**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**ISAAC GINSBURG**

**PhD, Applied Mechanics**

**Kharkov Polytechnic Institute, 1958**

**Dissertation: Stress Analysis of Shell Structures**

BIRTH: March 2, 1936, Kiev

SPOUSE: Lyuba Khoroshky, August 23, 1935, Friedrichhofka,

Ukraine. Mechanical Engineer

CHILDREN: Anna Ginsburg Friedgan, 1954, Bobroysk

PARENTS: Dr. Naum Ginsburg, Cardiologist

Dr. Paulina Shmilkina Ginsburg, Pediatrician

SIBLINGS: Boris, born 1947, now resides in Kfar Saba, Israel

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Yudka Styolarov, born Odessa ?, deceased Odessa 1924,

financial officer

Genya Styolarova,

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Grigory Khoroshkiy, born Proskurov?, deceased Kharkov,

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JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

Ezra Habonim Synagogue

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago

NAME: **ISAAC GINSBURG**

DATE: January 21, 1991

INTERVIEWERS: E. Snyderman and M. Hirsch

(Isaac, we're going to back to go back to your earliest memories. You were born in Kiev?) Yes. (So in Kiev or nearby?) Exactly in Kiev. (The years just preceding the war.) In 1936, so just before the war. Here it was three years, in the Soviet Union five.

(In your home, you were living with your mother and father and who else?) It's a big family. We have a room, as I know - not remember, but know - there lived my mother's parents and some of our relatives. (Which relatives?) From my father's side. Maybe his aunt and her son. (Your father's cousin...) Maybe, but it's not very close. I don't know how many,-- the aunt lives in one room, the cousin lives in another room, my parents live in a third room with my mother's parents. (Was it pleasant? Did people get along?) Yes. What I know. I cannot remember. I was little, maybe one year old.

Because after that we moved to a place where my father began to work. It was in the little vil­lage, like a station, (a small town?) No, it's not that big. Like a station. It's near Stary Oskol'. It's not far from Voronezh, which is a city in the Soviet Union. You can find it. [looking on map] In this place we lived some time. I don't remember how long. After that we came back to Kiev, approximately in 1940, where father began to work on his Ph.D. I don't remember exactly what year this was, but we lived in Kiev before the beginning of the war, until 1941.

(Your father was working...) In Kiev he was working on his Ph.D. (And your mother...) I think she worked in that time like a doctor, too, because she graduated from medical institute, in some hospital. (So it's your grandparents who are taking care of you.) Yes, my grandmother, my mother's mother, she took care of me all life.

(Did you ever hear Yiddish spoken in the home?) Yes, I heard this because my grandfather very often spoke with my grand­mother in Yiddish, and I think he was religious, because he not only spoke Yiddish, he goes to... I don't know about synagogue because I don't remember... maybe before the war, but what I remember after the war, he prayed at home some days and I think that he goes to some house sometimes. (Somebody may have had a Torah hidden away...) Yes. So that I remem­ber.

(So even if in the home you weren't able, for example, to get matzos for Passover--) Yes, because there are some places, not legal, illegal, but people in these places can buy. I don't remember in Kiev because I was too young for that, but I remember that much later we buy in some places, in Baltic republics, or from Moscow.

(When did you first realize you were Jewish?) I think that it happened when I graduated from high school and wanted to go to the institute. In our family most of our relatives were doctors, so special atmosphere. And of course I wanted to go to medical school. Maybe not "of course," but I want this, I know it exactly. (It was expected of you, but at the same time you wanted to do it?) Yes, but I cannot do it because at that time in the Soviet Union, the anti-semitism had a very high level.

In 1952 there are doctor's process, if you remember. (The Doctors' Trials...) Yes. In that time doctors were free, but the atti­tude toward the Jewish people, toward medical Jewish people was not very good. In medical school, in the Ukraine especially, Jewish students cannot be admitted. So my parents decided that I didn't have the chance to go to medical school. And because I was not a bad student in math, I went to the polytechnic insti­tute, but I cannot be admitted in the polytechnic institute in Kiev, so I moved to another city, Dneipropetrovsk, where my father worked at that time, and I became a student in the engineering college. After that I moved to Khar'kov with my father. I began to study there in the polytechnic institute. So this is the first time when I understand what it means to be Jewish.

(That means that you were pretty well protected during the terrible war years from feeling the anti-semitism around you...) I think maybe. But maybe I don't remember because during the war I was about six or seven years old when I started first grade in school in 1943. I cannot remember exactly how I felt at that time. For me these years - I don't remember these years very good.

(Is it because there's a lot of moving around and a lot of turmoil? Maybe because there was some unpleasantness that you don't wish to remember? These war years weren't easy years. I remember your mother saying she was sick, too, your father was away and she was worried about him. So you were too young to be aware of those things...) I think maybe. I don't know why, but these years go from my memory. (So you really don't remember much from the war years...) No, I remember that this was a hard time. It was not enough to eat. But I don't remember what is my relations with other children. I know that I was good in school because I have these papers, and my mother tells me I was. I remember, but maybe from my mother, how I felt when I met my father in school.

(Your father surprised you one day, - He came to the school and looked for you...) Yes. (And you don't remem­ber that moment?) I remember, but I think it happened because my mother many times told me about this moment.

