**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORTPRIVATE**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**IGOR FERTELMEYSTER**

**Electrical Engineer**

BIRTH: June 22, 1956, Moscow

SPOUSE: Tatyana, April 8, 1959, Moscow

CHILDREN: Marina, 1983

Yevgeny (Eugene), 1987

PARENTS: Leonid Fertelmeyster, October 5, 1930, Moscow

Galina Feller, August 9, 1932, Moscow

SIBLINGS: brother, name not given

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

NAME: **IGOR FERTELMEYSTER**

Interviewers: Ruth Goodman and Gail Neiman

I was born in Moscow in 1956. It was a famous day in Russia, it was the beginning of the war, June 22nd.

It is very tricky to explain what my parents did for a living. My mother was an engineer, with software engineering and my father worked as a buyer for companies. I think that is close to what you would call it in America. They would buy components in big quantities and then sell them in smaller quantities to different plants. He dealt with radio components.

When I was a child we lived in an apartment building. When I was born there were five of us who lived in a room, twelve square meters in size, and I don't even remember how many families were in the same apartment as we were, but we changed our apartment when I was two years old and we had a room, twenty square meters, and when my brother was born there were six of us in this room and also two other families in this apartment and there was one bathroom for all of us and one kitchen. It was very complicated!

Then we got a two room apartment when I was eight years old and then we changed and when we left Russia, with my new family, not with my parents, we had a three room apartment. It was even larger than this apartment. But it was pretty unusual. Usually people lived in worse conditions than we did. We were lucky in this, because we had this big apartment and my mother and father also had a two room apartment. This is very good for the way people live in Russia.

My parents met when my mother was on her vacation in Odessa and my father lived downstairs from the apartment of her relatives. They met at that time. My father was a sailor then and he lived in Odessa. They were married about a year later. They didn't tell me anything else about how I was born!

When they were first married they lived in Krasnodar where my mother went after graduation from the Institute. Because it is the law in Russia that after graduation you must go to some place which is chosen for you to work. When I graduated, practically all people who lived in Moscow, they stayed in Moscow. But when my mother graduated, no one from her group stayed in Moscow.

When I was born, they returned to Moscow and lived with my mother's parents, in this 12 square meter room. The other people in the apartment were not relatives, the relatives just lived in the one room. In our room were my parents, my grandparents and myself. How they found the time to have my brother in this situation, I do not know.

I used to go to day care when I was four years old and then I went to school and I changed schools almost every year, because I went to one school and then we changed our apartment and I was in a new development; then they build another school which was closer to our building and then I went to another school and then another school. Then I stayed in one school from fourth grade to eighth grade and then I changed school and went to a specialized school in math and physics.

When I was very young I don't know who took care of me but when we moved to Moscow I had a baby sitter. It wasn't the truth when I told you that there were five of us in that room, because the baby sitter lived with us so there were six of us.

There were probably some Jewish children in my first schools but I don't remember this for sure. I don't remember when I found out I was Jewish but probably not from my parents but from someone else. There is another meaning to being Jewish in Russia, in America it is probably people who belong to the Jewish religion because there are a lot of Jews who assimilated, and do not think they are still Jews. In Russia, we have a special mark on our documents with this as our nationality. Even in first grade this was marked on all our documents. So, probably somebody told me about that.

My parents were probably different from other families in Russia but I wasn't too much aware of this as a child. But my parents did not know anything about Judaica or Jewish History. My grandparents knew because both of the parents of my mother spoke Yiddish and my grandmother on my father's side also spoke Yiddish. For my father's mother it was easier because they lived in Odessa and it was a more Jewish city than Moscow.

I remember that when I was very young, probably about four, everyone in Odessa seemed to be speaking Yiddish, and when I grew up about half of the people in Odessa were speaking Ukrainian. I didn't know my grandfather from my father's side because he was shot in 1937, during Stalin's terror. I don't know.

I went to school, as a youngster, the school began about 8:30 AM., I don't remember. Then I came back and was alone at home until about six o'clock when my parents came back from work and for most of this time I read. I began to read not so early, at eight years but from that time on it was my love. I read now, also, maybe too much!

I don't remember having chores or jobs to do at home as a youngster. I think the adults took care of everything by themselves.

