking about. Everything started from the Revolution, and now people have recognized all things that have happened, and they tried to throw out ideology and they're coming back to a religious point of view and education and so on. Of course, I'm not talking about subsidiary processes, because this process of Russian national recognition brought them this branch, this strong stream of anti‑semitism too. Because Russians, now they're recognizing themselves not as Communists, because the Commu­nist idea is that everybody is equal and we are not nation­alities, we are working class. There are no nationalities, there are only working people and capitalists.

Dividing people (Economics...) Right, dividing people according to special reasons. And now they are recognizing themselves as a Russian nation. They are trying to condemn Jews, and of course this process of recognition as a nation brought anti‑semitism, too. But maybe, I do not know exact­ly, we are trying to follow events, but maybe the last events happening in Russia show that anti‑semitism isn't popular in Russia, and even in the Ukraine. The Ukraine was much more anti‑semitic than Russia. Why? Because now the most impor­tant point in Russia is simply food.

(But other people have voiced a different view of that than you have. That's very interesting. They say that when there are shortages, blame it on the Jews.) Exactly. That's true. But, you see, surely you're right. But start­ing to do this, later on people somehow realized that even if they would do something wrong to Jews... right now Jews have simply started to leave Russia... nothing happened.

(But they are saying that the reason they are leaving is because they are afraid. You know *Pamjat'*, a very anti­semitic organization, has threatened them and there were many incidents reported last late winter, early spring ‑ things were happening. I haven't heard anything now, if that reflects that there is nothing going on, or just the fact that the Jews aren't moving so quickly. We were told right now there's an arrival in Tel Aviv of a hundred Soviet Jews an hour.)

Yes, I know. One day before the New Year, each half­hour arrived one plane. Yes. (And this hasn't lessened one bit. I spoke to an Israeli woman today who is visiting the U.S. She's going back a week from today. She's uneasy being here this long because her family is there. And she says that even with this threat of war, she says that there are no less coming in. The same number are streaming into Israel.) Yeah.

(So why is that?) Okay, I will try to explain what I think about that. To some extent, anyway, despite the war, Jews feel themselves more protected in Israel than in Rus­sia. See? Even if it's a war, or close to war situation, and of course, now they can see that the situation is bad and becoming worse. And it won't be better. You see, everybody needs to eat, to be protected, and these are exactly the two things that are in short supply in Russia.

(When you say "to be protected", are you talking about from danger or from the weather?)

Not weather. This is not the point in favor of Israel, because many of them come from northern parts of Russia and they're used to having a different climate. Then the south­ern climate in Israel, the moist weather, is a different thing, but they come in spite of this. No, of course not the weather. (I mean shelter...) A roof, I see. (For some people Israel is not a good climate at all.) Not at all.

(I realize this is a difficult thing to ask someone who is here in the U.S., because this is where you wanted to come, but if you were at home now in Moscow...) You're going to ask me if I would leave Russia for Israel. No question. Of course. (At this moment, knowing there could be a war there any day, would you leave Russia for Israel now?) That's really difficult to answer, because we were not hesitating at all. We were thinking about that when we married. (That takes me back to the marriage, because Lilia said in her interview that almost maybe from the very time you got married, you were talking about emigrating.) Yeah, that's true.

(So let's go back. What made you want to emigrate from the time you got married?) At first I wanted to emigrate, not starting from the time we got married. I wanted to emigrate ten years ago [previously] when I finished my institute and when I started to understand things that were happening. I wanted to do this, but at that time, it was 1979, at the end of the year, and at that moment, Russian policy changed and very many things happened. Russians simply closed the gates. I couldn't get out. For ten years I had to find some kind of occupation, work. I was lucky that I could. I can't say that I was wasting time.

(You accomplished something.) Something, more or less. Maybe not very bad, trying to do the best. But when I met Lilia and we started to talk about things like that, to tell you the truth, we didn't talk much, because quickly we realized that we have abso­lutely the same opinion, and when you have the same opinion, you don't have much to talk about, you see? We were only waiting for the moment. But we were not sure that the moment could come.