(What do you remember?) For me, when he came to school, for me it was very surprising. I cannot remember exactly his face and he was in a military uniform. It was after three years. (You hadn't seen him for three years, and at this point you're about eight years old?) I was eight. (What city are you in now?) Boguruslan. It's in the East part, near the Ural moun­tains. (He went to the home of your aunt, I guess...) No, my mother was not at home. She moved to her sister's. My father took me and we went in the direction in which my mother was going. He met her in Kuibyshev train station.

(When you saw him, were you frightened? What was the reaction that you know you had?) I jumped into his arms and I think I was happy. Also I wanted to go with him so he could see what I can do, how I am skiing. I think that in this place it's dangerous for children, maybe for Jewish children, too, to go skiing alone. So any time my grandfather go with me. He had great patience with me while I was skiing. This place is very cold in winter. When my father came, he went with me. It's some mountain from which I ski. (You actually had skis that you rented there?) Little skis which are made. Not the same kind of skis. Made from wood, but they're made not in the shops. They're made by hand. He stayed and I went from the mountain. But it was very cold. At that time he came from Poland, I think. He didn't like when it's cold. So he cannot stay. He is very frozen. I remember that after very little time, he said he is very frozen and we need to go back. It's what I remember from this time. (So that happened the day your father came back for you?) Yes. (He was actually willing to watch you ski, but he couldn't stay too long...) Yes.

(So that was a brief opportunity to be with your father. And then the war continued. Do you remember when you returned home after that, to Kiev?) I remember that my father came a second time, and we all, my mother, her parents, moved to Kiev. It was a long trip, I don't remember how many days. It was on the train. (Would this be 1944 or 1945?) 1945. (So has the war officially ended?) Yes.

We came to Kiev and it was very sur­prising, to see a big city. I forgot what it was before. So these beautiful streets, some of the buildings are destroyed. But for me it all seems new. So it was very surprising for me. Except that I remember that in the shops there is food that I don't see before. (Was that because food was purchased in a market­place?) No, there are in the shops food, but it was very expensive, maybe. I don't remember exactly why, but it was expensive. Not everyone could buy it. (And even with your mother working and your father sending money, even so it was hard for you to get enough food?) Of course, but in the place where we lived before there is not enough food for anybody. But here in some shops, I think there were special shops - I don't remem­ber exactly. I think like cooperative shops, not exactly. So the prices were much more, people who work couldn't buy in these shops regularly. It does not matter what job. If it's government job, it's a small salary. People cannot afford. Sometimes they can, on some holidays maybe.

But when I see this, especially ice cream - I had never seen it before. So for me it was all new. But I remember that we lived with father. He was on vacation some days, so it's not a long time, and he moved to his place in Germany and we stayed. And I begin to study in his school. I was in fourth grade. After I graduated from fourth grade we went with my mother to my father's place in Weimar, Germany. And I studied there in fifth grade. (There was a Russian school there?) Yes, for the chil­dren whose parents were in the army.

(What was the difference between the schools in Kiev and Weimar? Was one better than the other?) No, I don't remem­ber. I think I don't feel it. (From what your mother described, there was a big change in your way of living...) But it's not what I remember. It was a big change because in Kiev we lived in a little room with a big family. We didn't have a living room. It cannot be compared. And we come to Germany and get - I don't remember - it's the first time we lived in an apartment. It was for me, ...I think it was a change which was bigger than the change now from our apartment in Khar'kov and our apartment here.

(What did that do for your spirits? Did it make you feel more cheerful and happy about life, or was it not important to you?) I think in these years it was not important. Maybe for me it was important that I was with my father. Of course I liked him and he can spend some time with me. What I remem­ber, most of the time he works very hard. But sometimes he'd go with me to cinema or to theater when a performance comes. Sometimes from Moscow come performances and we go and see them. I remember that most time my father worked. But when he went for his job to another city, he takes me and I go with him in car. So for me, I liked it. Here I began to learn how to drive. (You were pretty young, weren't you?) Yes, but I sit near him. (So it was an opportuni­ty to get to know your father after being apart for so long...) Yes.

(At this point were you aware of any worries in the fami­ly. It was after the war, we are told, that more anti-semitism became more obvious after the initial Communist slogans of equal­ity prior to the war, this seemed to change. Did you know if your parents were concerned about this?) I don't remember. I begin to understand something when I came back to Kiev and I was in the high school. At that time in the Soviet Union, begins the time of cosmopolitanism against Jewish people. Some of the people about what I saw the articles that they were bad. I know these people. They are our friends or they're in our family. So I begin to under­stand that something is wrong.

As I began to understand later, my uncle, my father has a sister, her husband is a very great scientist in the Soviet Union, and not only in the Soviet Union. He is known in the world, I think, because it's really very big person in biochemistry. (His name?) Boris Goldstein. He was not an ordinary person. He was very intelli­gent, and he thinks not like others. So sometimes he said his opinion about some­thing. Maybe the first time I don't understand him, but when I became older, I began to understand. When I compare what has happened and what he says, I begin to understand that there are many bad things in the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union, in school, all people are learning that all is going Okay, that the government is the best in the world. And if something is not best, then it's better than someplace else in the world.

So students learned that only one way is right, the way which is given by Lenin. It's right - all others are wrong. All other people are bad. If something happened in other places of the world, so it's very hard for children who are in the school or in some other institute, to understand what is happening. Because any time when you listen to the radio, when you watch TV - oh, you cannot watch TV at that time in the Soviet Union. We have in 1953 only. But from newspapers, the radio, any people, only one kind of slogans can be heard.