Our family celebrated some things but they weren't Jewish holidays, just the usual governmental and family holidays. We celebrated anniversaries, weddings, things like that. For a birthday, it was typical to eat, eat, eat and it was maybe more fun than here because you could eat anything you wanted. But in Russia there is a special preparation for this day and people tried to get something unusual. I don't remember what these things were, I have never been a great eater.

Our family had practically no friends because of the character of my father, he didn't like people, so on these holidays it was mainly our family. Mainly they were from my mother's side of the family because they all lived in Moscow. Actually my parents had only one family as friends.

When I was young and at school, we spent each Summer in Odessa because it is near the sea and it is a kind of resort. We lived their with my grandparents. It was fun to go there because there was no sea in Moscow and there is sea in Odessa! Not a bad place to spend a summer.

As for as finding out that I was Jewish, it was probably in a negative way. I don't remembers anything specific but usually if somebody would remind you that you are a Jew it is usually in a negative way.

My father's father, I only know that he was arrested in 1937 and then my grandmother got a paper that he had died in 1943, but he probably died earlier. When he was arrested my father was seven years old and his sister was three or four years old. So my grandmother did not get married again, so all her life was in raising her children in Odessa. She is still alive in Odessa. She is eighty-three years old and she lives with my aunt.

I think my grandfather was probably arrested because he was a Jew and he was something like an accounting clerk and my grandmother was told that he had belonged to some organizations and that was why he was arrested. It was a crazy idea of Stalin's.

My grandfather on my mother's side was born in Minsk and when he was twenty years old he went with his older brother to Palestine and his brother stayed in Palestine and my grandfather came back to Russia because he was a communist and he believed in their ideals. Maybe if he had changed his ideas at the right time I would have been born in the right place!

I don't know how he met my grandmother because she lived in Moscow and she lived in, as far as I remember, in a Jewish neighborhood of Moscow. It wasn't actually in Moscow at that time, it was a village near Moscow, but now it is part of Moscow. And I remember my great-grandparents from both sides. I don't know a lot about them, all of them passed away when I was pretty young. I remember only that my father's grandfather had some private place where they made cooking oil. After the Revolution he lost everything and when I saw him he was very, very old. I really didn't remember that we spoke of anything serious. He was very kind to me but I don't remember more about him.

My grandfather believed in all the things and my parents weren't members of the communist party and I really don't remember what they thought about the party when I was young but when I grew up they understood everything about the situation of the country but my grandfather, he believed until his death and he argued with me when I said something against the rules of the country. It was difficult to change his mind because he was used to living this kind of life and when someone tells you that everything is wrong it would mean that all his life was wrong, and it was not easy to change your attitudes about these things. At least I never heard from him about any change in his thinking.

I had found at an early age that I like mostly math and physics and this branch of science. I told you that I changed in high school (there is not such a term as high school in Russia) and I spent these years in a Special School for Math. There are special language schools. Okay, my wife will tell about her school herself, but she went to a Special English School but it didn't help her to know English.

After that, I went to a Machine Building Institute. I tried to go to a University but I failed. I went and applied and had exams but I didn't pass that exam and probably because I was Jewish because after my special school it is impossible to get a "D" in a math exam. So, one task was so difficult that I didn't know anyone who could solve it. It seemed impossible. So then I went to this Institute and passed all exams very easily.

There is no problem for Jews to go to Technical Institutes because there is no real demand for places at these Institutes. I have to explain the situation, because it may be difficult for you to understand. In America, you pay money and you go to university, - you pay? you stay. And in Russia, everything is free, so they choose people who would study at this Institute and because it is free it is their choice, not ours. There are more places in Technical Institutes than there are people who want to study there. So most of the Jews study in technical areas, machine building, civil engineering, and you must really be something special to go to Moscow University. Not many Jews get to go there.

I am not sure but I suppose there is a special percentage of Jews who are allowed to study there and this percentage is probably less than it was during the Czar. Because during the Czar's time it was 5% and in Soviet time it is less. But this situation is not only for Jews. It is also difficult for people from the Caucasus: Georgia, Armenia - to pass these exams to the medical institute in Moscow. Some rules are hard to understand.

