**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**MARK FRIEDGAN**

**Student**

BIRTH: November 9, 1979, Kharkov

SPOUSE:

CHILDREN:

PARENTS: Anna Friedgan, January 18, 1959, Kharkov, Computer

Programmer

Alex Friedgan, May 25, 1959, Kharkov, Mechanical Engineer

SIBLINGS:

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Isaak Ginsburg, March 2, 1936, Kharkov, Veterinarian

Lyuba Khoroshky Ginsburg, August 23, 1935, Friedrich-

hofka, Ukraine

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Leo Friedgan, Civil Engineer, October 12, 1934, Kharkov

Lilyan Lishnyevsky, Production Engineer, June 18, 1936,

Dnepropetrovsk

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

Jewish Community Centers Shalom Sunday

Ezra Habonim Synagogue

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

WOMEN'S AUXILIARY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS OF CHICAGO

NAME: **MARK FRIEDGAN**

DATE: May 3, 1991

Age 11

INTERVIEWER: Margot Hirsch

(Where were you born?) Kharkov. (What is your earli­est memory from when you were little?) My first memory is when I broke my first tooth, which really hurt. You know those film strips like slides? I liked to watch those when I was little. (A viewer?) Yes. But to put the viewer on you need a stool. So I was coming from the kitchen. I bumped into the door and the chair went around and I broke my tooth. (How old were you?) [didn't hear answer] (And you actually remember it?) Yeah, I had a lot of blood and everything. And the tooth came out only here.

(You lived with your mother and father?) And my grand­parents. (Did you live near your father's parents?) Not really. The city was divided into parts. They lived in the suburbs, not a far suburb, but a suburb. I lived in the middle of the city, not really the middle. But Rogers Park would be where I lived and they would be a little further, maybe Skokie.

(Before you went to school, who took care of you?) My great‑grandma. (So you did see them a lot?) Every day. (Even though they lived far away?) Yeah. [ISAAC: It's my mother. She lived not far. But he's talking about another grandparent. The other side.] (Your mother's parents lived far away but your dad's parents lived...) No, they [Isaac?] lived with us, and my dad's father and mother lived in the suburb. (So your grandma took care of you.) Great‑grandma. Paulina. (She wasn't working at the time?) I guess. [Isaac: No, she wasn't. He went to the kindergarten near Paulina's house.]

I remember I had a good friend when I was there. His name was Anton. (He lived near you?) Not near me, near my grandmother. Later we moved there. (Was your friend a Jewish boy?) No, I don't think so.

(Do you remember anything about being Jewish when you were little? When did you find out you were Jewish and that it was different?) I was about eight years old. (Do you remember how you found out it was different?) It wasn't really different. (Were most of your friends Jewish or not Jewish?) I had about thirty friends, and about five of them were Jewish. But that was when I was older, when I was in third grade. (Do you remember anything about kindergarten?) I remember my teachers' faces. That's about all. And that we had to sleep in the afternoon, which I really hated. Usually I didn't, and then I had to stand in the corner. (What did you do?) I don't know.

There's this kid that nobody likes, he was more of a clown. That's what we called him. (Because he wasn't smart?) He was funny. Everything he did, he was like a *klutz*, and that was very funny. That's about all.

(How did you celebrate your birthdays? Do you remember the room where you slept and ate, all the things about when you were little?) I remember the rooms. The first birthday I remember right now was when I was seven. (Was it a party? Did other boys come over?) Yeah. It was a pretty good party. I had, like those rings that you hang on? Like in gym? I had those in my house and they were low enough so you could just pull yourself up and sit in there. You could put different things on there. So that was the most enter­taining thing. You couldn't do it for very long because... my grandma... the kitchen was like over here [drawing] and there was a hall and there was a big room and then my grand­ma's room. This is where the rings were. The television was in here. So we played here in the hallway and then we watched tv in my grandmother's room, and then we went to the living room, and that was where I slept ‑ I had the corner and they had the right corner.

(What colors were in there?) The living room was red, my grandmother's room was green. The kitchen was completely white. We had curtains here in the hallway right before the rings. The doorway out was right before the rings and the curtains right after. So my grandma carried all the foods from here to the big room so we could eat, through the hallway. (She was a good cook?) Yeah. (You still like to eat her cooking?) Yeah.

(Can you describe the neighborhood where you lived?) When I was little there was a military school nearby, so the neighborhood was like a military neighborhood. There was the military campus, the training grounds. That's mostly where I hung out. We lived in a house because my grandpa was teaching there before he stopped. Then we moved. We had to move. (How old were you when you moved?) Eight, I think. (You had to move?) Yes, because the house was for military school trainers and everybody in the military school. (And why did you have to move?) Because my grandpa wasn't teaching there anymore.

(Where did you move to?) We moved to the house where my great‑grandma lived, Paulina. She was on the first floor, and we moved to the fifth floor.