Of course, that moment wasn't absolutely clear. The situation could change quickly and so drastically for Russia that the president of Russia wouldn't have anything else except, "let them go." When it happened we were almost the first. My cousins, probably they were almost the first who left Russia with Gorbachev, as people say, during the fourth wave. Now, counting back to the Revolution, people enumer­ate our emigration as the fourth wave. But it depends upon the point of view. First, after the Revolution, then before the war, immediately after the war, the third in the '70s that finished in 1979.

Now this is Gorbachev's, the fourth wave. We really can call it Gorbachev's, because he gave permission. It's a difficult question.

(So you saw it was hopeless. You lived your life trying to make it worthwhile, and during that period, were you expect­ing that there would be an opportunity again because there was an opportunity in 1979?)

Yes, I felt there would be.

(When did you sense that the opportunity had come? What happened? What occurred that made you say "now is the time to apply"?) That's not a difficult question. At first, of course there were very slight marks, Gorbachev trying to change the situation... (You mean "signs"...) Signs, yeah. At first, we got very slight signs when he was trying to change some­thing in Russia and outside Russia, when he was trying to gain some kind of better opinion and some kind of help from Western countries and America. He permitted more freedom and more contacts with Western coun­tries. It was close to the situa­tion in the '70s, the period of time that was called *Detente*.

But then we got strong, very strong, clear signs. What kind? I had very many friends who were... I forgot the proper name, they were refugees... (Refuseniks?) Right, refuseniks. (That was going to be my next question ‑ did you know any refuseniks?) A lot of them. (In the true sense of the word? Where they lost their jobs or had to take a less important job? They were struggling just to stay...)

If it is your next question, then I can tell you some of the stories that I know exactly. My cousins who came here a year before us were refuseniks for ten years. (What is their name?) Rothstein. A rather big family. (They live in Chicago?) Yes, all of them live in Chicago now. That's the reason we came here. (They sponsored you?) Yeah. We got a grant? Like a visa... You have to have some kind of rela­tives, friends... (Sponsors) Sponsors. They sponsored us. Exactly. My cousins really lost their jobs.

(What did they do?) I can't tell you exactly right now. I can't remember ‑ it was so a long time ago. My cousin, he worked... The story was they were very active and my cousin, she was trying to bring all people who wanted to leave Russia, to bring them together. She was making lists of names. They were gathering meetings. Very many times they were held by the Ukrainian KGB. They lived in Kiev. They had very many problems. By the way, their father lost his job. He was a geologist. He worked for some kind of geological enterprise in Kiev. Maybe he was connected with some kind of secret projects ‑ I don't know exactly ‑ and he lost his job when his administration knew about his chil­dren, that his children were involved in this kind of activ­ity. He lost his job.

My cousins were changing jobs from time to time because they were not supposed to have something interesting. For five to six years they were living only waiting for permis­sion. They were refused. They got refusal. Very many times in 1979 they came to my place in Moscow because they tried to apply to Central... not committee, not organiza­tion... (OVIR?) Yes, I didn't want to use this name, but if you know this name, then it's exactly right ‑ OVIR. It's an abbreviation. I can tell you exactly what it means, but anyway... For five years, they lived each day living and thinking about this chance, the opportunity to leave the country. Then after these five years probably they dropped this idea and started to find different kinds of activities, to find something for living in Russia. Maybe they lost this feeling that they would be able to leave Russia. (They lost hope.) Hope, exactly.

Then, in 1988, I believe, they pretty much... (They received the visas...) Right. I'm trying to organize this period of time, because nobody expected... I think it was unexpectedly, they got the permission. They got the phone call. They were asked to come to Ukrainian OVIR, and if they would like now, they were told that they are reviewing all kinds of documents, and found that they were refused many years, and if they would like, they could leave Russia right now. And they did, in spite of the fact that my cousin, he had different family. At that moment in time he had different family than at the moment that he applied documents. And now suddenly Russian officials had a differ­ent application.

