**LINE FIVE: THE INTERNAL PASSPORT**

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

**of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago**

**BORIS "G"**

**Mechanical Engineer**

**Industrial Institute Tashkent**

BIRTH: 1947, Tashkent

SPOUSE: Betya Z., Gynecologist

born 1954, Chernovtsky

CHILDREN: Alexander, 1975

Albert, 1981

PARENTS: Rakhel G., 1917, Azarichi

Samuel G., 1921, Bershetz

SIBLINGS: David, age 39, resides in Beersheva

Naum, age 26, resides in Rechovod

MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

Abram G.

Bassa M. G.

PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS:

JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF GIVEN):

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

WOMEN'S AUXILIARY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTERS OF CHICAGO

NAME: BORIS G.

Date of Interview: July , 1990

Interviewer: Elaine Snyderman

(What was your childhood like in Tashkent? What do you remember of your household?)

I remember everything. Maybe I took this from my grandfather. When I was little he was a very old man. After the second World War, he was maybe seventy years old. He raised me, because he lived with his youngest daughter, my mother. He died when I was five years old and I remember this night like I see you today.

He was an old Jewish man. He knew the Russian lan­guage very badly and to me he spoke only Russian because after second War, in Russia, most Jewish parents decided to raise their children only as Russians. In 1946 or 1947, Stalin and his government made politics about the Jewish people, and all the cultural leaders of the Jewish people were killed. And the Jewish theater was destroyed. (Not only in Tashkent, but all over Russia.)

In 1953, in the far eastern part of Russia, they were going to take all the Jews in Russia and send them there. It was a huge camp but I don't know how large. My father was an army officer and he served in the Far East and he knew the place. He was a doctor in the Army at the time. My father was a doctor and he was placed under house arrest at this time. I don't know how long he was under house arrest because then Stalin died and this gave freedom to the Jews.

Until 1970 my father was an officer in the Soviet Army. He was the chief of a large hospital in Vilnius. All the while he was an officer, he did not discuss this with me. I guess I was about twenty-five before he told me of this. It was after 1970. My brother, David, left the U.S.S.R. in 1974. I think my father told me about this in 1974 because he wanted to leave Russia and he wanted us to go with him. That's when he explained to me about the old politics.

I guess I didn't believe him too much because he became a Communist during the Second World War, in 1943. He changed his opinions about this after the war. Maybe I believed him, but I thought maybe this was just one event in seventy years in the Soviet Union. And I didn't want to leave.

I think that when he was a high level officer, he believed everything because he had good money from the army, and he had a personal car from the army, and a personal driver and everything. Before, maybe twenty years, he went to this level from Second War and he was raised up in his occupation. In 1970, he had everything - a big apartment (for Russia), a good city for living. Before 1965, all his life he lived in Far East, Khamchatka, and this was a bad place for living. And Saholin, was not too good, either.

He spent more than twenty years in that area. He made a good promotion and when he had it he believed everything he wanted. But, I listened earlier, before 1970, when he was talking between with another officer and several times I had a vacation with my father in a big rest camp for offi­cers. It was a very good place, near the sea, in the Cri­mea, and several times I was there with him. I listened to the talk between the officers and the Jewish nationalists, all officers. Maybe his friends were doctors, I think so, because many doctors were in the army after the war.

They talked about the fact that for Jewish officers it was not possible to go abroad. Now, one year ago this place was not good for living, but twenty years ago all the Rus­sian people felt that the big bosses lived well in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It was an opportunity for the Russians to see other places, buy new things. This travel was closed for the Jews before, and the high ranking positions were impossi­ble. But my father became a big officer, between a Major and a Colonel. He was chief in a big hospital and for doctors this was a good position.

For many years he waited for this promotion and they took it away after two weeks. In the Russian army many officers, if they live many years in Kamchatka, Saholin, they can change their assignment to Europe. From Europe, many officers change to Kamchatka. But there was a General who needed this place for another person so my father had to retire from the army.

His pension was great for the Soviet Union. He got two hundred rubles a month for pension which was much bigger than what everybody gets. Only officers could get such a pension. It was 1979, now the same level of pension is now three hundred rubles. This is still a very good pension. Not comparable to the United States but a very good pension for Soviet Union. It is a high pension for the Soviet Union for a civilian.