(Do you remember what holidays you celebrated?) Not Jewish holidays. We did celebrate the Ninth of May, Victory Day. The First of May was really good because there was a big parade and I usually got a lot of presents. I bought them. Because you could go out on the street and there would be a parade here, a parade there. You know those Macy's parades in New York? It's about that big. (But military?) Well... (Were there balloons and that sort of thing?) Yeah, but the balloons weren't that big. The Ninth of May was the military parade. There was a plaza, half bricks. (So you did not celebrate any Jewish holidays...) No.

(At what time did you ever feel that your family was different from the children who were not Jewish?) I didn't. (When you went to school was there any difference?) No.

(When did you start school?) Let's count. I skipped fourth grade.... I was six. (What was your first school like after kindergarten? What did you study? How many people were in your class?) The first grade, there was math and Russian. I started Ukrainian in second grade. So there were like two subjects in first grade. [ISAAC: And read­ing and writing.] Right. Math, reading and writ­ing. Art, music, gym. Special stuff. (What time in the morning did it start?) First grade started at eight o'clock. The school was not really big. It was from first grade to tenth grade, all the grades. There were two times. From eight to twelve and from twelve thirty to six in the evening. (So you had half an hour for lunch?) No. Two shifts. (After first grade you only went to school for a half day?) In first grade you go from eight to twelve. In second grade you go from twelve to six. (And in the third?) All the even grades were in the evening. The odds were in the morning. (So you never went the whole day?) No. (Was that because the school was too small for that many children?) Yes. It was quite small. It wasn't like here. Because here it's like six grades, and then two grades and then four grades. The schools are different. The school had a swim­ming pool, that was a big advantage.

(When you had art in school what did you do?) .... (Did you just learn to speak Ukrainian?) To speak and write. (It's not like Russian, right?) It's a little bit different. It's like Polish. (What did you do in art?) Drawing differ­ent things. We were only drawing things. (Did that art continue all the way through school or only just when you were little?) I don't know. (When you first came here to this country, when you left Russia, were you still taking art?) Yeah. (What did you do in there, just drawing?) Just drawing. (What?) We had drawing of differ­ent things that I liked. [Parade] drawings, and we tried people drawing but I couldn't do it. (Was there instruction or did they let you just do what you could do?) There was actual instruction.

(What about music?) I hated music. I didn't learn anything in music because all we did in music is she played the piano, we sang songs, and we learned notes and took tests. (You read notes?) Yes, but I went to music school. (You had a lot of private lessons?) Well... (You had English and music lessons?) Yes. (When did you do this, at night?) Yes. The private lessons were sometimes at the teacher's house, sometimes at my house, sometimes at a friend's house.

(When you came to Chicago, did your English lessons there help you a lot or was it almost as if you had to start out?) They helped me a lot because all I had to learn was the accent and that was about it. (But you had all your grammar and vocabulary?) It was like sixth grade. It helped me. It was easy but it helped me.

(Tell me about your best friends. Are they there, are they here?) My best friends are still in Russia. In Russia we collected things. You know like Bazooka gum? They have those small things? We had a different kind of bubble gum and we collected those. I didn't actually collect them at first. Like little comics. In second grade, because all my friends did, I began to find out. In third grade I started collecting them. I have a really lot of them because mostly what I did is... If you buy some gum inside there was some with cars or different things. In third grade I was like the master person for trading. There were two third grades, thirty people in each class. (So you'll be a good business­man someday?) I might, I don't know.

(So it's kind of like baseball cards here. Are you into baseball cards here?) I know what it is, I can play it. I don't really like it too much.

(Was it hard for you to leave your friends? Do you write to them now?) No. (You've made good new friends here?) Yeah.

(Do you remember around the time that your family decided they wanted to come? When did you first realize that you might leave Russia?) A year before we left. (What did you think about that? Did you want to leave?) I didn't actually care. What's the difference? (What is the differ­ence?) When I was there, I was free to do anything. Here I'm not. (Why is that?) Because my parents think I'm really small. I'm eleven years old. (They're strict with you?) They don't let me do anything. (You won't believe it but later you'll realize it was probably for your own good.) I don't think so. (How do you like school?) It's Okay, it's easy. I hardly have to study to get good grades. (Is that because you already know a lot that they're studying here?) Math is easy. Science is a little bit harder. English is... I usually never get less than a B. On tests I usually get As. I've never gotten a B on an English test here. For the English grades, I have the better grades in the class.

(You'd like to be the best?) Yeah, but I couldn't be right now because there's a HEP program, do you know what that is? (No.) Higher English Program. I'm not in it because you have to get good grades in English, like the grades I got, for three years to get into HEP. (You'll get there if you study...) Yeah. (You have to earn it.) For English I don't actually study. [his mother is talking ‑ can't hear what she's saying] Yeah, I don't study, I get good grades. [mother?: If you studied, you could have even better grades.] I don't want to! I don't care what you want.