(You mean he was divorced?) Right, and he married a dif­ferent woman. This is an interesting thing, before the Russian officials were very... I'm not going to say accu­rate, but they were very careful about all things because, as my wife says, they are continuated?... (Situated?) No... When you are trying to find a radio station on the radio you are trying to tune the radio, yeah? And when you've found your station, it's in one exact position. And this one position is the story of Russian organizations like this. They had one exact posi­tion, and this position is to refuse. [laughs] There are a bunch of different outlets, ways to answer the question, but they have only one.

It was very strange that they got permission because he had another family. By the way, my [female] cousin had a very good situation to refuse, because different documents. You start your process from the very beginning, the invita­tion, you could not know anything. But now the situation was different. That was a very strong sign that policy is different. At first we thought that it could be that things were different only for people who waited ten years.

(So you thought you had to be on the old list?) Right, but we were not, because at that time they simply didn't want to deal with my documents at all. (So in 1988 you applied?) Yes. (Do you remember what month it was?) Yeah, sure. But let me tell you a different story that happened with my friend, my colleague, the man I worked with. We were colleagues. We worked in the same laborato­ry. The same business... but then science is not a busi­ness, it's necessary to remember. (You could say "in the same work".) Sure! I can do that, but this is the way I hear people using this word! (But you were friends as well as col­leagues...) Yes. (Was he older than you?) He is much older. It's interesting. He was the man with whom I was on my vacation when I met Lilia. At the same time he came to that company, and so on. So he considered himself a *shafer* in Russian.

(A person who arranges marriages? In Yiddish there's the word *shafrat*.) Could be. (Lilia's name is Shafran, so that's not a Russian name?) Of course not. Shafran is not a Russian word. There is a Spanish flower, saffron, a sort of spice... (So this was someone you worked with and liked, and you looked up to him...) Yeah, right. But the story about this man is that he was a refusenik for ten years, too. He applied at the same time as his brother.

(Was he a bachelor?) No. He was married for a long time. He had a family of four people. He has two kids. His parents died a couple of years before we got acquainted. But his brother left Russia during that very convenient period of time in the late '70s, and he got a very interest­ing job in New York. Now he lives here for twelve or more years. But my friend could not. He was late. He wasn't waiting or wasting time, no. He wasn't so quick as his brother. And he couldn't leave Russia, but he wanted to, and when I came to that laboratory, after a short period of time I realized that he was, as people used to say, *v poda­che*. It means "in appliance", that you've applied and are waiting.

(I don't think we have a comparable type of word.) Anyway, an interesting story with this man. (Can you say his name?) Sure, his name is Alek Reibord. By the way, now his daughter is here in Chicago. For some period of time she works for the Jewish community service. (Does he live in Chicago?) No, he's in Maryland, close to Washington D.C. He worked at the National Bureau of Standards, and now he got a professorship in Maryland. The interesting story: He was much older. He worked many years for the same labo­ratory. He wrote many papers. He was famous in Russia and America. He had results and so on.

He expected, after things rapidly changed in Russia in the late '70s and early '80s, he expected to lose his job. It wouldn't be surprising for him. He knew that he could lose his job, lose his position, lose friends, colleagues, people to work with. He would lose everything in a short period of time. [laughs] And I expected something like this too. But, very interesting that it didn't happen.

And for ten years he worked in the same laboratory, in our laboratory, in our institute, doing things that he wanted, bringing much of interest to science, to different areas that we were working in. This is for sure because of the chief of our laboratory, of course, and because of special atmosphere at the institute. But this is a diffi­cult question. I'm not sure I'd like to touch... It's a long question.