(So in 1970 they told him, you've got to retire now and you leave this place?)

I remember the date because I was a Soviet sol­dier. I went in after my vacation. I became a soldier and my father became a civilian. My father now works about twelve hours a week, as a doctor, because he cannot earn more than that. The most he can earn with salary and pen­sion is three hun­dred rubles. He lived and worked in Vil­nius. In 1979 he left Vilnius for Israel.

My brother, David, went to Israel in 1974 or 1975 to live with the family of his wife. He was at our wedding party and then he left Russia. So my father went to be with him.

(To go back to your childhood, you said something about your roots, your grandfather and your father.)

My grandfather's name was Abraham and his last name was Gorchov but before the Revolution he changed it to Gorohov, Russian pronunciation, because he needed to work in this big city but it was not possible for Jewish people to work there. There was a line within which they had to live. For his job he needed to go to Kiev and another big city and he changed his name from Gorchov to Gorohov.

There was no Yiddish spoken to me at home. Maybe as a little boy I understood some of it. Because my cousin who lived with us, because it was a big home and the whole family lived together. My grandfather had many children but when I was born only four daughters and one son were left. The son lived separately but the four daughters all lived with my grandfather. There were about eight or ten big rooms but it was a big house with no conveniences. No running water, not in the yard, only on the street. If we needed water we had to go about one mile to a big river and we took water from the faucet. It was like a spring.

We used to carry two pails at a time on our shoulders, We had a big family but this water was only for drinking without boiling. For other water, we had a channel in our street, not for drinking without boiling. It was like rainwater and it had to be boiled. Before 1960 we had no prob­lem with pollution. In Uzbekistan, all people used this water. But, there were a lot of infectious diseases like dysentery and typhus.

Now there is a lot of sick­ness too. When I was small we sometimes had this big illness, dysentery and typhus, sometimes yellow fever. There were none of these in my family. You cannot imagine what Uzbekis­tan was like. It was much different than where my wife grew up.

My grandparents were very religious and kept a Kosher home especially for my grandfather. He had all special dishes, utensils, and even another special set for Passover. He was like a salesman and his brothers - he had four broth­ers - all his family dealt with wood. He was a big special­ist about wood. He could tell about a tree how many board feet, what size, could come from it. He had several people and they cut the wood and the wood was floated down on the river to a different town where they cut the wood. Maybe one big owner had this business and this helped.

Before the Revolution he was not poor, but not really wealthy. He had twelve children and only he worked. After the Revolution he was very poor. His business was cut, the state took over all the business. They lived in a small village and my grandmother opened a little store. Many Jews did the same. I know my grandmother and my aunt, her daugh­ter, were selling in this store. My aunt is now eighty three years old. So this store gave my grandparents support in their older years.

My grandfather, I don't know how he decided, but he became *colhosmi*, a farmer, he dyed fabrics. For several years after the Revolution he was on this public farm.

But, when my mother finished fourth grade, she could not continue her education, she and her sister, because my grandfather was the owner of a business. In Russia, he was 'without rights' because he kept the business. I know my mother, when she was ten or so, moved to another village to study and she never told about this before we left the country.

(Who did she live with?) She lived with relatives but her mother or father would sometimes come about once a week and bring her food or other things she might need. But she was much on her own. Her oldest sisters were without educa­tion. She finished three or five grades of gymnasium and after the Revolution, she made a smart decision. After 1929, maybe, my grandfather became part of a collective farm. I know about it because in 1933 there was hunger in Russia. My mother told me about it. He asked for a piece of bread and he could take from the public storage because he worked on a state collective farm. A lot of people, not only in Russia but in Ukraine, died because of the lack of bread. No one on the collective farm died. There was enough bread to keep the people alive but none extra.

In 1933, my mother moved at age fifteen to Ivan­ovo- Vosnesensk, a city near Moscow. Because one of her sisters lived there as a student and my mother worked some time in the farm and took a certificate paper to Ivanovo to be per­mitted to study there. My mother was the youngest in the family. She studied five years in a technical college and after that time, she went to Tashkent to work.

She was in the field of textiles and she was a techni­cian for winding, for spools of thread and fabric. But, before the Second War, she moved back to Byelorussia because her parents became old.