(So your thoughts were imposed upon you. This Boris Goldstein was outspoken apparently in saying this is not the way to educate people.) Yes. But we met not too frequently and he said not too much because it was very dangerous in the Soviet Union. (So this was in private gatherings...) Of course. (And then something happened to him?) To him nothing happened. (He was never detained or questioned?) No. (He opened your eyes.) Yes. (But when others like him were captured and imprisoned for those comments, you knew that was not a good reason...) Of course. Especially when this happened with the doctors. Because we lived in this doctors' neighborhood, so you know that these people are very good. They cannot do anything bad for others. We just know what the government said about these people is not right.

(So here you've been back from Weimar since 1947. You're studying. At this point you're in your teens. You're starting to really be aware of the broader world.) Yes. (Did this worry you, what was happening? Were you frightened now because of your Jewishness?) Of course. (So this is the first time you're afraid even though you've lived through a terrible war...) Maybe I wasn't afraid because I was very young. But now I began to understand that for Jewish people in the country is no freedom.

(When you're about 16, did you actually apply to medical school?) No, because my mother didn't think I had any chance to get into school. Because if the student who graduated from high school didn't go to the institute, he must go to the army. So she was afraid, if I cannot be in the institute, I can be in the army. So she want that I go only to the institute. So I take exams in the polytechnic institute. (This had to be a strategy for many Jewish parents to try to keep their sons out of the army...) Yes. (And the reason for that was what?) I think that there are several reasons. The army in the Soviet Union is so hard for any young man, but for Jews especially, to be in the army in the level of soldiers, there is a lot of anti-semitism, a lot of crime in the army. The oldest are beating the youngest. Some of them can be killed. I know some Jewish people who were killed in the army. (They just died from the severe beatings...) Yes.

Especially we have a not very far relative who died, but it was in the 1970s. (But this is a tradition that goes back even to the tsarist army...) And the conditions for living in the army are, in my opinion, like in jail, the bad jail. I feel it when I was one month in the army. All students in the Soviet Union, in most institutes at the time when I studied, there is a military department. All male students have to do some military service. I was lucky because I must only one month be in the army. Before, it was more. This time for me was the most diffi­cult, I think, in my life.

(Can you describe it for us?) The first thing which I hate is that the man who is not very educated and is very vio­lent. (This is an officer?) No, like sergeant. The students are divided into tens. They especially for students find the sergeant who is not educated, he hates educated people, and is very violent. So he gave orders that didn't have any sense. We have forty minutes for rest. And we are in the forest. There are a lot of pine cones. He begins to pick them up and put them in the place. After hard work, the same thing. He wanted to make slaves of us, I think. That is the first thing that is very hard for me.

Another thing, the tent where we have to live. It's a little tent for the sergeant and the students. So what is this tent? A bed is made of wood, and all one next to the other. It's terrible to describe, how you can sleep in this. (How wide is this bed?) Ten people. If you need to turn, the person next to you must turn too. Maybe like the size of half the wall. (So ten bodies had less than a foot...) Yes. Maybe fifteen feet.

Then other living conditions - the food that they give. Maybe it's harder for me, but what I see, most of the students who are not so choosy in their food. The food was terrible. For me it's not hard physically, because my physical condition is good. For most students physically, because we stayed early at night and must run about three kilometers, about two miles, and then we go to the gym and must do some exercises. Early in the morning. (Before sunrise?) At about 6:00 in the morning. After that we go and have breakfast. And after breakfast, we must go to study. But the study is we have one class in one place and after the second, after fourteen minutes, but the distance is so far that this fourteen minutes we must run. So the people must be in very good physical condition. For me it's a very hard time. (So you did this before you entered institute?) Not before, when I studied in the institute, after four years. I studied five years. After four years, in the summertime, all males go. (That's a summer program then?) Yes.

(Was there any anti-semitism there?) Oh, there is some, but we had not many Jewish students in this institute. (During the month of the army training...) I understand. (So it's a group from the institute...) Yes. In our group there are three Jewish men. And my friends are not in such good physical condi­tion, so they make some mistakes and they feel the anti-semitism very much, because when they cannot jump through some.. like this table (over hurdles...) Yes, and only after that can you go to breakfast. And they cannot do it. So they have to be in train­ing and we get breakfast. And second, they give them special - So it was harder for them.

(At the institute, were there any student organizations that you belonged to?) No. (You didn't join the Komsomol?) No, I was in Komsomol before the institute, when I was in high school. But you see, Komsomol is not independent organiza­tion. It's like all people go in school. So when you get to some age, you all go to Komsomol. There are some people who begin to fight this government and they didn't go to Komsomol, but these are... (It was required where you were?) Of course, so it means I am in the war with government. It means that I am refugee. But in the Soviet Union we didn't have too many refugees in that time. (You mean like a refusenik?) Like a refusenik. There are some of them, but you can calculate it by the fingers.

People who are in Komsomol and before in Pioneer organi­zation, it doesn't mean anything. They do something, the government sends them to work in fields, or to build some railways. They say you are in Komso­mol, so you have to go. It's only one thing that the govern­ment tells. But everything else they just do.