(He was able to continue work.) The important thing is that we were not involved in any kind of secret projects. Working in science, it's not a secret, because you must publish all your results openly, for everybody ‑ in this country and that country, all over. This is not a secret. Maybe because of this. And different people who tried to get permission to leave the country from secret places, they simply couldn't get permission and they lost their jobs, because it was out of the rules of that game.

(Was it a question of luck, of who you know?) To some extent. This is the question ‑ the luck of the place, of the people around you... (So in other words, if you had a boss who was...) Who wanted to... (Who was sadistic or anti‑semitic or...) Very good point. We really had good people. By the way, it's really an interesting laboratory. And he was able, I think he was absolutely lucky, to stay at his job for that period of time and to work. And he got the same phone call at the same moment as my cousins did. And he was asked if he would like to leave the country. (He was happy...) Yes. (He was shocked...) Sure, almost everybody was.

(So did he make preparations to leave immediately?) No. You see, this is the difficult question why. It's necessary to know this person. Again, this is a question ‑ it's up to the personality, how quickly you can prepare yourself, how quickly you can take your bag, do all things and leave Russia. My cousins, they left almost immediately. Just signed all the papers and forgot about the old life. But he couldn't, because he had very many connections, very many friends, things to finish there, preparations. His prepara­tions were really very long.

(How long did it take him?) Maybe a year, more than a year. (Was he really getting his own personal papers in order, or was it just hard for him to leave after all?) To some extent, it was really difficult to leave. (Because he had to stop what he was doing?) Of course, he used to live that type of life. (How old was he in 1988?) He was around 55. If you have a younger generation who can earn a living and support you, then probably that's not so difficult, but if you are the only person responsible for the family, and now it's a question, if you are really valuable or not, if you're really worth something or not. Because when you are living your old life, it's like a long, long road that could last for many years. But when you are rapidly changing the way, when you are ready to dive in an absolutely different ocean, then it's like a reevaluation of yourself, of every­thing. (He had to weigh the risks vs. rewards.) Sure. (It was almost a decade later, so things had changed a little.) Sure. (He had to think twice.) Right. Now we're measuring things in decades ‑ one decade back, one decade forward.

(You got your invitation from the U.S...) No, from Israel. (Once you have the sponsorship in the U.S., it's possible for Israel to invite you, because they wouldn't let you leave unless it was an Israeli invitation, right? The Russians wouldn't let you leave unless you had an invitation from your homeland, is that correct?)

In principle, that's correct. I don't know very good this modern process. Now probably the process is very simple, because you're supposed to go to Israel if you have Israeli invitation and to America if applied to American embassy. But then the situation was different. You know we're talking about Russia, a very special country. What's necessary to do to get to America? It is necessary, if you're in Russia, to get to America it's necessary to get an invitation from Israel, and then to buy a ticket to Vienna, Austria. After that, Vienna is a switch point, and you can choose. You can go to Israel or America, or you can say you'd like to go to Australia. At that time it was differ­ent, but at that time the situation wasn't so tense as it is now. We didn't hesitate. We simply wanted, probably be­cause of language, my wife and I knew English, and we didn't know anything about Hebrew.

(About Israel...?) We knew some things about the state. Lilia's aunt lives in Israel. And of course I was worried very much about my job, about my work, about the possibility to find something to do that I would like to do. Because of these reasons, we wanted to go to America. But at that time, if the situation was like it is now, if we didn't have other way to go, of course we didn't hesitate, we would come to Israel. That simply was the possibility that we were look­ing at, because when we were in Europe, it was a difficult time, because America started to reject people. American authorities stopped the process of unlim­ited emigration, acceptance of people in the United States, and very many people were denied in Europe. They didn't get permission to enter America.

This process didn't frighten us very much. We were prepared to go to Israel. We recognized that this is a part of ourselves. This is very close to what we are thinking and feeling now.