The children of lawyers weren't allowed to study in law schools. They just weren't allowed. Because if you are a lawyer and the professor is also a lawyer, and this might give you connections that would help your children at the school. So it is really crazy. You are used to living in a normal world and this kind of crazy world is hard for you to understand!

So after you graduate a day institute, a full-time institute, because there is an evening institute or a part-time institute that people attend while they are also working. When you graduate a full-time institute you cannot choose between positions that are available, they put you in a job. I was first in my group so I could choose from among many positions, but I was advised to go to one place, a machine building plant, and I really loved this place, because of the people.

Russian education is very different from an American one because Americans get a very narrow but very deep education, and we got a not so deep but wider education and it is very important when you went to work to go to the right place with people who could help you to learn deeper. So I was in a good place with good people. I was twenty-two years old when I took this first job.

I also met Tatyana, my wife, while I was working here. It was very funny. At that time I understood why I paid my money as a member to Komsomol, the Communist Youth Organization. Because I met Tatyana in the quarters of the Komsomol Organization in our plant. She was a journalist and she came to our plant to make interviews with some young people who worked at our plant.

So I met her and we got married in two months. When I met her I did not know that she was Jewish, my mother asked me about that but I couldn't answer her on that. Fortunately, she was. I think it was important to my family that she was Jewish because in Russia, especially, there is a lot of problems with intermarriage. I understand that there are a lot of problems in America with this kind of family situation but there are probably differences. With some spouses, whether they are Jewish, or of another nation, which are living under more difficult situations than if you are Russian.

For example, if your husband wasn't promoted and you understand that he wasn't promoted because he is a Jew, you might begin to complain, "Why did I marry you, when I could have chosen another guy and not have these problems?" There are some Jewish/non-Jewish marriages, but probably not as many as between different nationalities within the Soviet. Even before marriage Jews understand that they might have trouble, not necessarily with their spouses but with the parents-in-law, and because of this closeness with one's parents in Russia, it is closer than here because everyone lives together in one apartment.

Divorce is as common in Russia as here but maybe the reasons for divorce are different. I think the main reason for divorce there is that everyone has to live with their parents. The second main reason for divorce there is drunkenness. You cannot imagine how much a Russian can drink. I could drink a pint of Vodka and I saw one guy who drank a liter of Vodka and he worked after that!

After I met Tatyana, we began to live together after two weeks. This is not common in Russia. She had a room in an apartment and so we began to live together. This was after two weeks and I had spent one of the weeks on a business trip. So it was very quick. I think that is the only way to get married when you are twenty-six years old because otherwise you see that this woman has these bad sides and another woman has these bad sides, and you know one will never find someone completely perfect. And I know I am not either.

We spent our honeymoon before the wedding because I decided to change my job and got a vacation from my job and Tatyana was at university and she had exams at that time and she had vacation from her work for exams and so we spent that time as our honeymoon. I read this joke that I liked, "We liked our honeymoon so much, we decided to get married."

The wedding ceremony was very official. In one year I participated in our wedding, the wedding of Tatyana's witnesses at our wedding and then the wedding of my brother. All the ceremonies were just the same and I was laughing under the surface. There is a special text that this representative of the Soviet government pronounces for the bride and groom and she pronounces it without any emotion. We had two parties because we didn't have enough room to invite all the friends and relatives. So we had one party for relatives and then, in a week, we had another party for friends.

At the parties, we drink vodka, maybe a little dancing, but there is not much room. Sometimes people have the parties at restaurants. But we did not, for us it was too expensive.

We lived very well for Russia when we got married. Now I tell you what my salary was. It was like $158 for each month.

It was really strange because when my cousin started to leave Russia I didn't think he was doing the right thing. Not that he was crazy or anything, but just that he wasn't right. And I changed my mind eventually when my daughter was born, because I began to see nightmares about *pogroms* and I understand that it is really possible in Russia and I did not want to be in Russia if it happened again. But I spent five years arguing with Tatyana about this. She wanted to stay.

Anyway, it was impossible to leave Russia at that time so then Tatyana picked the right time to leave. It was at the easiest time to leave Russia and come to America because before that it was very difficult to leave Russia and now it is very difficult to get into America, so we did choose the right time.