(So for you Komsomol is just an organization in name only?) Yes. (Were there any professional organizations that a young engineer would belong to?) We didn't have. There are not any special organizations for students. Only sporting clubs. (Did you join any?) I was a tennis player. I like sports, and I was tennis player in institute. I played for institute's team. It's only one organization. (Did that allow you to do any trav­eling through the sports team?) But I didn't do traveling in other cities. We only played in our city. I am not profession­al.

(I know some of the sports people did get to travel around the country with their teams...) But this is teams like, not professional, but like professional, because you can calculate them. There are not too much, basketball, football, from several institutes, and these students can study in the institute about seven-eight years because they are players. But it's not for all stu­dents.

(As you're going up the ladder in school, you didn't pursue what you really wanted to pursue, which was medicine. Are you doing this with willingness and good will, or are you resent­ful that you have been held back?) The first year I do it with­out willingness, and half of the second year. But then I under­stand that I need to graduate and have a job, so I begin to work harder, and I graduated from institute with good grades. After I graduated and began to work, I also wanted to go to medical school, but in the Soviet Union, you cannot go to another school. If you graduated from some institute, you have to work. People who work, in medical school they didn't have night classes, so I haven't any chance to go to medical school. Because I have to go to work.

But when I work I understand that mathematics is inter­esting for me. After some years I go to the evening mathemat­ical department in the university, and begin study, and then I go to another job and I have more time, and more reason for this study, so I graduated from the university. And I like this kind of job because it's more scientific and more logical.

(When and where did you meet Lyuba?) In the Khar'kov Polytechnical Institute. When I came to Khar'kov, she met me. I studied in one class, one group, so we met in the group. It was when I was in the second level of the Khar'kov Polytech­nical Institute. We met first in the institute. (What year is that?) It was 1954. (So you knew each other about three years before you married?) Yes. (When did you know you were going to get married?) I think between '54 and '55. [wife says something] Okay. Between '55 and '56. (Maybe both of you knew at different times.) [laughter]

(Did your families know each other?) No, Lyuba's parents lived in another city. It's very far. They lived in Kazakh­st­san. She was born in a little village in the Ukraine before the war, and during the war they moved. And after the war they lived in Byelorussia in a little town, Bobroysk, and she graduated from school in Bobroysk, and came to polytechnical institute in Khar'­kov. Her parents moved to Kazakhstan. [LYUBA: I had an aunt in Khar'kov. My sister decided on Khar'kov institute.] (We'd like to interview you separately to get all this...)

(Was it important to you that your wife be Jewish? Did that matter to you?) I think yes. In that time I have my opinion. I hate all what's happened in the Soviet Union. Maybe I have some friends, good friends, one of them is here, my sponsor, was the best student in our school. He's a very good person, and I think that what does it mean to be in the Soviet Union, and we have many times dia­logues about that. I think the first time they didn't feel what has happened and what's going on. Instead he was best in our class. (In studies?) The best in our class. He knows many things. He reads much more than all of us. But maybe he feels not like I feel. I don't know why. But the first time he was very pro-Soviet, more patriotic. So we discussed many times many problems, but then when he was a student in the institute, he began to think the same way. And he left the Soviet Union twelve years ago. He is a very good man. He helped twenty-six families come here. (What is his name?) Boris Silver­stein.

(Did Lyuba share your views about these things?) I think yes. [asks her] (What was your wedding like?) It was a good wedding! (Was there anything Jewish about your wedding at all?) We went to the wedding palace and then we have with our friends and relatives wedding. But we haven't any Jewish like we've seen here in the last year, like the *chupa*.

(So the rites of passages, like weddings and bar mitzvahs and bris, funerals and so forth...) In that time it's all dead. In Khar'kov we had no synagogue, only we read in the Chicago Tribune that in the last year they opened. There was before the war a synagogue building, but after the war it became a sports club. And only in the last years they opened this synagogue. The Jewish community buys this synagogue with money that was given them from the Jewish community in the United States.

(So after you get married, where do you live?) With my parents. [Lyuba: In a two room apartment.] (So who lives in this apartment?) My parents, Boris, my brother, and me with Lyuba. And after Anna was born, so there are six of us. And after some time grandmother came. The first time father's grand­mother, and then... (For help...) To help her. And after she died, my mother's mother came together. And from 1966, we sepa­rate, we get one room apartment, and we live, Lyuba, I and my daughter Anna, we live separate in a one-room apartment. [shows something] (This is from the wedding? Did you have a honeymoon?) A few days, but not after the wedding. After a few months, because we were students and we cannot... but when we finished our course we had honeymoon. We went to Leningrad and Moscow and Kiev. (How long were you in Leningrad?) About ten days.

(Are there any events through school that you think are worthy of mentioning, any difficulties or special teachers that you want to mention, any problems with your disserta­tion...) When I studied in polytechnical institute, I had not hard compli­cated problems because we are Jewish. We feel that we are Jewish when after some time we have to go on the practice. All students go on the practice. So there are several places. Lyuba and I wanted to go together to Lenin­grad. (You would have liked to have lived in Leningrad?) No, to the practice, one-month practice. (Like an internship. What was Lyuba's specialty?) The same. We were in one class, and she was the best student in our class. (That must have been difficult to deal with...)

But we have the right because we are good students, to choose the place. And we wanted to go to Leningrad. The professor wanted that we go with him too because he needed help in his dissertation and especially I can help him. But after this the chairman decided that other people will go to Leningrad and we go to a little city named Kramatorsk. So we are disappointed, but most people... but I can understand that this can happen, and I was not very surprised. Any time I'm not surprised because I very well understand the rules.