(When you were still in Russia, and your friends knew you were going to leave, how did they feel, how did you feel?) I don't know. They thought I was really cool. (It was inter­esting to them that you were going off to a big adventure?) Right.

(Tell me about the trip coming here. What did you have to leave behind?) Actually I brought everything I wanted. (Your violin?) I only wanted to sell that. I didn't want it. (Are you good at it?) I can't really say. (You don't enjoy playing?) No. I have to. We have a talent show at school, so I have lessons with my teacher on Monday and Thursday and with my c... in school on Tuesday and Thursday.

(Tell me about the trip?) It was fun. Italy was fun. I went to school. I didn't learn anything there, but I just went around. (How long were you there?) A month, that's the shortest you could be there. (Before Italy?) Vienna. For two weeks. (You've seen a lot of the world...) We also went to Germany once.

(Back in Russia, you lived in the second apartment until you left?) Yes. (Do you have other relatives besides the ones here?) I have another great‑grandma, my mother grandpar­ents. I have an uncle in Israel. Two uncles. In English you'd call them cousins.

(What age are your cousins?) One is seventeen and the other one is twelve. (So that one is closer in age to you...) Yeah, he's only half a year older than I am. (So were you good friends in Russia?) Yeah. (What did you do when you played with him?) Mostly fighting. (For real or playing around?) Playing around. (Do you write to him?) No. (Do you write to anybody?) No. I don't like writing. I can write, like at school we had a journal that we wrote in, and I made up a story. I got like seven pages of it. (What was that about?) It was about a starship that I made up. I was watching TV and it pulled me into a starship. If you correct­ed it, it would be like a hundred mistakes for seven pages, but it was good.

(Can you compare your friendships here with fri­end­ships in Russia? Is there a difference or is it pretty much the same thing?) In Russia I was mostly a leader and here I'm not... (Yet...) Yet. (How do you get to be a leader?) Well... (What makes a person a leader?) You're followed. (Why do they follow?) Because you're smart, because you can lead them. (How do you get smart?) Show them. (You have to learn, right?) Yeah.

(What are you going to do this summer?) I'm going to go to a camp in Wisonsin, I can't pronounce it. It's near Milwuakee. For a month. (You'll like that...) Yeah, because I can get away from my parents!

(What do you like the best in this country?) Televi­sion, Ninten­do. The library is pretty good. (I thought you didn't like to read?) I like to play on the computers. They have a lot of good stuff, golf. I had to write a report for school on the computer. (Do you think the schools are better here than they were there?) I can't actually compare them. (Isn't the attitude in the school here different, the teachers, for example, from the ones there?) Yeah. (In what way?) Because before, in Russia I had three school years and three teachers, and here I've had two school years and seven different teachers. (Because they're teaching different courses?) Yeah. (There the teacher taught every one of the subjects?) The main sub­jects. (Math, English, Ukrainian or Russian?) Yeah. (Woman or a man?) In first grade and half of second was a woman, and the other half of second was a mean woman that I finally got revenge on. And in third grade there was a man from the army. He was twenty‑two.

Here I had a homeroom teacher who was a man. But here I have a woman. (Is the attitude with the way they teach you the same or differ­ent?) It's different, because in Russia I had two really good teachers. (Stricter?) No. They were soft and pretty, but one was mean. Real mean. They had an assignment notebook where they wrote behavior ‑ they'd write all over. (Which school was tougher ‑ there or here?) What do you mean tougher? (Where they wanted you to perform more...) They expected more from me there. (Did you have a lot of homework?) Yeah. Here I bring homework home once a week. Not much homework. (Do you think you learned more in one place than the other?) I learn more here, but they expected more from me there. (Why do you think you learn more here?) Because there are more sub­jects. The other thing is that in Russia I was only up to the third grade. But in third grade we studied the things... I learn the math here now. (So what you learned in third grade there your're learning here now?) In sixth grade. We didn't have science there.

(Did you have computers?) No way. How do you expect that? The only fun thing in school there was pool, the gym. (When you went to school there and came home, you were only in third grade so you didn't have a lot of homework. But you had private lessons.) I did have a lot of homework, every day. (What did you do other than go to school other than school and lessons?) I also had swimming lessons. (Were you active in sports clubs?) Only the swimming. I think in second grade I tried ice skating. I quit after two lessons. (Why?) Because the teacher was mean. And second because I didn't really like it. (So you haven't been ice skating here either?) No, but I've been roller skating. I'm pretty good at it. I can't say I'm very good, but I'm pretty good.

(What don't you like here?) I don't like the people's attitudes. (In what way?) I don't know. (The kids, the grown‑ups?) The kids. (They make you feel like a s­trang­er?) Yeah. (You have to give them time. That's how kids are...)

(Is there anything you'd like to tell me that I haven't asked you? Do you like being here? Do you like being with Jewish children better than just in the school? Do you feel better then?) Yeah.