It is possible to read about *pogroms*, but it was as if it was something that was only possible before the Revolution and that they were impossible afterward. But, I knew that this was possible. Only because I had a child, because I don't think that when people decided to leave in our time (not now, completely different now), they didn't think only about themselves, only about their children. Even now, I can't say that it is better for me in America than in Russia because I really had a good job, not a bad apartment, and - the most important thing - I lost my friends and my circle of living. How to say it? When you live in America, you begin to forget about all the difficulties you met in Russia and remember fondly all the things you left there. But I don't feel bad that I left.

We decided to leave in 1987. It was a one time decision because we went to visit my friends who got permission to leave and there was another couple there and they asked my friends to make them an invitation to Israel and I asked that they would also make this invitation to us. We waited three months to get this invitation and then waited five months to get permission, but it was very easy.

I don't think that we considered going to Israel when we were in Russia but when we were in Italy this situation with permission to come to America changed and then we considered going to Israel. But, the main thing was leaving Russia. There is no big deal in the difference between countries outside of Russia, there is a big difference between Russia and other countries in the whole world. But we didn't have anybody in Israel, some friends of our relatives but they were not close to us. Here I had a cousin and he was pretty close to me when he lived in Russia.

It is hard to say what the difficulties are in Russia. Everything that is easy in America is difficult in Russia. Shortages of food, of clothing, of apartments, of anything there. Now it is worse than when we left. I read in one letter that there is nothing on the shelves there and this nothing becomes less and less. The most difficult thing is the insecurity. You don't know what will happen in the next day and it is possible that everything you can imagine, or can't imagine, may happen. This applies to all Russians, not just Jews.

When we prepared for our interview with the American Embassy in Italy and it was important to prove that we were leaving because we had difficulties because we were Jews, we began to remember some cases when something wasn't allowed us because we were a Jew and we did remember. But it wasn't the only reason for our leaving. The main reason is that it is practically impossible to live in Russia. For anybody!

6/26/90 INTERVIEW WITH IGOR FERTELMEISTER.

(What did it mean to be a Jew in Russia?)

Mostly it means that you feel different, no - not that you feel different, but that other people push you to feel different. Because a lot of Jews find they are Jewish at seven years old when they go to school. When other people, teachers, tell them something that is not polite. It really depends on the teachers. Russian teachers have a different level of intelligence and education so some of them can tell Jewish kids that --, especially now, now there are a lot of cases, where teachers belong to this Russian Nationalistic organization, *Pamjat'*. And I read an article about one school in Leningrad where they really pushed all Jewish kids from this school. All teachers, with the principal of the school, and there were about 300 Jewish kids. And this was a special school, I don't remember what was special about this school, but it is very common with special schools that there are more Jewish kids than in common ones. Because Jewish parents want their children to get more knowledge in different fields.

And when I grew up all companies were formed mostly along nationalistic principles. Because a lot of my friends were Jewish and not because they were the best people for me but because if I knew somebody was a Jew even that made me feel a different way toward him and to closer to him. But, I also had Russian friends and at some point we couldn't understand each other. With Jews, there were fewer points of non-understanding.

Maybe for people who tried to hide their Jewishness, it was more difficult to live because they had to think every time that they didn't, they couldn't show they were a Jew. For example, not to mention the maiden name of your mother, because then they would show that they were Jewish. For me it was simpler because I never tried to hide that I was a Jew. I didn't really have a lot of difficulties connected with my Jewishness. I told you that it was difficult for me to get to the university but,---

When we had to prepare ourselves for the interview at the American Embassy in Italy we began to remember all cases where it was bad for us and we remembered seven cases. But it wasn't really the reason for our leaving. And we had to try real hard to remember these. Before we came to Italy it was very easy to get into the United States. This interview at the American Embassy with the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) was pretty informal and just when we came, America changed rules and people began to get a refusal to come to America. So this interview wasn't so informal.

When we lived in the townhouse in Italy with another two family and two families got permission to go to United States and we left Italy day after day. But the third family got refused, so, they spent four months in Italy. I thought at the time, and I think it now, that America could not refuse anybody for reason, because it would be impossible to blame America for discrimination in this case. And it was lenient toward Russian immigrants. And they refused without any visible reason. There was some refusal with reason but only a few. Only now, all people who were in Italy have come here. About two weeks ago the last family from Italy came. They spent more than a year in Italy.