But when we graduated from institute, we can not go on for Ph.D. For Jewish people it's not accepted. Especially in the Ukraine. In other parts of the Soviet Union, they can. In that time they can go, for example in Siberia. People who graduate can go on to work on their Ph.D. But in the Ukraine you cannot. It's not only because people's anti-semitism. It's government anti-semitism. (At this point was it more official, the anti-semitism?) Yes. Suppose you want to go and work on Ph.D. You pass exams. You can get all As. But after that your papers go to the Party's office. In any city the Party building and offi­cials have a department which leads all institutes in the city, so they take your papers, and if you are Jewish, they don't give you. And only the president of the institute can decide it, but most of the presidents didn't want to have trouble from this, so it doesn't matter if they are good or worse. They didn't accept Jewish people for work on their Ph.D.

So I cannot do it and we go for the job and we begin work in one company. The same compa­ny. [Lyuba: We met a man in our department, a Jewish man. He invited us to his depart­ment.] (This is in what city?) Khar'kov. (So you met a Jewish man...) He was the chairman of the personnel department in the manufacturing company, and he was in the com­mission who can invite the students who have graduated from the polytech­nic institute and he invited us. So we go to the job.

(So how long did you work there?) Lyuba worked about a year. I worked a few months. And after that I go to another company. In this company I worked about five years. (After six months you went to another company, what did that company manu­facture?) Another company is coal-mining institute who made a project for coal-mining industry. I worked in the vibration laboratory in this company.

(During this period, Anna was born?) Yes. (That did not interrupt Lyuba's career because... who was taking care of Anna?) We lived with my parents. My grandmother came, so they helped us and she takes care, and we have a baby-sitter who during the day takes care... (Was this a Jewish woman?) No. (Ukrainian?) Ukrainian or Russian, I don't remember. I think you couldn't find a Jewish baby-sitter in the Soviet Union. They are chang­ing. Some are better, some are worse. So we changed some. And when Anna was three years old, she goes to the kindergarten in the same building where we live.

(So your career is going along as you would expect it to. Nothing is unusual here?) Uh... (But at some point you realize you'll have to go back for a higher degree...) Yes. I was not satisfied with my work in this company. I have some friends on our team. So we all think that we have to work on the higher degree. And we go to the university when I work at this company. We begin to study. And in the same time, we want to work on our Ph.D. too. (Lyuba's doing this too?) No, she's not. But we understand that we cannot go to the institute. So we choose another way. We begin to study in our team. All people who work on a Ph.D. must pass three exams: foreign language, philosophy and in their specialty. So we begin to work to pass the exams. And in our coal-mining company, we have a very good person who was chairman of this company. And he talked with the Chairman of the Engineering College. And he wrote a letter to the institute and asked them to make the conditions to take these exams. Because if you want to go to the institute and say, "I'm prepared to pass exams. Please give me a chance," nobody will talk with you. So all our team, and most on our team were Jewish except one, no, all people are Jewish.

He wrote a letter to the institute which our company supports. So the chairman of this institute gave us a chance to pass the exams. All of us passed the foreign language very good. (What language?) English. And the second, philosophy. Maybe in that time, I don't know how they understand that something is wrong. That five or six Jews passed the exams, and they made special conditions. Two of the persons are real professors in philosophy, and the third man was the chairman of the Party department. And they didn't give us a chance to pass the exam. They say that they are very busy, so come back after a month. It takes some time, but after that, they say Okay, come. We begin to pass our exams. And this chairman of the commis­sion didn't want that we pass the exams. So on all answers, we don't write, we talk with professors. So anytime when he gives a question and I begin to answer, or somebody else, he says that it's not Okay. Something is not Okay. But two other members say it's Okay. So they didn't give us grades. It takes about two weeks before they make a decision. Only after two weeks they give grades. They are not what we can take, most of them are C. But it doesn't matter for us. After that, the third exam, we cannot pass in this insti­tute, so some of us pass the exam in another place. It was after three or four years after that time.

(You studied in night school for all this?) We studied by ourselves. (This was the biggest impediment when the exams were not judged fairly.) Yes. But it's not first in my life. After school I had many troubles. I cannot go to the poly­technic institute. So I go to another institute. Only because I was Jewish. It was a very hard time. I was too young. It was like a blow to my head. (So even though you knew it would be difficult, it was more difficult than you'd imagined?) Yes. (Were you demoralized?) No, because after a few weeks I can go to another institute in another city. It was not too hard for me. But those few weeks, I feel very bad.

(By 1968 you've got your dissertation completed and ac­cepted? What are shell structures?) What does it mean? These structures used in aircraft, in missiles, in vessels, but in the building industry, too. (So a lot of it had a military applica­tion?) But now a lot of them have a civil engineering implica­tion too. The sports arena. Stress analysis, shell structures...

(It sounds as if it was an important topic that you pursued. So after you completed your Ph.D., did you have better work? Was it more interesting?) The work did not change for me because, it's a good work and interesting for me. I worked as an assistant professor. I cannot move because I was Jewish. My title and level for more money, I cannot do it. The work is the same. I gave lectures and I worked in the scientists' team. It does not change for me. For people who are Russian or Ukrainian, once they get Ph.D., they suddenly take the next level. But I worked in this same level about ten years. But the levels mean only money, not what you teach.