(The process is in place. You're packing up to go. You've made the decision to come to Chicago. What did you feel you must take with you, that you could not leave be­hind? Your parents were coming with you at the same time?) No. (They came later?) Yes. (So you had to arrange for them?)

That's a difficult, special story, because when we were thinking and talking, my parents... Lilia's parents passed away, and I didn't know them, but my parents, they were not prepared. They didn't think much about emigration, espe­cially my dad. You see, he is a veteran of the war. He was at the northern front fighting for the country. Maybe for this reason, it was difficult. Of course, they are much older than we are, and it was much more difficult for them to leave and to do all things like that. We tried to do everything as quickly as we could. The only problem that really stopped us for three‑four months was our kid. I don't remember if I told you that we got permission to leave the country, and Lilia delivered the kid on the same day.

(I don't think she told me that. She said she knew as soon as the baby was born... What's his name again?) Boris. (So Boris was born and you got the mail or the other way around?) Two days later, I came to OVIR. Lilia was at the hospital. I came each day to know about her condition, and two days after she delivered I was at OVIR and I knew the story. They told me we got permission, and if we liked we could get all documents, visas, and leave Russia as quickly as we would like. But it was to some extent difficult because our kid was so small. We had to wait for three or four months. He was exactly four months old when we were prepared to travel with him. This is part of the answer to your question ‑ what was necessary...

Trying to answer this question, I would prefer to divide all things into two parts: first, to tell you the truth, we had a lot of luggage. I'll tell you why. First of all, we have many things for a kid. We had special food, like formula, but he used to eat this kind of food for four months. We thought it would be difficult for him to change this type of food. It was Finnish milk. We didn't think it would be very good to change.

(This was after Chernobyl. The accident happened in April, 1986. Were you worried about the milk and food supply your baby would get if it came from Russia?)

Maybe not very much, because we lived in Moscow, and northern parts of Russia didn't suffer much. (Did you check the source of your food?) You're right. It was very impor­tant. Living in Russia, you always try to get something that you can depend on. But the best way to get some kind of Western food. (Even before Chernobyl you felt that way..) Yeah, even before. Chernobyl is a long story.

(We'll get to it later. So you had to get supplies for Boris?)

Yes. There were many special things like clothing, socks, shoes. You see, you need a pair of shoes for an adult and maybe ten pairs of shoes for a kid. Everything. (For a baby?) Of course, because you need something if he's outside, if he's in his bed. (All the equipment...) Right. And we had a big baby stroller. (And you wanted to bring that?) We had to. We didn't know how long we'd be there. Probably it was a good idea to bring that old and absolutely awkward baby stroller, but it was very big and solid. It protected the kid very good. When we got to America we traveled a lot. I don't remember any other period of my life when I traveled so much! He was like in a small tank. If you want I can show you this stroller. Now it is in Chica­go. (For the future.) We are not saving it. We forgot about it.

(In addition to what you needed for the baby, were there books, etc.) Then, the second part of the lug­gage. We came to the second part of the luggage and I was abso­lutely lucky. I don't understand how it could happen. I could bring with me, take the entire archive, simply every­thing I had in Russia. I had many books. Partly we sent them to America to my friend. (Technical books or your general library?) I'll try to explain in details every­thing. General books, literature, fiction, stories, novels, we sent to my friend in Philadelphia who left a year before us. It was a special portion of books that I used at work that I didn't want to send by mail because Russian mail isn't very dependable.

Except this, I simply had handwritten things. You cannot send handwritten things by Russian mail. It is absolutely prohibited. You can send it from city to city inside Russia... (When you say handwritten, do you mean that it was written by hand?) Yes. (Or do you mean that it was all original documents but that some of it was typed...) Handwritten. I used to write everything. (So this would be your experiments...) My thoughts, work that I've already finished. (Like a journal...) Not a journal, because I'm not so organized to keep everything in the same journal. It's papers, and all of them are separated. They're col­lected by a clip. One clip is one point. (Different files.) Right. And I had some computer programs that I finished.