(When you decided to leave, what was the process?) Everybody who is going to leave knows exactly what he is going to do. Because, even before he made such a decision he knew a lot of other people who were going to leave and others who had already left. So everyone has some instruction on how to prepare yourself for leaving. It is about ten pages with the names and addresses of all organizations you need to deal with. With a list of all the papers you need to fill out, with different advice on how to make the process easier. So it was very helpful.

Most people went from Moscow to Vienna, then Italy, and then to the United States. So we spent twenty days in Austria -it was very beautiful, and then we came to Italy and found out about these refusals. Then it wasn't so beautiful! In the beginning I didn't believe in this. Because it was only eight cases and I could see some reason for these refusals. But when it became thirty percent - - -

Before we left Russia we considered only about going to the United States. When we were in Europe, we understood that the main point is to leave Russia. Where we ended up was important but not as important as being out of Russia. So, in Italy we had to consider that maybe if we are refused by America, maybe we will go to Israel. But, mainly the reason we wanted to come here was because we had only one relative outside of Russia and he was living here. We thought it would be easier for us to accommodate in a country where we knew someone. And this is true. Because there are all the different rules, even little ones, and people behave differently from what we were used to. And we needed someone to give us advice and we were really good pupils. I followed all my cousin's advice! Now, I don't.

(What did he tell you?)

Where I needed to apply to Social Security; how to write my resume; how to open a checking account in a bank. A lot of things we would have never thought about. The language also. I remember how scary it was when I went to apply for Social Security. Everything was so strange for me, I went along the street and it was really scary. Now I am at home.

Nothing frightened me in Italy and Vienna. We were just very excited. Especially because it was the first Western country we saw. I was in East Germany and Bulgaria but it is not the same. Germany is not so bad in comparison with Austria but Austria is better.

I didn't connect these reactions with freedom but more with the different stores, the things, and mostly the food available. We were in Austria - we left Russia on the twentieth of October, so there were a lot of fruits. There in the fruit stores, and very cheap. And you cannot buy even apples, in Russia. And another thing we were surprised at the clean air.

Now it is really strange for me, the American government made a law about clean air and Chicago is one of the worst places in America. The air in Chicago, compared with Moscow, it is perfume. I think there are some places in Moscow where there is no oxygen at all.

(We wanted to go back and talk about your grandfather and what happened to him, the one you said was probably arrested because he was an activist.)

I knew only a few things about this because I think parents try to save their children from bad things. They do this not only for the children, but for their own security. Because, even after this Twentieth Congress of Communist Party when Khrushchev spoke about Stalin and what he had done, even after that it was marked on any application form was the question, they asked if somebody from your relatives was repressed or something like that. Also, if you or your relatives had spent any time in occupied territory. Because every person who was in occupied territory in World War II was not considered like a hero but a criminal. And a lot of such people when they were freed from the concentration camp in Germany, then they came to Russia and then were sent to a concentration camp in Russia because they were considered as traitors because they were caught. So parents did not tell a lot about somebody who had spent some time in this way.

My father was born in 1930 and his father died in 1937 so even he did not remember him well. I only know that my grandmother who lived longer that this was very difficult because when my grandfather was killed she had to raise two children, one seven years old; another four years old. And when she got old, then as an old woman she like to cry. So she mostly cried about her husband and they had only lived together maybe eight years in all. I never really discussed this with her. At first, I was too young to ask these kinds of questions. And then when I didn't go to Odessa where she lived, and then I became older and it was a good time to ask these questions, but then she was to old to be asked. She is still in Odessa. We wrote a lot of letters back and forth at first but now it is very, very seldom.

My mother and brother are still in Russia. My brother is going to come out, but it is difficult. He got refugee status at the American Embassy in Moscow with his new wife, because he got a divorce and then married another girl. And now he is going to divorce her, and now I can't figure out how he will come here because she doesn't want to come here and she doesn't allow him to go alone. It is not simple. In Russia, even if you pay, you need to get the divorce paper that she has no financial dependence on you. And she does not care to sign it! Her father was Jewish but not her mother, but that doesn't matter. But he --

He has children by both his first wife and his second wife. Fortunately, his first wife is now married to my cousin and they are also going to come. It is so funny.