(But you have to feel some bitterness about this when you see your non-Jewish colleagues getting more for the same effort --.) Okay, but at that time I understood that because I'm Jewish I cannot do anything more. Of course I was offended, but the work is interesting for me. I did not feel bad. I under­stand that in this country only one thing can happen - I can be fired. This happened in 1976. I was fired.

(Why?) It was because I was Jewish, but not only I. Some very good professors from this academy were fired. I think the best in this academy, and they are Jewish too. In this academy there are a lot of Jewish professors. Why? Because the chairman who came to Khar'­kov and established this academy was a smart man. He came from Moscow. And he understands that he can make a good college only if he has good professional teachers. It's a military academy. And he hired many good Jewish scientists who cannot find a job in another place. And for a few years, it became a very strong military academy. It's not exactly academy, maybe college. It works exactly like an academy.

In Soviet military office, there are in any military field, one academy. So one missile academy, one tank academy, one aircraft academy. Then there are several military colleges which are in many places, in many cities. But what made the chairman of our military college - he very quickly lifted the level of our college so it seems like academy. Be­cause not in all places, in all colleges, can you get a Ph.D. In Ph.D.s there are two levels in the Soviet Union. The first level is the Candidate of Ph.D., and the second level, which is higher, is Doctor of Science. So for Doctor of Science you have to have special scientists' union which has a lot of Doctors, so any of the colleges can accept this union. But our college has three of them. It's more than any other institutes in Khar'kov even. So it's a very good college for studying and working.

But in 1969 or something like that, he was retired, and came in another person, and when the chairman is changing, he changed his helpers too, sometimes. So the atmosphere in this college became worse, and then came the third chairman, and with him came the, like commissar. It's a special name in the mili­tary college. The chief of Party politics. [head of the Party department] He was a very anti-semitic man. In this time, as you know, in the Soviet Union we have the first.... The first Jewish people start to go.

(There was support for the Arab states after the Yom Kippur war of 1973.) Yes, but after that people started to leave, and Khar'kov gave us support for Jewish people. (And there was more activism, world conferences about Soviet Jewry taking place in the world. There was one in Febru­ary 1976, Second Conference of Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry in Brussels. So there's help from the outside for some of this.) Yes. (So in 1976 you lose your job...) Yes.

So, if you know, the government asked the president of Soviet academy, Keldish, how long does it take that he can fire all Jewish scientists, and he said he's need about ten years. So in this time they begin to fire good Jewish people from these places. And because we have this kind of person in our Party department, they decided to fire Jewish professors from the college, and they did their job very well. They fired most of Jewish professors.

(This is the climate now that you're living in... How long did you remain unemployed?) But what I want to tell you is that I was not disappointed because I wanted to leave the Soviet Union, and I cannot do it because of my work in this department in the military academy. So I need to have more than five years after that. But you see, it's very hard for a Jewish scientist to leave his job because to find another job is very hard. But I was maybe lucky in this.

[TAPE 2] When I was fired from the academy, at the same time I can find a job in like three months at Khar'kov State University. And my chairman from the department at the military engineering academy was not an ordinary person. He was a nice man, a Russian. And what he did, he went from the academy because the Jewish professors were fired. He was a good professor, well-known in the Soviet Union. His name is Brislavsky. He went to the civil engineering institute. At that time the mechanical department was very bad. They didn't have good teachers like in many Soviet institutes now. And he said that he can begin to work there if they give him the chance to hire the person he wants. And because they want the famous professor in their institute, and he was very strong, he talked with them several times, and after three months he can hire me in this department. So I continued to work with him in the civil engi­neering institute. And I worked in this department before I left the Soviet Union. (Until your departure...) Yes.

(During this period, are you aware that there is a move­ment taking place to save the Soviet Jews?) I don't under­stand exactly your question. (Were you aware, for example, of the conference going on, on Soviet Jews in Brussels.) I don't know about the results of a conference on Soviet Jews, but I listen to the American Voice every day in the Soviet Union, but I think the most impor­tant part was in the economic fields. Carter talked with Brezh­nev, and Brezhnev wanted support from his government. He gave permission for Soviet Jews to leave Soviet Union, and for that he received from the West the technology, some meal, except that, he can do his political steps which after some time, and after some time Afghanistan happened. So that was politics in the Soviet Union. They need to give Jews permission, because for that reason, they can have from the Western governments something. And I think this is most important. (That's kind of a revelation to me. I didn't realize that President Carter had already laid the foundation for the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting that took place subsequently.) Yes.

(In the 1970's, you didn't even attempt to apply...) I didn't even try, because if I apply, I lose any chance to find a job. Some people, my friends, they try and they think that they have a good chance to get a permit, but I know that I cannot get a permit.

(In 1979 the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and that's the end of detente.) Yes. (In 1980 we have Sakharov arrested and exiled to Gorky. Sharansky has already been imprisoned.) Yes. (Are you able to read any underground information?) I can only listen for real information from the Voice of America, but the information which the Soviet government gives is lies. And I understand and I know that, but for me it was very surprising. I have some good friends and they are intelligent and like litera­ture and poetry and many other things. Some of them did not understand that what the government said about Sakharov - I don't think we have any person which we can compare with him. That it's not a lie. We discussed with my very good friends very many times. For me it was surprising, that kind of person that was much more intelligent that many others, they didn't, first time, ...after a few years they understand that it's a lie. (But you picked it up right away...) Yes. (That was very hard for the typical individual to read between the lines...)