After education, all the time, when I finished my education too, all people were sent to a place to work. When my mother finished her education, she was sent to another place to work as an engineer with the city for three years. Everybody has to work for two or three years after finishing their education, wherever they are sent.

About my mother, she moved back to Byelorussia because her parents lived alone, and they were very old. So, she lived together with her parents until the Second World War. When the war started they ran from this village, it was not good for them and they had relatives in Tashkent so they moved there and stayed there. So my grandparents stayed in Tashkent and all the children in the family lived in Central Asia and they all sent them some money. My grandfather bought a little home for all the children and himself, built it and made it bigger. This is the house from my youth.

My parents met after the Second World War and my fa­ther, from the war, came to Tashkent for vacation because he had friends from this village, Bershad, who lived close to my grandfather. I don't know how they met but they did.

(During the War, what happened to your mother and father, from what you know?)

My mother was twenty-nine, born in 1917, when the war finished. I was born when she was thirty. In 1940, the Germans invaded Russia. My mother came back to Tashkent where, before she moved back to Byelorussia, she worked and studied. After they came back my grandfather decided he couldn't support my mother like before and she finished her education in 1943. She was sent to Aemolinsk, this is Kha­zakastan's port, and now is Tselinograd.

The collective farm was a place to work but not a place to live. The commune was different. In the Russian Ukraine, people moved to Asia. Maybe Stalin artificially made things that way to begin. Maybe he made movement for people with the purpose of having them take the new place for Russia. He moved Jews and other people all around to make it all be mixed up and not just Russian. Because Russian people now live in Uzbekistan, in Lithuania, Kazas­khan, Moldavia, in different republics. Mainly the Russian people live in different places, not just Russia. And Gorbachev can say, "I cannot divide the U.S.S.R., because the Russian people live in every republic."

This is the result of Stalin's policy. This is my thinking only. People were moved around by his plans. He made a plan and implemented this situation.

My grandmother died after the Second World War, she died before I was born in 1946.

My mother worked as a railroad engineer from 1943. She was a captain, because the railroad people were considered like an army. She had a uniform with epaulets. This was during Stalin's life. She moved to Tashkent in 1946, after the war. Her father wrote then to the officials to say that he was old and alone and she was permitted to go home to take care of him.

My father finished his education, too, in 1943, in Tashkent. He finished medical school. For one year he practiced as a doctor in Central Asia, a family practice. He was an urologist really. He worked in a little vil­lage, he told me about this. It was in the Syr-Darja area.

This is what he did in the army too, urology. Then after about ten years, in 1960, he was made the assistant to the chief doctor. Then he did not have time for patients. After 1970 he studied one year in a special program and then he became a dermatologist. When he left the army he worked as both a dermatologist and urologist.

(So your parents met in Tashkent in 1946?) They mar­ried and then they went to the Far East where my father had to live as an officer. First, in 1946, he was in Pogro­nichna, on the border. There were several camps of Japanese soldiers and officers. He was a doctor in the camp. It was a bad place and in 1947 there was not just one but several camps for Japanese prisoners. These were internment camps. We don't know what the final disposition of these camps were.

I know about this because my father sent us a picture that was drawn by a Japanese from a photograph of me. It was a pencil drawing, a very fine drawing. I have remem­bered this all my life, I don't know where it is now.

My parents went to the Far East but the officials did not allow my mother to go. She was missing some documents she would have needed. She was an officer in the railway corps and she could not get the release from the railroad to go join him. So for several years my parents were married but they lived separately. They only spent time together during their several vacations. My mother lived with her father and my father lived alone.

They lived together for a short time but they separated in 1950. They were divorced. Because the place where my father lived was near to border, she could not go there. They were married for about four years. When I was born, my mother did not want to live in the Far East. When I was small, and asked about what happened, she worried about me. My father would explain things one way, my mother another way, so I had to decide for myself. But they never got back together. My mother remained a single person and my father re-married after my half-brother was born. My mother is still angry at my father. She is upset if I suggest going to see my father.

My father sent some money to my mother, maybe just the judging. In Russia, if someone divorces, they must send 25% of their salary to help care for any children. If they do not do it they could be convicted. They will be forced to pay. But my father sent gifts for me and when I could write, he sent me letters, and when I was seventeen, every year he would take me for vacation. Several times he came to Tashkent to see me. When I was seventeen, I met with my half-brothers. One was just born, the other was twelve years old. I also met my future wife that year.