(So you couldn't send it by mail in Russia, so you carried it with you?) [laughs] Yes. (And then you mailed it?) Probably from Europe I could mail it, but then it was very expensive. Now it costs a lot and we don't have this money. You know, this process, living in Europe, we were supported by HIAS (J.A.) I forgot the name of the agency that supported us in Europe... Because we have the HIAS agency in Chicago, but we don't have J.A. It operates outside of America. We had enough for living, for apart­ment, for rent. But of course not enough to send. It was like four big boxes with books and papers and everything. It was interesting, because I tried to put papers inside bags with clothing, with shoes, with all this stuff, and mix everything.

Because you know that at customer service to leave Russia you have to show everything. (At the airport?) Yes.

(At Customs, they went through everything?) Absolutely everything. (How long did that take?) It was a long proce­dure. (Hours?) More. Days. But it de­pends. Actually, it consists of three parts. If you're lucky, you can try to send cargo to the place you're going ‑ if you have tickets to Vienna, you can send cargo to Vienna. But I wasn't lucky, and I couldn't send cargo because at that period of time we were in a hurry to leave Russia as soon as possible. So we changed tickets.

Again, an inter­esting story. We had tickets for Aero­flot and we changed tickets for the Austrian airplane, and I couldn't send cargo. That's why we had to carry everything. Of course, then, we threw out everything that wasn't abso­lutely neces­sary, and I left only books and papers. (That was before you left home...) Yeah. It was two, three days before leaving.

(Were you nervous?) Yeah, we were, to some extent of course. We got into an accident at the customer's house... (You got into an accident? What do you mean?) I was very nervous. I was crying, not crying... (Yelling?) Not so much, but I visited the office of the chief of the depart­ment trying to get the permission and he said it depends on the guy... not very much, but simply I tried to send cargo, but I could not. (You were upset.) Of course, very much. (Did you actually cry?) No. (But you felt like crying?) Not crying, but very much upset, because I realized that I should carry everything with me.

(Were you angry or upset?) Angry. (So you lost your temper.) Exactly. I lost my temper. (And you yelled...) Probably, yeah. But now we're entering the area of minute details. But right, I was angry and upset. (Do you remem­ber what you said to him? Did you yell at everybody?..) No, I couldn't lose my temper to this extent. I don't remember all details very good. It's not a very interesting story. I'd like to finish the story, maybe it's not very important, but simply interesting details of the process that these people had to pass through ‑ the process to leave the country. First, cargo. If you would be lucky to send it, then you do, if not, you don't. Then, before the day that you have airplane, you can pass through Customs offic­es. You should show your luggage, just open all bags, all boxes, all things you have and show everything. They have a great list of shortages, of things that are restricted, that you can't take out, or if you can, you cannot take out two things, you can take only one of this.

(Did you have any such things?) Of course. For in­stance, there are two different types of things. Let's say golden ring or earrings or maybe chains ‑ things that belong to women. Or silver spoons, forks for table ‑ these things are prohibited. (You had such things packed?) No, they shouldn't be packed. (So you didn't bring such things.) We didn't bring them at that moment. We didn't bring all things the day before. But when you pass through Customs house, you cannot take your handwritings. Handwrit­ings are prohibited at all. That's nothing to talk about forever.

(How do you explain that?) In Russia... (I haven't heard of this before.) That's really strange, maybe because you didn't ask anybody. (So if you had collected letters that you'd received from friends...) No, no. You have to forget about this. Leave everything. (If you kept a diary and they saw you had a diary, they wouldn't let you take that? A jour­nal...) Right. No. It is not possible, none of them. Proba­bly you can try to do this. You have to show your journal, your register, your diary, to officers, and then it is their choice to make a decision. They could look through every­thing, read it, and come to a decision. Or if he would find something, or not like your face, then forget about it. It's up to his personality to give permission or not. And why the concern with handwritings? Because Rus­sians are always afraid that somebody could take secrets out of Russia and bring them to different countries, to their enemies, and Russia could lose their priority or treasure.