These friends worked in this academy, I think somehow are separated from all others because the attitudes between professors in the acade­my and each other. They didn't have other troubles which Jews people, other people who worked in the offices or the companies and other places. Sometimes we have a special climate in this academy. After several years this climate was destroyed. But from the beginning, because of the chairman, we had a special climate. People worked hard and they're all in this work, and they didn't think about other kind of problems. Maybe they were separated from us and didn't realize what was happening in polit­ical life. They are not interested in this kind of life. Be­cause I think that most intelligent people understand that what they have in the newspapers is a lie. Because after Khrushchev has a speech at the Communist meeting and they talked about what Stalin did, many people who had a brain understand that what they know before is a lie. So why do they need to believe in all what the newspapers tell?

(In Kiev, did you know of any refuseniks?) No, I didn't know refuseniks. But one of my friends, his name is Schwartz - now he is here - he applied to leave at the same time as this Silverstein, but he didn't receive permission. He was late. They stopped. At that time he was fired from his job because he applied to leave. In Kiev they organized a committee for Jews who want to leave, and he was a member of this committee. So they did some­thing for notifying people who want to leave. They wrote let­ters, they applied to the West, but what he told me is that maybe after one year, the KGB began to push them, and some of the people from their committee are in jail. So he stopped. And all years he wait for the time when he can leave.

(Meanwhile, what kind of work is Lyuba doing?) Lyuba is an engineer. All the time she works for one company, like a mechanical engineer. She was a group leader. She is a very good project engineer.

(During this period, your little girl is growing up. Are you seeing her experience some of what you experienced as a young Jew. Is she having some of the same disappointments and diffi­culties, or other ones...) No, I don't think she did, because we did all that we could to help her. And she knew many things which I, for example, didn't know before, because I spent more time with her, and at home I say what I think. So she under­stands what it means to be a Jew, and the relation between Jews and Soviet government.

I helped her study in school and when I saw that the school is not very good, she goes to another good school, a really good school where mostly Jews studied. The children are from good families, and all of them like to find an intelligent job. It's a mathematics school. But all subjects in this school are studied much better than in all others. So she has a good education, and then she goes to the university. I don't know, maybe if she has a chance to choose, she go in another place, but I think that for Jewish person, this is a good pro­gram. It's not hard to go to this place for Jewish people be­cause it's very hard to study in this place, so not too many people go to this department of the university to study. In the Soviet Union, when students after high school go to university or institute, they have to pass special exams. And if there are more students than places, they play games. And they can give Jewish students a bad grade. Of course in the university, even in the mathematics department they can do that too. But in Khar'kov State University, in the mathematics department there are many good professors. The Jewish people who can study here, it's easier for them to go to the university than in another place. So she had not much trouble to be a student in the uni­versity.

(During this period, we're going to see that Gorbachev and Reagan meet, and suddenly there's something called *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. This is in 1984.) I think 1985. But it didn't suddenly happen *perestroika*, because maybe after 1986.... (After the Chernobyl disaster...) Yes. (I've always wondered how much the Chernobyl disaster contributed to that meeting, whether that was a terrible blow, an embarrassment to the Soviet government when that happened... So it's 1986. Mark was born already. How old was he at the time of the Chernobyl disaster, in 1986?) Six. (You're in Kiev...) No, we're in Khar'kov, about 600 kilometers, about 400 miles...

(So you're not as frightened as people were...) Not the reason for our leaving. (It didn't affect you in any way?) No. (You weren't worried about food?) We have bad food, but we don't worry. It's not the reason. The reason for leaving is another one. (This didn't make you more anxious...) No. (The government didn't make it seem like it was a problem for you... because the food... did you look at the labels to see where your food came from, or did you know where your food was coming from?) We have no labels on the food in the Soviet Union! [laughs]

(But did you know where your vegetables or fruits were coming from?) We don't know, only when she goes to the market and can ask. I know that many people are afraid of the food, but I'm not afraid because I know that the food is bad. In the Soviet Union, the pollution is so bad, and it was for a long time. Many years they are testing bombs in the atmosphere, so the pollution is very bad, so of course Chernobyl makes trouble, but if you have a chance, come to any city in the Soviet Union, and compare the atmosphere with Chicago. You cannot compare it.

(But the Chernobyl pollution was invisi­ble...) Yes, but what I want to say is that for our family it was nothing.

(Did you find your life change at all after *glasnost'* and *perestroika*?) It does not change anything. What I know now from letters from my friends, that even now when in other places new things happen in the Soviet Union, in Khar'kov there's not too much changing. Only the shelves in the shops are empty, but in other parts of life there is nothing changing.

(When did you realize it was safe to apply to emigrate?) Okay. When we saw that in 1987 our friends who were refuse­niks about ten years, they get a chance, a permit to leave. Some of them live in Khar'kov, and some others in Tblisi. We understand that we have a chance too. My daughter's girl­friend, her best friend, is a refusenik too, and her rela­tives, her brother lives in Israel. He lives in United States, but before he lives in Israel, so he can live in any place. She received permit to go to Israel and sent us an invitation. It was in the end of 1988. We received it in March of 1989 and we decided to go. We decided to take a chance to get a permit.

So we applied to OVIR and received a permit. At that time we knew that it was easy to get permits. (So three-four months it took?) Faster. We applied on April 1, 1989 and received permission at the end of May. (When did you actually leave?) We left in August 9, 1989.