My mother wants to come here, and was here to visit us. She didn't like America when she was here but now when she is back in Russia, now she likes America!

But their coming mostly depends on my father. And when we were going to leave he wouldn't even speak with me. Now he completely changed his mind about immigration. But it is very difficult for him to lose his job. Because he is a manager, some kind of manager and he deals with a lot of people and people like him and he really lives on his job. So, to lose his job was practically to lose the most important part of his life. So, when he will be retired, it would not be a big difference for him to live in Russia or here. But even then it would be difficult for him. Because at his age it is very difficult to learn the new language and he has never learned any other language. My mother used to learn English and French.

My father will be sixty this year, and my mother is fifty-eight. So when my brother, I hope, leaves Russia, and his first wife also leaves Russia. Because my mother is very strange. I think she likes her first daughter-in-law better than her son. Because when they were divorced my mother stayed with her ex-daughter-in-law, even though she (the daughter-in-law) had her own apartment. So, when all of them will leave Russia, I think that it will be easier for my parents to leave. They have already applied for permission to come to America but it will probably take them more than a year to get this through to American Embassy, maybe two years, because now it is something like a million who have applied.

I am concerned about their still being in Russia. It is possible to be worried about everything one can imagine happening, and even things one cannot imagine. In one program, on Russian TV, was announced that this organization *Pamjat'* was going to make *pogroms* on the fifth of May. I could believe it. Just before we left, it was the same slogans out on the street that there would be Jewish Pogroms, I can't remember, it was the Fourth of June or the Sixth of June. It was the thousandth anniversary of Christianity in Russia and they were going to celebrate this way. There wasn't anything, but people were really scared and some of them didn't go anywhere - to the countryside where they have some country houses. They were afraid. There were slogans all over the countryside. There were articles in the newspapers that the KGB knew about this and didn't let it happen.

This Anti-semitism in Russia became more open. I can't say it grew up but it became more open. I used to speak with the guys in *Pamjat'*, but they were just stupid. But this group is really dangerous, *Pamjat'* - Memory. Most of their slogans are all right. They are saying that Russian nature is spoiled. That Russian culture has been destroyed. That it is necessary to save Russian culture and nature. That it is not right for the Russian government to sell all natural resources to the West. Everything is logical, only one point - they blame Jews for everything.

But these right words make a lot of people feel that these guys really want changes in the right direction. I saw people who came to Moscow from Kazan, from very far places, especially to speak with the guys from *Pamjat'*. Another thing, Russian people used to think that everybody who was blamed for anything in the newspaper were actually the good guys. Because Russian newspaper wrote that Solshenitzyn was bad, Sahkarov was bad. And now everybody knows that they were not bad. But, *Pamjat'* is still bad, so there are plenty who think they may really be good.

So, I never met the leaders of this organization. I only read interviews in Russian-American newspapers but those members on lower level, they know a lot of slogans, and they are very pushy, they don't want to hear any arguments but it is not so simple. For example, I saw where when one guy called the man from *Pamjat'* an Anti-Semite, and he tried to grab him and bring him to the police because he used a bad word to him. They never told that they have something against Jews, only about Zionists, but all Zionists have already left. They speak against Zionists and Masons, and they also don't know who they are. They say the Masons are a conspiracy organization. There were Masons in Russia but I am sure there are only a very few now.

(What are you disappointed in here?)

I don't want to hurt your feelings. I thought that Americans were smarter and better. I am really disappointed in the level of the American engineers. There is really a different educational level. Most American engineers are Bachelors and most Russian engineers have their Masters degrees. First, I thought that our Masters Degree was closer to Bachelors but not now. It is another kind of education. We got a very wide education, maybe not so deep as American. And in modern industry and modern sciences it is good to know things in a wider area.

Another thing, I don't like the way I have to work. Because both companies I work for are small, and everything depends on the one man. I'm am used to making my own decisions and everything must be referred through him and it is uncomfortable. In Russia, I could argue with anybody, the production manager, my supervisor, - I was fully responsible for my work. And here -he signs checks, so I should keep my mouth closed.