This is again an interesting point that delves deeply into the Russian ideology ‑ everything belongs to the State. You do not have your own property, your private property. This is something that appeared in Russia only during the last year. And even during the last year they started to talk about this. They started to think about laws about private property. Before that, it was an absolutely awful thing: everything belongs to the State. Then the State makes the decision to give you permission or not. Every­thing belongs to the State.

And this is the story that happened with our family Bible, or better to say to Bible, but *Chumash*. Just two months before we left it was a law that you had to get special permission to take each book with you. And if your book was old enough, published maybe before the war, before 1947, then you wouldn't be able to get permission, or if it's a really special case, you have to worry about that, and it's a very big headache, and so on. Our *Chumash* was published... By the way, I realized that it was old, but only in America, whereas it was published in 1898, and I couldn't [take it out]. They couldn't get us permission. My parents tried, and they couldn't. Nobody gave them permission because they thought that it was a treasure and it should belong to Russia. It's an interesting story. It's a bilingual *Chumash*, Russian and Hebrew. It's an absolutely Jewish book. It is written on the first page, "For use by Jews." Despite this fact, they wouldn't let us... [laughs]

(Where it published?) Maybe in the Ukraine, maybe in Po­land. But if you come to our home I will show you. I'm sure there are people in America who know more about this book and who would be able to tell me something, if it's valuable. But the end of the story... My parents could not...

(Your parents weren't allowed to leave. Your books couldn't leave... What about your friends?) Almost all of them who wanted to come to America were gone. Our friends in America, better to say, our new friends that we found here in America, they're Americans ‑ her aunt visited Russia last summer. We asked her to meet Lilia's friend in Russia. She was prepared for this opera­tion, committed by Lilia. She organized all of it. That lady in Russia brought the book to the American lady, and the American lady brought it here through Customs. (They didn't check her the same way...) Probably. Probably they asked her, and she said it was her own book. But they didn't check her. Of course, she was American. They didn't check her so thorough­ly.

To finish this story, I'd like to say that the third stage when you are exactly leaving Russia, when you are coming through not only Customs house, but military persons who are checking all your visas and documents, at that moment they are checking absolutely everything you have with you. For instance, they didn't allow me to take my stamp collection, but I wasn't worried about that thing. It's a tiny thing ‑ forget about it. But an interesting thing ‑ now it's inter­esting, but at that moment it was absolutely awful ‑ we had the baby stroller, and our baby was sleeping. Fifteen to twenty minutes before this procedure he fell asleep. And I asked them to leave him ‑ not to touch the kid, not to touch the baby stroller because he was sleeping, and it would be a bad thing. They refused, and they started this procedure of checking everything ‑ inside the baby stroller. (You had to take the baby out...) Of course. We had to wake him up. He started to cry.

(How old was he?) Four months old. (What is his birthday?) 28th of September, and we left the country on the 29th of January.

He started to cry and he was crying for three hours, until we reached Vienna. That was absolutely awful. I don't know what they were looking for ‑ gold, something secret. Do you know the term that we use to call this last procedure ‑ we call it "the last piece of Soviet Russia". Something that I will remember probably forever.

(How many hours do you think you spent there that day?) I spent more than a day, because first they checked the luggage. They started at night. It was very many hours. And then we had to come home and bring family and bring the rest of the things ‑ my wife and kid. Then we were waiting in a long queue, a long line. It took completely, probably a day. More than 24 hours I wasn't sleeping. Believe me, it's a long and difficult procedure. But you see, I didn't know anybody for whom it was an obstacle. This procedure isn't an obsta­cle. If you're afraid of this procedure, then you have a different choice. You can leave everything. You can take just your passports, visas and bags with some necessary things, and that's it. This is not an obstacle.