(Was it difficult to get airplane reservations?) Of course it's difficult to get tickets. But we pay much more than the cost of the tickets and we get it. (How long was your pas­sage?) We went to Vienna, to Rome, then on Sept. 28 we arrived here. It's very fast. (Did you stay in Ladis­poli?) No, in Santa Marinella.

(When you were packing up to go, what did you feel you had to take with you?) The most important thing is language, but there wasn't enough time to learn! I liked to take some books with me. We took some of them. I think I need to have my scien­tific books, but my friends tell me I don't need them here, that I can find what I need. So I left some books which I think are very good. There are all books. In Russian. So now I think it's a mistake, some of the books I need to take. (Who has them?) I left the books in my department. Some people worked with me on Ph.D. I gave them these books. It's not important because here now I have a lot of, but some of them... If I many times use this, it's like old friends.

(Were there any surprises when you came here?) Two of them. Not too many because I read a lot of things and listen to the radio everyday, so most things which are here I know. But two things. First is the air. The air is so clear for me. I think that this is not of pollution. I hear from people who are in jobs... In the newspapers they write a lot of lies, I under­stand, but when they write about the pollution in the United States, I think that it's right because there are too many cars. So the air. And the next thing is the people who met me. I find new friends from Jewish family center. Volunteers. They are so friendly. You never can find this in the Soviet Union. People in the Soviet Union are mostly like enemies. Life is so hard that, I don't know, you can find a person who is friendly to some foreigners who came, but these people are like relatives who want to help us, to do what they can do. So the attitude from the Americans to me is very surprising. We didn't do anything. But with this family of volunteers, we have them from family and from Jewish vocation a lady - they are so friendly and so want to help us.

(What were your disappointments?) Of course I was disap­pointed to not find a job. But I know that it's not easy for me to find a job because my English is not so good and because the years are... If I was ten or more years younger, it's easier to find a job. So sometimes... it's not that I'm disappointed that I came here. But it means that sometimes for me it's hard to understand... For me it's difficult to apply for public aid. For me it's hard because I can do a job, and I think that I can do even now some kind of job. (But do you have to take public aid?) Yes. I have medical assistance. They give food stamps. We don't use the medical assistance, but if something happened, we need to have it.

(You do have part-time work?) Yes, but it's not real part-time because in Truman College, this kind of job is very... so people who take English classes can at the same time have work-study. Some of them work in libraries, but I work like tutor. So the supervisor, who is a very nice man, says that I can write that this is a part-time job. But really part-time job means another thing. But I don't. If I don't take the classes, I can't have this kind of job. But because I study English, I work like a tutor in mathematics. Twenty hours a week. But it pays very little. Like financial aid for students.

(What are your hopes for your daughter and her husband and your grandson?) I think that my grandson has a choice here, many choices. I think he's smart and he can realize. He knows Eng­lish I think better than all others in our family because he learned it in Soviet Union for about four years before, and he has a good teacher who now is here too. And he was very young, so he very fast. He has a good memory. And he studied in Eng­lish school.

(How important is it for all of you, and especially him, to be part of a Jewish community, to have a Jewish identity here?) I think this is important. You see, all Jewish, maybe not all, but most Jewish people in the Soviet Union cannot feel in the Soviet Union themselves like a person. All of them are with ["neglected minds"]. They cannot look straight because they at any time feel that society pushes them to the ground. Even in school when little boys now go to school, they feel that they are Jewish because the people are very anti-semit­ic, and they teach their children in this way. So even in school there are incidents. Jewish boys are beaten because they are Jewish. (Even today...) Even today. But here, if you look at people who came from the Soviet Union and compare with people who live here, you can see that they are not similar. It's very easy, because they look not alike the people who come from Soviet Union. I think because they have support from Jewish communi­ty. They feel equal in this country. I think so. So I think that he can be part of Jewish community. (Does he go to Sunday School?) Yes.

(You told me that you didn't see any of the rites of passage, marriages, funerals, the bris, circumcision. Some of the boys, when they come here, are circumcised.) Yes. (This is not something you chose for him?) I think that he's eleven years old. Maybe he needs to understand by himself what is important. We don't need to push. If he was a baby it's another thing. I think I don't need to push him or his parents. They have to understand...

(Does he enjoy learning the history of the Jewish people?) I think so. They didn't pray. I think that all kinds of history that he can learn, he enjoys. And he learns very fast. Even Hebrew he learned. But I don't know what happened. He doesn't like the religion.

(How did you keep your family strong and together during these difficult times?...) I think that my daughter would hear from me or from people around, my friends who came to our house, she knows my opinion and opinion of my friends, and her friends are the same. Because I think that it's very impor­tant for growing young person is what area she grows. So she has the same kind of opinion about many things of our life, and she chose her friends in the same way. They have all left the Soviet Union now. And she knows that I wanted to do it. I was afraid my parents, especially my father, his health is very bad, so I'm afraid, but she knows that I wanted to do it. She asked me, do I want her to ask her friend for an invita­tion, and when I said yes, she's happy, and we do it.

(Are there any questions I should have asked?) No, I think we talked about all kinds of life. I'm happy that I'm here. And I think that after five years I can do better than now because I can improve my English. This is what I need most of all. (The economic times are hard, too.) It's very interesting, but we live here better than in the Soviet Union even.... (But it's harder to find a job...) Yes. (We're glad you're here. Thanks...)