Then too, my mom was used to living with her large family and maybe her sisters persuaded her not to leave. She had two sisters who were married, and one older sister who was never married.

(Do you think the political attitude of your country influenced your parents divorce?)

After the War, you can understand only if you could see the horror in Russia after the War. Many women without husbands. Many young women who could find no husbands. A few men were around because of the War. It seems to me that at that time, each woman seemed to feel she would be happy if she found a husband. I think my parents knew each other only about seven days when they got married. After this first happened in their life, then my mother could not go to the Far East. It was not political, just circumstances all around them.

After my grandfather died, we lost everything about Jewish tradition. No holidays. I had a baby-sitter, she was born as a Russian, but her father changed his religion to Jewish. This woman was a good friend of my grandfa­ther and when he died, she helped my mother to raise me. She was a lot older than my mother. When I went to school, she took me from school and kept me until my mother finished work and then took me home.

She had in her home, all the Jewish traditions. And if my mother brought food from store she would ask if it was Kosher or not. She used only chicken from special man, the *schochet*. If we had fish she looked closely, is this good fish or not? does it have skin or not? She taught me everything. I lived here only several years. After that we had only one *schochet* in Tashkent. One time a week, my mother would go to the *schochet*. For just ourselves she could not do it, it was too difficult. I don't know any more about this. It was just very difficult. If people lived in villages it might be easier because my grandmother, from my father's side, lived in a little village. They had a *schochet* and it was easier for everyone to use him.

But in big cities the Jewish practices were harder to keep.

In Tashkent, there were about two million people, many of them Russian, maybe 40% were Uzbeki, and maybe 2% or 3% were Jews. Now it may be less. But right after the Second War there were a lot of Jews there. There were Sephardic Jews who came from Bukara and Andijian and many of them moved to Tashkent.

I was happy in my childhood. I had a good nature, cheerful, for many years I had the same mood, but only now I have changed! In Tashkent, it was easier to be a Jew than in other places but in my childhood, several times, I had big fighting. Because these other boys called me, several times, this bad name for Jews -*"Zhid".* The last time this happened I was fifteen years old. I think I was beaten in these fights. It wasn't a bad fight but people in the Soviet Union, maybe this attitude started after I was born.

There was a company, an organization, that made a study from 1947-53, this company was against Jews. Nazis told people what a Jew was and that they were bad. They told people that Hitler wanted to kill the Jews and the Jews are respon­sible for everything that went bad in the Soviet Union. That is how I remember it myself, that the Jews were guilty of everything. The Jews were different. When I was twenty years and I would meet with a young girl I would not say about my na­tionality, that I was a Jew. With other Asian peoples I did not men­tion it. If she asked, I might answer but maybe not. Because we studied in the same school, and from studying with these people, I don't know how, but I knew that Jews were bad.

Like my mother said, it started after the beginning of the Second War, from the Nazis, and it continued in 1947, what Hitler didn't finish. Many papers wrote about the Jews being like cosmopolitans and this started in 1947 when the cosmopolitans were blamed for everything. "We don't have bread because the cosmopolitans sell it." And all cosmopol­i­tans harm Russian culture because many Jews became Russian writers. They are changing the culture. This is maybe a little true, because all the good writers, the children's writers, are Jews.

Samuel Marshak was a great chil­dren's writers of poems, songs and tales. He was my wife's favor­ite writer when she was a child, and the favorite of a lot of other children too. And a favorite of our children too. My wife knows most of the book by heart!

He was just one, but a lot of other composers, actors, artists, playwrights, and so on, were Jews.

In 1947 there existed an Anti-Fascist Committee which helped the Jews in Europe. Mayerhold, a Russian Jew, a Soviet actor and producer of the theater in Moscow, was on this committee. He was known all over. America helped this committee with food for Jews in the Soviet Union. This Committee worked together with the Joint Distribution Com­mit­tee and the Joint helped them. Mayerhold was killed and this was a signal for the killing of all Jews. Then a lot of Jews were killed.

The Doctors Plot was like the finish of this time. Between 1947 and 1953 all the newspapers were full of these stories.