But, the main thing, the good thing that is different from Russia, but these things seem so natural to us now that sometimes we forget that we didn't have them in Russia. For example, nature. There are only rats and cats on the streets in Russia and here we see so much more. It was a one of our biggest surprises, when we had just come here and we saw squirrels. We have them in Russia but in special parks, not on the street. Basically, I see these animals on the road. I drive on Rand Road. The speed limit is 55 but everybody drives 65. I see animals by the side of the road. I saw two live deer, and others. One time we even had a raccoon by the house. They look very nice.

Another big surprise for us was that Jews are Jews here and these Orthodox Jews surprised me. There are even the Jews here with the big black hats and very they walk proudly as a Jew.

Basically we had not so good expectations and often told ourselves that our life would be very difficult especially the first couple of years. We were really looking ahead to our children's future. When we came, we found out that our life wasn't over yet, so we have a lot of years ahead. We can have our own fun in America. Now my wife will tell you she says, "Why did we come to America? to work or to have fun?"

Basically I thought about the children and their future. They can choose their own way in America, there are a lot of good ways and a lot of bad ways. The good ways are much better than in Russia; but American bad ways are worse than Russia. So I want my children to choose the good ways. You know this better than me: drugs, crime. There are probably some drug problems in Russia but especially five years ago nobody knew about the problem. And it is much more difficult to get drugs there. From this point of view, children were safer there.

There were other problems there. Alcohol. Acetone. As Russian engineers, we had to make something from nothing. In America you don't have to be so creative because everything is available.

I don't know if I ever want a business of my own. I know what kind of a business I can manage. But, for this business first I need "cold metal" because I am an engineer in the area of control. And there are not a lot of companies which have such an engineer on their staff. I deal with anything which has automatic controls, any machine tools, in any industry. And there are a lot of smaller companies, ten to twenty or so people, who cannot afford to have such a specialist on their staff. So if I would know forty or fifty such companies and everyone would have a problem ten days out of a year, I could open my own business. It doesn't make any difference to me in which field I work, because from the point of view of the controls any machine is practically the same as any other. But it is not a goal, to have my own business.

I could speak a very long time about many things we have not discussed. You can see, when you ask the questions I tell you more than you want. It is easy to remember things not connected with your questions at all.

My son now answers the question, "Where are you from?" with "Chicago." This is not upsetting to me. Maybe it will be helpful to him to know about Russia and maybe he will have some interest in Russia when he is older. But now I do not feel it is important to talk about it much. I don't care what he remembers about Russia.

At home we speak only in Russian, and we do not allow our children to speak English at home. But it is very difficult to stop that. In a few years, it will be easier for them to speak English, even in a few months. My daughter began to translate phrases from English into Russian after a half a year in America. She deals with Russian phrases in an American manner. She is the only Russian kid in her class. She speaks English all day and she spends maybe two or three hours a day with us. And we cannot spend all these three hours talking with her. We are trying not to let her be too involved with TV either.

We have explained to her many times why we left Russia. My cousin told me that they had a lot of problems with his daughter. They also left when their daughter was seven years old and in a year she was trying to hide that she was from Russia and she did not want to bring her friends home, embarrassed that her parents didn't speak English well. The only way they managed was by explaining what they did was for her and that it was very difficult for them. For us the leaving was much simpler than for them. They were some of the last immigrants on the first wave. For us it was simpler in the bureaucratic way but in a psychological way it was the same.

So it is the way that children can be made proud that they have another heritage than American and that they are not worse than American kids. They have something that is good. And when my daughter told me that she wants to change her name to Alice. I told her that it is very common among kids that they want to be the same as the others, but it is really important but more difficult to be different.

I know my cousin has a lot of problems with his daughter now but it is different. She is sixteen now and they had terrible problems. His wife is a doctor so she, after they came here, she had been preparing for her exams for two years and then there was her residency. He worked to feed his family and neither of them could spend a lot of time with her. So they practically lost control of their daughter, now they have problems. Let us hope it works better for us.

**IGOR FERTELMEYSTER**

J.C.C./W.A.

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